

FRANCIS SCHAEFFER (d. 1984)

Biography

1. Schaeffer was influenced by:
 - a. B. B. Warfield.
 - b. Cornelius Van Til
 - c. J. Gresham Machen
 - d. Gerhardus Vos
 - e. Hans Rookmaaker
 - f. Rousas John Rushdoony
 - g. Amy Carmichael

2. Schaeffer influenced:
 - a. Os Guinness
 - b. Nancy Pearcey
 - c. Covenant Theological Seminary, Jerram Barrs



Lessons from Schaeffer's Life

1. Prayer is the most important work that we do.

- a. Prayer is the most important work that we do, whether in the task of apologetics or in any other area of our Christian obedience.¹

2. Believe God has spoken truly to us in the Bible.

- a. “God truly exists, and He has spoken to us in the Bible to tell us about Himself, about ourselves, and about our world. He has made known to us what we could never discover by ourselves in our questioning and searching. God has spoken truly to us in His Word, and therefore the message of the Bible fits with the nature of reality as we experience it. To use an image, the biblical account of human life fits like a glove on the hand of reality. Christianity is true to the way things are.”²

3. Go to the themes of biblical theology for answers.

- a. “He read four chapters of the Bible every day of his life, three from the Old Testament, one from the New. He would divide the Old Testament into three roughly equal parts—let’s say, starting in Genesis, 2 Kings, and Proverbs—and read a chapter from each, and thus progress through the Old Testament; and then also read a chapter from the New Testament. In this way he would regularly be reading through the whole Old Testament every nine or ten months, and the New Testament every eight months or so. What is particularly interesting about this pattern of reading Scripture is that he developed an ever-growing sense of the unity of the biblical message; a deep sense of the unfolding of God’s words and actions over time in real history; of the way that the content of all biblical passages relate to the foundational themes of creation, fall, redemption, and consummation....”³
- b. “But how did he [Francis Schaeffer] answer questions? His approach was always to look to Scripture for his answer—but not by going to individual verses to find a ‘proof-text.’ He would go to the themes of biblical theology, and these themes would beget his answers.”⁴
- c. “...[Through all those years of ministering in L’Abri, from the early 1950s until his death in 1984, he was helping countless individuals to see the central themes of biblical truth that had captured his own heart, mind, and imagination.”⁵



4. Treat people with dignity as God’s image-bearers.

¹ F. Schaeffer, in J. Barrs, “Francis Schaeffer: The Man and His Message.”

² F. Schaeffer, in J. Barrs, “Francis Schaeffer: The Man and His Message.”

³ J. Barrs, “Francis Schaeffer: The Man and His Message.”

⁴ J. Barrs, “Francis Schaeffer: The Man and His Message.”

⁵ J. Barrs, “Francis Schaeffer: The Man and His Message.”

- a. “He always treated people with dignity as God’s image-bearers, with compassion as those fallen from a glorious origin and deeply marred by sin and its consequences, and with love as those for whom Christ died.”⁶
- b. Schaeffer saw our creation as God’s image-bearers as foundational to everything else that Scripture reveals about human persons. Where many Christians today want to begin with the sin and the fallenness of people around us in our secular society, Schaeffer insisted that the fall did not “stop anyone from being human.”⁷
- c. “For twentieth-century man this phrase, *the image of God*, is as important as anything in Scripture, because men today can no longer answer that crucial question, ‘Who am I?’”⁸
- d. “That which differentiates man from the machine is that his basic relationship is upward rather than downward or horizontal. He is created to relate to God in a way that none of the other created beings are. ...This differentiation makes genuine love possible.... Furthermore, if we are made in the image of God, we are not confused as to the possibility of communication; and we are not confused as to the possibility of revelation, for God can reveal propositional truth to me as I am made in his image.”⁹
- e. The recognition of human uniqueness is at the heart of Scripture.¹⁰
- f. Christian growth is restoration to the image of God, that is, to true humanness.¹¹
- g. “We must understand that human life stands at a unique place. Human life stands at a crucial place because there is an unbreakable link between the existence of the infinite personal God and the unique dignity, intrinsic dignity of people. If God does not exist and he has not made people in his own image, there is no basis for an intrinsic, unique dignity of human life.”¹²
- h. For Schaeffer, his conviction that Scripture teaches that we are God’s image-bearers continually fed his passion to help alienated young people see that they had dignity and value, and also challenged him to speak up for the unborn, for the newborn, for the handicapped, and for the elderly.¹³

5. Ask questions and find out what is troubling a person’s heart and mind.

- a. “If I have only an hour with someone, I will spend the first 55 minutes asking questions and finding out what is troubling their heart and mind, and then in the last 5 minutes I will share something of the truth.”¹⁴

⁶ J. Barrs, “Francis Schaeffer: The Man and His Message.”

