

Form and Freedom in Francis Schaeffer's Biblical Defense of Marriage

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Today we are bombarded, it seems daily, by social compromises in regard to marriage and sexuality both within the church and society at large as we hear and see news reports and follow social trends. Schaeffer was no stranger to this struggle in his time, as he not only dealt with it first hand on a pastoral level, but also quite often on a personal level with visitors and inquirers at L'Abri¹. Schaeffer, as usual, was ahead of the curve in this regard, taking on topics related to this subject matter privately that still make many counselors and pastors cringe today. In his letters,² it can be found that Schaeffer responded to questions such as marriage in general, finding a partner, dating, sexual relations, sexual sin, sexual relations before marriage, marrying non-Christians, re-marriage, homosexuality and lesbianism, the meaning of love, eroticism, adultery, marital reconciliation, racial marriage, masturbation, platonic relationships, the significance of the marriage ceremony and certificate, male-female roles in marriage, birth control, contraception and of course abortion. Moreover, it should be noted that these are just the ones that made it into the *Letters of Francis Schaeffer* edited by Lane T. Dennis. In the appendix of that volume it is indicated that those that found their way into the final collection was from a total of about 19,000 letters. These, it is assumed, is perhaps a conservative number of the 30,000 pieces of personal correspondence of various types now found in the Francis Schaeffer Collection.³ No doubt many of those that remain, that did not make the cut, touch on this same subject matter. Yet in addition to all of these, there is also a substantial amount of content within Schaeffer's works on the subject of marriage. For although Schaeffer himself never wrote a book on marriage, there is much that we can draw upon to obtain his view which we will explore here today. One can consult his work *Basic Bible Studies* for starters to see that it is part of his teachings in a pastoral training kind of way.

Before we continue, it should be noted that some of his content also has crossover in the teachings of Edith Schaeffer as well, who dealt with many weighty matters in both the philosophical and practical aspects. In particular, her work, *Common Sense Christian Living* and *What is a Family*, directly coincide with Dr. Schaeffer's teachings on the subject. When we mention the broad scope of Schaeffer's work it is always important to mention that Francis saw his work as a unity with Edith's.⁴ For example her work *L'Abri* gives the narrative of the practical aspects, lived out by their family at L'Abri, of what books like *The God Who is There* and *He Is There and He is Not Silent* theologially and philosophically imply.

The Historic Christian Position

Schaeffer, in his lifetime, although revolutionary in his expression and explanation of the Christian faith, was regularly applying and showing how the principles of the Christian faith applied to everyday life. So it

¹ L'Abri is of course is the community that Francis and his wife Edith founded in Switzerland to provide honest answers to honest questions and experience the care and hospitality of Christian living in practice. See labri.org for further details.

² *Letters of Francis Schaeffer: Portraits of the Man and His Work*, ed. Lane T. Dennis. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1986).

³ Guinn, Daniel, Interview with Bruce A. Little on the collection, The Francis Schaeffer Collection Documentary -2012, Nov. 10, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TONMvOA5QMU>

⁴ Schaeffer, A. Francis, Why And How I Write My Books, Eternity Magazine, Vol. 24, March 1973, pp. 64f.

is no surprise that he viewed marriage in its historic Christian context as an ordinance given by God to mankind.

The church has always recognized this in insisting that marriage is given by God not just to the redeemed, but to all men. This is an ordinance of God to all men. Unredeemed man's sin and separation from God does not remove him from the human ordinances of God.⁵

Moreover for Schaeffer, marriage and the historic Christian position is a natural apologetic which explains the unity of man.

Certainly the fact of the woman's creation out of the man has a very definite philosophic importance, because it means that mankind is really a unit. Man didn't just come out of nowhere. Nor has he sprung up from numerous starts. There was a real beginning, a beginning in a real unity in one man, one individual, differentiated from all that preceded him, and then differentiated in terms of male and female. It is this picture of man which gives strength to the Christian concept of the unity of mankind. The world today is trying to find a basis for claiming all men are one, but the Christian does not have this problem, for he understands why mankind is really united.

