

Young People's Forum (II.4)

Dear Young People,

When shortly ago I and my wife were in Singapore, I had the privilege and opportunity to speak to you on four different occasions on "A Reformed World-and-Life View." We had, I thought, a good time and we had opportunity to discuss different problems in the lives of the young people of the covenant.

That subject that we discussed while we were with you is the same as our present discussion on the antithesis. One can say that one's world-and-life view is the reason that the Christian must live the antithesis; that is, he must live an antithetical life in the world. His world-and-life view compels him to do this. His world-and-life view is that the world is developing in sin and is incapable of doing anything about reversing the growth of sin, because everyone in it is totally depraved. That same world-and-life view teaches the child of God that the church is the only important institution that survives the final holocaust that brings the world and everything in it to an end. When we confess that we have a unique world-and-life view, we mean to say that God has graciously made us members of His church, the only institution that will survive history. It will survive because it is a heavenly institution and its life in this world is a journey to heaven. Hence, our world-and-life view is that we as members of the church are called to live as members of the church, that is, live lives that are in obedience to God. That is the antithesis.

In the last installment I sent you, I called attention to the fact that the Bible describes this antithetical life as the life of a pilgrim and a stranger in the world. But the Bible uses other figures as well. One of the most important figures the Bible uses is that of a soldier called to fight an on-going battle. The key text here is Ephesians 6:10-17. I'm going to quote the whole passage here and will be referring to it again and again. "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armour of God that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God."

In the Old Testament times the children of Israel were called to fight against all their enemies. The battle was, of course, a battle against what Paul calls in Ephesians 6 a battle against flesh and blood. But this was the Old Testament when everything was done by means of types. And so the type of earthly warfare was the kind of warfare Israel had to fight.

Canaan was the land of rest, a picture of heaven. But Israel had to fight against many enemies to gain the land. Joshua was the leader of the armies, and the name "Joshua" is the Hebrew equivalent of "Jesus." Both names mean "Jehovah is salvation" – one in Hebrew and the other in Greek. So Joshua was a type of Christ who leads His people into battle.

Israel had to fight already on its way to Canaan. They fought the Amalekites (Exodus 17:8-15), the Moabites (Num. 31:1-12), Og, king of Bashan and Sihon, king of the Amorites (Num. 21:33-35; Num 21:21-30). The only way to gain the land was through warfare. In fact, the whole land of Canaan as promised to Abraham was not gained until the time of David, who conquered all the nations that still possessed parts of the promised land.

Nevertheless, even though Israel's battles were, typically, against earthly kings, kingdoms and powers, they surely implied also a spiritual battle, because they were the people who served the living God and who had to fight against idolaters. This spiritual aspect of the warfare of Israel is referred to many times in the Psalms, when the Psalms speak of the threat that the enemies of God to the "soul" of the Psalmist.

But especially in the new dispensation the battle is spiritual. This does not mean that we are not called to fight for our country against enemies that threaten our land, but there is nothing spiritual about such battles. They are fought with guns, bombs, cannon, planes and ships. The spiritual battle the people of God are called to fight is something quite different.

If we fight an earthly battle the worst that can happen to us is that we are shot or blown to bits by artillery or bombs. But should this happen we still go to heaven. If we are "killed" in the spiritual battle we are called to fight, we go to hell where we will spend eternity.

We can fight a spiritual battle while we are fighting an earthly battle. In fact, we must do this, for our fellow soldiers are going to curse and swear; they are going to get drunk when they have leave. They will run in the direction of houses of prostitution if such are available. Against these sins the Christian warrior must fight, even while he is fighting an enemy of his country.

The enemies against which the Christian soldier fights are the enemies of sin. But sin is not the enemy itself; sin is the tool the enemy uses to destroy us. Thus the Christian soldier has three enemies: the devil, the wicked world and himself. All use sin as the weapon.

The devil is the greatest enemy because he is behind the wicked world, commanding it, giving it orders, directing it to attack here or there. He is a powerful enemy who is very cunning and sly. He has 6000 years of experience in this warfare and has millions of lesser devils who are his soldiers and who carry out his commands. If any of you want to read an interesting book about how the devil and his demons work, read "Screwtape Letters" by C. S. Lewis. You can probably get it from the library. The devil is also merciless. He tries to destroy little babies, young children and old people. He does not leave us alone for even a minute and does not care if we are weak and wounded, weary and down-hearted, sick and suffering great pain. He kicks a man in the head when he is down. He pounds mercilessly on a person when that person is dying. He cares for nothing but to destroy. He is vicious and relentless.. He goes about, Peter says, as a roaring lion, looking for people to devour (I Peter 5:8). In fact his attacks are the most fierce when we are weak and vulnerable.

Nor must we forget that the devil and his demons never give us a moment of rest. Even when we fight for our country, we are taken off the front lines for some R & R – rest and relaxation. But there is no R & R in this battle. And Satan's attacks are especially against those who are the people of God. The devil has the world in his power already and wicked men do what he wants them to do. But God's people do what God wants them to do and so they are the ones he hates the most and is determined to destroy. He works hardest in the church and in the hearts of God's people.

Demon possession in Jesus' day was a terrible thing. But as bad as it was, it is nothing in comparison with the demon possession of one who has become a captive of Satan. His rule is unbelievably harsh and cruel and the ends of serving him are hell and damnation.

I want to say more about this figure of the Christian warrior, because it is so important in Scripture. But that can wait till the next installment.

With our love in the Lord,

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