

Basic Bible Study Themes, V

Father, we want to thank You for this lovely weather and the wonder of Your creation. Even more, Father, we thank You for the wonder of Yourself and all You have done for us. We pray now that as we think together in this class that You will teach and challenge us. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.

In lesson nine we discussed the third section from Basic Bible Studies, which was on salvation. We looked at how God's holiness is not compromised and Schaeffer's emphasis on space, time, and history. He also emphasized the empty hands of faith, that we come to God with faith plus nothing. Any emphasis on works is humanistic. Fourth, we looked at how sanctification is by faith as well, and fifth, we looked at the relationship with all three members of the Trinity. This is one of Schaeffer's major stresses on the Christian experience. In answer to questions in the last lesson, we added in a sixth point, which is that evangelism is every Christian's calling.

That brings us to point number seven, which is the last point in this section. It is about Schaeffer's emphasis on the lordship of Christ over the whole of life. Let me read one short passage from lesson 19 on sanctification. Schaeffer says, "Being Christian should make a difference in every aspect of our lives." For Schaeffer, one of the central characteristics of being Reformed meant this emphasis on the lordship of Christ over the whole of life. It is something you may have heard me say in class, but he used to say it over and over again. When people thought about being descendants of the tradition of Calvin from Geneva, their emphasis would be primarily on Calvin's teaching on the sovereignty of God in salvation. They would focus on God's work of saving His elect and special people. But in Switzerland, Holland, Germany, and France, if you used the word "reformed" to talk about the Reformed faith or Reformed churches, people understood you to mean those churches that, following Calvin, emphasized the sovereignty of God over all of life and the whole of history. God is sovereign, not only over salvation, but also over the Christian's life today. We are called to serve God in everything that we do. Here in particular, there is an emphasis that there is no secular part of the Christian's life. We are called to serve and honor God with our whole life. This was a constant theme of Schaeffer's teaching. It was in many sermons, his books, and discussions all the time. God is not interested in some corner of our life but in the whole of life. That is a seventh point: the lordship of Christ is over the whole of life. This became a fundamental part of Schaeffer's teaching on the Christian experience.

The fourth section is on the church. Let me make a few comments at this point. The first point is that you find an emphasis already on what Schaeffer called the two orthodoxies. In the church there ought to be both an orthodoxy of doctrine and an orthodoxy of community. I do not know whether he made the expression up, but it is an expression you will find over and over again in his books and tapes. He says on page 74 of lesson 21, which is on sanctification, "We are called to regular attendance at a Bible-believing church. This does not mean just any church or group, but one which is true to the Word of God and has an orthodoxy of doctrine and an orthodoxy of love and community." This was very important to Schaeffer, particularly in reaction to his own background where the emphasis had been so strong in the separatist movement on orthodoxy of doctrine. The only real Christian churches are those that are faithful to the Word of God in their teaching, and he never changed that emphasis. If you read his book, *The Church Before the Watching World*, you will see a very strong emphasis on the necessity of churches being faithful to the Word of God in their teaching. It was a fundamental part of his teaching right through his life to the very end.

Consider all his critiques of liberalism. The very last book he wrote was *The Great Evangelical Disaster*, which challenged the evangelical church on departing from orthodoxy of doctrine. Particularly

after those early years of his life and the crisis that he went through, he began to stress more and more the necessity not just for orthodoxy of doctrine in the church but also orthodoxy of love and community. This became a major part of his teaching about the church. Personally he advised people as they left L'Abri to find a church, and he always made this double stress. He told them to find a church that taught God's Word faithfully but also lived God's Word faithfully. There should be a real community, and people should care for each other. Love should be practiced there. This was the mark of the Christian, as he called one of his books later on, that the church displays love. It should show a genuine care of people, one for the other. It is one of the major emphases in his book, *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century*. There he makes a point as he quotes John 13:34-35 and John 17, Jesus' prayer, where Jesus says, "By the way you love one another all men will know that you are my disciples." By the unity and active community expressed in the church, people will know that the Father sent the Son. This was tremendously important to Him. Schaeffer would say that if there were not some reality, even if only a poor reality, of an orthodoxy of love and community, then it was not a biblical church. You do not really even have a Bible-believing church, because it clearly shows that we do not believe God's Word if there is not at least some attempt to put what He says into practice. So the first point is what Schaeffer calls a double orthodoxy and the necessity of that in the church.

