

The Secret of Power

In this lesson we will consider the article, “The Secret of Power and the Enjoyment of the Lord,” in its two parts from the *Sunday School Times*. Lane Dennis, in commenting about this in the introduction to *The Letters of Francis Schaeffer*, points out that this article marks a watershed in Schaeffer’s own life and thinking and in the ministry of the Schaeffers. In *The Letters of Francis Schaeffer*, there is a letter from Schaeffer in which he mentions this article. In Dennis’ introduction to that letter he said, “This article set off a major controversy in the Separated Movement and marked a watershed in the thinking and lives of the Schaeffers.” Schaeffer himself, along with enclosing a copy of the article, wrote in a letter to a friend, “I have just sent this off to the *Sunday School Times*. I do not know whether they are going to print it, but it has meant more to me than any other article I have ever written, and I spent two years writing it.” It was just a short article, but he put his whole heart and soul into it. Some following letters also refer to the issues that he was speaking about in the article. One is a long letter that was 17 pages long.

As we think about this article, because it is so important in the development of Schaeffer’s thinking and it marked the spiritual crisis and turn in a new direction of his life, we may speculate about why he chose the particular title. Whether it was intentional or not, as you read the article and the letters from that time, one of the things that he was tremendously concerned about was the abuse of power in the Separated Movement. This is obviously something that had been on his heart—the struggle for leadership, the kind of leadership, and the abuse of that leadership. There was search for political power within the movement and as a movement over against other groups, such as the National Association of Evangelicals or the World Council of Churches. There increasingly arose a struggle for power. At least, that was Schaeffer’s analysis. He never said that directly anywhere in the article, but that is obviously what was in the back of his mind all the time. What is power? What kind of power should the Christian look for? Should we want this kind of political power in a Christian group, in a church, in the Separated Movement, or as a group over against other bodies of Christians or churches? Thus I think there is word play with the word “power” in this article. He never stated explicitly what the real problem was, because he did not mention people by name in the article or give examples that had led him to think about the issue.

Behind this awareness of the struggle for power and the abuse of power that he thought he had been seeing in the separated movement had come the realization in his thinking that there was a fundamental problem in the Separated Movement and that there had been a fundamental problem in his own life. The starting point is that problem, which he defined in two ways: the lack of power in the Christian life among Bible-believing Christians and the lack of enjoyment in one’s relationship with the Lord. He was seeing that, in the separated movement and in his own life, there had been some real weaknesses. He suggested that these faults of a lack of power and a lack of joy are evident both in individual Christians within the Separated Movement and in Christian organizations within the Separated Movement. In one of the letters he speaks about the way he lost the joy that he had when he first became a Christian. He speaks in one of those letters of the tremendous closeness that he felt to the Lord when he was first converted and how that began to get lost in the battle of the Separated Movement.

What does Schaeffer mean by power and enjoyment? By “power,” Schaeffer simply means a lack of fruitfulness in people’s lives. That fruitfulness is both in the sense of the fruit of the Spirit in their own lives, whether people were really being transformed by the power of God, and there is also a lack of fruitfulness in the sense of whether people are being saved, becoming Christians through this movement. He suggests that there is a lack of power. The power of the Spirit is not evident on much of what the Separated Movement was doing, in terms of the transformation of people’s lives and bringing people to salvation. It was not evident that the Gospel is the power of God to salvation, as Paul said, and the power that transforms. There was a lack of this, both in

individuals and in the organization. There was also a lack of enjoyment. Paul said the kingdom of God is righteousness, joy, and peace in the Holy Spirit. Schaeffer said that there was a lack of that enjoyment of fellowship with Christ.

This is what lies behind the article. It was his growing awareness that became a crisis in his own life, which we will return to in a subsequent lesson, of a lack of power and a lack of joy. There was a growing awareness of this in the whole Separated Movement. He did not mean it was lacking in every individual, but as a movement it could be characterized in this way. As he said, he took two years to write the article. It is very short. It was something that remained important to him throughout his life. I remember him handing out copies of this article to us as workers many years after he wrote it. The things he said in the article were fundamental to him from that point onward in understanding what the Christian life is all about. That is what this article is getting at. What does it mean in practice to be a Christian?

