

The Roots of the Emergent Church

by Francis Schaeffer

Francis Schaeffer explores the historical shifts in authority from the Bible to humanism and the need to return to biblical truth as the ultimate authority in Christianity.

Duration: 6:35

Scripture: Psalm 119:105, John 14:6, John 17:17, 2 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 4:12

Topics: "Biblical Authority", "Church History"

Description

This sermon delves into the historical shift away from the early church's emphasis on the Bible as the sole authority to the Middle Ages where authority was divided between the Bible and the church. It explores the impact of Thomas Aquinas' reintroduction of Aristotle's teachings, leading to a blend of biblical and non-Christian philosophy, and the subsequent questioning of the necessity of the Bible. The sermon highlights the importance of returning to the foundational belief in the Bible as the supreme authority, as exemplified by figures like John Wycliffe and John Hus, emphasizing the centrality of Christ's work and the absolute truth found in God's Word.

Transcript

...moving increasingly away from the teaching of early Christianity. In the early church, the authority rested on the Bible alone. But in the Middle Ages, there gradually had come a change, with the authority divided between the Bible and the church.

Then came Thomas Aquinas, a Dominican monk. He was the outstanding theologian of that period, and his thinking still has much influence. He had an incomplete view of the law of man, as man had revolted against God.

In his view, the human will was fallen or corrupted, but the intellect was not. As a result of this emphasis, gradually philosophy began to act in an increasingly independent, autonomous manner. More and more, the teachings of the Bible, and those of the classical non-Christian philosophers were freely mixed.

He reintroduced the teaching of the Greek philosopher Aristotle, although Pope Urban IV had previously forbidden it. Because Aquinas emphasized Aristotle, a problem was raised which later became crucial in the humanistic elements of the Renaissance. Aristotle emphasized the individual things around us, the particulars.

This cot is a particular. The molecules which make up this cot are particulars, and you and I are particulars. Beginning from man alone, and from the individual things in the world, that is, the particulars, the problem then is how to find an ultimate and adequate meaning for the individual things, and most important, how to find a meaning for man and for life, and what will be man's basis for morals, value, and law.

Later, the mixture of biblical teaching and non-Christian philosophy led to the question, is the Bible really necessary? Since truth could seemingly be reached without it. What has happened, of course, is that Thomas Aquinas in the Middle Ages has opened the floodgates in his emphasis on Aristotle and on the particulars. And as this is done, philosophy is increasingly made free from anything that God has said.

And as such, we find that man begins to take over and place himself at the center. Increasingly, the authority of the Church took precedence over the teaching of the Bible, and it was emphasized more and more that salvation rests on people meriting the merit of Christ instead of on Christ's work alone. Gradually, there grew up a humanistic element, and that is, what the Church decided was made equal with what the Bible decided.

And this just changed everything, because then everything could be brought in, and anything could be brought in. For example, it immediately led to a different emphasis on how to approach God through man's added works to the merit of Christ, as well as the merit of Christ itself. And all kinds of things changed.

But at the same time, there began to develop a reaction against these distortions of the original Christianity. John Wycliffe, an Oxford professor of the 14th century, raised his voice. He said, The Bible is the supreme authority.

His translation of the Bible into English had an important influence throughout Europe. John Hus of Czechoslovakia said, The Bible is the only final authority. Man must return to God through the work of Christ only.

And Wycliffe, when he came forward, and Hus, really understood that the deviation had come at a central point, and that central point was the lack of having the Bible as the only authority. One must say about Christianity two things. The heart of the Christian message is that through the substitutionary death of Christ, we can return to God, and our true moral guilt is removed on the basis of Christ's work.

But on the other hand, as far as facing humanism is concerned, the central thing is not the acceptance of Christ as Savior, but the fact that we have absolute truth in contrast to relative truth. And this is the real tension. Are we merely beginning with man as autonomous, or is the truth from a personal God that gives us real absolutes? And therefore we're not only dealing with statistical averages.

Now this has a tremendous impact in the area of morals, in the impact of law and political life, as well as religious life. It's not minimizing at all the acceptance of Christ as Savior. It's quite contrary.

There is no other way to come to God except on the basis of his finished work. But unless this is framed in the concept that we're talking about truth, and not just an endless series of relativistic things, merely talking about accepting Christ as Savior will never meet the humanist dilemma. There is only one real solution, and that's right back where the early church was.

The early church believed that only the Bible was the final authority. What these people really believed, and it gave them their whole strength, was in the truth of the Bible as the absolute, infallible word of God.

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