Furthermore, we can begin to understand something about marriage because God Himself ties the marriage bond into the reality of the unity of mankind. Hence, we can understand something of that particular union when the male and female constitute one whole, become one flesh. Man, with a capital M, equals male and female, and the one-man, one-woman union reunites the unity.⁶

The Problem

It is possible perhaps, that some might have assumed that Schaeffer only deals lightly on the subject of marriage or only in the abstract on the subject since, as we have mentioned already, he never wrote a book with that focus. Or perhaps one could assume that Schaeffer is so concerned with matters or cultural criticism, theology and philosophy that he is completely unconcerned with the family. This notion could not be further from the truth and any suggestion thereof would imply a major lack of understanding of Schaeffer's works. The prior quote just mentioned hints at Schaeffer's greater concept, but it is truly just a glimpse. Peppered throughout Schaeffer's teachings are regular dealings with not only the topic of marriage, but the Biblical answers as well. Rather than write directly on the family, Schaeffer regularly couches his perspective within the broad cultural context he is explaining, giving the reader a sense of *why* the family is struggling and *why* it is important in the here and now. The following is one such example from the opening remarks of *The Great Evangelical Disaster*:

Time magazine recently published a special sixtieth anniversary edition with the title "The Most Amazing 60 Years." In recalling the world into which Time was born, this special issue began with the words: "The atom was unsplit. So were most marriages."⁷ Here two things occurring in our era are properly brought together—one, the scientific technological explosion; and two, a moral breakdown. It is not just by accident that these two things have happened simultaneously. There

⁵ Schaeffer, A. Francis, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: Volume Three, A Christian View of Spirituality (True Spirituality)*, Westchester, IL, Crossway Books. 344.

⁶ Schaeffer, A. Francis, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: Volume Two, A Christian View of the Bible as Truth (Genesis in Space and Time)*, Westchester, IL, Crossway Books. 31.

⁷ Original Citation: Henry Grunwald, "Time at 60," *Time*. October [60th Anniversary Issue] 1983, p. 5

is something which lies behind both phenomena, and in recognizing this Time really has shown amazing comprehension.⁸

It is important to note that Schaeffer here is writing a work on the problem of the Church, yet he starts it with a statement about marriage. This begs the question, "Why?" Well, not only is Schaeffer aware of the problem, he is alarmed by the lack of awareness the church shows on the subject. He utterly laments the ongoing loss of the Christian ethos in our time and the peril of the family.

The world spirit of our age rolls on and on claiming to be autonomous and crushing all that we cherish in its path. sixty years ago could we have imagined that unborn children would be killed by the millions here in our own country? Or that we would have no freedom of speech when it comes to speaking of God and biblical truth in our public schools. Or that every form of sexual perversion would be promoted by the entertainment media. Or that marriage, raising children, and family life would be objects of attack. Sadly we must say that very few Christians have understood the battle that we are in. Very few have taken a strong and courageous stand against the world spirit of this age as it destroys our culture and the Christian ethos that once shaped our country.⁹

Christian Perfectionism and Taking the Fall Seriously

Yet, the first aspect of Schaeffer's collective teaching on the concept of marriage involves admitting that there is not only a problem with marriage in our generation, but recognizing also that there are problems in general in the area of human relationships in a fallen world. Some have tried to merely look at the problems we are seeing in our time as only part of our own cultural miscues, and forget about the problems we all face as a result of the Curse. We must acknowledge that this is rather naive of the church in the scope of history, and if the world is to see change, we must learn to take the fall seriously. I should mention that, in an interview I had last year with Jerram Barrs, a student of Schaeffer's for many years. This was a matter he was quite emphatic about, as needed in our day to speak to our culture.¹⁰ The church has not taken the fall seriously, thus it cannot understand human inclinations toward evil or explain the abnormal world. Schaeffer is extremely mindful of this point. While he readily identifies the inhuman ways in which our culture more elaborately propagates these errors, he does not disconnect them from the initial concept of the fall. Listen to this quote from *True Spirituality*.

With the Fall all became abnormal. It is not just that the individual is separated from God by his true moral guilt, but each of us is not what God made us to be. Beyond each of us as individuals, human relationships are not what God meant them to be.¹¹

In numerous places in Schaeffer's works he takes great pains to emphasize this truth, that we live in an "abnormal world," and that notions that wish to emphasize absolute purity, while we are "walking through

⁸ Schaeffer, A. Francis, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: Volume Four, A Christian View of the Church (The Great Evangelical Disaster)*, Westchester, IL, Crossway Books. 308.

