

# Watershed of the Evangelical World

by Francis Schaeffer

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*The watershed of the evangelical world is the point at which the movement must decide whether to hold a strong view of Scripture or compromise its teachings.*

**Duration:** 45:37

**Scripture:** Genesis 2:21

**Topics:** "Evangelicalism"

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## Description

The video is a sermon by Dr. Francis Schaeffer titled 'The Watershed of the Evangelical World.' He emphasizes the importance of holding a strong and uncompromising view of Scripture in today's culture. He states that this is necessary to remain faithful to the teachings of the Bible and Christ. Additionally, he highlights the need for a strong view of Scripture in order to prepare for the difficult days ahead for ourselves and our children. He concludes by urging Christians to live in a way that reflects the love of Christ and to be a witness to those around them.

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## Transcript

Dr. Francis Schaeffer represents a living model of a life open to the unexpected leading of God. Surely he never anticipated the development of L'Abri when his college-age kids began to bring home friends with questions about Christianity, questions requiring more than bromides and pious clichés in answer. But the L'Abri community in Switzerland and other locations have provided honest answers for honest questions, and the beauty of community for countless young people who have despaired of finding either in relationship to Jesus Christ and Christianity.

Perhaps there are some of you here personally indebted to Dr. Schaeffer for the rescuing even of your own children or children of friends and their focus of life now upon Jesus Christ, the Lord of the universe, our King. Without doubt, all of us are appreciative and grateful to him for his writings which have helped us to understand the thought forms of this 20th century and helped us to bridge the gap in our communication of the gospel. It's a great privilege to have Dr. Schaeffer here with us tonight, coming at such short notice and in the midst of an especially busy work schedule.

You see, for the last year and one half, Dr. Schaeffer has been working with Gospel Films with Billy Zioli and his own son Frankie Schaeffer to put together a 13-part film and TV documentary on the rise and decline of Western thought and culture entitled, How Should We Then Live? We ought to be looking for this series and nationwide premier sessions with which this massive project will be launched sometime in

September or October of this year. This magnum opus will also be released in book form by the Revell Publishing Company. Since the documentary is certainly the major work of Dr. Schaeffer's lifetime, we're particularly grateful to him for his willingness to interrupt his schedule of filming and come here to Washington to minister to us tonight.

Dr. Francis A. Schaeffer. My topic for tonight is the watershed of the evangelical world. The watershed of the evangelical world.

There are two reasons today for holding a strong, uncompromising view of Scripture. First and foremost, and this would be enough in itself, this is the only way to be faithful to what the Bible teaches about itself and what Christ teaches about Scripture. That would be enough reason in itself.

But today, there is a second reason why we must keep this steadfastly in mind, why we should hold a strong, uncompromising view of Scripture. And that is, there are hard days ahead of us for ourselves, for our spiritual and our physical children. And without a strong view of Scripture as a base, we will not be ready for those hard days.

Christianity is no longer providing the consensus for our society, nor as far as that is concerned, and being in the city of Washington, D.C., neither is Christianity any longer presenting the consensus upon which our law is based. We're in a time when humanism is coming to its natural conclusions. And in morals, in values, and law, all that society has today is relative values based only upon statistical averages, and that is all.

That's all there is in the society today. In the area of morals, values, and law, all that society has is relative values based upon statistical averages. The Reformation, with its emphasis upon the Word of God as being the revelation of God in all that it teaches, provided a freedom in society and yet a form in society as well.

Thus, there were freedoms in the Reformation countries such as the world had never known before, and yet without those freedoms leading to chaos, because both laws and morals had the consensus surrounding them resting upon what the Bible taught. That situation is now finished, and you cannot understand it for yourselves or your spiritual, physical children unless you understand, in reality, that situation really is finished. In retrospect, we can see that ever since the late 1930s in the United States, the Christian consensus is a minority view and does not provide the consensus for society, morals, or law any longer.

We who are Bible-believing Christians no longer represent the status quo of our society. The primary emphasis of biblical Christianity is that an individual can openly come to the Holy God upon the basis of the finished work of Christ and that alone. Nothing need be added to Christ's finished work, and nothing can be added to Christ's finished work.

