

Young People's Forum (II.7)

Dear Young People:

In our discussion of the antithesis, I pointed out a number of figures that Scripture uses to define what it means to live a life of the antithesis. Such a life is a journey on foot through strange lands and among strange people; it is a journey of citizens of the kingdom of heaven in the world, which is the kingdom of Satan. It is, from our point of view, a very dangerous journey. An antithetical life is a constant battle against all sorts of enemies. It is a race that has to be run. It is a boxing match that requires vigorous training.

But all these are figures. They all remind us of some aspect of our calling, but they are all spiritual in fact and not physical: not a physical race; not a physical hike, not a physical battle. We travel spiritually in a spiritually strange land. We fight spiritually, with spiritual weapons against spiritual enemies. We run a spiritual race on a spiritual "track" that leads us to heaven.

In the articles that you will, God willing, be receiving in the future, I hope to discuss some very practical problems of living an antithetical life. What does it mean in our day-to-day life to live antithetically? The question has to be answered. And the answers have to deal with such things as dress, entertainment, friendships, confessing the truth and witnessing to it, earning our daily bread at our jobs, etc. I want to talk about these things with you, because they are important if you are to live as a Christian – which you profess to be.

But before we get into these practical matters, a brief review of the antithesis is good to remind us of that it means to live an antithetical life.

It is here where, in my judgment, common grace has its greatest evil affects. Common grace teaches, among other things, that there is a lot of good in the world that wicked men are capable of doing, because they also are the objects of God's **common** grace. And, because the wicked in this world are able to do many things that are good in the sight of God, we are able to cooperate with them in their endeavors, make friendships with them and enjoy fellowship in their company.

It is like a bridge. Think of a very deep canyon with very steep sides, which is impossible to cross unless there is a bridge over it. On one side of the canyon are all the wicked people going about their worldly business and on the other side of the canyon are God's people who are servants of Christ and doing, as best they can, Christ's work in the world.

Common grace is that bridge that makes it possible for God's people to go to the side of the chasm where the wicked are and enjoy some cooperation and fellowship with them. The trouble, of course, is that the wicked can also cross that bridge and joins with the people of God. Now, if these are converted, that is all well and good and they belong with us on our side of the chasm, for they belong with God's people.

But those who are worldly and sinful come across the bridge too and teach God's people how to enjoy life here in the world and engage in all the sinful practices that so delight the ungodly. So common grace bridges the antithesis and so destroys it, for God meant no bridge at all when he created the antithesis.

When we live an antithetical life, we live as citizens of the kingdom of heaven and not as the world lives as citizens of the kingdom of Satan. We have Christ as our King; the wicked have Satan. We are heirs of that kingdom and shall inherit it when we die; the wicked have this world for a few years and then only hell to look forward to. We love Christ who has saved us;

the wicked hate Christ. Our greatest joy is living in obedience to him; the wicked find their fun in mocking Christ's commandments. We are very sorry when by our sins we hurt Christ; the wicked are pleased that they have succeeded in slapping Christ in the face.

This antithetical life cuts across the whole of our life. There is no single part of our life that is unaffected by the antithesis. We may not say that, while it is wrong to go along with wicked people to houses of prostitution or theatres, it is all right to have companions among the wicked. We may not say we have to live like Christians in one thing, but may live like the world in other things. We do not even laugh for the same reasons that make the wicked laugh; and we do not weep for the same reasons that cause the wicked to weep.

The wicked may laugh, but they laugh at jokes about God and the Bible, about bawdy and dirty stories, about terrible things that happen to others. The people of God laugh too but they laugh because they are happy that God has saved them. The wicked, for example, may weep when some member of the family dies, but they weep with tears of despair, because they know full well what the end of a sinful life is. The people of God weep also when someone they love dies, but they weep because God has broken a tie with someone they love very much, and because God has broken a precious tie that God himself has created to bless us. But they do not weep as those who have no hope.

We must never forget that to live an antithetical life is to fight a battle. The battle is against Satan who tempts us; and the battle is against the wicked around us. But it is also a battle that must be fought in our own lives against the sin and temptation always present with us. The battle is fought against the wicked world in which we live. It is fought against Satan who is able to enter our heads and put all sorts of evil thoughts and desires in our minds. It is a battle against ourselves. It reminds me of something I read many years ago. We usually have comics in our newspapers. One comic strip was named "Pogo" and it pictures many difficult situations, into which Pogo got himself and many things he said and did to get out of the jams into which he entered. In one such comic strip, he made a remark that is very true, even though I do not think the author of the comic strip knew how true it was. Pogo said, "We have met the enemy and they is us." Putting aside the bad grammar for a moment, it is indeed true that our greatest enemy is ourselves, for we are still sinful and have a sinful human nature.

An antithetical life is not easy to live. The older one gets the wearier of the battle one becomes. Yet the end of it all is very wonderful. An eternity in heaven is worth a few years of pain and struggle, of battle and self-denial. And so, let us be faithful.

I will begin our discussion of the practical problems in the next mailing, God willing.

With love in the Lord,

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