

# Apologetics

by Francis Schaeffer

---

*Francis Schaeffer discusses the importance of Christian apologetics in engaging contemporary thought and the necessity of knowledge in faith.*

**Duration:** 57:23

**Scripture:** Proverbs 2:3-5, John 14:6, Acts 17:11, Romans 10:17, 1 Thessalonians 5:21, 2 Timothy 2:15, 1 Peter 3:15

**Topics:** "Apologetics"

---

## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of understanding the cultural framework and mindset of the people we are trying to communicate with. He compares it to speaking in a foreign language without learning it first. The speaker suggests that in order to effectively preach the Gospel, we must take the time to understand the generation we are living in and address their objections and concerns. He also highlights the need for both defense and positive communication in engaging with others. Overall, the sermon emphasizes the need for Christians to effectively communicate the message of the Gospel in a way that resonates with the culture of the second half of the 20th century.

---

## Transcript

About the most difficult thing of this talk was putting a title on it. I'm not quite sure what the title is. Maybe we could have a vote after the third lecture as to the proper title.

There would be two possibilities. Thinking of it in traditional Christian terms, theological terms, we might speak of it as Christian apologetics for the second half of the 20th century. Or we could use the title of the nature of the relationship in contrast to the thought of the 20th century and the historic Christian faith.

I would say beginning in the more classical sense of thinking of it as apologetics, in consideration of what Christian apologetics can mean in our own generation, that there's two ways of thinking of apologetics and two ways of thinking of bringing together the historic Christian faith and contemporary thought. One would be from a somewhat negative viewpoint. Here I am and here are the people for whom I might be responsible as a pastor, something like this.

And in any age you have a certain amount of shooting at any position, and that would be true surely of the Christian position. So the first thought would be a thought of defense that we must bring together, we must think of giving an answer into the century in which we live in defense of myself and my people. One mustn't be embarrassed about the use of the word defense.

This is not a negative thought because after all in any conversation, it's really dialogue, there must be answers given in answer to the objections raised as well as to the positive, in giving a positive thing. The second thing would be the positive, in that here I am and my problem is talking to people who are about me. And so we have a positive thought too.

And in bringing together Christian thought with the thought in the second half of the 20th century, the second part must be kept in mind as well as the first. How to communicate with others, how to communicate with them. Communication I think can be broken down into the consideration of how to say that which is in my mind in such a way through my lips or through the pen, into the ears of the other person in such a fashion that when it reaches their thinking apparatus, it will say substantially that which I meant it to say, the idea that I had in my own mind.

I would say too for those of you who are Christians that I feel that there has been a danger in our 20th century apologetics of the citadel mentality, the mentality of sitting inside and saying, Hi, you cannot reach me, and then you go out to lunch. But this is certainly not all that there must be in communication between ourselves and the century in which we live. Also, there must be a point made that if Christianity is going to be considered as Christianity, it must never be allowed to be merely scholastic.

We must be in contact with the real world, facing the men that we face. And I think this is a very important thing. We mustn't take our Christian contact with our generation and just retreat with it to an academic chair and simply sit there.

Also, in thinking of the presentation of Christianity into any century, and certainly into our own, we must understand that this presentation must be more than merely giving a nicely balanced system. But if it's going to have any meaning, and that would always be true, but especially true surely in our own day, that we must be able to live with it in the day in which we live. In other words, we aren't just presenting a Greek concept of philosophy, and as long as it is well balanced, like a well-balanced mobile, that this is all that is needed.

We who are Christians, and I would speak for historic Christianity to you tonight, whether you are Christian or not, we who are Christians must bear the weight of being able to live with our system in our own generation, and that's in all the areas that we would touch. Christianity does not separate itself from knowledge. As a matter of fact, historic Christianity, in contrast to modern theology, must bear the weight of believing and teaching that all truth is one.

Occasionally, people will say, well, why don't, is it spiritual to talk about these things? Are you really considering the work of the Holy Spirit when you deal with knowledge with facts? But I would say, yes, the Bible makes it very, very plain that indeed while we who are Christians must count upon the work of the Holy Spirit, at the same time we must never separate ourselves from knowledge. This is particularly true, I would say to those of you who are struggling with a question honestly, as to whether Christianity could be believed and whether it's worthwhile to become a Christian. This is peculiarly so when you are facing the question of whether you should become a Christian or not, or whether, further back even, whether it is worth listening to in such a day as ours.