But at the same time, where Christianity provides the consensus as it did in the Reformation countries, and did in the United States up to a relatively few years ago, true Christianity also brings with it many secondary blessings. One of those secondary blessings that Christianity brings with it, and has brought with it in the Reformation countries, has been titanic freedoms. The titanic freedoms we have had, yet without those freedoms leading to chaos.

Because the Bible's absolutes provided a consensus upon which freedom can operate. But once this consensus has been removed, as it is today, then the very freedoms which have come out of the Reformation, and in Reformation countries, these very freedoms became a destructive force in society, leading to chaos. What was a secondary blessing, removed from the Christian basis, then became destructive.

And this is the explanation of the destructive Sixties. The young people with whom I worked by thousands from all over the world, and back in the days of a decade ago. By the Sixties, our society had come to the natural conclusion of giving up the Reformation consensus.

Having given up the Reformation consensus by the Sixties, our society had come to the natural conclusion of the thing it had done in giving up that Reformation consensus. In the 1970s, largely, the young and the old together have only two core values, personal peace and affluence. Personal peace, as I am using it here, is not peace in one's heart, basically.

It is rather to live undisturbed by the troubles of others across the world, or undisturbed by the troubles of others across the city. Personal peace, which is one of the two great predominant values in our culture today, personal peace is to live my own life form, whether it is middle-class or hippie, it would not matter, undisturbed regardless of the cost to my own children and to my grandchildren. That's what I mean by personal peace.

Affluence is an always expanding area of things, things, things, and more things. Success is always judged in the area of more possessions. These two core values now dominate both the young and the old in our culture.

It wasn't true in the Sixties. The youngsters really hoped for something better, and they had a good analysis of the dilemma of seeing the society held in the grip of personal peace and affluence, but their solutions were wrong. They have come in a great circle, as I have dealt with them in thousands as they come from across the world, and you could see the change.

They have gone in a great circle, and they've given up their hope. They're caught in the grip of apathy largely, and they too now have only the poor values of personal peace and affluence. This is the situation of society today, of our society today on every side, both abroad and at home.

And there are signs that some form of authoritarian elite will fill the void and force a form on society based on arbitrary absolutes. Realize you're in a changing day. In such a setting, we who are Bible-believing Christians, or our children, or our grandchildren, depending upon the speed with which it comes, face very hard days ahead.

The soft days for evangelical Christians are past. The soft days for evangelical Christians are past. Put that down in your mind and in your book.

In such a day, only a strong view of Scripture is sufficient to stand the pressure of an all-pervasive surrounding culture which is built upon relativism and relativistic thinking in all the areas of life, just as in the early Church. It was only a strong view of Scripture which enabled the early Church to stand the pressure in the days of the Roman Empire. But let us say it with tears, and that is that evangelicalism today, although growing in numbers as far as evangelicalism in name is concerned throughout the world and in the United States, is not unitedly and clearly standing for a clear view of Scripture.

It is for this reason that I spoke concerning this at the Lausanne Conference, and I would like to repeat just a small portion of that which I gave then. We must say if evangelicals are to be evangelicals, we must not compromise our view of Scripture. There is no use of evangelicalism seeming to get larger and larger if at the same time appreciable parts of evangelicalism are getting soft at that which is the central core, namely the Scriptures.

We must say with sadness that in some places, seminaries, institutions, and individuals who are known as evangelical no longer hold to a full view of Scripture. The issue is clear. Is the Bible true truth and infallible wherever it speaks, including where it touches history and the cosmos, or is it only in some sense revelational where it touches religious subjects? That is the issue.

The heart of neo-orthodox existential theology is that the Bible gives us a quarry out of which to have religious experience, but that the Bible contains mistakes where it touches that which is verifiable, namely history and science. But unhappily, we must say that in some circles this concept now has come into some of that which is called evangelicalism. In short, in these circles the neo-orthodox existential theology is being taught under the name of evangelicalism.

