

## "Two Contents, Two Realities"

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December 11, five weeks ago, was only the second time in almost 40 years I was not able to preach a Sunday sermon because of illness. But I think it is a good sermon. And I am going to share it with you this morning. It is the last segment of the "Fresh Insights" series, where I talked about things the Lord has taught me recently. Today's insight are some things that I thought important over 40 years ago, still are. Though much has changed over the last four decades in my life and in the world around us, I was recently reminded that some things have not.

I have been reading a very good book by Tim Keller entitled, "Hope in Times of Fear." In one chapter he talks about Francis and Edith Schaeffer. They were missionaries in Europe after WW2, serving with a very conservative Presbyterian denomination. In the early 1950's, their daughter started attending a Swiss university, and was soon bringing friends home for the weekend. Many of the students lived a hippie lifestyle, flirted with Eastern religions or atheism, and embraced post-modern thinking and morality. They were far from Christianity and the Schaeffers began to prayerfully ponder how they might bring the gospel to these young men and women who, like Paul describes in Ephesians 2:12, were without hope and without God. In 1955, they named their home, a chalet in Huemoz, Switzerland, "L'abri," which is French for "the shelter."

Over the next 30 years L'abri was a place where thousands of students and other seekers traveled, and frequently found hope and God, through faith in Jesus Christ. Time magazine labeled Schaeffer "the missionary to the intellectuals," but a wide variety of people were impacted by L'abri. Many of the sermons and talks Francis Schaeffer gave were to become best-selling books.

In the latter years of his life, (he died in 1984), Schaeffer produced a couple of video series, "How Should We Then Live?" and "Whatever Happened to the Human Race?" These focused on the cultural ramifications of Biblical Christianity. They were shown in many churches, and Schaeffer played a huge role in bringing evangelical Christians into the pro-life movement.

Francis Schaeffer was clearly one of the most influential evangelical leaders of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and he is an individual that God used to impact my life in a huge way. I have told you before how his book, "He is There, and He is Not Silent" was a great help to me when I went through a faith crisis in college and wasn't even sure God existed.

I recently realized a second book by Schaeffer has also had a tremendous impact on my life. It is a very short book called, "Two Contents, Two Realities." Schaeffer's books didn't always have the best titles. It is based on a talk he gave in 1974. Schaeffer said, for the evangelical church and individual Christians to be faithful to the Lord at this time, and to have an impact on the unbelieving world, there needs to be a commitment to and a focus on two contents and two realities.

The contents of our faith, he says, must be, first, sound doctrine, and second, honest answers to honest questions. The realities are first, true spirituality, and second, beautiful human relationships. What strikes me today, is that for the past 40 years, the time that I have been a pastor, these have basically been my goals as both a Christian and a pastor. Though I have not really stated it this way before, these provide a foundation for how I want to do life and ministry.

This morning we will take a closer look at these two contents and two realities. I want you to think about whether they are characteristic of your life and our church. Let's pause and pray that the Lord would enable us to see and apply the truth this morning.

First, sound doctrine. A church and individual Christians only flourish if they believe sound doctrine, which means embracing teaching that is true. Doctrine refers to what is taught. In **1 Timothy 4:16** the Apostle Paul says, **Watch your life and your doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.**

Schaeffer notes four things this means. First, there is specific content. Christianity is not primarily about feelings or experiences but about

truth, truth that is rooted in historical events. Paul says, **1 Corinthians 15:3,4 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.** To be a Christian is to believe that Jesus of Nazareth, was not only the Christ, the Jewish Messiah, but the eternal Son of God. Through His sinless life, sacrificial death on the cross, and resurrection from the dead He brings salvation and wholeness to all who trust in Him. That is the heart of Christian belief or doctrine. It is also called the Gospel.

Yet, some pastors claim Jesus was a great teacher, but not truly God. Or they believe Jesus spiritually rose from the dead, even though His body remained in the tomb. Schaeffer would say these individuals may be pastors, but they are not Christian pastors. It is also dangerous to say, "As long as I love Jesus, it doesn't matter what I believe." The foundation of Christianity is truth the Bible teaches about Jesus Christ.

Second, sound doctrine involves a Biblical worldview. When Schaeffer says, "He is there and he is not silent" he means that the Eternal Creator and Sovereign of the universe not only exists, but has spoken to us through His Word, the Bible. Schaeffer insists it is important that we believe what the Bible teaches and accept its authority in determining what we think and how we live. He is especially concerned that we don't ignore the first 11 chapters of Genesis, because they provide a necessary context for the entire Bible story.

