

Marriage & Seminary Life

Father, we thank You for this day. We ask for You to be with us. We pray that we may learn and rejoice in You as the one who acts into our history and the history of each of Your children to bring about Your purposes in the world. We ask that we may learn to be faithful. We pray that You will teach us by the example of both the good and the bad in the lives of Francis and Edith Schaeffer that we may follow You more closely. We ask it for Jesus' sake. Amen.

At the end of our last lesson I pointed out some of the commitments as a Christian that Edith Schaeffer brought to their relationship. We looked at her commitment to prayer and compassion for those in affliction. She was concerned as a child when she saw baby girls being thrown away in China. She was committed to the unity of all believers coming from the China Inland Mission (CIM) as a nondenominational work. She had a passion for truth against modernism.

There are a few more things I want to add here. Something else that she brought with her to their relationship was a problem with evangelical legalism. As a teenager she had a real difficulty with the definition of worldliness that existed in her church background. For example, she loved to dance, yet dancing was one of those behaviors that was not allowed in evangelical circles at that time. There were many other things like that in her life where she did not appreciate a narrow definition of Christian lifestyle that was current at that time. She reacted against that, and she talks quite openly in the book about the way that she deceived her parents at points over these issues.

Incidentally, she wrote a delightful children's book published by Harper and Row about her childhood in China and her love for dancing as a tiny little girl. It is a delightful book in which she did all the illustrations as well as write the story. I read the book when I stayed with her in Rochester, Minnesota. Even in that you see that she remembers vividly everything that happened to her as a child of three and four years old. She has a great memory for details. This book is a recanting of one incident after another in her childhood. She was only five or six when her parents moved back to the United States, but she still remembers those years in China so very clearly. It is quite remarkable. If you ever talk to her or read any of her letters or books, you can see what an interest she has in details. She remembers everything that was said in a conversation and everything that happened. She is still that way. She will recount a whole situation in all its detail. That was a sixth aspect of what Edith brought to their relationship. She brought a problem with the narrow legalism of her background.

Seventh, she brought a love for literature, beauty, music, and creativity in any form, whether in words, clothes, music, sight, sound, and sense. She has always had a tremendous delight in the creativity of God that is expressed in His creation. As His persons, we reflect that creativity in our own creative abilities. That is something that was with her as a little child and has stayed with her through her life. Finally, Edith brought a lifelong concern for the Chinese and the growth of the church there. She left China as a young child, but she continued throughout her life, and still does continue, to pray for China.

Recently she was sent an article from *The Daily Telegraph*, a British newspaper, about Yangzhou, the city in which she was born and spent her first few years. Until very recently, little was known in the West about what happened in the Chinese church after the communist takeover in the late 1940s. There was a complete embargo on news. One would begin to hear little snippets about 10 years ago that the church was still there and was beginning to grow. It is just in the last two or three years that we have heard more about the details of how the church flourished after all the missionaries were thrown out of the country in 1947 and after many of the leading pastors were imprisoned. The church continued to grow. Just recently Edith was sent a copy of this article describing the Christian revival in Yangzhou. This is a city that Edith has prayed for ever since she left

there. Let me read part of it, “A southern Chinese city often praised as a model of communist economic reforms has defied Marxist logic by becoming the center of a mass Christian revival. Four thousand party members have joined the ranks of believers in the coastal city of Yangzhou.” It goes on to speak about it. It says that now in this city there are more than 400,000 Protestant and Catholic believers, which is 7% of the city’s population. “Yangzhou, one of the earliest centers of the Western missionary effort of China, is now literally strewn with churches.” That is where CIM had one of its major missions.

The theory of the present government of China is that the reason for any revival of religion at all is because of poverty. With the new economic reforms and the transformation of China’s economy, the theory of the government is that Christianity and all other religion would die away. This article points out and the government has acknowledged that they do not really understand what has happened. Yangzhou is now a very affluent city. It is one of the cities where the economic revival has really taken root. Yet far from suppressing religion, the church has carried on growing. The government has regard poverty as the source of religious prejudice. But here is a city that is no longer racked by poverty. But it still has an ongoing and reviving church in it. This was fascinating to Edith and a wonderful answer to her prayers. She, like many other missionary families who left China, has continued to pray. It is wonderful to see what God has done in that place. It has been a real delight to her.

