

# A Day Of Sober Rejoicing

*Dr. Francis Schaeffer*

An address by Dr. Schaeffer to the 10<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America on the occasion of the receiving into its' body of the Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod.

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The following written address was delivered by Dr. Francis Schaeffer at the 10<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America which met in Grand Rapids, Michigan on June 16, 1982. Because of the historic occasion with the Presbyterian Church in America receiving into its' body the Reformed Presbyterian Church Evangelical Synod, Dr. Schaeffer and the Christian Education and Publications Committee make this address available to each church and commissioner present at the assembly and to each church and pastor not present at the Assembly.

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It is a profound privilege to be asked to speak today as this day we are one church.

It is a day of rejoicing. It must primarily be that. And yet it is also a sober day before the face of our dear Lord—a sober day, for while this is now in one way an accomplished fact, in another way it is only a beginning. Like birth itself—birth is something completed—the human being nine months old emerges into the external world. But then, though this is a completed thing, what then matters is what is done with life. There is a life to be lived.

For us, what matters now, with the rejoicing is the looking to our Lord for the common life which we now have together, to be lived and to be lived well in the light of the infinite-personal God's existence, in the light of His revelation in the Scripture, in the light of the teaching and the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, and in the light of the coming complete restoration of all things.

We must realize that our being one will take looking to the Lord for help. There will be problems of coordination which must be worked out with patience, with being servants to each other. This will not happen automatically. It will take conscious thought, prayer, and a realistic love not to let our egotisms spoil that which God has given us. I would just say to you there are going to be months, there are going to be times, that you are consciously going to have to realize that there are things that have be worked out in love, and it is imperative that as these things are worked out that the things of personal egotism and personal preference which is not principle would not spoil that which God has given us.

We have much to help us: The Lord Himself, and our common heritage. There are differences in our heritage between the Northern and the Southern Presbyterian Churches. And there are divergencies in our histories since we have left those churches. But our common heritage is much greater than the differences.

Our common heritage is rooted in the eternal final objective reality, the infinite-personal Creator, the triune God Himself. Our common heritage is rooted in the unity of all those who have believed God from the Fall onward. Our common heritage is rooted in the New Testament Church from Pentecost onward. Our common heritage is rooted in the Reformation when God's people threw off the encrustations of the medieval church and returned to authority resting in Scripture only, and salvation resting only in Christ's finished Substitutionary work in history on the cross. All these things are our common heritage which far outshadow the differences. But more, our common heritage is rooted back to Geneva and to Scotland with our Presbyterian forefathers, and then again closer to us in this moment of history. Our common heritage is rooted in that we take seriously the Bible's command concerning the purity of the visible church. This is our common

heritage or we would not exist as individual churches and now as one church. And, thus, when the denominations to which we have belonged passed the point of not return we—with tears but with loyalty to our Lord—practiced truth and we stepped out from the denominations when there was no return in these denominations after we had patiently tried.

We have no illusions that in this fallen world and with our own finiteness and our own individual sin that we will have a perfect church but we stepped out looking to our Lord to help us have a true church. It will not be perfect, but we believe indeed we have a call to a true church—with a proper preaching of the Word, unmixed with liberalism; the proper sharing of the sacraments, being able to guard the table not having people sitting there who deny the great things of the living God, the Scriptures, and the living Christ; and also the proper administration to discipline in both doctrine and life.

Yes, we do have differences of background but the common heritage eminently overshadows the differences.

As we look ahead I would suggest certain things should be in our thoughts as individuals and as a particular church of the Lord Jesus Christ. Forgive me if I stress what I have stressed before in talks, articles and books. However, we will not know who we are or what lies ahead as a privilege and a duty unless we remember our Presbyterian recent past history. As we cannot understand our young people and the culture which surrounds us unless we understand the 60's, so we cannot understand the present *religious* climate in the United States unless we understand the 1930's. Prior to the 1930's the Bible believing Christians had stood together as liberalism came in to steal the churches. Then at different speeds the liberals achieved their theft of the various denominations with their power centers of the seminaries and their bureaucracies. At that point and onward the true Christians instead of standing together as had been the case previously divided into two groups: Those who held to a principle of the purity of the visible church; and those who accepted and acted upon the concept of a pluralistic church. There's a line just like that. It's a line that began back there in the 30's, has continued and marks the religious life of the United States excruciatingly in our own day—those who hold to the principle of the purity of the visible church and those who accept the concept of the pluralistic church.