There must be, from the biblical view, there must be an adequate base of knowledge before there can be any true profession of faith. This raises a very practical thing that should be faced. Often people, it seems to me, are invited to become Christians in a way that leaves us in a situation in which we can only conclude that a certain psychological need is met.

But from the historic view of Christianity and from the view of the Bible itself, this is not so. No man is invited to accept Christ as Savior until there is an adequate base of knowledge for his doing so. After the matter with Thomas at the Resurrection, John sets forth his reason for writing the Gospel of John, and he says this, and many other signs, and this word in the Greek is not just signs in the sense of the German word wonder, let us say, but it is a sign in the, we would say today, as a historic space-time proof, a claimed historic space-time proof.

So we could read it this way. Many other space-time proofs did Jesus, truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. This brings it down to the claim of a verbalization not only in that which is spoken, but a verbalization which can be written, which can be brought down into the area of grammar and into lexicons and language.

And many other space-time proofs truly did Jesus in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book, but these, that is, these space-time proofs are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and the believing ye might have life through his name. However, you will notice that in this order you are not invited to accept Christ as Savior, put that in quotes, but you are not invited to do this until you are convinced that that which you feel is good and sufficient reason for knowing that a certain base of knowledge is truth. Again, I would say I well recognize that in the new theology there is an entirely different mentality.

And I would again say that there is a certain connotation and thought in the word faith and religion today which these verses, which I have just read, cut completely across and to which they are completely counter. I would say this way, that if you define the word religion and you define the word faith in the twentieth century meaning of these words, then one must say that the New Testament claims for itself not to be a religious book. The whole New Testament is in this setting.

It is not just these verses we have read. I would repeat, we are not invited to believe until there is a ground of true knowledge. In other words, from the scriptural viewpoint, Christian faith is not a jump in the dark.

Now there are two kinds of apologetics. There would be that which is none, that does not take, that does not talk, a great deal at least, if at all, about presuppositions and the apologetic that would talk about presuppositions. In Europe, you could put the date of this line at about 1890.

I am not choosing a specific date, just in general locating it. And in the U.S. you could put it at about 1930. Before that time, you find very little discussion of presuppositions.

I think there is a reason for this and that is that, I would say first, however, I think this was a weakness. I feel that the Christian thinkers should have been careful in realizing the things they were saying only had meaning in a certain set of presuppositions, rested on a certain set of presuppositions even before 1890 or in the United States in 1930. So I think it was a definite weakness that presuppositions were not discussed before.

But in practice, it is perfectly true that if one had lived in the day of somewhat Princeton theologians such as Hodge or Warfield, for example, in this country, in practice, one did not have to talk of presuppositions because prior to this line, and my whole lecture tonight will be about the line actually, what occurs here, prior to this line, men in general and our culture had a more or less unified type of thinking. More or less unified type of thinking. The world about the Christian, the world about the Christian acted on the same kind of presuppositions even if they had no right to them.

Even if there was no philosophic or reasonable base for the acting on these presuppositions, yet nevertheless, in general, prior to 1890 in Europe, 1930 in the United States, people acted upon a common set of presuppositions or acted as though they had the right to them, whether they had a right to them or not. These presuppositions largely could be spoken of as dealing with absolutes. And absolutes in two areas.

First of all, the absolutes in the area of knowledge and secondly, absolutes in the area of morals. For example, in the latter class, if you had lived back there prior to, well, say in 1920 in the United States with a common American consensus at that time, and if you said to a girl, you should be a good girl, it would have seemed a reasonable sentence to her. To most people, it would have been considered prior to 1930 that you had uttered something that had reason to it, that made sense, that there was a reason for simply, in the sentence, be a good girl.

You would have communicated, I would have said, to this girl, most of them. There would be exceptions in any age, of course, but in general, you would have a communication with this person which would be comprehended by her, by you, and you would be in the area of communication with this girl. That would be true whether she was a Christian or not.

In the area of being, people talked in terms somewhere back there of the nature of saying this is true in contrast to that is false. And so in the area of being, people would say this is true, that is false. In the area of morals, this is right, this is wrong.

They would act on these presuppositions whether they had any adequate base for such absolutes or not. It was the way people thought, the way people talked in general. In their philosophical and epistemological outlook alike, they were operating in this more or less unified field of thought.