Let me say a little bit more about the Schaeffers’ relationship and marriage. The relationship between Francis and Edith grew very rapidly. I told you in the last lesson that it began when he asked if he could take her home and she said she had a date. He told her to break the date, and she did. From that time their relationship grew very rapidly. It had only one short break, which she recounts on page 144 of *The Tapestry*.

Francis told Edith one day that he felt that they were becoming too close, and he needed to question whether such a deep and close relationship could be pleasing to God. He felt, reluctantly, he had to break their relationship off. He said, “We better break up the relationship, because the Lord may be calling me somewhere where no woman could follow.” She says she is not quite sure where he visualized that place to be, but those were his words to her! They felt that they were parting forever, but it was just later that evening that he called her back and said he could not live without her! So their one break in their relationship was a very short duration. But the relationship grew very rapidly.

He went back to college shortly, and they began writing very frequently. Within a couple of months of his return to college, they both wrote every day to each other. At that time the mail was also delivered on Sundays, and deliveries made it to their destination the next day. I do not know what has happened to the postal service since then, but it does not seem to be quite so efficient! They wrote every day all through his time in college. She always sent parcels of food, cakes, and cookies that she thought he might need. He frequently cut classes and hitchhiked up to see her. He was able to do so because he was on the dean’s honor roll all the way through college. Consequently he was given unlimited cuts because of that. In *The Tapestry*, Edith includes several examples of their letters to each other. They are very interesting to read, though they are typical in the sense of being like any other young engaged couple’s letters to each other. They are filled with affection, passion, a growing relationship, and longing for each other. They are interesting, too, in the sense that from the very beginning they shared every aspect of their life and growth as Christians together.

Something that comes through over and over again is the commitment of both of them to the ministry at whatever cost. It is something they frequently discussed in the letters they wrote to each other. They had a deepening love for God and a desire to serve Him in whatever way He called them to. By the time Francis finished college, he had done well all the way through. He had been on the dean’s honor roll all the way through college. In addition to all kinds of scholastic honors, he was given an award as he graduated for being the outstanding Christian on the campus during his four years.

Let us move on to their wedding. They were married in July 1935, right after his graduation. Francis' mother carried on being the same as before. She was rather unpredictable and not able to get outside of herself to really think about what they would have appreciated. She was not prepared to say whether or not she would come to the wedding. They did not know whether she would come until the very last moment when she appeared dressed and said she was ready to go. This was not because she disliked Edith; they seemed to get along quite well. But she always had a bitterness and chip-on-her-shoulder mentality all through her life. Only much later when she became a Christian did it begin to dissipate in any way at all. If you read through the letters between Francis and Edith, you will notice a tremendous romanticism. It was not just a romantic attachment to each other, but they had romanticism about each other. They thought that they were perfect.

Edith writes about this in a very helpful way in *The Tapestry* on page 174 to 175. She talks about how when they got married they very rapidly discovered the flaws that existed in both of them. Luther has called marriage the school of character because in marriage you see very quickly your own weaknesses and failures. You see your partner's weaknesses and failures as well. Whatever idealistic notions you may have had before are quickly done away with about yourself and about the other person when you actually live together. Edith writes some very helpful things about this. She says, "If you are ready to be envious of perfection in our lives, you can stop holding your breath, because there are no perfect people, no perfect marriages, no perfect children, no perfect families. There is no formula for how to have perfection. But, you may say, he wrote and told you how perfect you were. And you wrote and told him he had no faults, and you went on and on about it all the time. And we felt that." But she says they discovered very soon that they both had faults and that they were going to have to live with them. "Unhappily no one stressed to us what we have constantly stressed to others. If you expect or demand perfection or nothing, you will have nothing." If you demand perfection in a marriage or in any other relationship, you will end up with nothing at all. You cannot appreciate the good that is there if you want perfection.

A lot of us need to apply that to ourselves. So many people who are perfectionists are down on themselves all the time. They are unable to be happy with anything about themselves at all because it is not what they would like it to be. We need to remember that the very heart of the Gospel is that God accepts us just as we are in all our weaknesses and failures through His Son. Despite that bumpy beginning because of the expectation of perfection, the Schaeffers have always had a very deep commitment to each other right through their relationship.