We can divide the article into two parts: a part on purity and a part on love. We will first consider purity, as he did. He began with purity, because he knew that everybody in the Separated Movement would agree with him, with the need for purity in the church. He started from a point that he knew everyone would immediately accept. They would say, "Yes, that is right. We need to be pure." Then he asked a question. How do we understand purity? Is purity simply giving up amusements and certain habits? He obviously had in mind the habits of that time that were evident throughout evangelical Christianity, including all the rules about what you could and could not do, such as dancing, going to the movies, smoking, drinking, card playing, gambling, and all the other kinds of things that were on the list of "do not's" at that time. All those things were still on the list of "do not's" when my wife went to an evangelical college a few years after this. They were part of what purity was understood to be at that time. We may say that they still are a part of that understanding in a large part of the evangelical movement today. Purity is understood to be a list of negative things that we do not do, plus a few positives such as attending church, Sunday school, and prayer meetings, or reading our Bible, praying individually, and occasionally plucking up our courage to witness to people. Purity is often understood as simply being that list of negatives and that list of positives.

Schaeffer asked if that was how we understand purity. Is it putting off a few amusements and habits and putting on a few habits? He gave several answers. First, he said that purity is much deeper than this. Purity is concerned with outward matters, although the outward matters that Scripture is concerned with when it speaks about purity are much weightier. Those matters are murder, adultery, theft, false witness, justice, and the commandments. Schaeffer then said that purity is even deeper than that, deeper than outward matters, even weightier than outward matters.

Second, purity deals with the heart. Purity is about the inward person. Purity is about covetousness. This theme that purity is the removal of covetousness from the heart was a fundamental part of his teaching from then on. It was a major part of his thesis in *True Spirituality*, if you have read that book. In it he deals with the tenth commandment. He points out that the tenth commandment is entirely inward, "Thou shall not covet." It applies to all the other commandments. What is covetousness? He gives various illustrations in the article. Covetousness is wanting what we do not have. It is also holding on to what we do have, whether that is possessions or leadership. He said, "Is there a simple test that I may apply to my life to find out if I am covetous? Yes there is. Let me ask myself, 'If so-and-so, who has more possessions than I do, or more leadership than I do, should lose them, would I be inwardly pleased? And if so-and-so who has less possessions or leadership than I have should begin to gain, would I be inwardly wretched?' If I would, then I have coveted. If covetousness is present, then I am not right inside. To the extent that I am not right inside, I do not express personal purity."

He obviously had in mind the struggle for power in the separated movement. These are very practical questions that he was asking. Paul made the same kind of comment. He thought that he was being quite obedient to the Law of God until he came across the tenth commandment, "Thou shall not covet." Then he realized that his sin revived, in a sense. He became very aware of the sinfulness of his own heart. This was the point that Schaeffer was making. God's Law applies to the heart, and all of us have covetousness inside. He said if there is such covetousness, if I am pursuing leadership myself, if I am bothered by other people's leadership or by other people having more power than I do, and if I am delighted when they lose it, then I am not pure. If that covetousness is present, there is no purity. Then the question that he kept asking through the article was "Is this easy?" He said, "No. This is a battle against the sinful nature all the way." In other words, purity is not a simple thing. Purity is something that involves the transformation of one's heart, of oneself from the inside out. Then he went further and said that purity is much more than that negative, than the absence of covetousness. Purity is actually love. He returned to that idea later, so we will not consider it for the moment.