The issue is whether the Bible gives propositional truth, that is truth which may be stated in propositions, where it touches history and the cosmos, and this all the way back to pre-Abrahamic history, all the way back to the first 11 chapters of Genesis, or whether instead of that it is only meaningful where it touches that which is considered religious. I am still continuing from my Lausanne talk. T. H. Huxley, the biologist, the friend of Darwin, the grandfather of Aldous and Julian Huxley, wrote in 1890 that he visualized the day not far hence in which faith would be separated from all fact, and especially all pre-Abrahamic history, and that faith would then go on triumphant forever.

This is an amazing quote for 1890, before the birth of existential philosophy or existential theology. He foresaw something clearly, and I'm sure that he and his friends considered this some sort of a joke, because they would have understood well that if faith is separated from fact, and specifically pre-Abrahamic space-time history, it is only another form of what we today call a trip. But unhappily, it is not only the avowedly neo-orthodox existential theologians who now hold that which T. H. Huxley foresaw, but some who call themselves evangelicals as well.

This may come from the theological side, in saying that not all the Bible is revelational, or it may come from the scientific side, in saying the Bible teaches little or nothing when it speaks of the cosmos. Martin Luther said, if I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God, except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I am professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefield besides is mere flight and disgrace if one flinches at that point.

That's the end of the quote from Luther. In our day, that point is the question of scripture. Holding to a strong view of scripture, or not holding to it, is the watershed of the evangelical world.

The first direction in which we must face is to say most lovingly but clearly, evangelicalism is not consistently evangelical unless there is a line drawn between those who take a full view of scripture and those who do not. And that's the end of the quotation from the Lausanne speech. The existential methodology, and if you have any doubt of what I mean by that, I would say go home and pursue the little book you've been given, No Final Conflict.

The existential methodology has infiltrated the theology that is sometimes called evangelical. This is the form the world spirit takes in our day, in which dominates in our generation. The existential methodology dominates philosophy, art, music, general culture such as the novel, poetry, the cinema, etc.

And now it is also the current form of liberal theology. That's what liberal theology is today, is the use of the existential methodology. What is this? It is saying like this, of dividing into an upper and lower story.

In the area of reason, in the area of reason, the Bible has many mistakes in it. In the area of the history and where the Bible touches the cosmos, that is those places where the Bible touches that which is of interest to science. In these areas, the Bible has many mistakes in it.

This is the existential methodology. But nevertheless, nevertheless, we can hope for some sort of religious experience and a sort of an upper story in spite of the fact that the Bible is full of mistakes. That's the present form of liberal theology.

But unhappily, this form of theology is now functioning in many places under the name of evangelicalism as well. It began a few years ago like this, in the evangelical circles. And that is where the Bible touches history and the cosmos, there are mistakes.

I'll give you a couple quotes in a moment to show you what I mean. But nevertheless, nevertheless, in these evangelical circles, it was stressed that we can still continue to hold on to the meaning system, the value system, and the religious things which the Bible tells. So a dichotomy was accepted in this situation.

I'll read you two quotations from men widely separated geographically across the world, showing what I mean by the acceptance of the fact that in the area where the reason operates, the Bible was accepted as having mistakes. These are men who would be in the evangelical circles. Quote, but there are some today who regard the Bible's plenary and verbal inspiration as ensuring its inerrancy not only in its declared intention to recount and interpret God's mighty redemptive acts but also in any and all of its incidental statements or aspects of statements that have to do with such non-revelational matters as geology, cosmology, botany, astronomy, geography, and so forth.

In other words, the Bible is divided exactly into two halves. Someone like myself, this is all very familiar, the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre, of a Camus, of a Heidegger, of a Karl Jaspers, the thousands of young people who have accepted the existential methodology, that reason leads to despair and you try to find an answer in the area of non-reason. All this statement is just placing the same thing in the evangelical circles into the world form which I find about me on every side, everywhere I lecture, among young and old who are really modern men today.

Another quote from someone, this is a translation from another language, from a country far far off from where we stand tonight. More problematic is in my estimation the fundamentalist extension of the principle of non-contradictory scripture to include the historic, geographic, statistical, and other biblical statements which do not touch in every case on the questions of salvation and which belong to the human element of scripture. Both of these statements do the same thing and that is they make a dichotomy, they make a division.

