

Speaking the Truth in Love

Father, we thank You for lovely weather. We thank You for Your love to us that is the same yesterday, today, and forever. While everything else changes, You remain the same. We pray, Father, that You will be with us and help us in our understanding. As we think about some difficult and sometimes controversial issues, we pray that You will grant us a clear vision of Your way. Father, be with us we ask, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Last time we discussed four issues raised by the separated movement. I mentioned Schaeffer's commitment to truth, the importance of distinguishing between essential issues and non-essentials, a commitment to the purity of the church, and the importance of disciplining those who start teaching falsehood in the church. We also talked about how we are to regard those who stay in churches that are mixed denominations. We spoke about the importance of what Schaeffer later came to call speaking the truth in love. I gave the illustration of how he wept when he remembered the bitterness and hardness there was between those who left the Presbyterian Church in the 1930s and those who stayed within it. It is important not to have that kind of bitterness and resentment but to respect people for the choices that they make.

I want to move on now to three more points in relationship to the separated movement. I recognize that this raises a lot of questions, some of them quite controversial.

The fifth issue I want to talk about is cooperation at the local level in the work of the kingdom between churches that are pure and those that remain in a mixed denomination yet are evangelical in their commitment. As you all know, this has been a huge area of discussion and still is. The work of Children for Christ was a work that would only use people who were members of denominations that as a whole took a clear stand on the authority of Scripture and the nature of the evangelical Gospel. They would not allow even a deeply committed evangelical person who was a member of a denomination that included liberalism to be involved in the work of Children for Christ. In that case, it was because that work was based on the work of the local church. They felt a strong need to send the children who were converted to churches that were evangelical. Here we come to another question. When we are involved in some aspect of the work of Christ's kingdom in a city, should there be cooperation at the local level between evangelical churches that are members of evangelical denominations and evangelical churches that are members of mixed denominations? It is a very difficult question.

We will see as we go along that it was in this next period of Schaeffer's life on his trip to Europe that he began to change his mentality in this particular area. We will see that as he went around Europe looking up churches that were faithful to God's Word, he found them sometimes in separated denominations and sometimes within the state churches, for instance in Scandinavia or Britain. He felt a tremendous gladness in his heart to find anyone there at all who stood faithfully for God's Word and for the evangelical Gospel.

This issue is sometimes called second-degree separation, which not only refuses to work together with those who are liberal but also refuses to work with someone who is evangelical yet is in a denomination that is dominated by liberalism. Certainly for myself, coming from England, I have found that in Europe one is so thankful for anybody who is evangelical. You are glad and delighted to work with them whatever denomination they may belong to if they really are faithful to God's Word. That is because there are so few people who are and so few churches that are evangelical. In America sometimes there is the unnecessary luxury of trying to be more pure than what is necessary. People are not sufficiently glad for what God does in people's lives. This obviously raises all sorts of questions. It was a question we had to face in Britain when we had an evangelistic crusade in our area. Our own denomination is one that stands firmly on its commitment to the full authority of God's Word and its commitment to the evangelical Gospel. We made the choice that we would gladly work with anyone, whatever denomination they belonged to, who was evangelical. Even then there was still hardly

anyone who wanted to help. There were a couple of other churches in the area, but we were very glad for that and to be able to work together with them. That is the fifth issue that is raised by this topic. You will see as you read through the next section of Schaeffer's life the opening of his vision to God's work in a wider way, even within some of the older traditional denominations where there were people struggling to remain faithful to God's Word.

The sixth issue that is raised as we think about separated Christianity is the danger of being part of the separated movement. I feel it is very important that we see this. Fundamentally we may say that the danger is negativism. Our thrust begins to become negative if we are not careful. One can become ingrown. We begin to think that we are the pure ones. Everything outside is terrible and unfaithful, and everyone else is the enemy. That can lead to a kind of pride that is not honoring to God. God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble. The commitment to truth, unless we are very careful, can become a snare of the devil to lead us into the direction of pride. At the moment where we think we are closest to the altar of God, we can find that there is tremendous pride, rigidity, and ingrownness in the heart where we fail to see what God is actually doing and accomplishing in the world. Instead we concentrate on our own little patch of purity.