He then raised a third point. Purity involves the purity of the church; the exclusion of false doctrine and moral disobedience is everywhere commanded by Scripture. He said that wherever the church has forgotten to be pure in that sense, of disciplining false doctrine and moral disobedience, then the church has lost its power. He gave two illustrations. One was from the early church in the time of Constantine onward. He said the church became compromised in its doctrine and life. So it forgot purity, and consequently it lost the power of the Lord. The medieval Catholic Church resulted. The other illustration he gave was the Nestorian church. It once was present across vast expanses of Asia. When it became compromised in its doctrine and life, it became indistinguishable from the world, and it lost its power. That is true of liberalism today. If you forget the purity of the church, if you ignore false doctrine and moral disobedience, then the church loses its power. It becomes indistinguishable from the society around it. Schaeffer said this kind of purity is needed, but it is not easy. He was not losing his commitment to what we call separatism in the sense of biblical discipline. This becomes clear in the letters about this. He said, "I am still 1000% in agreement with the stands that we have made." He thought it was right to leave denominations that were liberal because discipline had become impossible. He said that purity of the visible church is necessary for there to be power in the church, for the power of God to rest on the church, and it is necessary for the enjoyment of the Lord, for enjoying our fellowship with Him. We must hold on to pure doctrine and discipline moral disobedience.

Yet he added a fourth point that was very important to what he was saying. The purity of the visible church is not an end in itself. Why do we try to make the church pure? The only reason is that we should do it as an expression of our obedience to the Lord out of love for Him because it pleases Him. The point he was making was that some were behaving as if the purity of the church, as if maintaining the discipline of false doctrine and standing against false doctrine itself was the sign of vitality, or the sign of life. He said that was not the sign of life, the sign of power. It is simply an expression of obedience to Christ. It may be necessary in order for the power of Christ to rest on the church, but it is not in itself the sign of power. It is not in itself the sign of vitality, of the life of the Spirit. The purity of the visible church is not an end in itself. It is simply a commitment to obedience to God's Word.

Then his fifth point was that purity is never only negative. It is not simply discipline in the sense of separation from unbelief or from disobedience. It must be separation to a deep love for God. He makes a very powerful point by saying if it does not involve separation to a deep love for God then it is not separation at all in the biblical sense. It would simply be division. You can think of the tremendously negative criticisms that Paul makes about divisiveness, about division in the church, such as in Titus 3:10 and 1 Timothy 1:4-6 and many other places. Paul said, "Warn a divisive man," then if he does not listen, have nothing to do with him. So purity must not mean simply separation from false doctrine but also separation to a deep love for God. Otherwise it is simply divisiveness rather than biblical separation.

We can summarize what Schaeffer has said to this point, and he himself made a summary. He said that purity must be based on deep love. We must be committed to purity in the sense of purity in our own lives and the purity of the visible church because of our deep love for the Lord. We are only committed to purity because He commands it and because we love Him and want to do what He says. Purity must lead to a deep love for the Lord. Schaeffer said that if purity is not based on deep love and it does not lead to deep love then it is not separation but it is simply of the flesh. It is just sin. That is his point. Separation that is not based on love and does not lead to love is actually just plain sin. It is of the flesh. We always have to ask ourselves that question. Is our orthodoxy based on a deep love for God, and does it lead to a deep love in our lives? If it does not, then our orthodoxy is of the flesh. That is Schaeffer's point. It is not of the Spirit.

That brings us to the second half of the article, which is about love. Schaeffer repeatedly said throughout his section on purity that the other side of purity, like the other side of a coin, is love. If you have biblical purity and you turn the coin over, then there is love. He makes several points about love. The first is that as Christians, and he was particularly addressing those in the Separated Movement, we must love all men, not only fellow believers, by which he means not only those in the Separated Movement. We must love all men. He made a point in one of the letters that he did not make in the article. He said that many of the people in the National Association of Evangelicals—although he was agreed with the stand that the Separated Movement took against them because of their comprehensiveness and because he thought they were compromised in certain areas—are our dear Christian brothers, and we should love them. You can see how he has moved from a few years earlier. We should love all people. We should love our fellow Christians in the Separated Movement, those who are fellow Christians who are not in the Separated Movement, and those who are not Christians at all. We are called to love them all. He appealed to the parable of the Good Samaritan. He said that love like this must not be minimized. He clearly believed that love was being minimized. There was only love for those within the movement and not love for those outside.