There are mistakes in the bible that are those areas that are open to verification but nevertheless we're to hang on to the religious thing, we're to hang on to the value system and the meaning system of the bible. This is the way the existential methodology came into evangelical circles. In other words, where the bible

touches history in the cosmos, it is not without error.

Let us think of what the Lausanne Covenant said about scripture and I would like to read that to you. We affirm the divine inspiration, truthfulness, and authority of both Old and New Testament scriptures in their entirety is the only written word of God without error in all that it affirms and the only infallible rule of faith and practice that was from the Lausanne Covenant. I ought to say because I know there's some confusion that that little phrase without error in all that it confirms was not a part of my own contribution to the Lausanne Conference.

I didn't know that that was going to be in there till I saw it in its final printed form. But I would like to speak first about why historically it is a good statement if left to itself and that is we are not saying we are not saying that the bible is without error in the thing it does not affirm. And the clearest example of course is where the bible says the fool has said that there is no God.

The bible does not teach that there is no God. The bible does not affirm that. But I would want to make a point beyond that.

We are not saying that the bible is without error in all the projections which people have made on the basis of the bible. What we're saying is what the bible really affirms is without error. So that statement as it appeared in the Lausanne Conference Covenant is a perfectly good statement.

But as soon as I saw it in its printed form, as soon as I saw it, I knew that it was going to be abused and it has been abused. I have a letter from Billy Graham dated in August and this is what he wrote to me in the section of his letter, Dear Francis, then down in the middle of the letter. I was thinking of writing a brief booklet on quote, in all that it affirms, end of quote, which I took to mean the entire bible.

Unfortunately, this statement is being made a loophole by many. And unhappily, though he is absolutely right, and I thank God that he sees it to be so, this statement which is good in itself taken in a historic context of meaning, yet nevertheless has indeed been made a loophole by many. How is it has been used as a loophole by many? Well, it is following still the existential methodology.

And that is that the bible affirms, I'm using now the words of the Lausanne Covenant, the bible affirms the value system and the meaning system set forth in the bible and certain religious things such as the physical resurrection. But on this basis of the existential methodology, to these men they would say in the back of their mind, even as the covenant is signed, but the bible does not affirm anything without error in the area of history and the cosmos. And with tears we can say that without any question, people signed the Lausanne Conference just where Billy put his finger, and that is using this thing which is good in itself put in a historic basis, but nevertheless they have used as a loophole to read it this way.

Because of the widely accepted methodology, and remember what it means, religious things being separated and isolated from what the bible teaches in the area, areas open to verification, that is history, and those things science would deal with, that is the cosmos. Because of the widely accepted existential methodology, therefore in themselves, and listen to me please, this is not an easy speech for me to make, because of the widely accepted existential methodology in certain parts of the evangelical system, therefore in themselves the old words of infallibility, inerrancy, without error, are meaningless today unless some such awkward phrase is added as, the bible is without error not only when it speaks of values and meaning and religious things, but when it speaks of history and the cosmos as well. If some such phrase is not added, these dear words to us can become meaningless, inerrancy, without error, infallible, can be

said by men today and yet not apply it to the whole of scripture, but only to the meaning system, the value system, and certain religious things leaving out any place where the bible speaks of history and the cosmos.

Those weakening the bible in the area of history and where it speaks, where it touches the cosmos, do so by saying that these things in the bible are culturally oriented. You always have chic terms in every period of history, and this is one today, culturally oriented. Where the bible teaches history and the cosmos, the bible is culturally oriented.

That is, these places where the bible touches history and the cosmos only show forth the general views on these subjects held by the culture in the day in which that portion of the bible was written. For example, when Genesis and Paul affirm, as they clearly do, that Eve came from Adam, that this is only borrowed from the general cultural views of the day in which these books were written. That's exactly the view that is held.

Thus, not just Genesis 1 to 11, but the New Testament is now seen to be relative instead of an absolute. These things are not seen as being set forth as propositional truth, that is, truth which may be stated in propositions. But let us realize, one cannot, as it were, begin such a process without it carrying on still further.

These things have now gone further among some who would still call themselves evangelicals. We now have come to the next step, and that's like this. They're still trying to hold on to the value system, the meaning system, and the religious things given in the bible, in this upper story kind of thing that I'm making here.