The second point is Schaeffer's emphasis on the need for material sharing. Let me read to you from page 64 in lesson 17, called "The New Relationship: The Brotherhood of Believers." He writes, "The second practical aspect of our helping one another in the church is the need to be a material help to each other." He comments on Acts 11:29, "From the earliest days of the church, Christians gave of their material goods to help those brothers in Christ who had less materially, even those at great geographical distance." Commenting on 1 John 3:17-18, he says, "There is no use talking about Christian love if we do not help our brothers in Christ when they have material needs." In this context he emphasizes the necessity of hospitality. Christians are commanded to be hospitable.

Sadly, this emphasis on material sharing was not often emphasized in some of the churches. Particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, this lack of emphasis was a reaction to communism. I remember a friend of mine at seminary who preached a sermon on the need to love one another practically and care for one another's physical needs. He spoke from 1 John 3 and 4, but members of his congregation afterward accused him of preaching a liberal communist doctrine. For Schaeffer this was a tremendously important thing. We need to give what we have materially to others who are in need. He never could have been accused of being communist. Schaeffer hated communism and saw its tremendously destructive character. He spoke very strongly about the need for Christians to share what they possessed with one another. That was something the Schaeffers lived out in practice very dramatically in their life in Switzerland. They often had very little, but they shared everything they had with other people.

The third emphasis in this section on the church is on the brotherhood of believers. There is a need for this to cut across all barriers. Schaeffer says in lesson 17, "When we come into this new relationship with God, all those who trust Christ as their Savior are our brothers and sisters. This is the communion of saints." He comments on Ephesians 5:26-29 and says, "The brotherhood of believers should be the predominate factor between Christians in all the relationships of life. This is true of husbands and wives, children and parents, servants and masters, and employees and employers. In all such relationships, we are also brothers and sisters."

That may sound like a strange emphasis to you when he puts it in the context of marriage, too. It was something he said over and over again. One should regard one's wife or husband as a sister or brother in the Lord. That is central in our relationship. As soon as you do that, it immediately makes the stress that what is fundamental in marriage is the love we have for one another rather than the structure that God

has given. Schaeffer would have said that God has certainly given a structure of headship to the husband, but Schaeffer wanted to have as a central stress that, first of all, we are brothers and sisters in Christ. We are called to love one another, respect one another as such, and share our lives with one another. The other relationships we may have of husband/wife, parent/child, and employee/employer are secondary to that. Schaeffer took that very seriously in the way he treated small children, whether his own or anyone else's children. He took their profession of faith, even if they were very tiny, very seriously. He regarded them as a brother or sister of his in the Lord. He felt they should be treated with respect and dignity and spoken to as equal.

This was one of the things that underlay his ability to relate to so many different kinds of people, whatever age, nationality, or class. He really regarded all Christians as brothers and sisters in the Lord. They were not people whom he was over because he was a teacher whom God had raised up in the church. They were his brothers and sisters in the Lord. That was the fundamental reality to him. He goes on to say, "This brotherhood of believers cuts across all the lines of nationality, race, language, culture, social position, and geographical location." This idea of brotherhood was very precious to him. He spoke about the church in Antioch from Acts 13 where it says that Paul and Barnabas were set aside for the missionary task. It gives a list of some of the people in that church. Acts 13:1 says, "In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen (who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch) and Saul." He made the point that there were people there who were Jews, Gentiles, one man who was wealthy from the upper class, brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and someone who was black. He always said when he mentioned that passage that the church at Antioch was his favorite church. There was a real demonstration there of the brotherhood of all believers. So that is the third point in his emphasis on the church.

This sometimes got him into trouble. I remember when I was in Switzerland in 1967, the year there was an English girl there who was a friend of ours. She met a young black fellow from Tulsa, Oklahoma. They got engaged, were married, and they now live in England and have three teenage daughters. Her parents have never seen her husband to this very day. They wrote him, telephoned him, and accused him of aiding and abetting interracial marriage. One of the sad aspects of all this is that her father was a pastor. Schaeffer's belief, which he really put into practice, was that there is a brotherhood of believers across all of these barriers. Sometimes it was quite costly to him in terms of the way people would respond, both to his teaching and to what it worked out to in practice. There were quite a few interracial marriages during the years of L'Abri.