⁹ Schaeffer, A. Francis, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: Volume Four, A Christian View of the Church (The Great Evangelical Disaster)*, Westchester, IL, Crossway Books. 311.

¹⁰ Guinn, Daniel. Interview with Jerram Barrs, The Francis Schaeffer Legacy Project: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sk_Sxwi8Zgw.

¹¹ Schaeffer, A. Francis, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: Volume Three, A Christian View of Spirituality (True Spirituality)*, Westchester, IL, Crossway Books. 206.

the mud"¹² not only smack of legalism, but are a false piety, and Utopianism.

In *True Spirituality*, Schaeffer outlines the consequences of this abnormal world by identifying what he calls the four separations. The first separation is from God, the second is man from himself and the fourth is man from nature. Yet to our subject at hand, the third separation is as follows:

The third of the great separations is man from man. This is the sociological separation. We have seen already how Adam was separated from Eve. Both of them immediately tried to pass off the blame for the Fall. This signals the loss of the possibility of their walking truly side by side in true democracy. Not only was man separated from his wife, but soon brother became separated from brother, Cain killing Abel.¹³

One can hardly pass over this quote without noticing Schaeffer's usage of democracy. It might even potentially lead us off topic. However, we should note that Schaeffer seems to be using this terminology in the non-political manner. Democracy as in, lower-case democracy, "a state of society characterized by formal equality of rights and privileges."¹⁴ Schaeffer elaborates on what he means elsewhere, as it pertains to the loss of the original perfection:

There are two parts here: the first relates to the womanness of the woman—the bearing of children—and the second to her relationship to her husband. In regard to the relationship to her husband, he says, "And thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee." **This one sentence puts an end to any unstructured democracy. In a fallen world, unstructured democracy is not possible. Rather, God brings structure into the primary relationship of man—the man-woman relationship.**¹⁵

So here we have a clarification that implies a meaning of equality of rights and privileges.

Schaeffer catalogues repeatedly his disdain for the notion that many people have that elevates personal satisfaction and romanticism over a sustainable marriage. He laments over those who will not "have what they can have" in a fallen world.

One does not need to have had much pastoral experience to have met married couples who refuse to have what they can have, because they have set for themselves a false standard of superiority. They have set up a romanticism, either on the romantic side of love or the physical side, and if their marriage does not measure up to their own standards of superiority, they smash everything to the ground. They must have the ideal love affair of the century just because they are who they are! Certainly many of the multiple marriage and divorce situations turn upon just this point. One couple refuses to have less than what they have set as a romantic possibility, forgetting that the Fall is the Fall. Another may want sexual experience beyond what one can have in the midst of the results of the Fall. You suddenly see a marriage smashed—everything

¹² See Schaeffer's sermon "Walking Through the Mud" - Schaeffer, A. Francis, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: Volume Three, A Christian View of Spirituality (No Little People, Walking Through the Mud)*, Westchester, IL, Crossway Books. 54.

¹³ Schaeffer, A. Francis, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: Volume Two, A Christian View of the Bible as Truth (Genesis in Space and Time)*, Westchester, IL, Crossway Books. 71.

¹⁴ Dictionary.com, definition #3 for democracy. Last accessed Mar. 30, 2014.

¹⁵ Schaeffer, A. Francis, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: Volume Two, A Christian View of the Bible as Truth (Genesis in Space and Time)*, Westchester, IL, Crossway Books. 66.

gone to bits, people walking away from each other, destroying something really possible and beautiful—simply because they have set a proud standard and refuse to have the good marriage they can have.

We wait for the resurrection of the body. We wait for the perfect application of the finished work of Christ for the whole of man. We wait for this, but on this side of the Fall, and before Christ comes, we must not insist on “perfection or nothing,” or we will end with the “nothing.” And this is as true in the area of psychological problems as it is in all other areas of life.¹⁶

This regular refrain, can be found here and also in several lectures¹⁷ and is also mentioned in Edith's works as well, "If you desire perfection of nothing, you will get nothing," seems to be a common Schaefferism in their own marriage. Instead of perfection, he rather emphasizes the possibility of "substantial healing" in this life, and in human relationships. This is not merely a figurative statement, or a cop out, Schaeffer does not skirt Christ's call to perfection (Matt 5:48), but provides a practical application that acknowledges the significance of the fall, that reserves absolute victory for Christ alone.