As you know, I have stressed over and over again the weakness of what became known as “the separated movement.” It is good to remind ourselves again what God's calling to us is once we have become Christians. Our calling once we have become Christians is to exhibit the existence of God and to exhibit His character, individually and collectively. God is holy and God is love, and our calling is simultaneously to show forth holiness and love in

every aspect of life—parent and child, husband and wife, church, state, everything else—an exhibition of the character of God showing forth his holiness and his love simultaneously. In the flesh rather than the work of the Spirit, it is easy to say we are showing holiness and it only be egotistic pride and hardness. Equally in the flesh rather than the work of the Spirit it is easy to say we are showing forth love and it only be egotistic compromise, latitudinarianism and accommodation. Both are equally easy in the flesh. Both are equally egotistic. To show forth both simultaneously, in personal matters, church and public life can only be done in any real degree by our consciously bowing, denying our egotistic selves and letting Christ bring forth His fruit through us—not merely as a “religious” statement, but with some ongoing reality. When we leave to begin a new denomination for Christ’s sake it is so easy to be proud, to be hard toward true brothers in Christ who differ with us, to those who hold to the Bible’s principles but nevertheless do not think the time is right. It is easy to be self-righteous and to self-righteously think that we are so right on this one point that anything else may be excused—very easy, a very easy thing to fall into. These mistakes were indeed made, and we have suffered from this and the cause of Christ has suffered from this through these now 50 years. By God’s grace as we begin together, let us consciously look to our Lord for His help not to give Satan the victory by making this tragic error.

But equally, let us not allow any place for confusing Christian love with compromise, latitudinarianism and accommodation! The spirit of our age is syncretism in all the areas of life, in all the areas of thought. The spirit of our age is syncretism, and thus accommodation is the rule. The spirit of our age is the age of syncretism in contrast in truth versus error; and this being so, accommodation is the common mentality.

Those in the churches who said they were practicing love but who confused this with compromise and accommodation have not been static in their error. Compromise is never static. It always progresses. Thus what began as ecclesiastical compromise has become the acceptance of a series of tragedies, a series of things which deny truth as truth. A series of tragedies which rest in the loss of the realization that truth as truth demands differentiation. Accommodation progresses and it is increasingly forgotten that truth, if it is really truth and not just subjective truth inside of our own head, demands confrontation, loving confrontation, but confrontation. If I lose the concept of confrontation it must be asked, do I believe that truth is truth. We must remind each other that all must be with true love and that the exhibition of God’s holiness must never be confused with hardness. Yet equally we must realize the responsibility to show forth and practice holiness as we go on together filling a great need in the church of Christ today not just in Presbyterian circles but in the church as a whole, and then in

our society and in our culture. We have a great responsibility in our Presbyterian circles, but it doesn't stop there. It goes on, our responsibility, our duty, our privilege, as we become one, concerning the whole church of the Lord Jesus Christ, and then out into the society and the culture.

Those who took the path of accommodation have not stopped on the level of one ecclesiastical unit but have had much to do in shaping that which is known as evangelicalism today.

At this point I would like to repeat a part of the talk I gave earlier this year at the Congress on the Bible in San Diego:

When Dr. Koop, Franky and I were in the midst of the seminars of "Whatever Happened to the Human Race," one of us received a letter from someone in the evangelical ranks. He holds a good theological position in regard to Scripture and I like him. In his letter, however, he said: "I see the emergence of a new sort of fundamentalist legalism. That was the case in the trust conceiving 'false evangelicals' in the inerrancy issue and is also the case on the part of some who are now saying that the evangelical cause is betrayed by any who allow exceptions of any sort in government funding in abortion." Now, speaking of the abortion issue, of course we would have to give some clarification. I know of no Protestant who does not take into consideration the health of the mother. If with tears the doctor cannot save both of his patients, the child and the mother, this is taken into consideration. It is all the other qualifications which are tacked on to the statement, I am against abortion except for this, that, the other thing, and 20 things more. And when we come to that place we have a question to ask, the question is raised if those who do this understand that it is human life as such that is involved in contrast to some individual's or society's concept of their own happiness. And when somebody tacks on all these exceptions one must say, do they understand all that truth means in the area of human life and the tremendous issues involved of human life as human life being important because we are made in the image of God in contrast to human life being able to be destroyed for either the individual's happiness, the mother who thinks it's for her happiness, or for society's good. One must ask, do people really understand this, do they understand what truth means when they indeed forget what the real issue is at the level of human life?

I would like to consider the phrase "a new sort of fundamentalist legalism" in regard to all the areas we have been talking about.