Edith describes one particular situation when they went on their honeymoon. It is very amusing to read it, because she describes how she had everything so perfectly prepared. She is a very good seamstress, so she hand-made all her clothes and made a beautiful truso to go away in. She had these romantic ideas of how she would cook for them and provide for them on their honeymoon. They were going to make it as cheap as possible, so they stayed in several one-room cabins. She brought all these vegetables along with her, and you can imagine what things like cooked cabbage smelled like! On the way they stopped for a milkshake, and she sat on the stool at the bar with these beautiful clothes on that she had made. When she got off the stool, she was covered in chocolate milkshake on her skirt from the previous person who had sat there. She said she learned a very important lesson at that time, which she then applied throughout their marriage. She was not always consistent with it, but she tried to remember that relationships are far more important than things like dress and situations. Rather than always groaning about the situation or spending one's time complaining that things have not worked out the way one had hoped, she realized that the relationship was far more important. She really committed herself to that throughout their life together.

She also says something else that is very important, particularly in light of the discussion today on the relationship between men and women in marriage. She was very committed to seeing it as the wife's calling to go where her husband felt called. Scripture tells us about Ruth with her mother-in-law, saying, "Your people

will be my people and your God my God. Where you go I will go.” Edith was absolutely committed to that. She felt and feels still, biblically, that is part of what headship means. It is part of what marriage is to be, not that the husband should not be concerned for what his wife desires, longs for, and is able to cope with. It is part of a wife’s calling to be prepared to go where her husband feels called to go rather than to stand in his way. It is her calling to share his life and calling, according to Scripture.

As you look at Francis in their marriage, he was completely committed to sharing everything with Edith. This was very evident when you got to know them. There was no doubt that he was the head in their marriage. He was not always an easy head to love, obey, and serve. Like the rest of us, he had his difficulties of character, but he was totally committed to them having a ministry together. He always enjoyed, encouraged, and acknowledged the many gifts that Edith had as a person. Their ministry was a ministry together in a quite unique and remarkable way. It was a mutually supported ministry in which he felt completely dependent on her. We will come to that later on. When he went on his first trip to Europe in the 1940s, he was by himself. When he came back after being gone for several months, he said he would never travel anywhere alone again. He said he could not live without Edith, and he was not going to. So he never traveled alone again; Edith went with him on every trip after that. Their coupledness meant a tremendous amount to both Francis and Edith.

There is a very amusing section in *The Tapestry* where she describes their honeymoon. I have alluded to that already. They spent most of it as a summer Bible camp. When they got there they had been married two or three days, but they had been assigned separate rooms. He was in a dormitory for boys, and she was in a dormitory for girls. That was a tremendous disappointment to them. She writes about Francis having the courage to tell them that they were on their honeymoon and were not prepared to sleep apart. They insisted on having a room together since it was not right to do otherwise. They were given a tiny attic room with two skinny bunk beds. It is a very amusing description of their first few days together at that camp. They saw that camp as being something that God provided to give a real foundation for the future. At the girls’ camp he worked in the kitchen, and she was a counselor. While there, Edith saved a girl from drowning, and this girl has been in contact with Edith all through the years since that time. In the boys’ camp Francis was a counselor and teacher, and Edith helped him in that. She discovered that she could do leatherwork. That stayed with her throughout her life. She taught little boys in the camp how to do leatherwork with a lot of bits and pieces of leather. That is how they spent the first few weeks of their marriage. They worked very hard in that summer Bible camp.

Let us move on to talk about their time in seminary. Francis started seminary in the fall of 1935 at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia. They managed to find a tiny apartment in a run-down slum area. It cost them \$23 a month and was a short walk from the seminary. They had very little money, so they made their own furniture from some old pieces that were repainted. Edith put leather handles on them. They made a couch from a set of old springs Francis found. They stuffed it and covered it with leather. She made curtains, bedspreads, and pillows. There was very little room in the apartment; he had to sit on the bed to study. I find it fascinating to read that, because when I first got to know them in Switzerland in 1967, he still studied in his bedroom. They did not have a lot of room there either. The bedroom was a little bigger than the one in their apartment in Philadelphia. But it was not that big, so he had a tiny chair and table at the end of the bed where he did all his work, including all his dictation to his secretary.

