

4. With Eyes Toward Europe

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Before leaving America, the Schaeffer family moved one more time. They did not know where they should go after Fran completed his work in Chester, so they prayed that God would show them where they could honor Him the most. Fran thought God wanted them to go to St. Louis, Missouri, so as Edith sought to know God's definite leading, she prayed for some clear evidence that God wanted them to move to Missouri.

Suddenly, in the midst of her prayer for clear leading, the Holy Spirit impressed upon her new words to an old hymn tune. She sang them joyfully and the words expressed her submission to the will of God. This experience convinced her that God had answered her prayer for guidance, and that they should go to the Bible Presbyterian Church in St. Louis. In subsequent years, the Schaeffers' prayers, sound reason, and past experiences of how God answered prayers enabled them to follow God's leading with more confidence.

Fran's father died in 1943, but the Schaeffer's rejoiced that he had accepted Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior. However, Fran's mother continued to hold bitter resentments against God and Fran's work as a minister. In this same year, Fran and Edith began a very joyful work in St. Louis. They felt comfortable and loved the people. Fran typically preached two sermons each Sunday and led a Bible study at their Wednesday night prayer meeting. They started a children's Bible class in their basement, and Fran taught the church women how to do the same thing in their homes. Before long, twenty such classes met regularly in the basements of church members throughout the city. Later, Fran and Edith used the lessons they learned from this children's ministry to begin "Children for Christ," a work they would soon take to many churches in Europe. Very slowly, God prepared them to take on greater obligations, and the Schaeffers felt keenly the same sense of responsibility that characterized the Apostle Paul: "I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise" (Romans 1:14). One of their former church members in St. Louis said of Fran's work there: "He worked hard, and he worked the people hard!"

During their years in St. Louis Fran continued working beyond his local congregation. On a national level he served in the American Council of Christian Churches. He also began a local council in St. Louis that included the Bible-believing congregations. Fran expressed his social concern and love for all people when he wrote a pamphlet to combat Hitler's antisemitism: "The Bible-believing Christian and the Jew" was distributed by the thousands in the midst of the war years. Later, Edith wrote her popular Christianity Is Jewish to break down the barriers between Christians and Jews. 1.

Deborah Ann Schaeffer was born in St. Louis on May 3, 1945. Germany surrendered to the Allies on May 7, 1945, so the Schaeffers joined with others in the church and joyfully celebrated Debbie's birth and the war's end. The church began to turn its attention to what it could do to help those ravaged by World War II. They wanted to care for soldiers coming home from the front, and they knew Christians in Europe had suffered terrible losses. Little did anyone realize that God planned to gently lead the Schaeffers into missionary work in Europe by showing Fran first hand the great need for someone like himself to teach there.

Shortly after Debbie's second birthday, Fran traveled to Europe on behalf of the American Council of Christian Churches and the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions (the mission board that J. Gresham Machen had supported so strongly). He went as "The American Secretary, Foreign Relations Department of the American Council of Christian Churches." For three months Fran traveled to many different churches in order to learn about their situation following the war. He also warned them of the theological dangers that their students might face if they studied in some of the American seminaries and Bible colleges. Fran knew what false teachings and practices in the church could do, so he tried to obey Paul's difficult instructions for all ministers: "command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer...These promote controversies rather than God's work which is by faith. The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Some have wandered away from these and turned to meaningless talk" (1 Timothy 1:3-6). As Fran grew in faith and knowledge, he learned how to strongly warn others and maintain love, a pure heart, and a good conscience.

Fran wrote detailed letters from Europe, and Edith carefully recopied these for publication. He studied the state of the church and the nations, and published his observations. During his ninety days in Europe, Fran met key Christian leaders and spoke at various times before many diverse groups of people. His experience in these European churches increased the reality of his being a part of a greater heritage than he had understood before. He marveled at the various historic sites of the Reformation and the courage of the Reformers. He realized more intensely the call of God for him to carry forward Biblical ideas and Reformation principles to his generation. He quickly learned that the state of the church in Europe was far worse than he expected. For example, of sixty pastors in the Geneva State Church, only two or three

claimed to be Bible-believing Christians. Some of those he met thought they ought to separate themselves and their churches from the teachings of people like Karl Barth and the ecumenical movement. They did not want to quit preaching the Bible's central teachings about Jesus in order to bring denominations together into one large super church or council. They did not believe that church unity should be more important than upholding the truth of God's Word and doing effective world-wide evangelism.

Fran spoke at meetings and hoped to help develop an International Council of Christian Churches to stand firm for the Bible and the truth of its teachings. He wanted to help create a united front against the theologically liberal takeover of the traditional churches and seminaries. In their life story, *The Tapestry*, Edith made the observation that characterized their thinking: "What a variety of wars there are, and what varied forms of devastation. Inadequate and watered-down food depletes physical bodies, but inadequate, watered-down, and even poisoned spiritual food endangers spiritual life." 2.

While Fran tried to stimulate interest in an International Council of Christian Churches, theological liberals worked to form the World Council of Churches, and it was formally established in 1948 in Geneva, Switzerland. Since then, the World Council of Churches has challenged Bible-believing churches around the globe and tempted them to compromise their convictions. Fran clearly remembered the words of Dr. Visser't Hooft at the Oslo Young People's Conference in Norway on July of 1947, one year before he helped establish the World Council. Visser't Hooft challenged the young people to confront the Bible-believing Christians in their churches in order to "drive the greyheads out" to have more churches in the World Council. On July 26, 1947, Fran heard the American theologian Reinhold Niebuhr speak. In that speech, Fran believed Niebuhr was using the ideas of Karl Barth to create a socialistic interpretation of Christianity. Of the World Council Conference itself, Fran lamented, "The whole Conference makes me desperately lonely for some Christian contact." 3.