We may say that in a different kind of way we are faced with the same problem today. As our society becomes increasingly secular, the temptation for the Christian is to love only other believers in the haven of the church and not to love all people, because it is too worldly and too dangerous to love them. I hear that argument made repeatedly, though never quite so simply. It would be so obviously wrong if anybody put it that way. Yet I hear the argument made repeatedly that we must separate ourselves completely from unbelievers and everything they do because they are too worldly and it would be too dangerous to expose ourselves to them. What that does in actuality is undercut the command from God that we are to love all people. So the first point Schaeffer made was love for all people.

Second, he said that if there is love present, which there must be in genuine Christians, it will lead to gentleness and tenderness. He said there has always been among great Christians a gentleness and tenderness to them. He appealed to Martin Luther and Bonar. If you read their hymns, you notice there is a wonderful love for children in them. He said that if that love, gentleness, and tenderness are not present, but simply harshness and narrowness, and a kind of tunnel vision, then we are missing the mark completely. He said we should be like those believers of the past, like Christ Himself, who said, "Let the little children come to me." We must be characterized by gentleness.

Third, Schaeffer said that love is not a slogan. We cannot simply carry around a banner or shout the words "love for all." Every Christian will acknowledge that we ought to love people. Yet it must be evident in practice. There are two particular things that he points out regarding how love ought to be evident in practice. The one is that love ought to be evidenced in little acts of kindness. That is the sign of the love of God being present in our lives, whether we are given to little acts of kindness.

In the second point he is striking to the heart of the issue in the Separated Movement. He said that love must be expressed by fair dealing to all, including the enemies of the Gospel. He said, "Even in the battle for the purity of the church there must be no misrepresentation of the positions of others, no caricatures." There must be scrupulous honesty in how we deal with other people. This is true even in the way we deal with the blasphemer. He must know that we have been fair with him. This is always a temptation for evangelicals, to misrepresent and caricature other people's positions and to think that anything is justifiable for the sake of the battle for the truth. Schaeffer's point is that it must be evident even to the people we have to stand against in the battle for the truth that we have been fair and just in our dealings with them. He said, "Even those we have to fight against we must genuinely love and desire their salvation," no matter who they are, no matter how against us and what we stand for they are. You can think of the way Paul speaks about this. He spoke about enemies of the Gospel, and he said, "I say this with tears." In other words, we must have an attitude of sorrow and compassion even for those who are enemies of the Gospel. A couple of passages that address this are 2 Timothy 3:22-25 and Philippians 3:18.

Schaeffer pointed out that this is easily missed, particularly if the purity of the church becomes an end in itself. He said, "The purity of the church must never become an end in itself. It must not even be loyalty to a principle. If that is all that is involved, and there is no love, then it is worth nothing at all." You can be as pure as you like and as separatist as you like, but if it is without love, even for the people whom you are separating from, then it is worth nothing.

Then he moves on in his fourth point to say that if we are so involved in the battle that any means becomes permissible to win the battle so that love is gone and power is gone, then all that is left is just sinful, fleshly, self-centered human effort. The means he was thinking of were character assassination, misrepresentation, politicizing issues, lobbying, and bending rules. Those kinds of things became ever more a reality in the separated movement. With those things, there is no power of God at all. You only have a man-centered movement. If you fight the right battle in the wrong way, then the power of God does not rest on you. This became the theme of his teaching. You can think of his sermon, "The Lord's Work in the Lord's Way," which was on this same issue. You can do God's work, but if you do it in the wrong way, then it is not the Lord's work at all. It is just your work. That is Schaeffer's point. It is also sinful work, because it is based on pride, egotism, misrepresentation, and the search for power. When it becomes that, it is just sinful. Love has gone. Power has gone.

