

## **Infiltration of Evangelicalism, II**

*Father, we ask that You will be with us now. We pray that You will help us to understand what some of the important issues are of the moment in which we live as we think about the church and accommodation to the spirit of the age. We pray for Your wisdom and understanding to examine our own hearts and minds that we may put ourselves clearly under the authority of Your Word and Your Spirit. We pray this for Jesus' sake. Amen.*

We are discussing accommodation, the accommodation of the evangelical church to the spirit of the age. We had looked at, I think, the first four points: the drifting away from an emphasis on propositional revelation, the reluctance to equate the biblical text with the Word of God—God's Word stands somewhere behind the text—the drift from any emphasis on the Bible as containing historical truth, and the drift in the area of the cosmos, of what the Bible says about the nature of the universe and the nature of human persons. We finished there, looking at the idea of complementarity, which is popular in evangelical circles in one form or another. That word may not be used, but we can see this in many evangelical churches today. By complementarity we mean seeing the Bible as speaking in the area of religious, theological truth while science speaks in the area of science and keeping the two apart so they do not really touch or inform each other.

What I want to move on to now is point number five, which is the loss of the certainty of knowledge. If we have accepted the “existential” methodology, as Schaeffer calls it, we end up with a problem with the idea that God can communicate truth to us in propositional terms. But even more than that, there comes an uncertainty as to whether we can ever equate our knowledge with what is true. Now, this is one of the central themes of our culture and of deconstructionism in particular in the last 10 years: truth cannot be known by us. Our personal understanding is at best an approximation of the truth.

As this begins to be applied to theology, there is the question whether we can ever have any kind of certain knowledge of God. I think you see that theme in Charles Kraft's book, as an example, *Christianity in Culture*. Kraft seems to think it is impossible to ever equate our theological statements with the truth about who God is. If you think about that, of course, it would mean you would have to reject entirely any kind of confessional approach to the life of the church. It would be completely inappropriate to say, for example, “We see the Westminster Confession of Faith as expressing biblical theology.” This whole direction seems to make it more spiritual to say, “Our knowledge is never certain.” This can be made to sound very spiritual. “God is so far beyond our understanding. How can we ever say that what we know is the truth?”

One of the ways in which Schaeffer responded to this was to say that certainly our knowledge is never exhaustive. We never have complete knowledge about anything, never mind about God. Of course we do not. We are always growing in our understanding. That is true whether our particular field of study is fruit trees or horticulture, whether we are farmers, whether we are in medicine, or whether we are in any other discipline. Or, let us say, we are married and trying to know our wife and children. We never know anybody or anything completely, perfectly, or exhaustively. That is true even of finite beings around us and of the creation. God has made the world in such a marvelous way that there is always more to know, more to understand, more to discover. This will be true for us to eternity. We will be living in the presence of God, but not only will there be more to learn about Him, but there will also be more to know about everything He has made. There is such a wonderful variety and depth in His creation. But to say we cannot have complete, perfect, or exhaustive knowledge or understanding or truth is quite different from saying we cannot have any certain knowledge. Certainly we do not have exhaustive knowledge

about God. But if we understand biblical Christianity at all, we must be able to say we have true knowledge, true information about God.

If you think about that for a moment, it is absolutely essential that we think that before we pray. “Do I believe? Can I firmly say, can I know, that God hears the prayers of those who come to Him in the name of Christ? Can I take the statement of Scripture at face value, which says, “The Lord has sworn [about the Messiah, about Christ] and will not change his mind: ‘You are a priest forever.’” (Psalm 110:4 and Hebrews 7:21)? Do I have the confidence? Do I really know that Christ is my priest today, that I may approach God the Father through Him? There is no question about that. Certainly I do not know everything about that, and every day we discover more about what it means that Christ is our mediator, that Christ is our priest. But we must never drift in the direction of deconstruction or existential theology, which deny that our knowledge can be certain or true in any real sense. Yes, we do not know God exhaustively. But we do indeed know Him truly. And we are able to set that down in words. He has communicated to us in words, and we may communicate to one another and to our own hearts with words, words that we may be confident are true.