They in general accepted a factor of absolutes in the area of knowledge and in the area of morals. Therefore, at that period, this being so, the term this is true, this is right had real meaning and as such, as a result, in general, people thought in terms of antithesis. That if you say this is right, this is true, then there is something that in contrast in an absolute antithesis could be said this is false.

If you say a thing is true in morals and you act as though this has meaning, you set up an antithesis that something else can be false, can be called wrong. Something's right, something can be said to be wrong and there is a real antithesis in both knowledge and morals. Thus, if we had lived back here prior to this line, though we may, as Christians, perhaps we made a real mistake in not talking about the presuppositions of which our statements rested, yet, nevertheless, in practice, it was not needed, and this is my point at this point, in practice, it was not needed for communication.

Now, of course, we don't live back there. There's no way to turn the thing back. I would say, in Europe and in the United States, there's only one class that may perhaps still be living back there, where such terms were automatically accepted, and this would be with the upper middle class people or the bourgeois.

And in a very real sense, with the upper middle class and bourgeois, you find, I think these people are really living back here still in these same thought forms. So, if you speak to these and you say, this is true, they automatically think something is false. If you say, this is right, they automatically think something is wrong, even if they have no real reason for the words truth and right and wrong.

So, whether they have a base for it or not, you can still speak in these terms and it's understood. But for the rest, for not only the intellectuals, but also for the working people, more and more, these concepts are lost. And that's just as true in Europe as it is in America and the other way around as well.

Now then, before this line, in practice, it would not have been necessary to speak in the terms of presuppositions, but we're not living before that line. So therefore, before any conversation between the Christian position, the historic Christian position, and our contemporary world can take place, after we live after this line, we have to talk about base. We have to talk about presuppositions.

Now incidentally, I would say too, for concerning this, that I think Christians made a terrible mistake of not instructing their own people what was involved. I feel that the shift of consensus, the American census, that came between 1930 and 1940, swept many Christians, especially Christian young people, away and confused them because they didn't understand what was involved in the shift. They didn't understand all that was involved and as such, because the Church had not been preparing people to really think into this changed area that has come, many Christians, especially young people, were confused that I think they didn't need to be confused if the Church had been more careful in making plain exactly what its statements, the presuppositions, these statements rested upon.

Now on our side of the line, that has changed. However, and this is the second point, however, this line really doesn't look like this. The line, now keep your eye on this line.

Keep on. The line really looks like this. And these are time steps.

Consequently, this is further back and this is nearer to it. I put this at 1930. You'll see why in a minute.

And this at 1965, where we are. So this is the line. And I would call it now the line of despair.

And we'll talk about that as we go along, as to why it could be called the line of despair. I would put this step, the step of philosophy, this, the step of art, thinking largely of the visual art, this could be music, this could be the general culture, and this is theology. And for a long time, theology's been behind everything else, I must say.

So that when people suddenly get excited about the new theology, I always find this very strange, because it seems to me it's an old, old thing simply in different terminology from what you could have heard a long time ago in these other areas of the culture. Now then, I would also say this division is arbitrary. If I was giving a full year's lecture, you could divide up into a hundred steps.

So it is purely arbitrary. So within the general culture, you could put, thank you, I've been hoping for this. If within the general culture, you could break it up into drama, poetry, into a number of things.

But I've limited to this simply because we don't have unlimited time. It would seem to me to be almost obvious, and yet, unfortunately, it also seems to me the Christians seem to be the last ones to think about it in many cases, that if you're going to talk for anything into any period of history, that you must have an idea into what you're talking before you can begin to talk. And it seems to me this is a truism, whether one is supporting the Christian position or another position, that if one is going to talk with any hope of communication into that which surrounds one, one must have an idea of that into which he's talking.

Consequently, largely, this first lecture will deal with the question of that which surrounds us, and the second lecture we'll press on, and the third lecture we will try to bring Christianity face-to-face with those

things which do surround us, historic Christianity. So this lecture will deal largely with this negative aspect of the cultural situation which does surround us in our own century. Incidentally, in passing, the Bible speaks of a spirit of the world, but observation of study of history in any area, in particular cultural history, must quickly bring to our attention that while one might speak of the spirit of the world, that this world spirit certainly takes different forms in different periods of history.

And this, again, I would say to those of you who are Christian here tonight, is something that I think it is worth spending some time thinking about. It is foolish to say to our young people, quoting the Scripture, keep yourself unspotted from the world, something like this, if we have no idea what the world spirit is about us that we are facing. It's all too easy to say this to someone and then help them be separated from, really, what doesn't exist.