The Christian position is understanding that on this side of the resurrection the call *is* to perfection, and yet at the same time not to smash and destroy what we cannot bring again to life—just simply because it is less than the perfections that we romantically build in our thinking. For example, how many women have I found—and how many men—who have stomped on a perfectly good marriage until it was dead, just because they had a romantic concept of what marriage should or could be, either physically or emotionally.¹⁸

I must recognize that no human relationships are going to be finally sufficient. The finally sufficient relationship must be with God Himself. As Christians we have this relationship, and so our human relationships can be valid without being the finally sufficient thing. As sinners, acknowledging that we are not perfect in this life, we do not need to cast away every human relationship, including the relationship of marriage, or the relationships of Christians inside the church, just because they prove not to be perfect. On the basis of the finished work of Christ it is possible, once I have seen this, to begin to understand that my relationships can be substantially healed in the present life. When two Christians find that their relationship has hit a wall, they can come hand-in-hand and bring their failures under the blood of Christ, and get up again and go on. Think what this means practically in the areas of human relationships—in marriage, in the—church, the parent-child relationships, the employer-employee relationship.¹⁹

In Schaeffer's prescription, in *True Spirituality*, he itemizes steps to be taken in a non-mechanical way, to first obtain "freedom from the bonds of sin" through Christ sufficient work, and then to begin the process of obtaining "freedom from the results of the bonds of sin." In this way, we are taught to live moment-by-moment as examples of Christ redemptive work in us. We are to be living examples of Christ's victory. Therefore, we are to be about working toward the healing of the separation that has

¹⁶ Schaeffer, A. Francis, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: Volume Three, A Christian View of Spirituality (True Spirituality)*, Westchester, IL, Crossway Books. 329.

¹⁷ Schaeffer mentions this explicitly as well in a Q&A time in a lecture called Names and Issues. You can find this on the Soundword/L'Abri Conference Video series digitized by francisschaefferstudies.org: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-Y2ECmH7So&list=PLkfiNxNP2fAdXQDNG3Cd2CL-CvYzBANgV>

¹⁸ Schaeffer, A. Francis, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: Volume One, A Christian View of Philosophy and Culture (The God Who is There)*, Westchester, IL, Crossway Books. 169.

¹⁹ Schaeffer, A. Francis, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: Volume Three, A Christian View of Spirituality (True Spirituality)*, Westchester, IL, Crossway Books. 346.

occurred through the fall, as examples to the watching world. Not perfectly until Christ's return, but substantially. This is the beginning of the Christian answer.

The Final Apologetic

The notion just described is not merely an arbitrary hope, but a mission that is linked directly to what Schaeffer calls The Final Apologetic. In John 13 and in Christ's high priestly prayer in John 17, which is one of the major themes of Schaeffer's *The Mark of a Christian*, this is clarified. Here are the verses to be understood, with emphasis added.

For this is the message that you have heard from the beginning, ***that we should love one another.*** (1 John 3:11 ESV)

Here are the words of Jesus:

Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world. And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ***that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.***

(John 17:17-21 ESV)

So now to quickly explain Schaeffer's Final Apologetic briefly stated in his own observations on the previous passages:

Jesus goes on in 17:21 to say something that always causes me to cringe. If as Christians we do not cringe, it seems to me we are not very sensitive or very honest, because Jesus here gives us the final apologetic. What is the final apologetic? "*That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us; that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.*" This is the final apologetic.²⁰

So we can see in the context of Schaeffer's teaching on the Final Apologetic, marriage is included in the visible oneness that we are to present to the world.

In two areas above all others, the Christian demonstration of love and communication stands clear: in the area of the Christian couple and their children, and in the personal relationships of Christians in the church. If there is no demonstration in these two places, on the personal level, the world can conclude that orthodox Christian doctrine is nothing but dead, cold words. In a psychologically oriented age people may try to explain away individual results in a Christian life, but love and communication between Christians add a human dimension which, especially in a day like ours, is not easily explained away.²¹

False Pietism

²⁰ Schaeffer, A. Francis, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: Volume Four, A Christian View of the Church (The Mark of a Christian)*, Westchester, IL, Crossway Books. 190.