That brings us to the next point, point number six. That is, as the existential methodology affects evangelicalism, we begin to see a pulling apart of reason and faith. This is one of the most important points: a pulling apart of reason and faith. You see, Schaeffer is repeatedly today charged with rationalism. “Schaeffer was a rationalist,” it will be said, over and over again. I was speaking to someone on the phone recently who studies at a seminary elsewhere. He said every time Schaeffer is mentioned in the seminary where he studies—and this is an evangelical seminary—the professors basically sneer and say, “Well, Schaeffer was just a rationalist.” They just dismiss him out of hand simply as a rationalist or as Aristotelian in his understanding of reality. But it is much more fundamental than that, simply dismissing Schaeffer as a rationalist. I do not think that is a fair criticism, and we have talked a little about that before. But what is really being done is that a wedge is being driven between reason and faith.

Look what Schaeffer has to say, for example, in *Escape From Reason* (this is on page 258, chapter six): “The evangelical Christian needs to be careful, because some evangelicals have recently been asserting that what matters is not setting out to prove or disprove propositions. What matters is an encounter with Jesus. When a Christian has made such a statement, he has, in analyzed or unanalyzed form, moved upstairs.” In this case, the downstairs is the rational and in the area of reason one puts the statement, ‘One does not set about proving or disproving propositions.’ That is, there is no point in seeking to rationally persuade the non-Christian of the truth of Christianity.

We have had a speaker here at the seminary who has been speaking a lot about the loss of persuasion. This is the fundamental reason for it, this split between reason and faith. If you make a split between reason and faith, persuasion disappears. How can I persuade a non-Christian if faith is in some completely different category, a completely different compartment from reason? Thus “downstairs” is the rational, so that persuasion is impossible. “Upstairs” is the non-rational, an encounter with Jesus. Schaeffer goes on to comment on this, “If we think we are escaping some of the pressures of the modern debate by playing down propositional Scripture and simply putting the word “Jesus” or “an experience with Jesus” upstairs, we must face the question: what difference is there between doing this and doing what the secular world has done in its semantic mysticism or what radical theology has done? At the very least, the door has been opened for man to think it is the same thing.”

The point Schaeffer is making is that, in the modern world, where there is such an attack on the Christian faith—and particularly where there has been such an attack on evangelical Christianity from

the liberal perspective—it may seem that it is possible to avoid the battle by saying, “It is not a question of persuasion; it is not a question of reasoning with people; it is just a matter of faith.” You think you are avoiding the battle and all the objections to Christianity, all the methods of tearing it down, by saying, “Do not ask questions. Just believe. Lose your mind and come to faith. Faith is an affair of the heart; it is not an affair of the mind.” You can think of many other statements, which you—at least those in Western cultures—have all heard, I am sure, many, many times, over and over again. But the point Schaeffer is making is this. If we do that, if we have the tendency to do that, we ought to ask ourselves how people hear us if we communicate that way. We may be convinced that this is indeed the truth we are talking about, and we will just not bother trying to persuade someone else that it is the truth. But will we actually be communicating that it is the truth if we talk this way to people? Or will we be just responding to the word “Jesus” as a kind of banner, seeking some kind of experience with Him? And when this does not work out for them, they will just pass through to something else.

Schaeffer writes in *The God Who is There* on page 183 in volume 1 of the Collected Works in appendix A on the question of apologetics. He addresses the charge that he was a rationalist. I encourage you to read that if you are able. That is the first appendix in the back of *The God Who is There*. He says, “At times some have said my way of discussing apologetics is a form of rationalism. First, a definition of words is helpful. A rationalist is someone who thinks man can begin with himself and his reason plus what he observes without information from any other source and come to final answers in regard to truth, ethics, and reality. In contrast to rationalism or the rationalist, rationality concerns the validity of the thought or the possibility to reason. I am not a rationalist for one moment. I am completely dependent on what God has spoken in His Word. We have a source of truth outside of ourselves. But I do believe in rationality—that is, in the validity of reason, the validity of seeking to persuade people, the validity of seeking to reason with them.”

I think this is a charge we will find over and over again against Schaeffer. In one of the books that was written to critique him, a point that was made was that it was not really Schaeffer’s arguments or reasoning that convinced anyone. It was just that some people have a certain kind of makeup so that they respond in faith when the Gospel is presented. Schaeffer responded quite angrily to that in a private writing, which he circulated among us in L’Abri. He said, “That is not what I am saying. Faith is not something that is some quite different capacity in the human person so that some people are able to have it and other people cannot. This would mean that reasoning is a waste of time, reasoning does not really matter, and our reasons are really worthless. When we look at Scripture, we find the apostle Paul, and we find Jesus reasoning with people, seeking to persuade them. We must be prepared to do the same, because in the end we are living in a world where God Himself is a God of rationality. And He has created us in His image, with rationality as well.