They managed to buy a sewing machine, and that is how Edith supported them all through seminary. She made clothes, dresses, and coats for women who provided the material for her to make them. She designed, made, and sold leather belts and buttons. That was how they survived the years of seminary together with working various summer camps. Basically Edith was the provider all through that period. She was very committed to what you could call coupledness. Every day when she sent him off to seminary in the morning, she made two packed lunches that were identical. She said you may think it was a little mechanical, but she felt it was very important that couples actually work on trying to share their life together even when they are not together physically. She

made two identical lunches every day, which she put a lot of work into. She did this so that she would know exactly how he was feeling, how much he had eaten, and how hungry he would be when he came home for supper. She was very creative.

I remember a packed lunch she made for me one time many years later when I worked for her in Switzerland and my wife was her secretary. This is when we were getting together. Mrs. Schaeffer has always been a matchmaker, and she could see that Vicky and I were beginning to spend time together. She had heard that it was my birthday the next day, and we were due to have a day off. So she stayed up half the night making us a packed lunch. She presented it to me in the morning. It was absolutely beautiful. It had a little linen tablecloth, table napkins, a tiny roast chicken, and all sorts of things. This was her contribution to trying to establish our relationship as we went off for a walk and a picnic that day. I had great delight in telling her later that we got engaged the night before! She has always been someone who likes to help relationships get together.

She worked at their coupledness in all sorts of creative ways. When Francis came back in the evening and studied, he would often study until two or three in the morning. She always sat up with him and carried on working on her leatherwork until he finished studying. She did this so that she could learn together with him, because he would discuss everything he learned at seminary with her. They talked about every issue he studied. Francis' teachers at Westminster were Machen, Stonehouse, Alice, Van Til, Kuyper, McRae, Wooley, and Murray. These are all names that have had a tremendous impact in the Reformed churches in United States. They became friends with Laird Harris and his wife Libby. He was the registrar at Westminster Seminary at that time. Their very best friends were Doug Young and his wife. He later became the founder of The Institute of Holy Land Studies in Jerusalem. They were best friends all the way through seminary and shared their ideas together and talked together. Something they prayed over again and again during those years at seminary was their commitment to go wherever the Lord would have them go. This has always been a feature of their lives. You can see this as you read through any of the things that they have written. They desired to put themselves in God's hand to go wherever He wanted them to go. They did not say that they would go to one kind of situation but never go to another. This is a real challenge.

It has been interesting to me as I have talked to young couples and students who have thought about coming here to seminary. This comes back to the other issue I mentioned earlier of a wife being prepared to go where her husband feels called. I came across a couple of examples in talking to students who wanted to come here of the wife saying, "I would never be prepared to live out of the south in Missouri. That is too far away from my home situation." There are two important issues there. One is that being a couple means being prepared to go together where the Lord is calling you. Second, being Christians, we are called to put ourselves in God's hands and go wherever He wants us to go, even if that might be a place that we could never imagine or would not have chosen. We need to be prepared to put ourselves into His hands to be His servants according to His will. We should not say, "I will serve You, but it will be in this situation, but it could never be there." In the summer of 1936, the Schaeffers worked and taught together. They led a young people's summer camp in New Hampshire.

In that summer of 1936, some events began to transpire that had a huge impact on the history of the divisions and formations of Presbyterian churches in the United States. During that summer, J. Gresham Machen was defrocked and put out of the Presbyterian Church. For those of you who do not know the history of this, at the end of the nineteenth century there was a very famous heresy trial in the Presbyterian Church. Briggs and Strapman were put out of the church and out of teaching at Princeton Seminary because of their commitment to liberal ideas. It caused a tremendous stir at the time. The Presbyterian Church prided itself on having taken a stand against liberal theology and against a critical and destructive approach to the biblical text. Basically the church then went to sleep. By the middle of the 1930s, the hierarchy of the denomination was ruled by the liberals. Machen was defrocked in 1936 but not on any doctrinal grounds. The Chinese churches demanded that evangelical missionaries be sent. They were fed up with liberal missionaries being sent to the field and not teaching Scripture. In response to that desire from the mission fields, Machen was involved in starting an

independent mission board to make sure that evangelical missionaries were sent to the mission fields. It was simply for that reason, and that reason alone, that Machen was defrocked. He had his ordination overturned and was put out of the church for starting an independent missions board. It was not for any doctrinal or moral failure of any kind. It was perceived as a threat to the domination of the liberals in the main Presbyterian church.

