

Young People's Forum (III.4)

Dear Young People,

In the last letter I sent to you I tried to explain to you the importance in maintaining the antithesis in what we believe. The antithesis, I tried to emphasize, had to do with the truth of Scripture. But having said that, it is evident that this does not solve the problem entirely. Other questions naturally come up. The most important of these questions is: How are we to live our lives in relationship to those who do not believe and confess the same truth we believe and confess?

This is an important question; we come almost daily into contact with those from other churches that hold doctrines different from what we believe. We sometimes go to school with them; we may meet them at work; we may have friends among them whom we see on a very regular basis; we may even be dating one from another church, or asked to go on a date with someone whose doctrinal beliefs are different from ours. How do we live the life of the antithesis in practice?

It is, I think, obvious that we may not isolate ourselves from others, build a wall around ourselves, and refuse to have any contact with anyone but one who believes exactly the same way we do. Such conduct would not only be impossible, but it would also be sinful. Although, Jesus tells us, we are not of the world, we are most emphatically in the world. We must live in this world, and living in this world brings us in contact with all kinds of people. Besides, we are to love our neighbor as ourselves, and everyone knows that our neighbor is not limited by the Lord to those whom we know to be people of God. Read the parable of the Good Samaritan

It is not possible, it seems to me, to draw up a list which gives us specific instructions as precisely how we must act in all the different encounters we have with people outside our own churches. Life is too varied to make such a list possible; and, besides, there is this element of Christian liberty to which we must pay attention. And so let us say at the very outset that God gives us only general principles to observe and keep, and that how we apply them is a matter of sanctified wisdom.

But let us be very sure we understand what Christian liberty is all about. Christian liberty is not (most definitely, not!) the right to do as we please. I recall a young man who wanted to play in a basketball tournament that was held on the Lord's Day. He, in fact, did so. When he was reprimanded for desecrating the Sabbath, he pleaded Christian liberty in Sabbath observance. Such pleas are very common in the church and, as a pastor, I have run up against those who excuse almost any violation of the law of God on the grounds of Christian liberty. Apparently, there has been considerable discussion on this matter of Sabbath observance in Singapore among the people of the CERC.

To all those who use Christian liberty to excuse their sins, I quote two passages from God's Word. One is in I Peter 2:15, 16: "For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: as free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God." The other text is in Galatians 5:13: "For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another."

These two passages make clear that Christian liberty is never to be used as an occasion for sin. Yet, at the same time, these two passages make another point clear: We are servants of God, and this requires of us that we love God and love our neighbor for God's sake.

I hope you appreciate the point. When we face the question of Christian liberty, we often look at it as something that defines some boundaries beyond which we may not go. And so we try to push those boundaries as far as possible and expand our field of life to as big an area as we dare. We do this by asking the questions: Is it wrong to do this? Why is it wrong to do this? What's wrong with this? Why mayn't we do this?" These are the wrong questions to be asking.

When, for example, we are talking about Sabbath observance, we are busy trying to make lists of what we may do and what we may not do on the Sabbath. Is it wrong to do our studies on the Sabbath? Is it wrong to go to church only once? Is it wrong to eat in a restaurant on the Lord's Day? Why may not we do our studies on the Lord's Day? Those are the sorts of questions which one who is interested in Christian liberty and living a godly life ought not to be asking. Asking those questions will get us absolutely nowhere.

The one all-important question we ought to be asking – if we are truly interested in living lives as free sons and daughters of God in God's family: How can I best live a life of praise and glory to my heavenly Father who, because of a wonderful miracle of grace, has made me a member of his family? How best can I serve him and give glory to him? If we ask this question, Christian liberty becomes a simple matter.

We must apply this now to our relationships to those who are not one with us in the faith. We must face and answer the question: How can I best be faithful to God in my relation to others?

Now, there is another point here. Especially in Galatians 5, Paul emphasizes that love is the key to living in liberty. That calling to love is a calling to love our neighbor. Our neighbor is surely the one God has placed at our side: our parents, our friends, our fellow saints, our classmates, etc. Our neighbor may be a fellow saint, but is not necessarily so. Our neighbor is placed alongside of us by God. God has placed our neighbor there because, in some way and for some reason, that particular neighbor needs our help. Our neighbors (our parents) need our obedience and help in the home. Our neighbors (our brothers and/or sisters) need our help to live godly lives. Our neighbors (our fellow saints) need our help to contribute to the welfare of the church.

The greatest help our neighbor needs is salvation. There is no need as great as that. Salvation is the one great need because unless that need is filled, every other need is unimportant. God put that neighbor there with that need of salvation.

Our neighbor who is already saved, still needs our help, for the pathway in life is difficult to walk and we cannot walk that pathway alone. We need our parents, our children, our fellow saints, our friends to walk that path. But when a neighbor is on a wrong road that does not lead to heaven, this neighbor needs our help to get off the path that leads to hell, if it God's will to bring such a one to repentance.

But you see, that neighbor's need may be widely different from another neighbor. There may be a friend who is very close to us in matters of our faith, but nevertheless, differs in some important respect. There may be a classmate or an acquaintance who does not go to church at

all and is, we may conclude, not saved. And so, the way we conduct ourselves as neighbors differs widely depending on the need of the one who is our neighbor.

I will be more specific in the next installment.

In Christ's love and service,

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