

HOW SHOULD WE THEN LIVE FRANCIS SCHAEFFER

How Should We Then Live is a profound question posed by Francis Schaeffer, a theologian, philosopher, and Presbyterian pastor. His book and subsequent documentary series, both titled "How Should We Then Live?", explore the implications of a Christian worldview in a secular society. Schaeffer's work serves as a guide to understanding the moral and ethical dilemmas faced by individuals and cultures today, urging a return to foundational truths rooted in Christianity. In this article, we will unpack Schaeffer's arguments, examine the relevance of his ideas, and discuss how they can be applied in contemporary life.

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT

To appreciate Schaeffer's message, it's essential to understand the historical and cultural context in which he wrote. Emerging in the mid-20th century, Schaeffer's work was a response to the growing disconnect between modern society and traditional Judeo-Christian values. He observed a significant shift towards relativism, secularism, and existentialism, which he believed were eroding the moral fabric of society.

THE RISE OF SECULARISM

Schaeffer argued that secularism, characterized by the absence of religious belief or practice, undermined the moral foundations of society. He pointed to several key developments:

1. **Decline of Absolute Truth:** The move away from objective standards of truth led to moral relativism, where right and wrong were seen as subjective.
2. **Humanism:** The elevation of human reason over divine revelation diminished the authority of scripture and traditional morality.
3. **Cultural Shift:** As secular ideas permeated culture, they influenced art, politics, and education, leading to a rejection of biblical principles.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF A SECULAR WORLDVIEW

According to Schaeffer, the consequences of abandoning a Christian framework were dire. He warned that without a solid foundation in absolute truth, society would descend into chaos. Some of the predicted outcomes included:

- **Moral Confusion:** With no clear guidelines, individuals struggled to navigate ethical dilemmas.
- **Loss of Meaning:** Existential crises became commonplace as individuals sought purpose in a world devoid of spiritual significance.
- **Social Fragmentation:** The breakdown of community and family structures contributed to rising social issues, including crime and mental health challenges.

THE CHRISTIAN RESPONSE

Schaeffer's central thesis was that Christians must actively engage with the culture around them. He believed it was not enough to retreat into isolated communities; instead, believers should bring their faith into every aspect of life.

LIVING WITH PURPOSE

FOR SCHAEFFER, THE QUESTION "HOW SHOULD WE THEN LIVE?" NECESSITATED A PURPOSEFUL APPROACH TO LIFE. HE EMPHASIZED SEVERAL KEY PRINCIPLES:

1. **EMBRACE ABSOLUTE TRUTH:** CHRISTIANS MUST STAND FIRM ON THE TRUTHS OF SCRIPTURE, WHICH PROVIDE A RELIABLE FOUNDATION FOR MORALITY.
2. **ENGAGE THE CULTURE:** BELIEVERS SHOULD NOT SHY AWAY FROM CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT BUT RATHER SEEK TO INFLUENCE SOCIETY POSITIVELY THROUGH THEIR ACTIONS AND WORDS.
3. **PRACTICE DISCERNMENT:** IN A WORLD RIFE WITH CONFLICTING IDEOLOGIES, CHRISTIANS SHOULD CULTIVATE DISCERNMENT TO NAVIGATE COMPLEX ISSUES WISELY.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION IN DAILY LIFE

SCHAEFFER'S INSIGHTS ARE NOT MERELY THEORETICAL; THEY OFFER PRACTICAL GUIDANCE FOR EVERYDAY LIVING. HERE ARE SOME WAYS INDIVIDUALS CAN EMBODY HIS TEACHINGS:

- **PARTICIPATE IN COMMUNITY:** GET INVOLVED IN LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS, CHURCHES, AND SOCIAL INITIATIVES THAT PROMOTE JUSTICE AND COMPASSION.
- **EDUCATE YOURSELF AND OTHERS:** STUDY VARIOUS WORLDVIEWS AND ENGAGE IN DISCUSSIONS THAT CHALLENGE OR AFFIRM YOUR BELIEFS. SHARE YOUR INSIGHTS WITH OTHERS TO FOSTER UNDERSTANDING.
- **ADVOCATE FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS:** TAKE A STAND ON MORAL ISSUES THAT ALIGN WITH BIBLICAL VALUES, WHETHER IN POLITICS, BUSINESS, OR SOCIAL SETTINGS.
- **MODEL INTEGRITY:** LIVE A LIFE THAT REFLECTS HONESTY, KINDNESS, AND RESPECT, DEMONSTRATING THE VALUES OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS.

THE ROLE OF ART AND CULTURE

SCHAEFFER WAS PARTICULARLY INTERESTED IN THE ARTS AS A MEANS OF EXPRESSING AND COMMUNICATING TRUTH. HE BELIEVED THAT ART COULD EITHER REFLECT THE BROKENNESS OF A SECULAR WORLDVIEW OR THE BEAUTY OF A LIFE ROOTED IN CHRIST.

