

Question and Answer Session

Before we pick up again today, let us go over some questions that have come up on the things we have talked about so far in the Basic Bible Studies.

The Bible studies were written for believers and unbelievers. Francis Schaeffer wrote them initially for a person with whom he discussed the truth of the Christian message. That person had gotten to the point where he wanted to really know what the Bible had to say. So Schaeffer prepared these for him. He went over them, and they talked about them together. They were prepared in the context of someone who was seriously seeking. That is probably the best context in which to use these studies. They are for an individual to use them with someone who has gotten to the point where they really want to know what Christianity says. They can go through them with that person. I have done that on several occasions with individuals. That is one of the points I want to make: Schaeffer always thought apologetically. I do not think he was interested in philosophy for its own sake. That is not why you get references to what he said about the Trinity or the abnormality of the world. He tried to show people how the biblical message really does explain the reality that exists today. He always had that apologetic focus in mind. These Bible studies are also very useful to use with someone who is a brand new Christian and needs instruction on some very basic issues.

Some have asked how many people came to L'Abri as unbelievers and left as unbelievers. I cannot answer the question with a specific percentage. Looking back on my 19 years of working at L'Abri, we had many non-Christians come through, though the number varied at any one time. Sometimes maybe half of your group of people would be non-Christians. Other times there were only one or two non-believers there. As I look back, I would say probably more than half of the non-believers who came left as believers. That is just a guess, though. There was never any pressure put on people to come to faith while they were there.

That is important, because it is not our place to put pressure on people. As we seek to communicate the Gospel to people, we have to have sufficient confidence in the sovereignty of God, that His desire to save people is far greater than ours, so we should not feel the need to put pressure on someone. If someone leaves without becoming a Christian, we do not feel that we have failed or that it was not worth their while being here. In fact, I remember Schaeffer sometimes actually encouraging people to leave for a while and get away from the situation. There is some pressure, simply by being surrounded with Christians who answer your questions and present the Gospel to you. He suggested that they leave and think about it alone for a while. He did that rather than saying that they had to believe while they were there or it would be too late. He believed very passionately that it was God who brought the people there in the first place. You did not have to see results right then. You could relax, in a sense, and leave this person in the hands of God. In other words, you really practiced Calvinism rather than feeling that it is all up to us. We believe that God is the one who desires to save and who works to save.

Of those people who left as non-Christians, I know quite a few who became Christians after they left, because they wrote and told us so. Sometimes it was a week or two later, sometimes months or years later. I know a few people who came through our branch of L'Abri who left as unbelievers, and to my knowledge they are still unbelievers. That does not mean I have given up on them. When I think about those individuals, I continue to pray for them. I believe God brought them there in the first place, so I do not feel that the fact that 10 years has passed means that this person will not come to faith. This is a very important thing.

Edith Schaeffer uses the image of the tapestry to describe the way God weaves together different threads into a person's life. When someone came to stay at a branch of L'Abri, Schaeffer recognized that this was one thread that God wove into that person's life. There were many threads He had already woven into his or her life. There were other people who prayed for them and the person who encouraged them to come to L'Abri. This was often an individual they met on a train, someone back home, someone in their family, or someone in a church nearby. There are all sorts of people who have sent people to L'Abri such as doctors, social workers, professional workers, divorce lawyers, and school teachers. We had dinner last night with a girl who became a Christian at L'Abri when she was a high school student in Saint Louis. One of Schaeffer's daughters taught French at a high school here in Saint Louis while her husband was a student at the seminary. This was a girl who was in one of her French classes. They got to know each other, and they started praying for her. She went to stay in Switzerland at L'Abri and became a Christian there. She is still a faithful believer now 30 years later. She is very active in one of our Presbyterian Church in America (PCA) churches here in the city.

We have to always see ourselves as very finite and one tiny part in God's work of salvation in a person's life. That is why I personally have very serious problems with those who teach evangelism as if everything rests on me. They see to teach that if I do not bring this person to a decision in the short time that I have with them then somehow I have been unfaithful to God. I do not see that in Scripture, but instead I see the opposite. God is the one who in His time will bring people to Himself. What He calls us to do is to be faithful. As you look at the Schaeffers in L'Abri and the whole work of L'Abri, they attempted to be faithful with the opportunities God gave them with the individuals who came through.

One of the points I wanted to make is that Schaeffer felt that evangelism is every Christian's responsibility. On page 74 in these studies he comments on Acts 1:8 and says, "The third is witnessing for Christ. This command is to all Christians. You can do your part; you can be a teller no matter where the Lord places you in life." The Schaeffers were passionately and personally committed to evangelism. What I have said about having confidence in the sovereignty of God does not mean that we do not take our responsibility seriously. It is just the opposite, and the Schaeffers took their responsibility very seriously. Every time either of them flew on a plane they would share their faith. When I went to pick Edith up from the airport when she came to speak on the day of prayer, she came out of the plane with a man who carried her bag. She had clearly been talking to him all the way from Minneapolis to here. She really takes her responsibility seriously to try to communicate the Gospel to everyone she can. Francis always did this, too. When you read his account of his travels around Europe, he talked to many people. He talked to waiters, porters in the train, and people he sat next to, met on the street, met in hotels, and saw in the hospital. He saw himself as having an obligation before God to share the Gospel. You can have these two things side by side.