Thus this is a fifth danger, or a fifth problem: the problem of separating reason and faith. Of course, from our particular Reformed perspective, it is possible to justify that split by appealing to the grace of God. We must be very careful not to do that. We might say, “Salvation is by the grace of God alone, therefore reason is worthless—therefore faith and reason are in completely separate compartments.” The apostle Paul believed more passionately in the grace of God than anyone today, we could say. He clearly was convinced of that. But that did not stop him from seeking to reason with people, seeking to persuade them. Nor did it drive him to put faith in a radically different compartment.

In answer to a student’s question, I think Schaeffer would have said that God uses all kinds of means to bring people to faith, to bring people to salvation, to bring people to commitment to Christ. And one of those means is persuasion. That is very evident as you read through the book of Acts. I suggest that you can see 10 or 12 kinds of things God uses as He seeks to draw people to faith. You may say, yes, there is

the direct action of the Holy Spirit in the heart of the person. But there is not only that. God uses creation—He witnesses to the truth of His Word through the creation around us. God uses His providential rule over history, His care for people to speak to them. God uses the circumstances of people's lives. We can look at Psalm 107, where you have those series of groups of people who got into all kinds of distress. Then they cried out to the Lord, "Lord, deliver us!" God used the circumstances they were in to bring them to a point of humility so that they would cry out to Him. God uses the quality of the lives of Christians to touch people's hearts.

The New Testament commands us, therefore, to live such good lives before the pagans that they will glorify God. Jesus says this, and Paul says to the slave, "In your workplace make the teaching of Christ our savior attractive." Thus there are many, many different things God uses. We must not think of the grace of God as being limited to the direct action of the Holy Spirit in the heart. That is a far too narrow definition of grace. When we talk about God being sovereign, God is sovereign over the whole of reality, over the whole of life. And He is able to use all kinds of different means to bring a person to faith.

There is no need whatsoever to see any kind of disjunction between reason and faith. Faith is a response to what one knows to be true. Biblical truth is addressed to the minds of people. No matter what anyone says about reason and faith being opposed to one another, as soon as someone stands up to preach a sermon or even to communicate to someone one on one, they are addressing their mind, their reason. You cannot escape that. That is how God has made us. Anyone speaking to another person about the Gospel has to use language, because God has made us that way. That language has to go through the mind, it has to be considered by the reason, it has to be understood and responded to. Faith is not simply reason; of course it is not. It is not simply knowing certain things are true. It is responding to those truths by committing oneself to those truths, by committing oneself to that person, Jesus Christ, by trusting Him. But do not put the two in opposition, and do not see reason as opposed to grace. God in His graciousness has made us rational creatures. Rationality is one of His gifts. To think that to reason with someone is somehow opposing the grace of God is to set apart what God has made, that is, human beings with the capacity to reason, from the Word of God and the work of the Spirit. That is really ridiculous, setting one part of God's gift to the human race against another aspect of His work in the human heart and mind. We do not want to do that.

Now, if someone says that by putting those two in opposition they mean that we cannot reason anyone into the kingdom, that the work of the Holy Spirit is necessary, that is true. But do not put the two in opposition. As you read through Acts, Paul reasoned with people, he sought to persuade them. And it says some of them were persuaded. That is the means God uses. For me to seek to persuade someone is not for me to think for one moment that I myself can bring someone into the kingdom. I know I am dependent on what God does and on what means God chooses to use. But to then think it does not matter whether I reason persuasively, it does not matter whether I live righteously, that it really makes no difference would be completely unfaithful and disobedient to the Word of God. It does matter. And we will have to give an account to God one day. In fact, if we have not been faithful witnesses, if we have lost the art of persuasion and we never seek to persuade anyone that Christianity is true, if we do not try to live attractively before people and people say at the end of our days, "He was such a rotten example as a Christian. I never even considered Christianity because of him," we will have to give an account to God for that. When we say we are clear of the blood of all men, and let us hope we can say that like the apostle Paul, what we ought to mean by that among other things is "When I had the opportunity to persuade somebody, I did. When I had the opportunity to live righteously before someone, I did. When I had the opportunity to pray for someone, for the work of the Spirit in their heart,

I did.” Rather than saying, “I just did not want to say this formula to this person,” let us really be faithful to what God has to say.