Let us move on to another section, which is the fifth one on the last things, or the future. There are a few points I want to make. The first point is that Schaeffer emphasized the continuity of life between now and the future. Often when Christians speak about the afterlife, we speak about it as if there were a radical discontinuity between the life we experience now and the life we will have in the future. A lot of that is because we have been affected by what one might call a super-spiritual view of the Christian life now. Much of life is not regarded as being very important to God, and only "spiritual things" matter. People have this vision of the future life as a life that is completely spiritual and has no real continuity with the present. But Schaeffer emphasizes in these studies the continuity there is between life now and in the future.

Let me read a passage where Schaeffer speaks about Christ's resurrection. He says, "He had the same body. It was not a new body... We will have the same bodies. Glorified—yes. Changed—yes. But the same." He speaks elsewhere of the continuity there is the whole of our life. This includes our relationships with other people between now and the future and living in a physical environment. This is a very important point. The way we often speak about the sacred and the secular, the temporal and the

eternal, and this world and the world to come gives to Christians an idea of something that is a totally different experience. Often in evangelical circles even the word human is used as a negative word. We are human, as if there is something bad about being human. The point Schaeffer gets at is that the discontinuity between the present and the future life is the absence of sin and the effects of sin. There is a removal of sin and a removal of what sin has produced: sickness, pain, suffering, and death. It is not other things that will change. We will see God face to face because our sin is taken away completely. Our relationships with other people will continue. The relationships we build now that are built on the foundation of Christ will endure forever. Anything we build on the foundation of Christ that is of value will endure forever. We will be physically raised up.

The second point Schaeffer emphasized is that our life in the future is going to be physical. Salvation is not complete until the physical resurrection. There is a very strong emphasis in these lessons on the physical nature of the future life. We will be raised up with new bodies that are transformed. There is a continuity, though, in that we will be recognizable to people. We will not look exactly the same, but we will be recognizable. The difference is that we will be immortal rather than mortal. We will no longer be subject to sickness and death. We will continue to have a relationship with the physical environment. We will live on a new earth in which righteousness dwells. The book of Revelation finishes with the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven to earth. There will be, fundamentally, continuity between life now and life in the future. What will be different is that all the bad things will be gone but not relationships or the physical world. Things like music are good parts of the creation that God has given us to enjoy. All of those good things will endure forever. It is only bad things that will be taken away. That is a very important point. Many Christians have very little notion of the physical nature of future life and the continuity between the present and the future. The fact that they do not have that makes people often very uncertain as to whether they even really want to be part of this future life. Their notion of heaven is so vague because it is so rarely taught on that they do not feel they have anything much to look forward to.

Scripture makes it quite plain that we will live on this planet Earth. Paul says in Romans 8 that this whole creation groans in the pains of childbirth now because God has subjected this creation to vanity because of human sin. He says that this creation will attain the same glorious liberty as the children of God. Then he goes on to speak about our physical resurrection. Paul sees the physical resurrection as being so important that he equates it to our adoption as sons. We usually think of adoption as taking place when a person becomes a Christian. We are adopted into the family of God. That is quite biblical. But in that passage, Paul equates our adoption as sons with our physical resurrection. He often speaks that way. His words in 2 Corinthians 5 are very powerful. He says that we have been given the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of our physical resurrection. He says it in both Romans and Corinthians. That is such an unusual way for Christians to think, because they think of the Spirit as having entirely to do with spiritual things. They understand it in some kind of other-worldly sense. But Paul says the Spirit has been given to us as a guarantee of our future physical resurrection. Romans 8 makes it very clear that our future home is this earth. You can look at all those passages in the Old Testament, for instance in Isaiah 11, that also make that very clear. The curse will be removed from this earth, and nature itself will be transformed. There will be no more destruction, even in our physical environment, and what we see there now will be gone. Peter also says that we look forward to a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. That is how Revelation finishes as well, with the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven to this earth.