Third, the focus needs to be on essential Christian teaching, not on speculative interpretations or secondary doctrines. Paul commanded certain teachers **1 Timothy 1:3,4 Not to teach false doctrines any longer or to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. Such things promote controversial speculations rather than advancing God's work-which is by faith.**

Schaeffer had seen his own denomination divided by conflicts over details about eschatology and arguments over whether grape juice or wine should be used for communion. He found that tragic. Christians are bound to have different opinions on all sorts of issues, but as long as there is agreement about essential Biblical teaching, we

should be able to work together for the sake of Jesus Christ and His church.

Fourth, don't corrupt sound doctrine by treating cultural preferences as biblical teaching. False teachers often subtract from true doctrine by denying Biblical truth but adding to what the Bible teaches can be just as destructive. In the 1960's, Schaeffer found that many Christians were critical of students at L'abri because of their long hair, unusual fashion choices and preference for rock music. Folks, those are not issues to which the Bible speaks. These days, folks sometimes confuse their political views with biblical teaching. Now, I have a lot of political opinions, and I think I can make good arguments as to why my views are correct, but I better not corrupt sound doctrine by pretending the Bible supports my views, if it does not.

Folks, for 40 years, I have believed that one of my primary roles as a pastor is to teach sound doctrine. By the grace of God, I certainly have sought to do that. I pray I have succeeded because it is a horrible thing when a pastor or teacher harms people's souls by leading them away from the truth.

And folks, you have the same responsibility. Whether you are teaching a Sunday School class, or talking to your own children, or discussing things with a friend, you need to make sure you communicate sound doctrine, telling people what you know to be true, because of what God teaches in His Word, the Bible.

Second, honest answers to honest questions. Some pastors teach sound doctrine, but then seem to expect people to just accept what they hear, "because I said so." At L'abri, Schaeffer met many people who had gone to church at some point in their lives but had left disenchanted because no one was willing to answer questions they had.

Folks, that is very wrong. Our desire to be effective ambassadors for Jesus Christ, and our love for those around us who are not believers, demands that we seek to answer their questions. In the 1960's Schaeffer was encountering the post-modern, post-Christian thinking and attitudes that have become so prevalent in our country today. He recognized that faithfulness to the Lord requires we not try a "one size fits all" presentation of the Gospel. We must take

seriously the perspectives and objections of those we are trying to reach.

I think that is clearly what the Apostle Paul did. In **1 Corinthians 9:20-23** he writes **To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews... To those not having the law I became like one not having the law... so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.** We see him put those words into practice in the book of Acts, especially in chapter 17 where he speaks to those gathered in Areopagus in Athens. We explored that passage in our Wednesday night Bible study recently. Instead of quoting the Bible, Paul quotes their own Greek poets, as he seeks to make the gospel make sense to pagans who have no concept of the true God revealed in the Bible. Oh, Paul knew that ultimately it is the holy Spirit who opens the eyes of the spiritually blind, so they see the glory of Jesus Christ, 2 Corinthians 4. Yet, he also knows it is his responsibility as the Apostle Peter says to **1 Peter 3:15 Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect.**

Folks, it is our responsibility as well. I continue to prayerfully ponder this question: How can I be more persuasive as I share Bible truths to others? Over the decades I have always tried to speak in a way that connects with the people who are listening. How successful I have been, I will let others decide. It can be difficult to do that in a sermon, since a variety of people are listening, often both believers and unbelievers. Yet, when any of us are in a conversation about spiritual truth with someone, we need to try to speak words that make sense to that person, we need to answer his/her questions. And we need to be asking good questions of those who are not believers, helping them recognize how shallow secular views usually are. And as Peter said, we need to do this with gentleness and respect.

Third, true spirituality. The phrase simply means living in a way that reflects the truth of biblical Christianity. For some, being a Christian just means believing certain facts about God, Jesus, and the Bible. Yet even though those truths are important to believe, Christianity doesn't stop

there. Believing in Jesus is more than just believing about Him. A person who truly believes in Jesus, trusts in Him, is born again, born of God, and is indwelt by the Holy Spirit. That indwelling spirit means that as Paul says, **2 Corinthians 5:17 If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.**

Yes, a Christian is simultaneously a saint and sinner. He/she still commits a wide variety of sins. Yet the Holy Spirit is in that person's life, and there should be evidence of that. Schaeffer thought this should work in very practical ways. One example is prayer. If we believe in the God the Bible describes, the all-powerful ruler of the universe, who is the loving Father of all those trusting in the Lord Jesus; and if we believe what the Bible says about prayer, that it enables us to communicate our concerns to our heavenly Father, then whatever problem we face, it only makes sense that we would pray about it.