I would say that in the end it is a restrictive view of the grace of God rather than a thoroughly Reformed view of the grace of God to set reason and faith apart. And I would suggest again that this view is a consequence of being affected by the spirit of the age; it is another part of it. It is true that we do not like rationalism. We do not like the attacks of rationalism on the Christian faith. But instead of rejecting rationalism, we say, “Let us reject human reason altogether.” But you are not to reject the gifts of God. And reason is a gift of God.

Without reason, we can never exercise dominion over creation. God has made us with minds. Well, first, God has made an orderly world, which runs according to laws He has set in motion. Really the laws are just descriptions of the way God runs the universe. And because God is consistent, there are consistent patterns. The sun will rise every day, and the seasons will come in their time, because God rules the universe in an orderly manner. This is because He is, if you like, a rational God. He is *logos*. There are some wonderful tapes we have in our library here at Covenant Seminary called “Chance Versus Logos” on John chapter 1, dealing with the issue of evolution as opposed to creation by a rational God. When John used the word *logos* there in chapter 1, it brings with it a specific idea. *Logos* for the Greeks was sort of the rational order behind the world. What John is saying is that Christ is that. Christ is the one who upholds the universe in an orderly manner, who created it in an orderly manner. Because God is like this, because He is an orderly God rather than chaotic, He has created the universe in a way in which things can be measured and understood. He has created the universe so that it runs in an orderly pattern with a consistency that reflects His own consistency, which is the consistency of His character. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He will not change.

Now, in addition to creating the world in that way, God has created us with rational minds in His image. And there is a coherence between the way my mind works and the universe around me. That is why it is possible for me to get in my car this afternoon and drive home and know I am driving on the right-hand side of the road. That is why it is possible to get into a plane and know it will fly. There is coherence between the way God has made us and the physical world around us. Thus we can have true knowledge about the world, and we can develop things that actually work in the world. And because God upholds the universe continually, there really are laws for the way He runs the universe, which means I can take those laws for granted. I can actually fly in a plane, or we can drive a car, or I can put one foot in front of the other, or anything like that. There is a real world here, the world God has made, with patterns to it. And that will endure until Christ comes, and beyond, because He will renew it, and it will be even better.

Let us move on to the next point here, point number seven. Point number seven is related to what we have just been talking about. That is, if we move in this direction of setting reason and faith apart, we will then begin to say that the internal testimony of the Holy Spirit is the only evidence of the truth. Schaeffer gives an example here in *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century*, in appendix B. He is talking here about how neo-orthodox theologians simply appeal to Jesus, to an inner feeling they have about His existence rather than to any kind of evidence for the fact of His existence. Then he goes on to give an evangelical example: “The intriguing thing to me was that one of the leading men of the weakened view of the Bible, who is called an evangelical and who certainly loves the Lord, in a long and strenuous but pleasant discussion in my home a few years ago, when pressed backwards as to how he was certain concerning the resurrection of Jesus Christ, had used almost the same words. He said he was sure of the resurrection of Christ because of the inward witness [of the Spirit]. He said he was sure

of the resurrection of Christ because of the inward witness [of the Spirit].” In other words, my only reason for knowing that Christianity is true is because I feel it to be true inside.

Now, again, you will have heard many, many people speak that way. It is possible to make a kind of one-sided appeal to Scripture to support this view. Jesus says in John’s Gospel, “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27). This passage is used to justify the idea that only the internal testimony of the Spirit is needed as the evidence for the truth of Christianity. But here we are really mixing two different things together. Certainly, Christ promises that He gives His Spirit to everyone who believes in Him. And the Spirit works as a witness in our hearts, as a guide, challenger, and comforter, a friend, a strengthener, and so on. The Spirit works in us in wonderful ways. But the New Testament does not suggest that conviction of the truth of the Gospel comes through the internal testimony of the Spirit alone.

For example, when Paul speaks about the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, he gives a list of people who saw Christ raised from the dead. In other words, he appeals to the evidence. He does not say, “I hear the voice of Jesus in my heart, and that is why I believe in the resurrection.” He gives a list of the people who actually saw Christ raised from the dead. Again, whenever you hear someone say, “The internal testimony of the Spirit is the only testimony that is needed,” what this is covering over is this radical split between reason and faith. I would say, if you push it far enough, what it will produce in a generation is the feeling that the truth I know as a Christian is in a completely different category of truth.