At the same time, Carl MacIntyre was put out. Schaeffer was a seminary student and had just finished his first year, but he resigned and came under care of the newly formed Presbyterian Church of America. So his second year at seminary began in a climate that was full of passion for defending the truth. Through this period, debate rose up about this, and they had a passionate commitment to defending the truth.

There were two issues that began to bother the Schaeffers at this time that remained a source of concern for them over the next few years. One of these was how it was possible to stand for God's holiness and purity in both doctrine and life yet not be harsh and not have ugliness result in human relationships. This was a concern that became deeper and deeper in both of their hearts and lives through the next few years. How could you stand against what you perceive to be wrong doctrinally and morally and yet stand with love? Schaeffer later came to call this speaking the truth with love. How could you avoid the ugliness? The second thing that began to bother them both was what Edith calls a deterministic view of the Reformed faith. That is that God's sovereignty is taken to mean that human beings have no real significance, and human choice has no real value. Schaeffer felt that the teaching of some of his professors at that time erred in that direction. They stressed God's sovereignty to the extent that the human person was left as nothing. They saw this having an effect on people's prayer lives.

I remember them both talking about this. Often the prayer meetings at the seminary were only for general spiritual blessings rather than prayer for specific issues, problems, and needs in one's own personal life. In fact, Edith recalls being chided on one occasion by the wife of one of the professors for praying for some material need in a prayer meeting. She was basically told that because God is sovereign, you should not pray for specific things like that. God has everything mapped out, so you should not bring specific issues before Him in this way. She was also told that God was not really concerned. You should not bother God with things like that. As I mentioned earlier, the reality of prayer for the practical needs of their work had been very much a part of her whole background growing up in CIM. This was something that was very precious to her, so she had a real problem with this mentality that seemed to be deterministic on the one hand. It ruled out God's concern and readiness to respond to our specific needs. This is an issue that Scripture makes very clear: God delights to meet the needs of His children. Prayers were only allowed to be for general blessings, and only spiritual blessings at that, rather than specific things that arose.

There was a tremendous contrast in their lives to what was being taught around them. At the time Edith was chided for praying for specific things, she was pregnant with their first child. During that period of their pregnancy, they managed to save up a little money toward the birth, but Francis suddenly had to have an emergency appendectomy and was rushed to the hospital. They wondered how on earth they were going to pay for the surgery, so they prayed about it. They did not want to use the money they had saved for the baby's birth, so how were they going to pay the bill? They prayed that God would provide for their needs. In some fear and trembling, Edith went to the hospital authorities and said, "I heard there was a fund for especially needy cases. Is there any chance that this could apply to us?" The director of the funds asked her to spell out what their situation was. She explained that they were at seminary, that she was working, that they did not have a lot of money, and that they were expecting a baby. He said, "The rule is that we are only allowed to give out every month a certain amount of money in the fund. If you come back tomorrow, I can tell you whether we have any left in the fund." She came back the next day with a bill in her hand, and he asked how much the bill was that she needed to pay. The surgeon, who was a Christian, had refused to charge anything, but the hospital bill was \$75. She handed him the bill and told him the amount, and he said, "That is amazing! That is exactly what we

have left in the fund this month.” To Edith, this was an illustration of the way God does care for the details of our lives. He will answer specific requests that we bring to him. We can really entrust ourselves to him.

Another event of tremendous importance took place shortly thereafter. Perhaps history would have been a little different if it had not happened. Machen died very suddenly when he caught pneumonia. He was the leader of the new separated movement. He was someone who many people have suggested could have possibly held the new movement together. He caught pneumonia but carried on a preaching tour of the Dakotas. He died out there in the Dakotas. His death was a tremendous loss to the new church that had been formed. He was not just a scholar, but he was also someone who was deeply, personally, and warmly devoted to Christ. He was a very warm and gentle kind of person. Shortly after his death, there was a battle in the new church, and the church split in two. There were various differences that came to the surface. Some of you are familiar with this. One of them was the accusation, “You are not Reformed enough,” by one group to the other group. This carried on being a problem.