If what is involved in the phrase "fundamentalist legalism" is the loveless thing that some of us have known in the past, we of course reject it totally. The love of God and the holiness of God, as I've said

before, must always be evident simultaneously. And if anyone has wandered off and later they see their mistake and they return, then surely the attitude should be not one of pride on our part that we have been right, but the attitude must be one of joy, and the playing of joyous music, and the singing of songs, and yes I would even say dancing in the streets because there has been a real return.

Again, if the phrase “fundamentalistic legalism” means the down-playing of the humanities as unhappily has so often been the case in certain circles, the failure to know that the intellect, that human creativity by Christians and non-Christians, that the scholarly, that the Lordship of Christ in all of life are all important and are included in true spirituality, then my work of 40 and more years and the books and the films, would speak of my denying it totally.

And if the term “a new legalistic fundamentalism” means the confusion of primary and secondary points of doctrine in life this too should be rejected.

But when we have said all that, when we come to the central things of doctrine including maintaining the Bible’s emphasis that it is without mistake an the central things of life, then something must be profoundly considered. Truth carries with it confrontation, loving confrontation, but confrontation nevertheless. If our reflex action is always accommodation regardless of the centrality of the truth involved, there is something profoundly wrong. As what we may call holiness without love is not God’s kind of holiness, so what we may call love without holiness including when it is necessary confrontation, is not God’s kind of love. God is holy and God is love.

This ends the segment that I have taken from the San Diego talk, and now to pick up and go on: That which has come out of the concept of accommodation has indeed grown and spread. First ecclesiastical accommodation. Then when the Scriptures were attacked with the existential methodology in the evangelical ranks this mentality meant that leadership was not provided in saying that here was a watershed issue which required a line to be drawn between those who held the historic view of Scripture and the new and weaker view. Now this is not to say that those who hold and held this view are not often brothers and sisters in Christ nor that we should not have warm loving personal relationships with them, but when one is considering the issue of Scripture at this point we should realize that the name evangelical really must be considered here, and the name evangelical was continued to be accepted and used about seminaries and other institutions as though their unscriptural view of Scripture made no real difference. This is real accommodation.

And when the human life issue came upon us, this same mentality of accommodation meant that no leadership was provided in meeting the issue any more than it had been in the scriptural issue. There was a great silence on this issue until some of God's people stirred themselves—largely and in many places in spite of the leadership that had the sense of accommodation. They had forgotten that the unique value of human life is unbreakably linked with the fact of the existence of the infinite-personal God.

But I would say, the accommodation does not stop; the whole culture has been squandered and largely lost. Eighty years ago there was a Christian consensus in this country; all the most devastating things that have come have come in the last 40 years. Anybody who here is 55 years of age, all the most devastating things in every area of our culture, whether it be art or music, whether it be law or government, whether it's the schools, permissiveness and all the rest, all these things have come climactically in our adult lifehood if you're 55 years of age. But, the mentality of accommodation did not raise the voice, it did not raise the battle, it did not call God's people to realize that this is a part of the task to speak out into the culture and society against that which was being squandered and lost and largely thrown away. An accommodation mentality ecclesiastically in the earlier years led to a lack of confrontation in our culture, society and in the country. As the great loss occurred in sliding from a Christian consensus to a humanistic one from the 40's onward more and more things were lost, more and more things were allowed to be robbed, more and more things slid away.

And, let us say with tears, if one has the mentality of accommodation we must realize that it will still continue. A mentality of accommodation provides no basis for confrontation with tears concerning the oppression of Christians by those countries that hold the final reality to be merely material or energy shaped by pure chance. This mentality of accommodation provides no basis for a clear and public stand for our brothers and sisters in Christ who know oppression in such a situation. The mentality of accommodation provides no basis for a cry against tyranny as tyranny—not only tyranny against Christians but tyranny against Man, spelled with a capital "M," who is made in the image of God. The mentality of accommodation provides no basis for fighting tyranny such as our forefathers fought tyranny, as we know the great and flaming names of the Scottish background and the Reformation who really stood not just against tyranny against Christians but understood that a Christian is called upon to stand against all tyranny. The mentality of accommodation provides no basis against not only internal tyranny in such countries as I've described but an expanding tyranny to new parts of Europe and the globe. A mentality of accommodation provides no basis for a strong stand in this situation.