Fran's spiritual depth at the time can be illustrated in a letter he wrote to Edith, for he told of his concern for his people back in St. Louis. "Often in the midst of other things, one or another person comes to my mind, and I pray immediately for that one then." 4. Fran's loving concern for people, and the practical expression of that love in whatever way possible, even through prayer when apart, always characterized his ministry and naturally drew people who needed help to his doorstep.

Francis and Edith Schaeffer expressed concern about false theological doctrines, especially when these teachings attacked the foundation of faith or destroyed people's trust in the Word of God. Believing the Bible is true marks the beginning of Christian faith, and Fran discovered in Europe the devastating results when church leaders tried to destroy people's understanding that the Bible was truly God's Word. The Schaeffers believed there should be spiritual experience and emotion in the believer's life, but experience and emotion should not be the basis for Christian faith. Christian faith must be based on the Bible, which is true in all that it affirms. Christian faith is truth that must be shared, because it is good news that leads to salvation. Christians live in faith and by faith, knowing prayer makes a difference. And if joyful experiences are not there sometimes, as in the case of Job in the Old Testament or of Jesus praying in the garden before His arrest and crucifixion, people can still trust in God because they know His Word is true and His promises never fail. 5.

When he went to Europe, Fran had practically no contacts or names of people to see. He went with the continuing prayer that God would take him to the people that he should meet. Edith and the girls prayed along the same lines, and this prayer drew them together while the ocean kept them apart. God answered their prayers, and led Fran to people deeply interested in helping form the International Council of Churches. And upon his return to America, he received many requests to return and help the embattled theologians, pastors, and churches of Europe.

One of the most unusual experiences of Fran's life took place during his return from Europe. He believed God directly intervened to save his life. The airplane in which he flew over the Atlantic suddenly developed engine trouble and plunged 3,000 feet. A ham radio operator who knew Fran was crossing the Atlantic at that time heard the distress signals and called Edith and the children at home so they could pray. They gathered together as a family and prayed, knowing that Fran's schedule called for him to be on that plane. Fran, of course, prayed too. As they prayed, the engines miraculously started again, and Fran's plane arrived home safely. When he got off the airplane, he heard one of the pilots say that he could not understand how the engines could have started again, that it was absolutely impossible. Fran told them very matter-of-factly, "I know how they started; my heavenly Father started them." The Scriptures teach: "The Lord is far from the wicked: but he heareth the prayer of the righteous" (Proverbs 15:29).

Fran's trip to Europe was one of his greatest spiritual experiences, but it exhausted him. As he thought of the many problems Christian faced in Europe, he knew there would be a huge battle for truth ahead, but God had used little people to defeat giants before. 6. He thanked God for the unity of the true Church of Christ around the world. He felt it crucial for the true churches to take a stand and separate themselves from the modern forms of unbelief and paganism that characterized liberal theology. Later he wrote:

"Nowhere is practicing the truth more important than in the area of religious cooperation. If I say that Christianity is really eternal truth, and the liberal theologian is wrong--so wrong that he is teaching what is contrary to the Word of God--and

then on any basis (including for the sake of evangelism) I am willing publicly to act as though that man's religious position is the same as my own, I have destroyed the practice of truth which my generation can expect from me and which it will demand of me if I am to have credibility. How will we have credibility in a relativistic age if we practice religious cooperation with men who in their books and lectures make very plain that they believe nothing (or practically nothing) of the content set forth in Scripture?" 7.

His report to the Independent Board and the American Council showed many accomplishments. However, because Fran was burned out, he thought he could never travel again. He did not want to answer the telephone or ever attend another meeting. But during his months of recovery, the Independent Board asked him to be their missionary to Europe. The Schaeffer family struggled to find God's will. Should they leave their happy life in St. Louis? Everyone agreed that the new International Council of Christian Churches needed Fran's help to get it firmly established, but should he leave his work in St. Louis? As he recovered from exhaustion, the Board asked Fran to travel and speak for six months prior to the first meeting of the International Council, which had been scheduled to meet in Amsterdam in August of 1948. To meet these deadlines, the Schaeffers needed to leave for Europe in February, less than six months after his strenuous tour.

What could a small family of five accomplish, sent to the whole continent of Europe so soon after a major war had brought such terrible devastation? How would they survive the lack of almost everything people take for granted? What could they do right in the midst of a massive reconstruction effort? What battles could these two dedicated Bible-believing Christians win in the struggle for truth against many rich mainline churches forming the World Council of Churches? What could Fran do when rising German theological stars (such as Karl Barth and Paul Tillich) were making such a tremendous impact with their false ideas in seminaries, in churches, and in the world theological scene? How would they inspire people to faith and action, a people who were more exhausted than Fran from fighting a different kind of war? How would they challenge people to keep on fighting for the truth, when after the war what they really wanted was peace and unity--almost at any price? "When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?" (Psalm 11:3). Perhaps God sent them on ahead to eventually found L'Abri, so they could rescue some of the children and grandchildren of those who followed and taught liberal theology? Did God need them in Switzerland to rescue those who had been raised in Bible-believing churches, but who had not been taught how to confront liberal challenges to the Scriptures? What did God want for them at this time in their lives? How would they discover God's will for them?

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