⁷ J. Barrs, “Francis Schaeffer: The Man and His Message.”

⁸ Francis Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time*.

⁹ Francis Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time*.

¹⁰ F. Schaeffer, in J. Barrs, “Francis Schaeffer: The Man and His Message.”

¹¹ F. Schaeffer, in J. Barrs, “Francis Schaeffer: The Man and His Message.”

¹² Francis Schaeffer, “Priorities.”

¹³ F. Schaeffer, in J. Barrs, “Francis Schaeffer: The Man and His Message.”

¹⁴ F. Schaeffer, “The Secret of Power and the Enjoyment of the Lord.”

- b. “No questions are off limits.”¹⁵
- c. “There is a certain gentleness about really great Christians. There are many ways to observe this, but perhaps one of the best is to notice the tenderness for children in some of the great warriors of the past.”¹⁶
- d. Dialogue, don’t debate.

6. Do not put emotional pressure on unbelievers.

- a. **2 Co 4:2** 2 ...We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God’s word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone’s conscience in the sight of God.
- b. We do not need to put emotional pressure on unbelievers, nor do we need to try to manipulate them into responding to our message. Rather, we commend the truth to them by seeking to show them that it is indeed the truth, and we pray for the Spirit to open their hearts to that truth.¹⁷
- c. “Always leave someone with a corner to retire gracefully into. You are not trying to win an argument or to knock someone down. You are seeking to win a person, a person made in the image of God. This is not about your winning; it is not about your ego. If that is your approach, all you will do is arouse their pride and make it more difficult for them to hear what you have to say.”¹⁸

7. With the majority of people, begin at the beginning.

- a. If people already share a Christian worldview because of growing up with a church background and with knowledge of the Bible, then, of course, we may begin with the ABCs, for this will make sense to them. But, if they are like the people of Athens whom Paul addresses (Acts 17:16-34) then we will have to start with the true nature of God and with the false ideas and idolatry of the pagan thinkers if we desire to make Christ known to them.¹⁹
- b. There are fewer and fewer people who truly hold to a biblical worldview. Consequently, it is absolutely essential with the majority of people we meet to begin at the beginning. The beginning for modern and postmodern people is denial or doubt about the existence of God and denial or doubt about the existence of truth. While these might seem like abstract issues, they are not in fact abstract. Rather, they are very practical. Nothing is more practical, nothing is more basic, than the conviction that there is truth that can be known.²⁰



¹⁵ F. Schaeffer, in J. Barrs, “Francis Schaeffer: The Man and His Message.”

¹⁶ F. Schaeffer, in J. Barrs, “Francis Schaeffer: The Man and His Message.”

¹⁷ F. Schaeffer, in J. Barrs, “Francis Schaeffer: The Man and His Message.”

¹⁸ F. Schaeffer, in J. Barrs, “Francis Schaeffer: The Man and His Message.”

¹⁹ F. Schaeffer, in J. Barrs, “Francis Schaeffer: The Man and His Message.”

²⁰ F. Schaeffer, in J. Barrs, “Francis Schaeffer: The Man and His Message.”

8. Bow to God three times.

- a. We have to bow first as creatures, acknowledging that God is God, and that we are not the source and origin of our own lives. Rather, we are dependent. Second, we have to bow morally, acknowledging that we are to see God as the Law-giver, that we are people who consistently have disobeyed His commandments and that we deserve His judgment. Third, we have to bow in the area of knowledge. God is the source of truth and we are not. We are dependent on Him for understanding the world and even our own existence.²¹
- b. “Throughout all of my work there is a common unifying theme, which I would define as ‘the Lordship of Christ in the totality of life.’ If Christ is indeed Lord, he must be Lord of all life....”²²

9. Let your life be your final apologetic.

- a. The life of the Christian is “our final apologetic.”²³

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²¹ F. Schaeffer, in J. Barrs, “Francis Schaeffer: The Man and His Message.”

²² F. Schaeffer, in J. Barrs, “Francis Schaeffer: The Man and His Message.”

²³ F. Schaeffer, *The Great Evangelical Disaster*.

Web Resources

Francis A. Schaeffer Foundation, <http://www.theschaefferfoundation.com>.

Francis A. Schaeffer Studies at Southeastern, https://library.sebts.edu/ld.php?content_id=16812132.

L'Abri Ideas Library, Schaeffer Collection, <https://www.labriideaslibrary.org/schaeffer-collection>.

Schaeffer Institute, <http://www.intothyword.org/53513>.

Podcasts

Covenant Theological Seminary, *Francis Schaeffer: The Early Years*, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/francis-a-schaeffer-the-early-years-audio-lectures/id418583067>

Covenant Theological Seminary, *Francis Schaeffer: The Later Years*, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/francis-a-schaeffer-the-later-years-audio-lectures/id418583194>