²¹ Schaeffer, A. Francis, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: Volume Three, A Christian View of Spirituality (True Spirituality)*, Westchester, IL, Crossway Books. 353.

Now Schaeffer is also mindful of an obstacle to this mission, one which stands directly in the path of the church accomplishing the goal of substantial healing and fulfilling the Final Apologetic. Something which not only affects our culture's perception of the church, but also the internal life of the church and the family. The obstacle is what he calls a "false pietism"²² which does not generally take the fall seriously in that it often couches Christian sanctification in social appearance and taboo, as if men and women can overcome the curse by natural means without the aid of Christ of an everyday, moment-by-moment dependence upon the work of the Holy Spirit and the finished work of Christ. In the next quote Schaeffer roots the problem in the later errors of Fundamentalism.

As time passed, however, the term *fundamentalist* took on a connotation for many people which had no necessary relationship to its original meaning. It came to connote a form of pietism which shut Christian interest up to only a very limited view of spirituality. In this new connotation, many things having to do with the arts, culture, education, and social involvement were considered to be "unspiritual" and not a proper area of concern for the Christian. Spirituality had to do with a very narrow sphere of the Christian's life, and all other things were considered to be suspect. Fundamentalism also, at times, became overly harsh and lacking in love, while properly saying that the liberal doctrine that was false to the Bible had to be met with confrontation.²³

Such a position may generally include a dichotomy between the more spiritual devotional aspects of faith and the application thereof to the whole of life. Understanding this, we can see that this form of thinking had effectively, all but cut off doctrinally at least, true and substantial healing in the area of human relationships in the life of the church. It is truly a strange Christianity that cares nothing for spiritual healing in the life of a believer, beyond an initial salvation conversion and moral taboos thereafter.

While Schaeffer notes that during the early publishing of his books and the early life of L'Abri there was a surge behind a new name, known as Evangelicalism, there eventually developed a partial decline and a faltering in it as well, but this time not to legalism, but to accommodation. It also characteristically would maintain a separation of an artificial "heart-felt" type spirituality from an understanding that engages both the heart and the mind.

Now, however, we find this matter of names with their connotations entering again. Gradually, though there was no need for it from the original use of the word, an appreciable section of those known as evangelical began a drift toward *accommodation*.²⁴

This struggle, described by Schaeffer, still continues in our day.

Grasping the Biblical Answer

We will now begin to look at the Biblical answer that Schaeffer highlights in contrast to the distinctions of

²²This terminology is specifically used in Schaeffer's Q & A section on the lecture called *Names and Issues*, but is found in his works as "poor pietism" or when speaking of Fundamentalist pietism. See Schaeffer, A. Francis, *Names and Issues*, Soundword, L'Abri Conference Videos, francisschaefferstudies.org

²³ Schaeffer, A. Francis, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: Volume Four, A Christian View of the Church (The Great Evangelical Disaster)*, Westchester, IL, Crossway Books. 369.

²⁴ Schaeffer, A. Francis, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: Volume Four, A Christian View of the Church (The Great Evangelical Disaster)*, Westchester, IL, Crossway Books. 370.

the aforementioned problems and tensions, in hope of gaining a truly useful understanding of what contribution he has made toward understanding the Biblical the solution. We will further see that Schaeffer's links his concept of The Final Apologetic with the framework of marriage.

The Bride and Bridegroom Theme

Much more can be said here than there is time for of Schaeffer's emphasis on the Bride and Bridegroom concept as a central teaching that is essential to the Christian as an example of the model the church is to live out both corporately and in the family setting. Schaeffer does not take it lightly that the Scriptures give such a strong emphasis to this theme. He deals with this perhaps most heavily in his book *The Church Before the Watching World*. When we consider how strong it is, and the bold link given between apostasy and harlotry, we should not forget how significant our actual marriages are as an example to the watching world as well.

Just as there is a real oneness between the human bride and bridegroom who really love each other, and yet the two personalities are not confused, so in our oneness with Christ, Christ remains Christ and the bride remains the bride. This great understanding of the way Scripture parallels the human man-woman relationship and our union with Christ guides our thinking in two directions. First, it makes us understand the greatness and the wonder and the beauty of marriage. And, second, it helps us to understand profoundly something of the relationship between God and His people and between Christ and His church. We understand in a real way something of this relationship as we understand in a real way something of the marriage relationship.