ART AS A REFLECTION OF WORLDVIEW

ART HAS THE POWER TO SHAPE CULTURE AND INFLUENCE PERSPECTIVES. SCHAEFFER ENCOURAGED CHRISTIANS TO ENGAGE WITH THE ARTS IN SEVERAL WAYS:

1. **CREATE MEANINGFUL ART:** ARTISTS SHOULD SEEK TO CREATE WORKS THAT REFLECT THE BEAUTY AND TRUTH OF GOD'S CREATION, PROVIDING A COUNTER-NARRATIVE TO SECULAR ART.
2. **SUPPORT CHRISTIAN ARTISTS:** BY UPLIFTING AND PROMOTING THE WORK OF CHRISTIAN ARTISTS, BELIEVERS CAN HELP CULTIVATE A CULTURE THAT VALUES TRUTH AND BEAUTY.
3. **CRITICALLY ENGAGE WITH SECULAR ART:** RATHER THAN DISMISSING SECULAR ART OUTRIGHT, CHRISTIANS SHOULD CRITICALLY ENGAGE WITH IT, IDENTIFYING THE UNDERLYING MESSAGES AND TRUTHS, AND RESPONDING THOUGHTFULLY.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EDUCATION

EDUCATION PLAYS A CRUCIAL ROLE IN SHAPING WORLDVIEW. SCHAEFFER ADVOCATED FOR A COMPREHENSIVE EDUCATIONAL APPROACH THAT INCLUDES:

- BIBLICAL LITERACY: ENCOURAGE A DEEP UNDERSTANDING OF SCRIPTURE AND ITS APPLICATION TO ALL ASPECTS OF LIFE.
- PHILOSOPHICAL ENGAGEMENT: STUDY VARIOUS PHILOSOPHICAL FRAMEWORKS TO UNDERSTAND HOW THEY ALIGN OR CONFLICT WITH CHRISTIAN TEACHINGS.
- CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY: TEACH THE IMPORTANCE OF ACTIVE PARTICIPATION IN CIVIC LIFE, EQUIPPING INDIVIDUALS TO INFLUENCE SOCIETY POSITIVELY.

THE CHALLENGE OF RELATIVISM

ONE OF THE GREATEST CHALLENGES FACING MODERN CHRISTIANS IS THE PERVASIVE INFLUENCE OF RELATIVISM. SCHAEFFER ARGUED THAT THIS WORLDVIEW LEADS TO CONFUSION AND DESPAIR. HE URGED BELIEVERS TO STAND FIRM AGAINST THESE TRENDS BY EMBODYING AND ARTICULATING THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL.

RESPONDING TO RELATIVISM

TO COUNTER RELATIVISM, CHRISTIANS CAN:

1. ARTICULATE THE CASE FOR TRUTH: ENGAGE IN CONVERSATIONS THAT HIGHLIGHT THE IMPORTANCE OF ABSOLUTE TRUTH AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR MORALITY AND SOCIETY.
2. MODEL A DIFFERENT WAY OF LIVING: DEMONSTRATE THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF THE GOSPEL THROUGH LIVES MARKED BY HOPE, PURPOSE, AND LOVE.
3. BUILD BRIDGES: FOSTER RELATIONSHIPS WITH THOSE WHO HOLD DIFFERING VIEWS, CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR DIALOGUE AND UNDERSTANDING.

CONCLUSION

IN THE FACE OF A RAPIDLY CHANGING WORLD, FRANCIS SCHAEFFER'S QUESTION, "HOW SHOULD WE THEN LIVE?" REMAINS PROFOUNDLY RELEVANT. HIS CALL FOR CHRISTIANS TO ENGAGE WITH CULTURE, UPHOLD ABSOLUTE TRUTH, AND LIVE PURPOSEFULLY SERVES AS A GUIDE FOR NAVIGATING THE COMPLEXITIES OF MODERN LIFE. BY EMBRACING SCHAEFFER'S PRINCIPLES, INDIVIDUALS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO A SOCIETY THAT REFLECTS THE BEAUTY AND TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL, STANDING AS BEACONS OF HOPE IN A WORLD OFTEN OVERSHADOWED BY CONFUSION AND DESPAIR.

AS WE CONSIDER HOW TO LIVE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THESE TIMELESS TRUTHS, MAY WE STRIVE TO IMPACT OUR COMMUNITIES POSITIVELY, EMBODYING THE LOVE OF CHRIST IN EVERY ASPECT OF OUR LIVES.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

WHAT IS THE MAIN THESIS OF 'HOW SHOULD WE THEN LIVE?' BY FRANCIS SCHAEFFER?

THE MAIN THESIS OF 'HOW SHOULD WE THEN LIVE?' IS THAT WESTERN CIVILIZATION HAS LOST ITS WAY DUE TO A DEPARTURE FROM ABSOLUTE TRUTH, PARTICULARLY ROOTED IN A BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW, LEADING TO MORAL AND CULTURAL DECLINE.

How does Schaeffer address the impact of art and culture in 'How Should We Then Live?'?

Schaeffer discusses the significance of art and culture as reflections of a society's beliefs and values, asserting that they can either reinforce or challenge the prevailing worldview, ultimately influencing how individuals and cultures live.

What role does Schaeffer attribute to philosophy in shaping society?

Schaeffer argues that philosophy plays a critical role in shaping societal values and norms, as it provides the foundational beliefs that guide ethical and moral decision-making within a culture.

In what ways does Schaeffer suggest Christians should engage with contemporary culture?

Schaeffer encourages Christians to critically engage with contemporary culture by understanding its philosophical underpinnings, advocating for a return to absolute truth, and actively participating in cultural discourse to promote a biblical worldview.

What historical events does Schaeffer examine to illustrate his points?

Schaeffer examines key historical events such as the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment to illustrate how shifts in worldview have led to significant changes in Western thought and culture.

How does Schaeffer define the concept of 'absolute truth'?

Schaeffer defines 'absolute truth' as universal and unchanging principles that exist independently of human opinion, which he argues are rooted in the nature of God and are essential for a stable and moral society.

What is the significance of the title 'How Should We Then Live?'?

The title 'How Should We Then Live?' emphasizes the urgent question of how individuals and societies should conduct themselves in light of the truths or falsehoods they believe, calling for a reevaluation of lifestyle choices based on a coherent worldview.

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