One of the central emphases of Schaeffer's teaching is that you have tremendous confidence in the sovereignty of God that enables you to know that this is God's work. Therefore you do not have to try to force conversion before a person is ready to come to faith. You can leave it in the hands of God. At the same time, you need a very strong sense of your personal obligation to be faithful to say what you can and declare the Gospel fearlessly, boldly, and clearly to every person when an opportunity arises. Schaeffer said over and over again that you have to hold those two things together. I would recommend to all of you his tape, "The Absolute Limits of Christianity." I think it is one of his best lectures where he talks, among other things, about God's sovereignty and human responsibility. If you are not careful you can fall off a cliff on either side. You can fall off on the side of stressing God's sovereignty in such a way that you make your choices, actions, and words meaningless. Scripture never does that, but it insists that what we do really has significance. On the other hand, you can fall off the cliff on the other side, say it is all up to us, and forget that God is sovereign. He is the one who saves. Schaeffer used to

use that image over and over again, saying that there is a very narrow way to walk as we seek to be faithful to this double emphasis in the Word of God. This is also true of the Trinity, the person of Christ, and various other things like that where you hold two things together that seem, at first sight, to have some element of contradiction or paradox. He would not use those words because he did not call God's sovereignty and human responsibility a paradox in the way that some neo-orthodox theologians would. He would say these have to be held together because Scripture clearly teaches them, and they fit together in God's wisdom. It is not up to us to try to see how they fit together. It is up to us to be faithful to God's Word and what it teaches.

Coming back to the question, there were certainly people who left L'Abri without becoming Christians. That, of course, saddened everybody, because you long to see people come to faith. It was not for your sake but for the sake of the Gospel, of Christ, and for their sake. It always hurts if someone turns away from you and says that they are not convinced or prepared to believe. You keep on praying for them, sometimes with tears.

We had several examples of people who came to us and professed to become Christians but later left and appeared to have turned away. We had a person who came to stay with us who was an orphan, rejected by her mother at the age of nine months. She was then put in a children's home and, on half a dozen occasions, couples took her in temporarily while they considered whether or not they wanted to adopt her. Then they decided they did not want to adopt her and put her back in the orphanage. You can imagine what kind of a wounded person she was. She came to stay with us because one of my colleagues was pregnant, and the last month of her pregnancy she had serious problems. She had to go into the hospital and was there for a month having to lie still to keep the baby safe. The girl in the next bed happened to be this girl, who was expecting an illegitimate child. They got to know each other, got talking together, and this girl came to stay with us after she had her baby. She lived with us there for two years. She made a commitment to the Gospel and worked with us for a while. She was very helpful to other people. She was still a very damaged person, though. The turning point for her was when we had a very dear Norwegian fellow staying with us who fell in love with her. He asked her to marry him, and at first she said yes. Then she was so terrified of that kind of human commitment after the experiences of her childhood. She thought surely it would fall apart like everything else in her life. She ran away at that point from him and from us as well. A little later she left, and the last I know of her through keeping in contact with her, she joined a lesbian feminist community. She proceeded to try to raise her little boy in that situation. You can imagine the devastating effect that has had on his life. He is exactly the same age as my eldest son, and I last saw him about six years ago. He was a total mess and in trouble with the police for all kinds of juvenile crimes. When you see something like that, obviously it fills you with terrible sadness when someone in whom you have seen evidence of God's work turns away from the Lord. It is very painful, and it is very difficult to know how to pray in such a situation.

For myself as I think of her and of her son, which I do from time to time, I believe that God brought her there in the first place. The circumstances were so remarkable, and we really saw some dramatic changes in her life over that period of two or three years. I just continue to pray with confidence that God is not going to let her go. I pray that at some point in her life He will bring her back to Himself and complete the work that He started. That has to be our confidence. At the same time, you cannot help but feel afraid for them. You have to, because it is only appropriate. You think of the way Scripture describes people who come to the point of seeing clearly that this is true and then turn away. I think Scripture clearly teaches that people who are genuinely saved are always saved. There is a perseverance of the saints, but sometimes it is very difficult to know exactly at what point our regeneration takes place. People change substantially before they are regenerated. I have seen many people whose lives have been dramatically transformed before they actually became Christians. It happened to me. My life

was radically changed simply by knowing that Christianity was true, and that was before I actually became a Christian. I had been so miserable and suicidal, but I met Christians and learned from them and their lives. I saw what God had done in their lives and saw the answers to my questions that they had which really made sense to me. It pulled me out of the pit long before I came to the point of being prepared to bow before God and ask for His forgiveness.