My personal opinion is that the marriage relationship is not just an illustration, but rather that in all things—including the marriage relationship—God's external creation speaks of Himself.²⁵

Schaeffer expands on this elsewhere, by clarifying that the bridegroom theme is actually a framework connected with the legal restrictions required by the fall, and Christ victory over thereof.

When man sinned, certain legal strictures were placed by God upon man and woman in marriage. In order to give a framework for order in the midst of a fallen world, the woman and man stand face to face with each other as creatures; yet the man has an office in the home. But the man-woman relationship must not only be stated in the negative—either in regard to wrong order in the home or concerning committing adultery, as important as these negatives indeed are—but it must also contain the command and the reason to love. Marriage is a picture of Christ and His Church (Ephesians 5:23). How poor is our concept of the work of Christ if we make it only a legal thing. How poor not to understand that we are to have communion with Christ and that there is to be a mutual love between Him (the Bridegroom) and ourselves (the bride). If human marriage is meant to be a picture of that tremendous union of Christ and His Church and of the present relationship of Christ as Bridegroom to the Church as bride, then surely there should be a showing forth of joy and a song in communication and love between man and woman.

Within the Proper Legal Circle

As Schaeffer refers to this framework, he uses the terminology of the "proper legal circle" to explain the

²⁵ Schaeffer, A. Francis, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: Volume Four, A Christian View of the Church (The Church Before the Watching World)*, Westchester, IL, Crossway Books. 137.

legal aspects that are required for the church and a demonstration of the restored human race.

...as the church exhibits who and what God is to each generation, there must therefore be a proper legal emphasis. God does have a character. We aren't exhibiting a God who is "the unknown God," in the sense taught by Tillich. God has a character. And because He has a character, there is to be an exhibition of that character, and this means functioning in the proper legal circle. The proper legal aspects of the church will deal first with doctrine, because otherwise the body is telling lies about its Head.

The legal aspects are not arbitrary. They are rooted in God's existence and in His character, concerning which He has spoken to us in the Bible. The church is not a body which thinks up ideas; the church is a declarative statement of what God has revealed concerning Himself in the Scripture. So the legal aspects are fixed by God Himself. **The church should represent the supernaturally restored human race in reality, and as such it is very obvious that there must be the proper legal circle of those in the church in distinction to those not in it.** Many stress that a Christian must not marry a non-Christian, but then they are willing to be in a church where many, including the outstanding officers, openly reject the God of the Bible. To try to have proper love and communication that would please God in such a condition is like trying to have a sexual life that would please God, with another man's wife or another woman's husband. The proper legal circle must be first or the church in name is not the church in reality. People will not always be led to act at the same moment in regard to the Bible's command concerning the practice of the principle of the purity of the visible church. However, if the principle as such is given up, the proper legal circle is broken just as certainly as if we cast aside Christ's and the Bible's command concerning the proper legal aspect of marriage (see *The Church Before the Watching World*). **So the church has its legal relationships in regard both to doctrine and life.** ²⁶

Today most non-Christians exclude any real notion of law. They do this because they have no *absolute* anywhere in the universe, and without an absolute one cannot really have any morals as morals. For them, everything is relative; they have no real *circle of law*. For them there is no circle inside which there is right, in contrast to that which is outside the circle and therefore wrong. To the Christian this is not so. God does exist, and He has a character; there are things which are outside the commandments He has given us as the expression of His character. For example, there is therefore a proper legal circle in regard to the visible Church. The visible Church should be a true Church. It will not be a perfect Church, but it should be a true one. **And marriage is the proper circle for sexual relationships.** The new morality, following the new theology and lacking the Christian epistemology, the Christian Scripture and the Christian God, can find no real legal circle and so finds no way to set boundaries.

The fault of orthodoxy is that though it has a legal circle, it tends too often to act as though merely to be within the legal circle is enough. We should be thankful for the legal circle—a real absolute, something we can know and within which we can function...²⁷

We will return to this concept toward the end of our analysis.

Non-Mechanical

²⁶ Schaeffer, A. Francis, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: Volume Three, A Christian View of Spirituality (True Spirituality)*, Westchester, IL, Crossway Books. 360.

²⁷ Schaeffer, A. Francis, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: Volume One, A Christian View of Philosophy and Culture (The God Who Is There)*, Westchester, IL, Crossway Books. 171.