I just read an intriguing article the other day by Michael Hackenberg from the book *Pressing Toward the Mark*. This is a history of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), which was the one part of the split. A chapter from the book is over the battle for the ordination of Gordon Clark. This was eight to 10 years later, in 1943 to 1948. The issue was still there with Gordon Clark. Could he be ordained, or should his ordination once he had been ordained be overturned? Was he Reformed enough? If you know anything about Gordon Clark, this is an amazing question to ask. That was the issue that was raised against him. Was he sufficiently Reformed to be a minister in the OPC? This makes very sad reading to see the battle that came up over him.

In Schaeffer’s time when he was a student, there was a very similar battle of one group saying to another group that they were not Reformed enough. Another area of battle was over the issue of Christian liberty. How much liberty does a Christian have? Is it necessary to bind the conscience of Christians in various ways? A third issue of concern was prophetic views. It was basically premillennialists against amillennialists. This is a very sad issue for a church to split on. There was a fourth issue involved as well, though that was not so evident at the time. It became much more evident later, considering some of the people involved. It was a battle for leadership where there were some personality clashes. That is one of the very sad things about reading this article, too. It is clear that behind the issue of whether Gordon Clark was Reformed enough was the issue of who was going to lead the denomination and what kind of denomination it would be. That is not an issue on which to have grounds for not supporting someone’s ordination or throwing someone out of a church.

Edith writes quite a bit about this period. She says that, looking back, she and Francis themselves felt sorry for some of the things they said and some of the attitudes they had during this period when the new church split in two. They had to decide which part they would go with. She says some very helpful things here. Let me read part of this on page 192, “

Looking back on that time, we wish we could have been less intense, less steamed up. Certainly we would not say now some of the things we said then. We would be glad if we could erase them. As the years have gone by, we have said to the men involved that we were sorry. So often in differences among Christians it is not the issues themselves that continue tensions years later. With such differences, whether in the relationships within families, between husband and wife, or in the church, it is the things said with harshness or in anger in the midst of speaking of issues that stick in the memory and still hurt years later. Often the sharpness of the issues has softened as the years pass by, yet sitting and quietly talking to one another and saying sorry to one another is put off or never reached.

I think that is a very profound thing that she says there. Most of the people who were involved in those divisions would have said a few years later that these were not sufficient grounds over which to divide a church:

prophetic views, Christian liberty, whether or not people were sufficiently Reformed. Still, sadly, between some of the people involved, there was no apology and no healing of relationships. We will see more of this later as we come to a later section of the Schaeffers' lives. This whole issue of bitterness, harshness, and lack of love between Christians as they discuss things over which they differ became something of burning importance in Schaeffer's own heart. At one point later, it caused him to completely reevaluate his whole commitment as a Christian. He went through a patch where he felt he had to go back to agnosticism and ask if Christianity created such ugliness in relationships, was it really true? We will deal with that in more detail at a later time. It comes in about 12 or so years after the point where we are now. Even at that time, this was an issue that began to really bother them. Later they made a point of going to apologize to anyone whom they felt they hurt at all.

Both of the new groups felt that they were going to be the new and perfect church. They thought they would have the new and perfect seminary. Half stayed at Westminster with the OPC and half went and formed Faith Seminary in Wilmington, Delaware and formed the new Bible Presbyterian Church. That is where Schaeffer went. He went to Wilmington, Delaware with some of the other students: Doug and John Young, John Sanderson, Art Glasser, and Walter Cross. Several of these men have been important figures in our own history, under God's hand. He went off with the first class of students to Wilmington, Delaware, where Dr. McRae became the new president. Laird Harris was one of the teachers, and George Seville, Mrs. Schaeffer's father, became another of the teachers. He taught Greek and missions there. It was in the summer of 1937 that the new seminary started. In that same summer, Priscilla, their first daughter, was born.