There is also the danger of witch hunting. Sometimes what holds a group together is their commitment to purity and separation above everything else. It can lead to a mentality where one constantly patrols the church, always on the lookout for someone who might put a foot wrong. Some are always on the lookout for someone who might not be completely, purely Orthodox. The danger is that one starts defining that in a narrower and narrower way to make absolutely sure that we do not let anyone squeak in who is not totally spotless. This is an area where we have to be very careful. We begin to forget that we all make many mistakes in our thinking as well as in our lives. We are sinners in the area of what we believe, think, and say, as well as in the area of what we do and the attitudes in our hearts. When we stand before the throne of Christ, we will see clearly what His truth is in all its perfection and detail. We will realize the areas where we ourselves were wrong and blind to our own misunderstandings. The danger, along with pride and ingrownness, is constantly searching the church and scouring it out to make sure that we are completely pure. No one is allowed along who is bending or straying one bit from what we consider to be the pure truth.

Another danger here is that such a movement can very easily become man-centered rather than God-centered. The leaders who speak the loudest and who fight the hardest against everyone else are seen to be the most pure and the ones who stand most strongly within a movement. That can be a real area where the devil can begin to cause chaos. Such men can begin to see this separated movement as their kingdom. They begin to take more and more control. Their authority begins to have a greater and greater sway. It can very easily lead to something that is very centered on the individuals who stand up and shout the loudest about whatever the problems are. That is something that is negative rather than positive.

Another danger here is that, if we are not careful, we can begin to cultivate conservatism of every kind simply for its own sake. What started out as a clear commitment to a conservative view of Scripture and the Gospel can begin to become more and more conservative culturally, politically, economically, and in every other way. We can see very clearly how that became a problem as time went by.

Finally, the most important danger is that we begin to define ourselves as those who stand against something rather than those who stand for the truth. We need to communicate the truth to others who need it, serve those who need to be served, and love those who need to be loved. We begin to define ourselves as those who stand against this, that, or something else. For the Christian, it is never enough to be against things. The Gospel is a Gospel that gives us truth and life abundantly. It calls us to share that abundant truth and life with other people out of the abundance that God has given us. It is not a negative message; it is a message of tremendous affirmation of life itself, the truth, and salvation that God has given us through Jesus Christ.

It seems to me that this is the most difficult problem. It is not enough to be against things; one has to be for things. The kingdom of God, Paul says in Romans 14, is righteousness, joy, and peace in the Holy Spirit. It is not a lot of rules about just exactly what everyone else's conscience should hold. In the context where Paul says that he was talking about the way faithful Christians can differ with each other about things, he says to be very careful not to define things too narrowly. That is not what the kingdom of God is about. It is about righteousness, joy, and peace in the Holy Spirit. This is a positive message that we communicate, and our mentality from our hearts outward has to be a positive mentality.