Paul's words in Philippians 4:6 should be a normal part of our lives. Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. At L'abri one of "the rules" was that whenever a problem arose, before you discussed it with other people, you should talk about it with the Lord. You should pray. That might be a good rule to follow at Chisholm Baptist church as well.

To live as we believe, or at least as we say we believe, is a good goal to have. But is not always easy to do. In fact, I doubt if anyone does that with total consistency. Yet, a certain degree of consistency, a true spirituality, shows the world Christianity is not just words and speculative ideas, but life lived in reality. That reality, described in the Bible, is a life of love, grace, and forgiveness, with the Lordship of Jesus Christ extending to every aspect of life. That should be the goal for all of us each and every day.

And I will add, the more true spirituality is a reality in our lives, the more we will honor the Lord, the better we will serve others, and the greater our own joy will be. Oh, it may not be an easy life, in fact it probably won't be, but it will be a good life.

Fourth, (second reality) beautiful human relationships. That is Schaeffer's phrase, not mine, but I like it, because when human beings relate to each other the way God intends it is indeed something beautiful. This starts with how we, as Christians, treat those who are not believers in Jesus. We believe every human being is created in the image of God. (Genesis 1:26) It doesn't matter if someone is young, old, male, female, black, white, rich, poor, nice, nasty, attractive or unattractive, that person is made in God's image and is worthy of respect, compassion and love.

"Love your neighbor as yourself." Who is my neighbor? Basically, anyone with whom I come in contact. Even someone I might think of as an enemy. That is why Jesus says, **Matthew 5:43-44; 46-47** "You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, For if you love those who love you, what reward will you have? Don't even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what are you doing out of the ordinary? Don't even the Gentiles do the same."

Throughout history, Christians have been the ones building the hospitals and orphanages, caring for those who cannot care for themselves, and serving people no matter what their background. If Christians today, individually and corporately, demonstrated this type of love, I still think the world around us will eventually notice.

Unfortunately, what often gets noticed are Christians who don't show a lot of love for their ordinary neighbors, much less their enemies. I think a great goal for us to have is that people who live in this community, who have never been to any service here, would know that folks who are part of Chisholm Baptist Church care about their welfare. The man across the street who says he is an agnostic, should know that you all care about him. Oh, I know it sounds a bit over the top, but that should be our desire. Yet, far more important than our love for the people out there, is our love for one another. Schaeffer called this the mark of a true Christian, which is the title of another wonderful little book he wrote.

Jesus, says, in **John 13:35** **By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one**

**another.**" That is what identifies us as believers in and followers of Jesus. The Lord Jesus prays to His Father, **John 17:21** **May they all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us, so that the world may believe you sent me.** Our love for one another, a Holy Spirit inspired love which flows out of our experience of God's love and grace, allows us to experience a unity with each other and with the triune God, that points to the reality of Christianity. When folks out there, see the love the people in this room have for each other, it has an impact. When they see how you serve one another, providing rides to an appointment, giving a \$100 bill to help with a car repair, offering a free afternoon of babysitting for a busy mom, or just being willing to sit down to a two-hour lunch to provide encouragement, should all make folks out there think, "Wow, the people at Chisholm Baptist Church really do care for each other. They love each other, and it is beautiful."

A few weeks ago, three visitors at Chisholm Baptist church made three different comments after the worship service. "Wow, the music was great." "Are the sermons here always that good?" "You sure have a lot of great activities going on here." That evening I mentioned at our prayer gathering that those are all nice compliments, but it would be wonderful if someone would say, Wow, this seems like a church where people really love God and love each other."

Well, on Thanksgiving eve, that kind of happened. A couple who were here with some family members, visiting for the first time, said, "Pastor Dan, we can tell this is a church where people are truly grateful to the Lord, and where people genuinely care about each other."

Oh, friends, don't be confused. #1 There is much room for improvement in both our love for God and each other. We are not in heaven yet. This is far from a perfect church. We need to continue to strive, by God's grace, to grow in our love for God and each other.

#2 Whatever love that does exist in this church, a love for God and each other, it is not us, but God who deserves the glory.

So, folks, a commitment to teach and believe sound doctrine, to provide honest answers to questions people are asking, to be characterized

by true Christian Spirituality, and to demonstrate genuine love that creates beautiful relationships. For a long time, at least 40 years, I have believed this is what a church should strive to be like. These have been important goals for my personal life.

And I am convinced now more than ever, that by God's grace, we as a church and we as individuals, should be characterized by these two contents and two realities, as we seek to love God, love others, and make disciples. Knowing those things, remembering those things, is good for you today, and for all the days ahead.