You see this over and over again with people. As they come among the people of God and hear His truth, it can have a very powerful effect on them before they are actually converted. We cannot always tell whether a person has reached the point of regeneration or exactly when that point is. We have to leave that in God's hands. That is why it is such a mistake to try to make people say when the point was when they became a Christian. A lot of people have no idea at all when it actually was. With some people it is a moment, like the apostle Paul. With other people they can say that it was at some point in the last two years that they came from darkness to light. They could not tell you when specifically. Many people, especially those who grew up in Christian homes, have absolutely no idea at all. They cannot ever remember a time when they were not believers. That is the way it ought to be. As we think about that or you see someone like the person I described, you cannot know. We believed at the time that she was born again, and on the basis of that we trust that God will bring her back to Himself. We trust that He will humble her in her rebelliousness. Certainly she has been humbled by the appalling nature of her life since that time.

Let me give you another illustration, which is very dramatic. This was a fellow who came to stay with us at L'Abri. I will always remember the day he and his girlfriend arrived. He came in the door first, and I was not sure whether he was the male or the female of the couple. He wore a green, gold, and scarlet dragon suit, and he had makeup and perfume on. They came straight out of the drug scene. When the girl came through the door, it was obvious which one was the woman, because she was unmistakably feminine. They came to stay with us, and they had been living on drugs all the time for the previous few years. They were completely spaced out constantly. Over time they both became Christians, they were married, and they had three little boys. Then he started committing adultery. They had become members of our church there, so we had to discipline him. One of the pastors of the church and I disciplined him for his adultery. As often happens in the case of discipline, he left. People either respond to discipline or get out. It is very difficult to be in a place where people are biblically disciplining you. He left and went off with the other woman. Eventually that relationship broke up, and he stopped the adultery. This is while the discipline was still going on, but there were other things going on in his life that were not good.

Then came one of the most dramatic things that ever happened in my life. I heard this tremendous knocking on my door at three o'clock in the morning. I went downstairs and this fellow was at the door. It was New Year's day, and he was absolutely wild. I thought at first that he had been taking drugs, but he assured me that he had not. He kept saying to me over and over again, "The devil is after me. I am going to hell." He was half out of his mind. I managed to calm him down a little bit, and he stayed for about an hour. We talked about where he stood before the Lord and his faith, and he assured me that he was a believer. He was overwhelmed by the sins that he had committed, and he felt that he deserved the judgment of God. My own feeling in the situation was that the devil was really after him. I felt he sought to drive him to despair because that was the situation. After I finally calmed him down, he left. The next night his body was found on a road on Salisbury plain. He was stark naked, and his head was crushed by a truck. He had driven into a field apparently and then run along the road, taking off his clothes as he went. He suffered a horrible death. I personally have no doubt that he is with the Lord and we will see him one day.

I think what we saw in practice tells us how very serious biblical discipline is. We often completely ignore what Paul actually says in 1 Corinthians. He says to hand the person you discipline over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. I think that is what we really saw happen in practice. He had been put out of the church, he had been disciplined, and the devil destroyed him physically. I have no doubt about that, but I also have confidence, particularly after that last conversation I had with him, that he is with the Lord. I was the last person to see him before he died. The whole situation was one that had a very dramatic effect on our church. You can imagine the way it made everyone feel. It sobered everyone. It really shook up very dramatically anyone who considered doing anything unfaithful or sinful. The funeral service was one of the most moving things I have ever been to. His favorite piece of music was a song by Mahalia Jackson. We played it at his funeral with the confidence from everybody present that he had indeed moved up a little higher and he was genuinely delivered from his situation. We need to take God's Word very seriously when we practice church discipline. It is a tremendously sobering thing that we do, because we put someone outside of the protection of God. I am sure that is what Paul means by that when he says we hand them over to Satan. This person is no longer in a situation where they receive the kind of protection that a believer normally receives. God's purpose is to bring the person to repentance.

We so often find ourselves in situations where we really have to leave ourselves in the hands of God. If a person leaves as an unbeliever, we keep praying for them, convinced that God brought you in contact with them in the first place and will carry on doing His work, weaving His tapestry in their life. Another person may come to faith and then appear to turn away. You keep praying for them with confidence that God will continue to work in them. Often we cannot answer the specific questions about people.

In relationship to the issue of discipline, let me talk about L'Abri's connection to the church. This is very important, because Schaeffer always made it very clear that L'Abri is not a church. Therefore it does not have the same structure as a church. It cannot administer baptism or the Lord's Supper or discipline people in the sense of church discipline. It obviously disciplines people as parents do their children. You have to treat people who come and stay with you with significance.