That's a very simple procedure. What is much more complex is understanding that which surrounds us and not being caught up in this particular thing. Now, in general, I would say that the world spirit, from the Christian viewpoint, the world spirit that surrounds, the world spirit in general, might be called humanism.

Humanism, of course, has two different meanings. There's the technical meaning, the narrow meaning of humanism, the philosophy of Julian and Aldous Huxley, and so on. But I'm not thinking of that.

I'm thinking of a broader humanism, a humanism in the sense that it begins with man only and works outward from himself. And in this sense, this marks the stream of man's thinking, man's culture, as we look at it in different places. Taking a man, putting him in the center of the universe in the areas of knowledge, standards, and of integration, that wherever we turn, this is all there is in which we could find integration, as in man himself.

But if we're going to talk truly to the man of our generation, and if somebody like myself says that we can have a communication with those who are typical 20th century people, without a leap of faith, it's imperative that we really think what the world spirit is, what the mentality is, so that we're not missing each other. I would say that this is a matter of linguistics. I don't think it's a matter of anything else.

I think what is involved here is the same situation that if we went to China and expected to communicate with someone, we must learn Chinese. If we went into a town where nothing but Chinese was spoken, and we spoke only English, the possibility of communication would immediately come to an end. And I want to say to you, I think this is just as true in the cultural differences of our own generation.

I feel we cannot expect to preach the gospel, to try to communicate the answers which Christianity claims to have into our generation without understanding the thought forms which we're facing, and without taking these things into account. I feel to try to preach the gospel to other than the upper middle class and to the bourgeois, except for that, to try to preach the gospel without taking time to understand what we're facing will bring as little result in most cases as trying to speak in China to those who speak only Chinese without learning the language. Now as we come and study the cultural history, if you're taking a course in cultural history in general, we find that in many places one can point out a tendency for there to be something of a uniform, monolithic cultural framework in a certain generation.

Now if you're studying in the older periods, of course, in archaeology and so on, one finds that this unified spirit moves slowly. And as you go back a long way in studying archaeology, you can find, for example, the Aryan people. You find a certain mark of this culture.

It's at such a place. And then later, you find that a long, long time afterwards, the same mark appears somewhere else. This is related, of course, to the problem of the spread of knowledge at that particular time.

But in our own day, it is quite a different thing. In our own day, the problem of the spread of knowledge is completely different. The spread not only of knowledge, but of impact, attitude, or the continental word, mentality, which is a very different thing.

Consequently, the concept of a more close-knit, worldwide mental attitude is a much easier one for our generation than it would have been previously. So therefore, I'm not saying that there has ever been a totally monolithic cultural pattern. This certainly could not be sustained.

But rather, that there is a tendency, with great pockets of exceptions, but there is such as there can be thought of, of the question of the mentality, the cultural framework of a particular period. And that includes, I think, the comprehension of this for our own period. Further than this, I feel that our own type of education does not lead many, many times to a consideration of a unified cultural pattern.

Our type of educational format, with its high specialization, leads to the disciplines moving rather in parallel columns, rather than any, very many people anyway, being concerned with across associations. You can say, well, this is necessary in our own day, simply because things are so specialized, there's so much knowledge, this is fair enough, but nevertheless, one is in a peculiar position if we're only thinking in parallel lines in the disciplines without seeing the total cultural relationship. I think Christians, those standing in the historic stream of Christianity, again, have been particularly slow at this point.

Slow in understanding the relationship, slow in understanding the association in the various areas of thought. And this is what I want to wrestle with tonight. The relationships, the associations in the various areas of thought.

And you must bear with me, this is not a year's lectures, it's only one night's lecture, and only three altogether. So there's not time to develop everything. What I'm trying to do is giving rather a quick statement as to something of these relationships as I would say it.

There seems to me a truism that if we're going to have a communication, you keep using the word communication because that's a very nice word today. Everybody talks about communication. And if we're going to have a communication and understand each other, we must understand something of what the other man, how the other man thinks, the form in which he is thinking.

Now if this has ever been so, that one has to take into consideration the differences between the cultural steps, it seems to me that's especially true with this line. Because I think the comprehension of where we stand today perhaps turns upon realizing what a chasm there is before this line and after it. I would say that the line represents between the last generation and this one at least 400 years, choosing this figure not just at random, but saying that those who lived prior to this line were much closer to the Renaissance man or the Renaissance man than they are to those who live under this line.