As Schaeffer mentions above, there cannot be a cold orthodoxy that merely adheres to the legal circle. This coldness is often the result of approaching the commandment in a mechanical way, which treats people inhumanly within the struggles of a fallen world. Being non-mechanical, in itself is a demonstration to the world in contrast to its own methods and a demonstration of the personal God of the universe. In the following quote Schaeffer is using “man” in reference to mankind.

Every man is my neighbor and is to be treated in a proper human, man-to-man relationship. Every time we act in a machinelike way towards another man, we deny the central teaching of the Word of God—that there is a personal God who has created man in His own image.²⁸

Lovelessness is a sea which knows no shore, for it is what God is not. And eventually not only will the other man drown, but I will drown; and worst of all, the demonstration of God drowns as well when there is nothing to be seen but a sea of lovelessness and impersonality.²⁹

Form and Freedom

Now to complete our understanding of Schaeffer's approach, we need to finally move into his terminology form and freedom. Firstly, Schaeffer is intent on conveying that within the scope of marriage, there is an explicit "form," or structure, that is given to us by design to both protect the family, society and God's Covenant people. It is this form that Schaeffer equates with "the proper legal aspect" of human relationships. It is within the “legal circle” which we have explained. Schaeffer makes it abundantly clear that this alone is not enough. There must also be “freedom” within the circle. The freedom Schaeffer is speaking of is not some form of lawlessness, but the distinctives of what marriage ought to be, as a magnification of the beauty of human relationships. He further clarifies that this is in fact a testimony to the world of the reality that Christ brings, and a portion of Christ command to "love one another" we have already covered.

The testimony has come down to us from the early churches—not in the Scripture, but by an apparently accurate tradition—that in the Greek and Roman world the cry went out, “Behold, how they love one another.” **And I would suggest that this is precisely what we must be striving for. It is exactly parallel to marriage.**³⁰

We must show to a world that is looking for beauty in the midst of twentieth-century ugliness that in the proper form (marriage), there can be a freedom of personal interplay which is beautiful.³¹

I emphasize: if we do not show beauty in the way we treat each other, then in the eyes of the

²⁸ Schaeffer, A. Francis, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: Volume Three, A Christian View of Spirituality (True Spirituality)*, Westchester, IL, Crossway Books. 344.

²⁹ Schaeffer, A. Francis, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: Volume Three, A Christian View of Spirituality (True Spirituality)*, Westchester, IL, Crossway Books. 347.

³⁰ Schaeffer, A. Francis, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: Volume Four, A Christian View of the Church (The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century)*, Westchester, IL, Crossway Books. 63.

³¹ Schaeffer, A. Francis, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: Volume Four, A Christian View of the Church (The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century)*, Westchester, IL, Crossway Books. 63.

world and in the eyes of our own children, we are destroying the truth we proclaim.³²

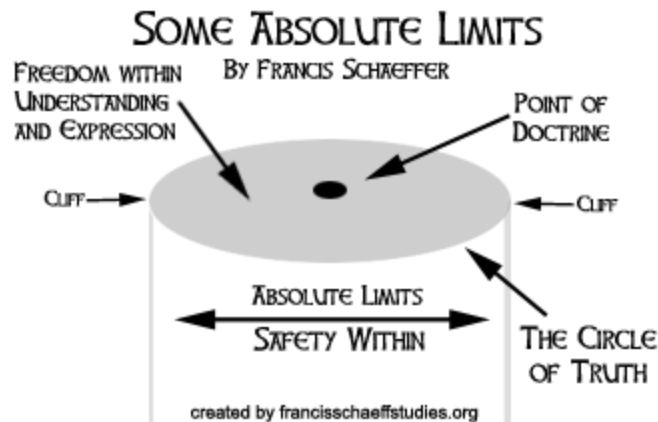
The Ultimate Reference Point

In the previous quote we can see what is the hallmark of Schaeffer's writing and his distinctive perspective on marriage. Firstly, a constant and consistent application of the historic Christian position as a living apologetic against the inhuman abuses of marriage of our culture. Yet Secondly, and the presentation of hope in the form and freedom offered by God's divine instruction. Instruction that relies on the ultimate reference point as the foundation.

in marriage, all this is possible because **God Himself is the ultimate reference point**, and so the members of the local church do not need to hang too much on each other... Everything is to hang only one place—on Him who is infinite and personal, and who can carry everything perfectly. This is not a matter of just hanging everything on doctrines about the infinite and the personal God, but upon Him as a person—because He is there, and He knows ... the individuals in the group by name.