That is the final issue regarding the dangers, problems, and issues that are raised by the question of separation. Fundamentally what happens is that, by defining oneself over against others and negatively, it leads in the direction of a deadness of soul. Schaeffer used to say over and over again that if you see someone making a mistake in a certain area in doctrine, life, or anything else, it is not enough just to react against it. You have to stress what they were concerned for in the right way. For example, suppose you do not agree with the idea of a second blessing. You do not think that the New Testament teaches that there are two receptions of the Holy Spirit or two distinct stages in the Christian life, as many Pentecostals and charismatics teach. It is not enough to just say that is not what the Bible teaches about the Holy Spirit. You have to understand what the people were concerned for. They saw a tremendous spiritual deadness in the church, and while we may not agree with the doctrinal position they have come out at, we must be aware that they long for a greater reality of the Holy Spirit in their lives. A greater reality of commitment and service to Christ is totally biblical. Rather than just saying that you are not in favor of the second blessing, we have to say and teach very clearly that the New Testament challenges us to be filled with the Spirit every day. We have to teach a positive message in our own lives, in our teaching, and in the attitudes of our own heart. I do not want to define myself as anti-charismatic or anti-Pentecostal, but I want to define myself as being pro-Holy Spirit. That is really important, and this is true in any area. It creates a totally different mentality, too, in the way you treat other Christians with whom you disagree. If we take this particular issue, we may disagree about exactly how we will describe the work of the Holy Spirit in the believer's life. But we are glad to honor and respect the commitment to Christ and the desire to be obedient to the Holy Spirit and to live a spiritual life, which is so very evident in those with whom we may disagree. This is really important, because it creates such a different mentality. We are able to embrace our Christian brothers and sisters, whoever they are, where we disagree on some issue. We fight for the same thing, which is a spiritual reality. We may say this is not exactly what we think about this issue.

This is a fascinating thing in thinking about the Schaeffers. Over and over again through the years I have met many charismatics and Pentecostals who assumed that the Schaeffers were charismatic or Pentecostal. The reason they did that was not because they were or they ever explicitly said they were but because they spoke so much about prayer, the Holy Spirit, and the reality of spirituality in their lives. It was so evident to anyone who met them, got to know them, and worked with them that they were deeply spiritual people who were daily dependent on the Holy Spirit. They communicated a very different mentality spiritually from what we may sometimes communicate within a Reformed tradition, which can be a negative attitude toward the Holy Spirit. That is terrible; how can anyone be negative about the Holy Spirit? There are some very important issues here practically in terms of how we treat one another. Among other things we may say that it opens all sorts of doors in terms of communicating the Gospel. As you go on down through Schaeffer's life and ministry, you see him delighting to speak to Pentecostal and charismatic groups. They welcomed him with open arms though he never said he agreed with what they were saying. He did not agree with them, and he was quite clear about that. But he recognized there was a deeper commitment to spirituality that is shared there even though the definition may not be the same. There were even some practices that he would not have practiced himself, but he was very glad to say that they were people who loved the Lord and desired to serve Him. So this is very important. We should not only stress what it is not, but we must stress what it is. It is not enough to react against something, but we

should teach that area clearly, affirmatively, and positively. There will be those who will say it is simply a question of truth, so they will not have anything to do with anyone who disagrees with them at any point.

There are also people on the more liberal side who say that truth does not matter. If you think about Hinduism, it says all paths are the same. It is a matter of tolerance and acceptance, and people can pursue their own way. They say to love everyone, no matter what they say, think, or believe doctrinally. Schaeffer came back over the years to the issue of speaking the truth in love. You do not remain silent about the issues of truth, but you communicate them very clearly. At the same time, you demonstrate that you really love people. You can think of what Paul says to Timothy when he says to correct your opponents with gentleness. He does not say to hammer them, drive them away, and have nothing to do with them. He says to correct them with gentleness in the hope that you may win them to the truth.

Let me give you a practical illustration from Schaeffer's own ministry. This happened when I was here at Covenant Seminary as a student. One of my fellow students here went to a public debate between one of the Death of God theologians and an evangelical apologist. He said at the meeting the evangelical, who was a really brilliant man, just completely devastated this Death of God theologian. He was brilliant, his wit was sharp, and so he destroyed his position. He said by the end of the discussion everyone was on the other man's side because he behaved like a gentleman. What came across from the apologist was ruthlessness. In contrast, the same fellow told me he went to the debate between Schaeffer and Bishop Pike. If you remember anything about Pike, he was an Episcopalian bishop who was very liberal theologically. For example, he suggested taking LSD in the communion wine so that one might have a spiritual experience. He really was extremely liberal. Schaeffer had a public debate with him, except Schaeffer was very careful to say that he never regarded it as a debate. He was not interested in winning an argument with this man. He was interested in the man. That is a total difference in mentality. The fellow who went to this meeting said the contrast was so dramatic. The thing that came across so clearly was Schaeffer's compassion for him as an individual. He was not interested in what the audience was thinking. He wanted to communicate what the truth was to this man and to care for him. While it was very evident to people that intellectually Bishop Pike did not have a leg to stand on, Schaeffer was very careful not to destroy or humiliate him publicly. He had a personal conversation with him, it just happened to be in front of hundreds of other people. This was so much so that they became friends, and they were able to communicate with each other afterward. Schaeffer was able to go and visit him and carry on talking with him.