That living here before this line, which I have called the line of despair, choosing a name, those who live here before this line are very close to the Renaissance man, but very far away actually from the one who lives underneath this line. One is aware of this all the time, the constant talk about the parents not understanding the children, the constant talk about the children not understanding the parents, the talk in

many churches we are not preparing our young people for college, something like this. I think these are all related to the same thing.

There is always a discrepancy between generations, fair enough, but I think anyone who fails to understand that this line here is a larger discrepancy, a great deal larger discrepancy than the normal line between generations misses the whole point of our present problem. I would say it is a total break, it is a new era, a chasm that exists between, in the thinking, and you remember I put the date in America, this break beginning somewhere around 1930 or slightly before. So what you have here now is if we ever had to try to have, if we were ever going to communicate, surely this is an important factor today to understand where the line, where there is such a division between those who live before this and those who live after it.

First of all, in philosophy, and of course where you begin in philosophy is a matter of choice. You can go back to India, to the Harappa culture, about 2600 years before Christ, you can begin with the Greeks, you can begin with the Renaissance in the consideration of philosophy. But I would suggest that wherever you begin, that philosophy can be said before this line to have taken a certain pattern.

That before this time, wherever you begin, you find men thought of philosophy in something of saying, here is a circle, here is a circle, and this circle will contain the knowledge which you ascertain. The knowledge which you find in the external world will be able to be fit into this circle. More than this, it's not only that external knowledge can be fit into the circle, but also that all of life can be fit into this circle.

Consequently, to take a very simple thing of the Greeks, all was fire, this was supposed to be a statement which would encompass the whole once the whole was comprehended. Now, however, as you run through the history of philosophy, and the history of philosophy is often a very discouraging subject, and I think the reason for that is that the history of philosophy runs something like this, that a man will set up such a circle and say, as I say, you can go back to India and see the beginning, I think, of this or the Greeks, and you can say a man set up and said this circle will encompass the knowledge and it will encompass life, and then someone says not at all, here's a failure in this, but this circle will. And the next man says no, of course not, but this circle will.

And the next man would say not at all, but this one will. And the next one, no, but this one will. And the next one, this one, and down all the way through the study of philosophy.

I think that's why that many people who begin studying philosophy with a history of philosophy, especially if they're studying by themselves or without a good teacher, get discouraged and throw the whole thing out of the bridge. It's simply, it's discouraging to continue this endless, this endless seeing failure and then holding your breath for the next answer and have it swept away like the one before. Now then as we begin with the philosophy with the Greeks, let us say, and then come to the Renaissance and think of the philosophy in Florence especially, and then proceed from that to the Germans, and this was the story of a stream of philosophic thought, we would come in these circles down to here.

To this point. And at that particular point, we come to a man who's changed everything, and that is Hegel. To Hegel.

And Hegel said something different. People often have often asked me, why do you think the line of despair has come? Why did it appear when it appeared? Why has philosophical change, philosophical thinking changed in structure? And my personal answer would be that I think it is like this, that if you took a

man and put him in a circular building in the pitch dark, with a quite large, with a large radius circumference to the building, pitch black, no exits, no doors, no windows, and he feels his way to the, to this round building and he feels around it, seeking desperately for an exit, that surely he would go around two or three times, covering the same ground, before he came to the conclusion there was no exit. But at a certain point, it would dawn on him that the whole fabric of the thing had gone astray, and there was no exit.

It seems to me that by the time you come to Kant and to Hegel, that men had come to the conclusion that they were that they had exhausted the possibilities, starting on the basis of their own humanist presuppositions, beginning with man only as, and man only with his, with that base, with that standard, with that integration point. That they had discovered that really they had gone over the same ground over and over and over and over again, and they had come out to the place where they weren't finding a rational answer, an answer wherein they could say now with confidence here is a new circle and knowledge and life can be placed in that circle. Suddenly, I think they came to the place where these things were exhausted.

Before the time of Hegel, you put Kant, and I would put Kant and Hegel as the doorway into the lines of despair. Before the time, of course, of Hegel, people had thought in the areas of cause and effect in a very definite way. There is a cause.

It causes an effect. The effect becomes a cause. The cause causes an effect, like numbering up numbers, something like this.