It is a very important question to consider whether Earth is our future home. I have an excellent little book on the subject, written by one of my colleagues in L'Abri, William Rietkerk, called *The Future Great Planet Earth*. It is a very exciting notion. In so much of our teaching, which has been so other

worldly, we speak as if life here on this earth really did not matter very much. That is not the way Scripture speaks. God made this earth for human beings to live on. This is our environment. At creation, we are the crown of this creation. We have the glory and honor of being made in the image of God. The problem with life on earth is not that it is on earth, but that human beings who have been made to have dominion over the earth have rebelled against God. The earth itself is subjected to vanity. It is cursed because of our sin, as is expressed so dramatically in Genesis 3. When Christ comes to redeem us, He comes to redeem everything about us. He redeems us, our relationship with Him, and our relationships with one another to make us new internally. He also redeems our environment. That is a constant theme of the Old Testament and of the New.

We should not think of heaven as some radically different location. The kingdom of heaven is God's reign. When I become a Christian, I am already in the kingdom of heaven. You are in the kingdom of heaven; it is here. We pray, "Lord, Your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven." We want God's kingdom to be completely manifest here. There certainly is a place where Christ is, because Christ has a physical body for eternity. He is God and man forever, and it is not right here. I could not tell you where it is, because Scripture does not tell us. But Christ is physically present somewhere. He is surrounded by angels and by the spirits of all those who belong to Him who have died and gone to be with Him. Revelation pictures that for us, and sometimes Scripture calls that heaven because God's kingdom is perfectly manifest there already. You might say that there are even a few believers there physically, like Elijah and Enoch, who were taken straight up into heaven without dying first. They are there physically already. Scripture pictures that when Christ returns to establish His kingdom in fullness He will return to this earth. As Revelation puts it, "The kingdom of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord and His Christ, and they will reign forever." In other words, the final blow in the battle that Christ has fought against Satan and against his forces is the banishment of Satan and evil completely from our environment, our hearts, and our lives. We look forward to the future great planet Earth. This is our home and where God has set us. This is the world that He has made us to rule over. Scripture teaches that very strongly. It is not speculation; it is a clear part of biblical teaching. Whatever view you may have about the millennium, you ought to be able to say that we will live with physical bodies in a physical environment, which will be this earth transformed.

The destruction of the world is part of the transformation. The picture is of a burning away of all that is sinful. In Peter he says that just as the world was once destroyed by water it will be destroyed by fire. He parallels the two. Just as once God judged the world with water and the flood, He will judge it again with fire at the coming of Christ. He does this only to renew it just as the people of God are cleansed by fire. Scripture also clearly teaches that. As believers, we will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. The fire of God will examine what we have done. What did we build on the foundation of Christ: gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, or stubble? If it is wood, hay, and stubble, it will be burned away. God is going to renew His creation. Jesus actually uses the expression "the regeneration of all things." We usually think of the term "regeneration" in terms of the new birth of a Christian. An individual is regenerated, and Scripture uses that term in that way. But it also uses it in terms of the regeneration of everything. Everything will be made new when He comes again. I think we should take those passages in the prophets and Psalms, like Isaiah 11, quite literally. They describe a physical reality and are not metaphors for the peace that we will experience. The passages also speak about that quite clearly. They are a description of what God will do. If we have a problem with it, we have to ask ourselves why. Is our problem that we have swallowed some notion that the spiritual matters more than the physical, therefore the notion of living in a physical environment forever seems rather strange to us?

Some have asked if Paul points to not appreciating the physical reality, but he does not. Let me use Colossians 3 as an example. Paul says, "Do not set your mind on things on the earth. Set them on things

above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind not on earthly things, but on things above.” Even in the last year I heard someone preach a sermon on that, saying that it meant that life here really was not all that significant in comparison with our spiritual relationship with Christ and the life there is to come. Paul, even in the context, defines what he means. He says, “Rid yourselves of all those things that belong to your earthly nature: immorality, idolatry, lying.” He makes it very clear that what he means by “earthly” is sin. He is not saying that the ideal Christian should be one who walks about this building, does not notice the color of the autumn leaves, does not know the changing of the season, but has his mind up there somewhere. That is not what he means at all. By the things that he says are things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God, he means peace, love, forbearance, and gentleness.

Of course, because our physical experience now is one that is so subject to mortality, Paul speaks about that as a life that we long to be set free from. Look at what he actually says when he says it. The first part of 2 Corinthians 5 can be read as if it were a completely Platonic statement. He says, “Now we know that if the earth we live in is destroyed we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling because when we are clothed we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent we groan and are burdened because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.”