In the first example I used, you can be quite sure that did not happen. It seems to me that no one who was present had any doubt about what Schaeffer thought the truth was. They knew he had truth on his side, he had the capacity, and he was able to show what was wrong with Bishop Pike's position biblically and in other ways. At the same time, it was not a public humiliation at all. This was a genuine conversation between two men who were able to communicate afterward. On a practical level, something that Schaeffer said many times to those who worked with him was if you have a discussion with someone, particularly if it is a public discussion but even if it is just a private one, it is not your calling to put every nail in the coffin. You should not regard it as if it is an intellectual boxing match where you are trying to knock this person down and leave him out cold. All you will do is humiliate him. His pride will be attacked, his personality will be degraded, and you have made communication impossible. You have closed a door to the possibility of communicating to that person. Schaeffer said you always want to leave someone a corner to retire gracefully into. That way they can go home and think about it. They can draw some of the conclusions themselves. You do not need to draw every conclusion. You speak the truth, but speak it in a way that respects this person and shows love to them. If you look at Jesus Himself in the Gospels, the only people He was really hard with were the Pharisees. These were the people who were sure they had everything right. You could call them the separatists of that day. Those are the people He was really hard with because of their lack of compassion on other people and their rigidity. To other people, He was not that way at all. As you read the Gospels, Jesus' compassion and care for other people

is evident. He desired to communicate the truth to them, and He respected them, even those who turned away from Him.

It is very hard to find the balance between speaking the truth and loving. It seems that it depends on the context. For example, we will not accept a man like Bishop Pike, who teaches a liberal Gospel, to preach in the pulpit. That is the issue that 2 John addresses. He talks about false teachers and false prophets who traveled around the early church seeking to gain a hearing for themselves by turning up at churches here and there and expecting to win all the people. You do not welcome to your church someone who is a liberal and ask them to come and preach on Sunday. You delight if they come to your church to join you and hear God's Word preached, because in that they hear the truth. You delight to get to know them as individuals and seek to communicate to them what is truth. Timothy says if there are opponents of the Gospel, we are to correct them with gentleness in the hope that we may win them. That must be one's goal. It depends on the context. If you have someone who troubles the local church by going around and teaching false doctrine to everyone, you may have to discipline that person in the same way as you would discipline someone who was a gossip. The New Testament speaks about people like that who try to get into everyone's homes and lead them astray. You do not want people spreading malicious tidbits of gossip for everyone to hear and be hurt by. The New Testament requires discipline. If you had someone who was an adulterer or a swindler in their business, the church is called to discipline them because they can damage the church.

But there are all sorts of other contexts where it might be completely appropriate to have someone in your home who teaches a false gospel. In the work of L'Abri, we had people come to stay with us who were ministers and theological teachers in liberal churches and seminaries. We understood very well that they were coming into our situation because they wanted to think and question. Sometimes when they first came they were not very open at all. The fact that they would be warmly received and welcomed as a person made in the image of God who has value before God and should have value to us made an enormous difference. Then we could say that we believe Christianity is true, therefore we were happy to have any issue raised and any question discussed. We were not ashamed of the truth, and we were not frightened that they would come up with something that would disprove it or cause problems. They could say and ask whatever they wanted to say, and then we could sit down and discuss it together.