But with Hegel, of course, he began, and I think it's after the thing is exhausted, as I've said, he came to a different proposition. And the different proposition is simple and yet profound. And it is the explanation, I think, of the cultural changes in our modern world.

That is, instead of cause becoming effect and that becoming a cause which was an effect, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera, instead of that, of course, most of you will know this, Hegel set up a thesis against this, an antithesis, and this produces a synthesis. Now, the reason, however, Hegel is called an idealist by most people is because, even though he's made this change, is because he still, in his writings, makes plain that he more or less feels that such a synthesis can be definitely and certainly ascertained. When Hegel put this forth somewhere in German, in the Germanic world, surely it would not have seemed like so much of a bang, of a big thing.

But, of course, with this, with the change as we are now, one can say that Hegel is king, that Hegel is one, that modern man thinks not in terms of antithesis, but of synthesis, that solution, whether it is in the moral world or in the political world, for example, is to be searched for not in the forms of that which is right and that which is wrong, but in finding a synthesis rather between the two. So, I would say we are Hegelian in a very real way in the twentieth century world. The next man would be Kierkegaard, and Kierkegaard has often been said to be the father of existentialism, and whether one is going to put him on one side of the line or another depends upon one's feeling about the matter in a way, but certainly he is included here, at least one must say, in that which is the doorway into the change in philosophic thinking from the old thinking to the new.

Kierkegaard made a contribution, and his contribution was that rather than this idea being worked out with some degree of rational certainty in finding the synthesis, that in reality the synthesis in the profound things of life was to be conditioned upon a jump of faith. A jump of faith. That the solution in the real world

was no longer to be thought of in the old framework at all, but rather in the jump of faith.

Now then, if we come down from Kierkegaard, we come to the modern world, and specifically the existentialist world. And the existentialist can be divided in various ways, but perhaps the simplest way is between the three countries of France, Switzerland, and Germany. And in France, of course, you have Sartre and Camus, in Germany you have Heidegger, and a man that is not as well known in this country, but I think in some ways is more important than Sartre and Camus in the real drive of things, Carl Jaspers, in Switzerland.

Now, Heidegger in a way is the Sartre and Camus would be more important to discuss simply because they are better known. Heidegger, would be more important to discuss because he has had more influence on theology, for those of us who have some interest in theology, than any of the others. But Carl Jaspers is the most important in a sense because he says what he wants to say so clearly.

And Carl Jaspers runs a system like this. Carl Jaspers says here is a line, and down here is rationality. Now, in the next lecture, I would like, I don't get to it tonight, to show a parallel between this and the thinking of Leonardo da Vinci at the time of the Renaissance itself.

But Carl Jaspers would see rationality equaling mathematics quite properly, equaling machines in a very real way. And as such, one finds it very hard, one finds it impossible, on the basis of logic and rationality, to come to a ny real grips with the problem of purpose or meaning in life. One can find, talk about machinery down here in the area of rationality and logic, but in the area of personality, of purpose, of meaning, of significance, rationality gives no answers, according to this view.

And as such, you put up here non-logic and non-rationality. And in the area of non-logic, and non-rationality, and one must play this game completely squarely or you miss the thing, and that is that when you say non-logic and non-rationality, you mean non-logic and non-rationality. You can't bring rationality and logic in as a ringer after you've started.

And in the area of non-logic and non-rationality, you have the final experience. The final experience. The final experience is that you have a, now you see I spelled it out.

In the final experience, you experience that which, like a streak of lightning, gives you an experience of purpose, an experience of meaning. And then that's it. This would seem a solution to the problem.

The only difficulty with, and this is the problem in it, is that if it's really in the area of non-logic and non-rationality, it means you can't communicate your experience. So you're a silent man. And it would be bad enough to be silent with everybody else, but you have to be silent to yourself.

Because if it is really a non-rational, non-logical experience, it is not only that you cannot communicate it to other people, but you cannot communicate it to yourself either. All you can say is the next morning, and I've worked with many of these people, and they've had an experience, a final experience. And they say, I've had a final experience.

And they don't expect me to say what, how, because then they would, because they think I'm among the initiated, and this would mark me among the non-initiated. So you never say, what is the experience? You never say, talk to me about it. You just say, well.