We may say that things are the same today. What Schaeffer was saying can be true about anything. If our confidence rests in our programs, in the models we adopt, or in anything rather than love for the Lord and dependence on Him, then dead orthodoxy is a short step away. Along with that, dead orthodoxy, moral failure, and heresy come very quickly. The battle must never become so important to us that we lose sight of what is at its heart, which is love for God and love for all men.

Schaeffer's fifth point is that love involves chastisement. That is, love and purity stand together. If we genuinely love people, then we will be prepared to point out their failures, in doctrine and in life. Love involves pain. If we genuinely love God, our brother, and our enemy, then we will point out the faults that are in people. Love for our brothers and sisters leads to holiness of love. So love and purity stand together. Schaeffer wanted to emphasize that if we look at love closely, we find that it also involves this commitment to purity, to holiness. It is the other side of the coin.

Then Schaeffer makes a sixth point. All of these points are closely related, but I am trying to help us analyze the article. Schaeffer said that if there is biblical purity and love, then there will not only be contending for the faith, battling in writing and in preaching, but there will also be devotional literature and sermons. In one of his letters he wrote, "What American writer, and particularly what writer in our Separated Movement, has produced any

great devotional literature?” If there is only contending, and no devotional literature, then something is very wrong.” He went on to say, “Indeed, if there is biblical purity and love, there will be growing prayer as well.” There will be growing prayer both in public and in private. So if there is biblical purity, it must lead to an increase in devotional literature and a growth in prayer as well.

His seventh and final point is the one that was present all the way through his article. Everything we do, our whole commitment to purity, is to be out of love for Christ. Why should we try to be pure ourselves and deal with covetousness and the hunger for power? It is because we love Christ. Why should a church be pure, discipline false doctrine, and separate itself from an unbelieving church? It is because of love for Christ. Schaeffer refers to the Ephesian church in Revelation 2:4. It had lost its first love. He made that reference in his letters when speaking about himself and the whole movement. He said that they had lost their first love. He said you can look at that church that hated false doctrine. That was good, and Christ approved that. Yet unless it would repent and return to its first love, then its testimony would be removed. Schaeffer said that would happen to them as a movement. That would happen to the movement unless it repented of the things it was doing, its wrongful search for power. Unless it returned to its love for Christ, then its testimony would be removed. Then it would have no power at all. It would become smaller and less attractive. God would not bless his work.

Schaeffer finished by saying that we must desire purity not because we desire honor, praise, leadership, power, money, to be proved right, and especially not because we want power. All those things are vain. We must desire purity only because we love Christ. At the end of the article, Schaeffer asked the question, “Do I love Him? Do I die daily?” What he meant was, am I really prepared to put the sinful desires of my heart, of my flesh, to death every day and have them taken away and cleansed and made new in the love of Christ?

As we think about this we may make some comments. First, what Schaeffer had identified, although he did not use the term, was the problem of Pharisaism or legalism. We may say that is the heresy that Bible-believing Christians are most likely to fall into. It is precisely because we are committed to the battle for a biblical faith, for the purity of the faith. The heresy we will fall into most easily will not be denying the divinity of Christ or the authority of Scripture, although we must beware of those things at all times. What we will fall into is the heresy of Pharisaism, of legalism. That is when the zeal for the battle becomes more important than zeal for the Lord. That was the point Schaeffer was making all the way through the article.

The second thing we should notice is that he did not mention anybody by name. He did not mention anyone explicitly. He did not even imply that he had anyone in particular in mind. This is the way he operated all the time. I knew him for many years, and I never heard him mention by name any of the leaders of that movement, some of whom did evidently seek power. That is universally known now in evangelicalism. This was an important principle to him. What we are called to do by God is to deal with principles, with issues. Another reason for this, beside being a matter of principle, was that the article had taken so long to write because he knew that he himself had been involved in this. He had lost his own love for the Lord. It had been a great spiritual crisis for him in returning to his love. So he was not pointing his finger at other people. He was analyzing a problem that he perceived in himself and that he perceived in the whole movement. He was calling himself and his brothers and sisters in that movement to repentance over these issues.