It is clear to me that the New Testament breeds that kind of mentality. God is very gentle. He did not give up on Paul because he persecuted the church and taught falsehood. God kept working on Paul, and eventually Paul came to the truth. He stopped kicking against the bricks. Sometimes those who God works in are those who initially speak most violently against the truth, as in Paul's case. It is evident in Jesus' words to him on the Damascus road that He had already been working in Paul's heart. He asks why he kept kicking against the bricks. It was obvious that Paul's conscience was already being pricked about these Christians, whether it was their lives or some of the things they said. We do not know for sure, because he did not tell us. But there was obviously something that God already used to touch Paul's heart. You would not have seen it on the outside. We could have said, "This is a dreadful man. We do not want him to come anywhere near us. Let us banish him and put up notices against him." But that is not the mentality of the New Testament. We have to be very careful that while we say it is our task to keep the pulpit clean and make sure that those who teach God's Word in our churches teach God's Word faithfully. It is not our task to separate ourselves totally from people who may hold all sorts of heretical ideas as central points, never mind points that are not central. It is a very important issue.

Vishal recently spoke at Covenant, and a Hindu man asked him a question. It was beautiful the way he discussed with him. At a point Vishal said, "Let us let someone else ask a question now." He did not want to pursue it any more, not just because there were other people there who had questions, but because he wanted to leave it before the Hindu felt that he was pushed into a corner. He told him very clearly what he thought was wrong with where he was coming from and what he thought was right about the Gospel. He wanted to wait a

minute and go to someone else. He let him ask another question later. That relationship will then go on. Today Vishal went down and met the swami at the temple. It was very interesting, and he will try to have some more time with him.

Throughout the Schaeffers' years in Saint Louis, they continued to pray for God's direction. Edith writes in *The Tapestry* on page 246 of how they had this big map of the world on their bedroom wall. They used to regularly, as they lie in bed and look at it, pray that God would send them wherever He wanted them to go. She mentions one occasion where Francis asked her if she would be prepared to go to Scotland to Edinburgh if he felt that the Lord called him to further study over there. She said she caught her breath, but she was willing. She had been praying that God would send them wherever He wanted them to go. She was prepared to go. This was something that was an ongoing prayer in their lives. She was ready to go wherever God wanted them to go. If you read about their time in Saint Louis or talk to anyone who was a member of the church at that time, you will know that the Schaeffers had a really wonderful time here. They made many friends whom they regarded as such to the very end of their lives. God blessed their ministry here. They were really content. They loved their home, and their children were happy in the schools they went to. God opened all kinds of doors for them. It was not restlessness, but it was an attitude of trying to be open to God. The Lord was sovereign, so if it was His desire, they would go wherever He wanted them to go. The map on the wall was not simply with regard to them; it was to think and pray for the work of Christ all over the world. It was a reminder to them of what God was doing everywhere. His kingdom stretches through the nations, so they prayed for other people in different situations. This prayer was not restlessness, but it was one of the themes of their lives as it continued to be. They prayed that the Lord would use them in the way or in the place that He wanted them to.

Those prayers that God would take them where He wanted them to go began to be answered in quite a new way in the spring of 1947. There was a board meeting of the Independent Board for Foreign Missions, and Schaeffer was on that board. He raised at that meeting this issue of Europe now that it was just after the second world war had finished.

It is difficult to think about that now, because we are so accustomed to the tremendous amount of information that pours into our homes over the television, through the radio, through books, and into our churches about what is happening in the church all over the world. You can think of the newsletter that many of our churches have called "The Church Around the World." There are many newsletters like that full of information. Try and imagine the situation in the 1940s: Christians in America knew virtually nothing about Christianity in Europe. Europe was engulfed in the most appalling war, one in which almost 50 million people died. A great majority of them were killed with conventional weapons. Europe was completely devastated. I can still remember as a little boy in England, which did not get the worst brunt of it, vast sections of our cities that were completely bombed flat. This was the 1950s, and I can still remember rationing when I was a little boy. There had been almost no contact between the churches in Europe and those in the United States for the whole of the war.