It is not his physical existence that Paul has a problem with. It is his mortality that he struggles with. His body is decaying. He says elsewhere, “Even though our outer nature is wasting away...” It does waste away. When you get to the age of 44, your outer nature wastes away. One of my friends once said to me, “If you wake up on your fortieth birthday and you do not have any aches, you are in heaven!” Our physical experience is filled with mortality. People really get sick, and they really suffer. They have such pain, and that is why Paul says, “I would rather be with the Lord.” It is not because he devalues physical life but because the experience of abnormality is so acute. The more filled we are with compassion for people, not the more other worldly we are, but the more completely we experience how broken people’s lives are, we will long more for the return of Christ and for everything to be made new.

Someone I know had back problems so very badly four or five years ago that she wished she were dead every day. When you are really sick you feel that way. You can be in unbearable pain, but it is thoroughly biblical to wish that. There is not something wrong about that. You should not make someone guilty who wishes their suffering was over. It is bad enough to cope with it anyway without having people tell you, “Chin up, feel good, really it is all fine. There is really no pain here; it is all in the mind.” A lot of Christians speak that way and make you feel guilty for feeling so awful. But that is what Paul felt when he said, “I would rather die and go to be with the Lord.” It is far better than what we experience now.

I came across a wonderful statement from Calvin when I was preparing a sermon several years ago on honoring your parents. Calvin says the most amazing thing as he comments on Paul’s words in Ephesians 6, which says, “Honor your father and mother that your days may be long on the earth.” Paul took the promise from the Mosaic Law, “Honor your father and mother that your days may be long in the land the Lord your God has given you,” and applied it generally to all believers wherever they are in the world. “Honor your father and mother that your days may be long on the earth.” Calvin says, “One may wonder why anyone should think it a blessing to have long life.” It is hard to imagine anyone in the twentieth century in the United States saying that because of living in a place and time in which we have so much blessing. We have medicine and care that makes our lives far more comfortable than most people in history. We are also more comfortable than most people in the rest of the world at the moment.

Long life, for many people, has been a tremendous burden because of the amount of suffering there is. Calvin is not another-worldly kind of person at all. He has a wonderful respect for God's creation and for being physical. He is not a Platonic Christian in the slightest way. But he takes seriously the reality of the abnormality of our experience. Our hope as Christians is indeed the future that Christ will come and wipe away every tear. We notice here that our hope is not to be delivered from the physical and the earth. Our hope is to be delivered from sin and mortality.

Third, you will see in these Bible studies that Schaeffer was a pre-millennialist. You will not find that in many of his books, but you will find it on a lot of his tapes. He did a series on 30 hours on the book of Revelation and another 30 hours on the book of Daniel. He was a very committed pre-millennialist. He used to say one interesting thing about the millennium. People asked him what value it served, why Christ does not come back and put everything right immediately, and why there has to be a gap of 1000 years. During the gap He reigns on the earth, yet the final judgment is still to come, and the creation of the new heavens and the new earth is still to come. They would ask why there was this hiatus. Schaeffer would say that obviously he could not really answer the question as far as to tell you why God has done this. But he would suggest one thing, and he used to say that in this time unbelievers always say that the reason they are not Christians is because there is not enough evidence. We live in a created world where there is so much evil: earthquakes, natural disasters, and suffering of human beings. People say, "This clearly is not a world that God has made. What kind of God would make a world like this?" Or people would say that there is not enough evidence from history to believe in Christ or the Bible. Schaeffer would say that the unbeliever always says that his reason for rejecting the Gospel is a lack of evidence. Of course that is not the reason at all. The reason is the hardness of people's heart. People are surrounded by evidence for the truth of Christianity. The evidence is absolutely overwhelming, so that people are totally inexcusable if they do not become believers. But Schaeffer would say that one of the things God will do in the millennium is demonstrate the truth of the Gospel. Christ will be present in person, reigning on the earth. The curse will be removed, but people still will not believe. There will still be those who rebel against Him at the end of the millennium. This will demonstrate for everyone for the whole of time that the real problem is the sinfulness of people and the hardness of their hearts against God. It is not about evidence, which Christ Himself said to people. People asked Him for a sign, and He said to them, "Even if you saw someone raised from the dead, you would not believe." Then when He raised Lazarus from the dead, instead of believing, they tried to kill Lazarus and Jesus to get the evidence out of the way. The problem is never the evidence. The problem is the hardness of people's hearts.