And this is fine, but suddenly there is a problem. If everything in life, if every purpose, every motion of significance, every motion of purpose, every movement of love, every thought of morality, higher than the concept of social contract, hangs upon an experience, how desperate it is to hang on to that experience. But if you cannot talk about it, in the evening you may say, this morning I had it, but the next morning you must say it was yesterday, and the next day you say it was two days ago, and in a week you say it was a week ago, and I've met these men, and they're beaten in this situation.

The existentialist as a whole has this answer. Of course, Sartre would postulate it slightly differently. The leap into the observed by the act of the will.

But you have the final experience, or you have experience, or you have, in LSD, let us say, experience. And these are all related. Aldous Huxley's presentation of the use of drugs was not only escape.

I know the person who provided drugs for Aldous Huxley in Paris. I know the family. And this was a very serious thing with Aldous Huxley.

But with Aldous Huxley, never think of the taking of drugs as merely, as merely an escape. He sets forth with great intensity that it also was a way to a first order, a first order knowledge. In other words, above rationality, above logic, without logic, without rationality, the hope that through this means would come the experience whereby he would smash into reality and have some place to stay.

And with Jean-Paul Sartre, of course, the dilemma is that there is no way to postulate in a totally absurd situation which has meaning in its parts. This is a mathematical difficulty, to put it mildly. If the thing is absurd as a whole, it is difficult to maintain there is any real rather than merely psychological subjective meaning simply by willing to move in a direction if it doesn't matter in which direction one would move.

It is not only, however, existentialism that finds itself in this dilemma. If one would go to Oxford and study the Anglo-Saxon theological world, and you come to logical positivism, you have the same kind of a situation. Logical positivism has the dilemma, and the reason I would put it under the line of despair, of a tremendous act of this first step of faith.

The first step of faith being the acceptance without a reason for doing so, the acceptance that the stuff which reaches you from outside may be called data. And this is a tremendous, a tremendous act of faith, a tremendous act of faith. Without any philosophic base, with no reason for saying so, the claimant will prove each point as he goes on to accept the fact that this is data is a tremendous step of faith.

And the men in Oxford are not doing well with their logical positivism at exactly this point. I had a boy who was pressing logical positivism who came to us for a time, and he was, I enjoyed talking with him very, very much. And he asked to present logical positivism to a Farrell House lecture.

And so we were glad, and he started. And he, in the first two sentences, he mentioned the word data about two times. And I said, you mustn't do this.

You're cheating. The word data is loaded with connotation. It is a connotation word.

It is a word that assumes objectivity. And you haven't proved it. So he said, what do you want me to do? I agree.

So I said, every time you're going to use the word data, use the word blip instead. So he started, when the blip reaches you. We may laugh, but it's also something for which to cry.

Because this is despair, in the sense of despair that I'm speaking of despair tonight. Not despair in the sense of weeping, but despair of giving up any hope of establishing a circle which will encompass knowledge and encompass life. The defining philosophers have exactly the same problem at Cambridge.

And the defining philosophers would be the first one to acknowledge that so far they're only dealing with prologamma. And they would say, all we're doing is defining terms in the hope that someday we will have enough terms to find that we can put two sticks together sometime. But there is no claim in these philosophic systems that they are standing in the place where the old philosophy stood.

So I think it is totally fair, though one might quarrel with my word, despair, it is perfectly fair to speak of them as having a similarity, even while they have, and of course they have, such tremendous differences. But I feel their similarity is in the area of giving up this hope which has marked educated men, philosophic thought of the past. I think the second step can be said to be in the arts.

Art has always been ahead of music in this regard. But it's common art. Just as you have here, just as you have here, a doorway.

So the doorway in the arts, of course, would be the impressionists. The impressionists as they began were classical. They were simply interested in following the problem of light as Turner had been before them.

Goya, on the other hand, had already blazed the way for a different thing that came out in the impressionists after they fought and scattered to the south of France. What you find is that Van Gogh, the three great names of Van Gogh, Gauguin, and Cézanne all broke through the line, or broke through the line, from being the doorway, the classical side, down into under this line. If you read the letters to his brother Leo, for example, it's very, very plain.

The Van Gogh did not commit suicide simply because Gauguin took his brother Leo a hope. The hope was that the really sensitive people, the artists, would be able to establish a new religion, a humanist religion, in the south of France, in a community, and there show the world to a great light. Gauguin was the first man who appeared in that community.