Schaeffer mentioned at the Independent Board for Foreign Missions meeting that it might be good to find out what was going on in the churches in Europe. They were completely isolated because of the war. Because of that isolation, it may be that there was a lot of theological naïveté about the new wave of theological liberalism called neo-orthodoxy. The teaching of Barth and Neibuhr came into the churches. They started sending theological students to the United States to study, but they had no idea what the seminaries were like now. They did not know that many of them had become theologically liberal. So it might be good to find out what was going on there. They had a lot of discussion, decided it was a good idea, and then they said that Schaeffer should go. That was how he first went to Europe; the Independent Board for Foreign Missions decided that he ought to be the one to go to find out.

So in July 1947, Schaeffer set out for Europe with three purposes in mind. The first was to find out the situation. He did a survey of what was happening in the evangelical movement in Europe and brought back a report of what had happened to Bible-believing Christianity in Europe. The second purpose was to begin to heighten awareness of the theological dangers of neo-orthodoxy. He wanted to strengthen the churches and believers who remained in understanding the theological battles of that time. Third, he wanted to look and see what the status of children's work was. He wanted to see if there was a possibility of beginning to encourage children's work like the work of Children for Christ. Those were the purposes with which he went to Europe. Formerly he went as a board member of the Independent Board of Foreign Missions and also as the secretary of the foreign relations department of the American Council of Christian Churches, which was the separated movement of evangelical denominations formed against the World Council of Churches. So he went both as a board member and as a secretary. The church in Saint Louis gave him a leave of absence. Edith went to Cape Cod for the summer with the children. She spent the summer there with her sister and her sister's family. Elmer Smick and his wife Jane came to pastor the church in Saint Louis while they were gone and to live in their home.

During their lifetime, both of them were members of the Anglican Church. It was not actually until after Wesley's death that the Methodist movement became a separate denomination. While many Anglicans refused to let him preach in their pulpits, the Methodist movement remained within the Anglican Church for many years. They did not want Whitefield to preach either because they did not like the evangelical Gospel. It was only after Wesley's death that the movement became completely separate.

This is a good illustration of one of the things we talked about earlier in thinking about separatism. One may have a very clear stand for what is true. When you read Whitefield, for example, you can see very clearly where he stood on issues of Reformed doctrine, the sovereignty of God, and grace. He had the grace to acknowledge that Wesley clearly preached the Gospel, and God used him mightily in bringing many people to Christ and into the church. He was glad to acknowledge that, even though he knew they disagreed. They disagreed quite sharply on various doctrinal points having to do with sovereignty and Arminianism, righteousness and perfectionism. Whitefield could see that he was a man who proclaimed the Gospel of Christ very clearly and very faithfully. He was glad for that. We need to be glad for that. We may be able to disagree with each other and say what we think is important. For example, we may emphasize the grace of God as a biblical issue and desire to sit down and discuss it. Scripture very clearly teaches this. Our clarity and commitment to that must not lead us to say that other people are not Christians. In practice you know that almost everybody is a Calvinist on their knees, as the old saying goes. You see anyone praying, and they thank God for what He does in their lives. They thank God for the work of the Holy Spirit in their weakness. Practically any believer recognizes that they are dependent on God's love, faithfulness, and graciousness to them. It is that recognition and humility of the heart before God that is more important than having every "i" dotted and every "t" crossed. You can have people who are committed to the doctrines of grace in theory who come across tremendously hard and proud and do not demonstrate a humble dependence on the Lord. For every step of life and every word they demonstrate a man-centered religion. There has to be orthodoxy in doctrine and in life.

This was something Schaeffer came back to later on. As I have said already, it was a lack of evidence of God's grace and graciousness in people's hearts and lives that made him start questioning everything again. Are we right if it produces ugliness, narrowness, pride, and battles for leadership? It caused him to question everything. Of course we must hold on to the doctrines of grace or whatever else we are committed to. But it is even more important to believe and practice the graciousness of God, His love toward us, and our dependence on His work in our lives. Schaeffer called this the innermost circle at a later point in his life.