But, as I've said before, where the bible speaks of history and the cosmos, these are only culturally related. But now, in the last couple of years, another extension has come to this. Now certain moral absolutes given in the bible are also said to be culturally oriented.

These things move with tremendous speed in a day like ours, and today it is not only that that where the bible speaks of that which is historic in history and that which touches science is culturally oriented, but also certain clear moral directives are said to be culturally oriented. Thus these moral absolutes have been placed under the line in the existential methodology, along with history and along with the place where the bible talks about the cosmos. I'll give you two examples.

There could be others. First, easy divorce and remarriage. What the bible teaches clearly about this, the limits it places upon divorce and remarriage, and I would say in parenthesis, I personally think that these are well spelled out in the Westminster Confession of Faith.

But where these, let me return now, but where the bible teaches about the limitations placed upon divorce and remarriage, is now put by some evangelicals in the area of the culturally oriented. They say these were just the ideas of that moment, and that is all. There are ministers, elders, members in churches known as evangelical, who simply do not feel themselves bound at all by what the scripture says on this matter.

To what the bible, what the bible teaches on this matter is now to them only one more culturally oriented thing, and that is all. The same is true in the area of the clear teaching of the bible of the order in the home and in the church. These moral commands in regard to this order are now also called culturally oriented by

conferences and books on this subject under the name of evangelical.

In other words, it has quickly gone in the last five or six years from this place where it started, and that is holding on or trying to hold on to the value system, the meaning system, and religious matters, but saying that history and the cosmos, when the bible speaks of these things, these are culturally oriented. It is now taking a further step very, very rapidly to trying to hang on to the value system, the meaning system, and religious things, but now saying that when the bible speaks of history, the cosmos, and these specific moral commands in the bible, these all are lumped together as only culturally oriented. There's no end to this.

There's no end to this. Once the men and women, once men and women began to go down the path of the existential methodology, under the name of evangelicalism, the bible is no longer the word of God without error. Each part may be eaten away step by step.

Under the name of evangelicalism, then, when men and women come to this place, what then has the bible become? It has become what the liberals said it was back in the days of the 20s and the 30s. I wonder how many of you sitting here tonight remember those days. Do you remember Howard and Trumbull of the Sunday school times? Men of God, if there were ever men of God, weeping their heart out issue after issue in the old Sunday school times, speaking of these things, pointing out that the bible was being constantly devaluated.

Those days, those days were the days which led eventually to the formation of the National Association of Evangelicals. It was out of that setting that this organization, the NAE, was formed. We are back in the days of Howard and Trumbull.

We're also back in the days of scholars like J. Gresham Machen, who pointed out that the foundation upon Christianity rests was being destroyed. What is that foundation? That foundation being that the personal God who exists has not been silent, but is spoken in propositional truth in all that the bible teaches. In history, the cosmos, and moral absolutes, as well as in the meaning system, the value system of the bible and religious subjects.

These men in the 20s and the 30s raised their voice and shortly after that there came forth the NAE to speak into the situation. What is the use of evangelicalism seeming to get larger and larger in numbers if significant numbers of those under the names of evangelical no longer hold to that which makes evangelicalism evangelical? We face a problem and we must face it on our knees. If this continues, first, we are not faithful to what the bible claims for itself and we are not faithful to what Jesus Christ claims for the scripture.

But also, let us never forget, if this continues, we and our children will not be ready for the difficult days which are ahead. If we do this, if we accept this position, we are no longer the redeeming salt for our culture. That culture which is committed to the concept that everything, not only morals but law, are only a matter of cultural orientation of statistical averages.

That is the hallmark, the mark of our age. And if we are marked with the same mark, how can we then be the redeeming salt to this poor, broken, fragmented generation in which we live? We will have become a part of the weakness and wrongness of the surrounding culture rather than the redeeming salt to it. I would like to read again the last line of my Lausanne speech.

The first direction in which we must face is to say most lovingly but clearly, evangelicalism is not consistently evangelical unless there is a line drawn between those who take a full view of scripture and those who do not. A line must be drawn if evangelicals in this country and other countries throughout the world are to be ready for the strenuous days ahead. If the line is not drawn, we have cut the ground from under our own children and grandchildren spiritually and physically.

