

INTRODUCTION

How do you read a personal letter? Do you tear open the envelope and randomly start reading a line here and a line there to find out what the correspondent has to say? Do you browse only a portion of the letter? Do you only read the opening or the ending of the letter?

No, you start at the beginning of the letter-and from the "Dear" to the "Yours Truly"-you read it straight through to comprehend the full meaning of what is being communicated!

If this is true for a letter from a friend, how much more should it be when we read and teach through God's Word? If God's people are to understand the fullness of God's will and character, they need a well-balanced meal: the whole Bible.

If a person only ate hot fudge sundaes, he may seem content for a while, but he will become fat and sickly, and eventually his health will fail. If one is to be healthy, they need the vegetables, the fruit, the meat, and potatoes in order to keep the body fit and running properly.

Sadly, some pastors just give the dessert-a verse here, and a topic there; they like to fatten the people with sweets and nice tasting treats. Yet they are troubled when the people are sick and weak.

It is only by going straight through the full counsel of God that makes a healthy people, a hearty, well-fed congregation. One of the Calvary Chapel distinctives is teaching straight through the books in the Bible. God has blessed this distinctive. There has been tremendous growth and great fruit from the teaching of God's Word. The people are well fed and hungry for more! For this, we thank the Lord!

Unfortunately, there is the temptation with some pastors to attract people with sweet-tasting sermons and slick church services, entertaining them with a lot of things other than sound Bible teaching. True the people may say, "Oh, isn't that guy a crack up?" or "Isn't he a great speaker?" But the reality is you're giving the people the whipped cream, the hot fudge sundae, and the sweets something that is very exciting to their taste buds-but it doesn't develop a strong, healthy body.

The solution to the dilemma of dessert-only teaching is to go straight through the Bible, book by book, verse by verse, and line upon line-in order that people might get a balanced diet, and begin to understand the Bible's teachings on a whole range of issues and topics.

Why is balance important? Many of the issues in the church today are multi-faceted; there are usually two sides. And if we only emphasize one side of an issue, we may be in error of neglecting the whole counsel of God's view on the topic. You have to give them a balanced teaching to arrive at the truth.

As an example, there is the truth of the sovereignty of God. He is sovereign. There is no denying that truth. But if you only emphasize the sovereignty of God, and you never deal with the human responsibility of man, you're not giving the people the whole truth, because the sovereignty of God is balanced by the human responsibility that God requires of man. And thus you have the balanced truth. So when we go through the entire Bible, there will be that built-in check and balance system to help keep us objective and in line with the full teaching of the Bible.

My challenge to you is this: if this through-the-Bible teaching is not a distinctive of your ministry, I would encourage you to go to another church or a denomination and learn how to entertain and have a relevant program that will appeal to people's 'felt needs!' But the reality is this dessert-only or seeker-based philosophy of ministry is not Calvary Chapel; we do not seek to entertain, but to feed the people as Jesus commanded. And the only way to produce healthy, spiritual people is teach them the full counsel of God, expositing and expounding the truths found in His Word.

How many of you want to spend your whole ministry trying to patch up disgruntled people, feeding them whipped cream and hot fudge sundaes, all the while dealing with all the health problems of a sick congregation? Not me!

I encourage you to teach the Word of God-from Genesis to Revelation. Watch the growth. The most exciting thing in the world is to watch people grow from being nourished and strengthened and fed the whole counsel of God's truth.

Pastor Chuck Smith Calvary Chapel Costa Mesa