

## Young People's Forum (III.2)

Dear Young People,

We are ready to start discussing the practical problems of life that we all face with we apply the antithesis to our lives. There are many areas in which problems confront us. It is well that we discuss some of these problems. In this letter I am going to begin to discuss the problem of the antithesis in doctrine.

But before we begin our discussion, I wanted to tell you that, if God wills, Mrs. Hanko and I will be making one more trip to Singapore. Although we are coming because the RDC graciously asked me to speak at the Reformation Day conference, we are going to stay longer than just the short time it takes to make the speech. In fact, we are planning to stay for the Youth Camp – at least the main part of it. We do have to return home before December 17, for on that day one of our grandsons is marrying a girl of the church. And I might just as well explain to you that we cannot come earlier than we plan to come, because another grandson is also marrying a girl of the church.

The Lord is richly blessing us with his covenant blessings. During the last two weeks the Lord gave to us two more great grandchildren. They were both girls. If the Lord wills, we will have three more great grand children before we come to Singapore. One of our granddaughters is pregnant with twins. Although Mrs. Hanko knows for sure how many great grand children we will have, I think it will be 18.

But enough of our personal affairs. I wanted to say to you that the Session of CERC has also scheduled some meetings with the young people. I do not know yet what I will speak on, and so, if any of you have any suggestions, please write them to me. And if any of you have any questions about these letters, you may either write them to me or save them for when Mrs. Hanko and I come. If there are enough questions, we may be able to devote a whole evening to discussing these questions.

Let's take this matter of the antithesis in the whole world of ideas and doctrines first of all. This is, I am sure, extremely important. We live in a time of religious and doctrinal tolerance. "Tolerance" is the password to success in the church world in which we live. Tolerance of the beliefs of others is, so it is claimed, our calling. To practice tolerance is what the Bible means by, Loving our neighbor as our self – especially when that neighbor is from a different church and believes different doctrines than we believe. We are repeatedly told that others believe different things because they do not know any better and we may not hold that against them. I have heard frequently the statement: "Even though those people differ from us in doctrine, they are sincere in what they believe, and we must admire and respect their sincerity." Or, I have also heard this remark: "They may not believe the same as we believe, but they are very good people who are sometimes holier than our young people." All these statements are made to support what makes tolerance a special Christian virtue.

But my question is: What happens to the truth of God? Have we no interest in that? Does not the antithesis affect also what we believe? Must we, for example, be tolerant of evolutionism and Arminianism? Must we be tolerant of atheism? And if not, where do we draw the line where our tolerance stops? Further, if we are truly concerned about practicing the antithesis in what we believe, how must we conduct ourselves towards those who disagree with us on important points of doctrine?

And, indeed, if sincerity is the true test of Christianity, what about the devil? No one is quite as sincere in what he does as he is.

Scripture addresses this matter of tolerance in a striking way in the Old Testament Scriptures in II Kings 5. I preached on that passage many years ago in the ERCS when the church was still meeting in the kampong on River Valley Road. I am quite sure that there are a few of you whose parents heard that sermon and maybe remember parts of it.

I am going to write a few things about it. You must read the chapter first, especially verses 1-19. Naaman was a Syrian, the chief general in the armies of Syria, which country was making armed forays into part of the nation and carrying away captives. But Naaman was a leper. Leprosy was one of the most dreaded diseases known to man, for the leper was witness to the gradual rotting away of his body. He was, so to speak, a living corpse. His body was already rotting away, but his heart still beat and so it was not right to bury him.

He learned from a captive young girl (who must have been from a believing family and who was torn from her family and brought to Syria because God wanted her to witness to the truth and be the means to bring Naaman to salvation). She told Naaman about the prophet in Israel who could cure from leprosy. And so Naaman went to Samaria, the capitol of the Northern Kingdom, because he was sure that such a powerful man who could cure from leprosy was in the king's palace. He went with costly gifts of such great value that they would make the one to whom he gave them a multi-millionaire – in our money. He also took along a whole retinue of servants, chariots, horses, all intended to impress the prophet with his wealth, his power and his importance.

But Elisha was not in the palace, but in a rather small house. Naaman surely thought that all his glittering pomp and ceremony would make a very powerful impression on the prophet. But lo and behold, the prophet was totally unimpressed. He did not even go out to the street to see Naaman's splendor and gifts. With an off-handed shake of his head he told his servant to tell Naaman to wash in the Jordan River seven times.

I can almost imagine Naaman's response. He was furious. He stamped his feet and began to curse and swear. He wanted to be acknowledged as an important person who was really doing Elisha a favor by coming to him in the first place. He expected Elisha to come out and perform some magical rituals, some incantations and waving of magic charms. Instead Elisha would not even recognize his presence with more than an off-handed remark to take a bath in the Jordan River. Why that dirty, muddy Jordan? The waters of Syria were cleaner and purer. He could scarcely contain his fury.

Why did Elisha all but ignore Naaman? Why did Elisha command Naaman to wash in the Jordan – of all places? Who Naaman was, was unimportant to Elisha. Who God was, was the all-important thing. Only God could cure from leprosy. It was because Naaman had a wrong idea about Elisha and the God of whom Elisha was a prophet. Naaman was ready to grant that the God of Israel might have some powers which Rimmon did not have, although Rimmon was obviously superior on the battlefield. In other words, Naaman believed that there were many gods, and Jehovah was one among these many. He was like one of the Roman emperors who had, in his palace, a bust of all the Roman gods, but included also a bust of Christ. There they all were, lined up as gods.

Elisha did what he did, first, because it makes no difference to God whether one is a brave and powerful warrior, whether one is wealthy, whether one has the praise of men ringing in his ears. Naaman was an elect, brought under the gospel through a slave-girl from Israel. He had to be saved. And, second, Elisha wanted Naaman to understand that it was not a question of whose god is superior, but who is the one and only God, besides whom there is no other. The gods of the heathen are idols; Jehovah is God alone.

This position is clear from what Elisha said to the wicked king of Israel: “Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? Let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel.” And, after Naaman was cleansed he returned to Elijah and his confession was, “Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel.” Third, Naaman was convinced so deeply of the truth that Jehovah was God alone, that he recognized the possible sin of helping his king bow down to Rimmon and he sought Elisha’s permission. Fourthly, he took dirt back to Syria from Canaan’s soil to make an altar to Jehovah on which to sacrifice. And he promised to sacrifice to no other god. And, finally, when he washed in the Jordan, this grizzled, scarred, weather-beaten old soldier receive the skin of a baby. That was surely a sign that God had regenerated him and made him a new man.

So many people do the same thing as Naaman. The god of the Arminians has his good points. It is not so bad to deny that God is a covenant God who establishes his covenant with the elect in the line of generations. The Pentecostal god is all right to serve. It may even be preferable to have several gods: the god of Arminianism, of Pentecostalism, of Calvinism. Give each his due and be like the Athenians who among all their altars in Athens had one altar “to the unknown god,” if perhaps they might have overlooked one (Acts 17:23).

I preached a sermon recently on 2 Corinthians 10:4, 5. This text struck me powerfully. Maybe I will preach on it when we are in Singapore.

But this letter is long enough. I didn’t get very far, I fear. But these things are very important.

With love in the Lord,

Prof Hanko