The Legal Circle, Form and Freedom, and Some Absolute Limits

In Schaeffer's works there is an appendix called *Some Absolute Limits*, where he seems to clarify the core concept of what he means by the circle and the notions of form and freedom. Herein, he lays out a clarification of doctrine, explaining it as a single point, with a circle around it. In some legalistic persuasions the Christian has been held to the single point of doctrine, without any freedom. However, Schaeffer suggest that there is liberty within the circle which allows for freedom without treating the individual in an inhuman way. The following chart depicts Schaeffer's view.



Now in light of this, this powerful section where Schaeffer describes form and freedom:

God brings structure into the primary relationship of man—the man-woman relationship. In a

³² Schaeffer, A. Francis, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: Volume Three, A Christian View of Spirituality (Two Contents, Two Realities)*, Westchester, IL, Crossway Books. 420.

fallen world (in every kind of society—big and small—and in every relationship) structure is needed for order. God Himself here imposes it on the basic human relationship. **Form is given, and without such form freedom would only be chaos.**

It is not simply because man is stronger that he is to have dominion (that's the argument of the Marquis de Sade). But rather he is to have dominion because God gives this as structure in the midst of a fallen world. The Bible makes plain that this relationship is not to be without love. As the New Testament puts it, the husband is to love his wife as Christ loved the Church (Eph. 5:23). In a fallen world, it is not surprising to find that men have turned this structure into a kind of slavery. It is not meant to be a slavery. In fact, it is in cultures where the Bible has been influential that the balance has been substantially restored. The Bible balances the structure and the love.

Nevertheless, it is still true: since the Fall, what God says in Genesis 3:16 is to be the structure of the form of the basic human relationship—the man-woman relationship. It is right that a woman should feel a need for freedom, a feeling of being a “human being” in the world. But when she tries to smash the structure of this basic relationship, finally what she does is to hurt herself. It is like unraveling the knot that holds the string of human relationships together. All other things flow from it—the loss of her own children's obedience and the crumbling of all society about her. In a fallen world, we need structure in every social relationship.³³

Conclusion

There is indeed form, but there is also freedom. We must loudly proclaim this in the face of the prevalent inhumanity. Freedom! Freedom of expression, freedom of conscience, freedom of practice! Yet safely within the circle of truth in the Biblical prescription of marriage. *In How Should We Then Live?* Schaeffer quoted Eric Hoffer's maxim, “When freedom destroys order, the yearning for order will eventually destroy freedom.”³⁴ This has been what the world has seen in marriage, a constant freedom without guidance and the safety of the circle of truth. Thus now, in our time, that unrestrained freedom, or what is more correctly named simply “anarchy,” threatens to destroy marriage itself, both legally and socially over time. However, let it be known, that in a society that wished to cast off all restraints in marriage, we have proper freedom! There is real beauty! Yet, there is also order and safety!

As we seek to grasp Schaeffer's teaching on the form and freedom within the Biblical circle of marriage we can see that we can understand much of the substantial healing that is possible. By Schaeffer's prescription, we approach marriage as a calling to fulfill the Final Apologetic, as a demonstration to the watching world, to elevate their view of the beauty of human relationships, against the backdrop of an inhuman world corrupted by the fall. We do this not by following some legalistic point of doctrine for its own sake, or holding each other to a standard of perfection or nothing. Rather, but by finding liberty and grace within the proper Biblical structure and looking to the ultimate reference point, Christ alone, for strength and the healing we need from both abuses and error. We need this perfect reference point, because we are imperfect and if we look to each other, we will fail. Ultimately, this, like all of our demonstration and light to a dark world, is a living apologetic.

³³ Schaeffer, A. Francis, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: Volume Two, A Christian View of the Bible as Truth (Genesis in Space and Time)*, Westchester, IL, Crossway Books. 66.

³⁴ Schaeffer, A. Francis, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: Volume Five, A Christian Worldview*, Westchester, IL, Crossway Books. 244.