This is rather like Frances Young in *The Myth of God Incarnate*. History and faith are in separate compartments. The cosmos and faith are in separate compartments. Reason and faith are in separate compartments. Of course, this leads to a radical devaluation of apologetics. It means there will be no common ground with the unbeliever at all. How can I seek to talk to someone about something that is an experience they have not had? In fact, this is how many people witness. They say, “If you respond to Jesus, then you will know, too, because you will experience it as well.” Now, that is certainly one element in witnessing. It is one element in the New Testament in witnessing. But it is not the only, and it most certainly is not the central element. But for many Christians it has become the only element in communicating to the unbeliever—that is, the reason for my faith, the reason for the hope that is in me (my *apologia*) consists entirely of the witness of the Spirit in my heart rather than any evidence to which I can appeal.

All of these different points go together. I spoke about how many people feel we cannot appeal to the universe in its form, to creation, because the Bible speaks theologically, and it is science that speaks scientifically. The way one English evangelical applies that is to say, “We cannot, for example, look at the human person and say that there is anything unique about the human person that corresponds to being in the image of God.” That means, what we know about human beings, he says, is of no value to apologetics at all. It is of no value at all. This is simply scientific truth. In other words, what he is saying is that what Paul says in Romans 1 and 2 about the universe and its form, as Schaeffer expresses it in *The Manishness of Man*, that God has left Himself with a witness that makes men inexcusable, both in creation and in the heart of the human person who is made in the image of God. The human person has God’s law written on his heart. But under this view we cannot appeal to either of these things. We cannot appeal to anything in the real world—this is his point—either in the universe around us or in the life of human beings to reason about the truth of the Christian message. There is only, again, the internal testimony of the Spirit.

That brings me to an eighth point, and that is, one might say, the adoption of a dialectical view of truth. Let me express that simply. That is that we might say that two views can both be true at the same time.

Schaeffer gives an example in *The Church Before the Watching World*, in chapter 1. He says this: “As far as religious truths are concerned, this man would express religious truths in such a way that one person could say that Christ is the only mediator between God and man and another person could say that Mary and the saints intercede for us, and they would both be right. As you look at modern existential theology, it is able to say that more than one thing is true at the same time.”

Now, how might this affect the evangelical community? I think there is the kind of drift in that direction in Western culture today. I remember taking part in a number of public debates in England a few years ago over the question of whether we ought to be pacifists or whether we ought to be committed to the need for armies, the need for deterrents, and so on. And at each of the meetings there were usually a few people who would come along and say, “Well, you are both right. You are both right. Both the just war view, the need for deterrents, and pacifism are both right. Now, let us just simply have a dialogue together. Let us just simply learn from one another.” Now, what happened was that the dialogue itself was seen as important. There was no conviction that we could come to a common mind or that we could actually find truth.

I think this is an idea you find even within the evangelical community in all sorts of different fields. People are saying, “Let us just have dialogue. Dialogue is a good thing. We will have dialogue. It does not matter whether we come to a common mind. Let us just have dialogue, because dialogue itself is what matters. The Lord is using both of you to make a contribution to His church at the present time.” Now, of course God uses all sorts of people to make contributions, and no one is completely wrong—usually. People are not usually totally wrong. But that is not what is being said. It is not a question of being charitable, of really learning to be humble and learning from one another. What is really being said is that there is no truth to be found in this area, whether it is just war versus pacifism or whether it is any other particular set of opposing views. Let us say it is one view of whether women should be pastors in the church or another view—somehow we can have both at the same time and both can be equally true. One is true for you, and the other is true for me.

We want to be careful not to move in that direction. It is important that we learn to have discussions charitably. But as Schaeffer used to keep saying, “We need to learn to speak the truth in love.” This means that where we learn we disagree with someone, we do not reject them as people. But we must hold on to the idea that truth is there to be found. And thus the reason for having discussions is that we might learn from one another and try to find what is true. When we stand before God, one thing will be true and not the other, not both. This is another area, I would say, where in this kind of methodology we have been influenced by the spirit of the age—that we can have two truths that may seem opposed to each other but are both true at the same time.

Now, I think there may be an influence of what we might call an Hegelian view in the evangelical church. This view suggests that we look, for example, at the Baptists and the Presbyterians in terms of whether or not you should baptize children, at the just war proponents and pacifists, at premillennialists and amillennialists, at one form of church government as opposed to another, at Calvinists and Arminians, at whatever—even at creationists and evolutionists—and say that they are both right. I have heard many discussions like this where people say, “Well, really, both are true. Let us learn from each other. Let us not think that anyone has a corner on the truth. Let us agree that both can be right. God has revealed this to you, and this is what is precious to you. But God has revealed that to me, and that is what is precious to me,” as if in God can someone transcend opposites, that in God’s mind both can be right.