This is not our common heritage. As Presbyterians our heritage is with a Calvin who dared to stand against the Dukes of Savoy regardless of what it cost. Our heritage is with a John Knox who taught us, as I've stressed in *A Christian Manifesto*, a great theology of standing against tyranny. Our heritage is with a Samuel Rutherford who wrote those flaming words, *Lex Rex*—only the law is king and “king” under any name must never be allowed to arbitrary law. Are you Presbyterians? Have we a Presbyterian body? These men are the men who give us our heritage—Calvin and his position, John Knox and his, Samuel Rutherford his, and no less than these in our own country, a John Witherspoon who understood that tyranny must be met and must be met squarely because tyranny is wrong. These who understood that true love in this fallen world often meant the acceptance of the tears which go with confrontation. None of us like confrontation, or I hope none of us do. But in a fallen world there is confrontation, there is confrontation concerning truth, there must be confrontation against evil and that which is wrong. The love must be there but so must the hard thing of acting upon differentiation, the differentiation God gives between truth and falsehood, between what is just, based on God's existence and His justice, and injustice.

We are Presbyterians; we are Reformed. But our being together and our responsibility and opportunity does not stop merely with being Presbyterian and Reformed. As one as we now are, we can in some measure speak with the balance of love and holiness to help to provide help for the poor church of the Lord Jesus Christ as a whole in this country; and then beyond into the world to provide help for the church of the Lord Jesus Christ in helping stop this awful slide. This slide in regard to the church, this slide in regard to Scripture, this slide in regard to human life, this slide regarding the oppression of our brothers and sisters in Christ, this slide in regard to tyranny toward others in the world. It is forgotten that a part of the Good News is to take a stand; that is a part of the Good News in a broken, as well as lost, world. The very preaching of the Good News is taking a stand, but it's forgotten that just as we heard from the former moderator that there isn't a dichotomy between the proclamation of the Word and caring for people's material needs with compassion and love, so also it must be emphasized that there is no dichotomy between preaching the Good News and taking a stand—and in fact, if there is nothing to take a stand upon there is no reason for preaching the Good News.

We are to be Presbyterian and Reformed, but that is not the limiting circle of our responsibility. I would say to you, I plead with you concerning this, we are to be Reformed and Presbyterian but that is not the limiting circle of our responsibility. Our distinctives are not to be the chasm. We hold our distinctives because we are convinced that they are biblical. But God's call is to love and be one with all those who are in Christ Jesus and then to

let God's truth speak into the whole spectrum of life and the whole spectrum of society. That is our calling. The limiting circle is not to be just that we are Presbyterian and Reformed. We hold these things because we believe indeed they are that which is taught in Scripture. But out beyond that there is the responsibility, there is the call, to be something to the whole church of the Lord Jesus Christ, and out beyond the church of the Lord Jesus Christ to the whole society and to the whole culture. If we don't understand this we don't understand either how rich Christianity is and God's truth is, nor do we understand how wide is the call placed upon the Christian into the totality of life. Jesus could not be said to be Savior unless we also say He is Lord. And we cannot honestly and rightly say He is our Lord if He is only a Lord of part of the life and not of the totality of life including all the social and political and the cultural life.

Our limitation of responsibility is not to be merely, as we being together, within the circle of Presbyterian and Reformed though it is to be this.

We begin together. May we ask God's grace that we may do well in the whole extent of the possibility of our calling. I want to tell you I doubt if many of you realize how great the possibility of your calling is as you sit here today. It is tremendous. There is a tremendous need in our day. We have largely lost our culture. The poor church has not been give a clear direction. You have tremendous opportunity; you have a calling this day; I have a calling this day; we have a calling this day by God's grace that we may do well in the whole extent of the possibility of our calling.

It is intriguing to me that in the last six months that some important voices in the media and some of those who are pushing for a pluralistic church have been using the designations: "separatist" and "ecumenical," I'm intrigued because I haven't heard these terms used like this for a number of years. We do not wish to be separatist in any poor sense and we do not wish to be ecumenical in the bad sense. But whatever terms distinguish the difference, as we begin together because truth is truth, we must be willing ecclesiastically, concerning the Scripture, concerning human life, concerning oppression of our brothers and sisters in Christ, and concerning the spread of tyranny, we must be willing when it is necessary to accept the privilege and the duty of confrontation rather than accommodation. This is the command of Scripture, and it is the example of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us be committed to each other, to the commands of the Scripture and to the example of the Lord Jesus Christ of understanding that truth is truth. We are not opposing these things for abstract doctrinal concepts, but what we are talking about is truth. We are talking about truth, and truth is not abstract. Truth is rooted in nothing less than the truth that God exists. This is the truth and that He has revealed Himself in the Scripture and He has sent His son to die for sinners like ourselves. If these things are really truth then it is not a place for synthesis, it is a place for antithesis. With love it is a place for confrontation and not just a mistaken accommodation which lacks a proper exhibition of God's holiness.