L'Abri is not the church, but let me give you an illustration of our situation in England. We started a church as soon as we could, out of obedience to God and for our own needs. God commands us to be part of His people in the formal context of a church. There was not an evangelical church in the area that we could happily go to or that we could take our own children or anyone who came to stay with us to. That is the situation in many parts of England. It may be some distance before you can find a faithful church. There simply was not one that we could feel really happy with in our situation, so in obedience to God's Word, we started a congregation. We felt the need for ourselves to be in the fellowship of God's people, and L'Abri was not a church. It did not meet those needs. We felt the need for our children that they be raised in a church. And we felt the need for all the people who came to stay with us that, as well as the context of L'Abri day by day, they also needed to see a church in action. They needed to be part of it, at least for the time that they were there.

We felt also that we had a responsibility to actively reach out to our neighbors. L'Abri operates in a way that the church cannot really do. It prays that God would bring people for us to take care of and communicate the Gospel to, rather than actively going out to get people. Church has a responsibility to actively go out and get people. All of us wore two hats all the time; we were very aware of that, and sometimes it was complicated. Within the context of L'Abri, we prayed that God would bring people to us. As a pastor in the church, I was involved in thinking and praying about how we could go out and reach out to the community. We saw that very much as a responsibility, not of L'Abri but as a part of the church of Christ.

So the church got started there, and that church now has approximately 300 people in it. It started with just two families and two single people. Most of those people are ones who had been converted from the area. Some are people who became Christians at L'Abri and then settled in the area. It is a mixture of people. We always tried to very carefully distinguish between what L'Abri did and what the work of the church was. Schaeffer wrote into the consensus that all L'Abri members were required to be members of a church somewhere. It was stated very clearly that it was not sufficient simply to work in L'Abri alongside other believers. Schaeffer would have said that the church is the only organization that Christ has established to last until the end of this age and until His coming. He believed that God indeed raises up parachurch organizations from time to time for specific needs in the church. That is how he regarded L'Abri. He saw it as an organization that God had raised up alongside the church to meet some very specific needs of the church at this present time. He had no commitment to L'Abri lasting forever. In fact, the Schaeffers prayed regularly that God would show His desire to keep the work of L'Abri going by providing for the financial needs of the work. If He no longer wanted the work to exist, they asked that we would not have our needs met any longer and He would close it down.

A lot of people found that very difficult to understand. They said L'Abri was such a good thing and was so helpful to people that they ought to start new branches everywhere. They asked why they did not aggressively go out and spread the work of L'Abri. Our response was always that we are not the church. If we felt that God was calling us to start another branch, we would do that. As I mentioned in an earlier class, we were offered quite a few properties that we turned down. We did not feel that was the right moment or the right place to establish another L'Abri. We very carefully made that distinction.

In the English L'Abri at the end of every semester, the very last session we had with a group of people before they left was about the importance of getting involved in a local church. One of us would give a talk about people's responsibility to get involved in a church when they got home. We did not want them to hang onto L'Abri as their spiritual home, though you cannot break ties that are there. They are very real and precious ties. You look at someone and know that he is a younger brother in the faith. That is a very precious thing that God gives us, and those relationships will carry on into eternity. That is why Paul was able to say, "What is my crown of joy or boasting on the day of the Lord Jesus? Is it not you? You are my glory and joy." He is not being arrogant, but he acknowledges that God used him in people's lives. People will be in heaven because of His work. He can say, "You are my glory and joy when I stand before the Lord." You are God's mark of His approval of my ministry. That is a wonderful thing to be able to say.

Many people who came to L'Abri became close to us personally and regarded L'Abri as a spiritual home. People who came from very bad family situations felt that L'Abri really was their home. We had a lot of weddings because of that. People did not want to go home to their parents because their parents did not care for them. They wanted to be married at L'Abri with the people there who felt like their family. That made for a lot of extra work, but it was worth it. At the same time, we would tell them when they went back to wherever they went that they must get involved in a church there. God commands us in His Word to become part of a church. We are to be active in the church, learn, sit under someone's discipline, hear regular teaching of the Word, get involved with a body of people whom we pray for, and use our gifts to serve the church. We tried very hard to challenge people to make sure they became involved in a church when they went back.

With regard to Schaeffer, when the International Presbyterian Church (IPC) started in Switzerland, there were some people who left L'Abri who had no church to go to. They were going back to parts of the world where there was no church at all. Those people often became members of the IPC. Some of them were members of it for years until they found a place where they could have fellowship and teaching and

serve. That was not ideal, though, and it was understood not to be ideal. The Schaeffers tried to take very seriously their responsibility to have some spiritual oversight over those people still. They wrote letters to them, saw them when they could, and encouraged them. L'Abri never held the Lord's Supper; it was always held in the context of a church.