Now, I think that is a very dangerous drift, because it is a drift toward a dialectical view of truth. Biblically, we must be prepared to say, for example, “I believe in infant baptism.” And let us say Clay does not. I will respect his right, as I hope he will respect mine, to differ on this issue, but I hope both of us are convinced that one of us is right and the other one is wrong. And when we stand before God, we will find out who is right. Now, of course we must learn to love one another and to speak the truth with love rather than to be bitter toward one another or tear one another apart. But only one is right in the end. Either God does or does not want us to baptize our children, the children of the covenant. One of us is making a mistake here. Because God is gracious, He will forgive whichever of us is making a mistake. He will forgive us for many things, because none of us is perfect in our understanding. And none of us is perfect in our lives. But I would much rather have Clay say to me, “I do not agree with you, Jerram. I think you are wrong, and we will find out one day when we stand before Christ,” than I would have him say to me, “Well, really, that is right for you, and this is right for me, and really both are true.” But that is what the dialectical view of truth says. And then we will have a dialogue just for the sake of having a dialogue. There is no point in having a dialogue just for its own sake. The purpose of dialogue is to try to find out what is true.

So yes, we must be prepared to learn from one another. Let us say for myself as a Presbyterian, I must be prepared to learn from Baptists in the church who in many areas—in terms of their own personal righteousness, in terms of their understanding of God, and in all kinds of areas—they may have a far greater understanding and commitment to God and His truth than I do. When I recognize someone else’s spirituality and submission to the Word of God, I must be prepared to be humble before them and to learn from them, whether they are in the same denomination as me or not. Of course we must take such a view. There is no room for denominational arrogance before God. But to say, “Let us learn to get along as brothers and sisters in the Lord, to respect one another’s differences of opinions, and to allow one another to have those differences of opinion,” is very different from saying, “It really does not matter. It really does not matter.” Schaeffer used to say, “I will fight to the death to allow someone to have a different view from me, even if I am convinced that they are wrong. But I will not say, ‘Well, really we are both right.’” That is a very different thing. And that is part of the mentality of our age.

Relativism, as it creeps into not only morality but also every other area and particularly into knowledge, says that your truth is true for you, and my truth is true for me. And that is where deconstructionism ends up, or it says that there is no truth at all. That is where that ends up. But for the Christian, it sounds very pious to say, “God has led you in this way, and He has led me in that way.” But this is not pious at all. There is truth, and there are things that are not true. And of course, some of them are far more important than others.

For example, the question of whether our children should be baptized is not a central issue, and it should not divide Christians. On the other hand, the question of whether Christ is the Son of God clearly is a central issue, and it divides us apart from those who are not believers. Thus we put a different order on different levels of truth. Schaeffer did this all the time. I will always remember a conference where he gave an impassioned lecture with many non-Christians present on the truth of Christianity. The first question someone asked him afterward was about baptism. And he said, “I will give that question 30 seconds.” This was not because he considered it unimportant, but he felt that in that context it was not the important issue. There were present many unbelievers who were filled with questions they really wanted to come back and ask—fundamental questions about whether God exists and who is Christ and can you know anything at all about what is true. And yet someone asks, “What is your view on baptism? Should you be baptized with lots of water or only a little?” I do not mean to be flippant about this; I have my own views on this subject. But this is not a life or death question. And so we say it is important, but in terms of degrees of importance, it comes somewhere way down the scale. But even on such an issue, I

will not say that it does not really matter what we think. Of course it matters what we think, because it has some practical consequences.

Thus learning to speak with love and respect is important. In my church in England, for example, where I was one of the pastors for many years, half of our congregation were Baptists and did not have their children baptized. And they felt no pressure to do so. We taught very clearly what we believed the Bible says on the subject. But at the same time, you must respect people's freedom and let them make their choices. And one day we will all find out who was right. I do not say that with any kind of arrogance; I do not mean it that way at all. All of us will find when we stand before God that there were many things we got wrong. The first will be last, and the last will be first. All kinds of things will be turned upside down. But what we will not discover is that it did not matter what we thought and what we believed. That is a very, very different issue.