After a very short time, a matter of a couple months, they had a horrible fight, and the community was spoiled, it was smashed, and Van Gogh never regained his balance until it led him to the place of suicide. Gauguin did the same thing, and you have no reason, if you are, if you attend your museum here in Boston, you have the greatest demonstration of this that you can find anywhere, and that is right here, his great work, *A What Wents Wither*. Each person should realize what this means, if he is going to understand Gauguin's dilemma.

Gauguin went to Tahiti, his concept was a concept that many people still follow, and that is the concept of finding some absolute in the area of the primitive, the noble savage, and he drew his beautiful women, he drew his exotic backgrounds, and he had hope of meaning in these things which he drew. But if you will go over here, and we should be over there to see it, but you will notice that when he did this tremendous painting, large in size as well as in thrust, he spoiled it from an artistic viewpoint by putting his title in French on the two corners. If there is anything that spoils a picture, it is that.

But he was willing to spoil the picture because it was not a picture to him, but in what he wrote in his letters, he declared it was a philosophic poem, a philosophic poem. He painted this picture in 1897 and 1898, and he said in his letters, I have finished a philosophic work on this theme compared to the gospel. The same sort of thing, of course, that Gauguin had said in relating this to a religious concept.

A figure lifts up its arms in the air and is astonished, looking at these two personages who dare to think of their direction. He says here he is painting somebody who has a care for what whence wither. And there is a figure holding up his arms in utter astonishment of wanting of asking the question, what whence wither? And then he says something further in his letter.

He points out, his letter, he points out that there is a, the end of the painting because he tells us to read it not from the, let's see, yes, not from the left to the right, but the right to the left. And he points out that the next to the last figure is an old woman dying. And then he does it in a couplet, like a poem in his writing, and he says the end of the matter is wither.

Close to the death of an old woman, a strange stupid bird concludes. That is, concludes the painting, concludes the poem. He's simply saying this old woman is dying, I can paint these women as beautiful as I wish, they may be beautiful, but a little while they are like this and I do not know the answer to what went wither.

And my hope of finding a meaning in the primitive, in the noble savage, turns to dust in my teeth and I have learned to hate it. And what most people don't realize is that he painted this picture and he attempted suicide. He did not, he was not successful as Van Hock had been, but he tried suicide and he never painted another great painting.

It was the end of Gauguin. Gauguin had tried to find a universal, had failed and broken forth into the area of despair in this basic sense I am using. Cezanne, Cezanne tried another universal.

It was the universal with geometrical form. If you examine his typical pictures, his landscapes, he rarely did it with figures, though he sometimes did, but his landscapes looked like a membrane pulled over, clear-cut, basic, geometrical form. In this, he had a clear relationship to that Greek philosophy, of course, which would have said that the answer was, would be in mathematics.

He never brought, as far as I know, I've searched and searched, I've never found that he went through the trap door into the area of despair, but the one who followed him did and that is Picasso. And we know that Picasso knew Gauguin and knew him well and was with him a number of times at the home of Gertrude Stein in Paris. Picasso is a bringing together of Gauguin's concept of the primitive, such as the Mademoiselle de Vigneault, where he brings into the primitive masks and Cezanne in geometrical form.

Picasso tried to find a universal in abstraction, but there's a problem with finding a universal in abstraction. And that is at the moment you almost have it, where you're not painting your model, but you're painting woman, and you've almost made it, suddenly she disappears from the canvas. And this is a tragic thing and Picasso felt this and Picasso was battered to pieces because he was thinking philosophically in a way that Brock did not seem to think.

And he was battered to pieces and that particular moment he fell in love and he wrote Gem Eva, I love Eva on this canvas. It didn't have anything to do with what he was painting, it might have been a stool. And he established communication with the person in front of him.

And that blazes the way for the problem of modern man. The problem of modern man did not begin with cybernetics and so on and the computer. It began with Picasso trying to find a way of universalizing and losing communication in a human sense with a man in front of his canvas who no longer knew what he was trying to say.

After this Picasso never again was the leader of the avant-garde in Europe. Instead of this there was a man by the name of Modrian and it was De Stijl that picked this up. Modrian we all know is marvelous horizontals and verticals, but it isn't just a balance.

To Modrian he was trying to carry on Picasso's concept. He and others worked out De Stijl and they had a magazine which they called De Stijl and happily I was able to see the last issue. And in it this is the poem with which they closed the issues of De Stijl and it was never printed again.

---

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/17/SID17566.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/francis-schaeffer/apologetics/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**