We will have been the ones who cut the ground from under them if the line is not drawn. Those who under God's hand have the leadership of evangelicalism, and many of you are here tonight, must have the courage lovingly, with tremendous emphasis upon lovingly, and then in parenthesis, not making the mistakes of the thirties when all too often harshness and unlove reigned, and we must say with tears that was true. But having said that, those who under God's hand have the leadership of evangelicalism must have the courage lovingly, lovingly but with courage, even if it is with tears, to draw a line and have the courage to do it publicly between those who take a full view of scripture and those who have accepted the existential methodology.

With tears and lovingly, but if we don't, we have cut the ground from under the feet of our own children in the coming generation if Jesus does not come first, and we have destroyed the hope of being a redeeming salt to the surrounding relativistic culture. We cannot wait. We cannot wait for others to draw the line.

You, whoever we are, have been called to place as a leadership in the church of the Lord Jesus, which we call evangelical for a better name. We must draw the line. We must draw the line.

Will it be with tears? I hope it will be with tears. I remember as a young man in the thirties where harshness and unlove reigned, but it does not need to reign when the line is drawn. It can be with tears, and it can be love.

It can be there, but brethren, beloved, I would be forced to become a fly the ocean to speak tonight if I didn't say, unless those who have the responsibility of the leadership are willing to draw that line lovingly and with tears, but to draw it really, we have cut the ground from under the church of the Lord Jesus for the hard days, which I believe are ahead of us. We who bear the name evangelical need to be unitedly those who have the same view of scripture as William Cowper had in 1779 when he wrote the hymn, The Spirit Breathes Upon the Word. I want you to listen to this, and I want you to place it in contrast to something, in contrast to any concept of the Bible being borrowed through cultural orientation, and that's what we're being told today, where the Bible touches history and the cosmos, and now in certain areas where it gives specific moral absolutes, the Bible has only borrowed from the cultural orientation of the moment in which that section of the Bible was written.

But in contrast, I want you to listen to Cowper's words, and I would say again, we who are evangelical need to be unitedly those who have the same view of scripture as William Cowper had, and in the second verse of this great hymn, and I end with this in contrast to what I have given as the weakness which today we face, and here were his words concerning the scripture, and if it isn't ours, what do we have in this world except relativism? What have we got to say to a relativistic world? What have you got to say to your relativistic children learning relativism in their philosophy classes and in their psychology classes and their sociological classes if you do not have this kind of a scripture of which Cowper spoke? A glory gilds the sacred page, majestic like the sun, it gives a light to every age, it gives but borrows none. Dr. Schaffer, thank you for ringing the changes. Some of us who were in Lausanne remember well your plea for a strong position on the word of God, and you've called us again tonight, I think, to take the kind of stand

that Martin Luther took when he said, here I stand, I can do no other, compelled by the word of God, and thank you for so clearly and compellingly calling this to our hearts and our minds.

I've asked Dr. Robert Andrews, the Light and Life Hour speaker, to bring our convention to a close by leading us in prayer. Will you all stand together, please? Let us pray. With the words of the psalmist, our father, we would pray that your word would be a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our pathway, and may it shine brightly not only upon the way that we walk in our day, but through our lives.

May it brightly beam to light the pathway of those who follow, our children and our grandchildren. Help us to hold forth the word of life, not only as we stand before microphones and pulpits, but in the everyday walk of our lives, in the way that we talk, the way that we conduct our business with our fellow men and women. In our homes, may we draw our children around the family altar and your word.

In our hearts, may we sing forth the praises of God through songs and hymns that lift up Jesus Christ as the only Savior of the world. As people watch us and see the way that we live, may there be a contagious love that radiates the fragrance of Christianity everywhere we go, until people will become hungry to know the Savior whom we serve. Thank you again tonight, our Father, for these days that have stretched our souls and filled our hearts and challenged us afresh to be men and women of God, to stand tall in a world that desperately needs to see those who know where they're going as they follow the Savior.

Dismiss us now with your love through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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