

Young People's Forum (II.1)

Dear Young People,

Now that we are finished with our discussion of courtship and marriage, I decided to discuss with you in this and future forum articles the Biblical idea of the antithesis. Probably most of you have only a vague idea (or no idea at all) of what the word "antithesis" means. I will try to explain it to you in the course of this letter. It is a word that defines more clearly than any other word what is the calling of the Christian in the world. Those of you who attending the classes I held on a "Reformed World and Life View" will have some idea of what I am saying.

The word has a very illustrious history. It has been used by Reformed Christians for hundreds of years and genuine Christians have been quite determined to preserve the word in the theological vocabulary of the church. This determination to preserve the word and the idea of the word has been so important to Reformed Christians, because constantly attacks are being made against it, attacks, which if not resisted, destroy the church and drag the believer into the mire and slop of the world. So we are going to talk about something very important to the church.

Furthermore, the antithesis is very practical. The term refers to how we ought to walk in the world over against the wickedness that surrounds us. It does not deal so much with theology as it deals with the practical questions of being a Christian. It is, therefore, an interesting and important subject for all believers, but especially for young adults.

Because this subject is so closely connected with your life and calling, you will probably have many questions about the practical application of the antithesis to you own life and about the many temptations that arise in your life that must be resisted. Please write me with any such questions as you may have, and we can discuss them in the forum.

I will try to explain what is meant by the antithesis in as few words as possible. The word "antithesis" itself comes from two Greek words which mean "to set (something) over against (something else)". When it is used to describe the calling of the Christian, that is, his calling to walk a godly life, the word means to set the calling of the Christian over against the life of wicked men in the middle of whom a Christian must live. The wicked people do this or that; may a Christian do it too? If he may not, why not? What must he do instead of what the wicked do?

You see, the antithesis is a sort of world-and-life view of how the Christian must live in this world. It is a guide to Christian conduct. It is to be faithful to your wife instead of divorcing her. It is to condemn and **refuse** to have anything to do with pornography, but it is to set over against pornography what a Christian ought to be looking at or reading. It is to say No to one thing that is evil, but it is to say Yes to another which is good.

Let me explain a bit how it is that a Christian is called to live an antithetical life.

Even Adam had to live an antithetical life in Paradise, before he fell. He was commanded by God to say No to eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But he was also called to say Yes to God and to eat from the tree of life (Gen. 2:16, 17). So life continues to be that way throughout the entire history of the world. It is to say No to sin, but it is also to say Yes to God. It is to say No to sin and Yes to God in this world and in the use of the things of this world. It is to set the Yes we say to God over against the No we say to wicked people. That is the antithesis.

When Adam fell into sin, he ceased to live the antithetical life to which he had been called. He chose to disobey God and eat of the tree of which God said he might not eat. He said Yes to the devil and No to God, the direct opposite of what he was created to do. By this act of disobedience, Adam agreed to work along with the devil in the devil's wicked purpose.

You all know the story. Satan was created as the highest of all the angels. He too was created good, just as all the angels. But he conspired with other angels in heaven to rebel against God and to put God off His throne so that Satan might climb onto it and claim all God's creation as his own. But because of his rebellion, he was cast out of heaven with the angels that agreed with him and tried to help him dethrone God.

And so Satan thought to himself: "If I cannot have heaven as my kingdom, I will try to have earth." But the only way Satan could manage to steal the earthly creation (the whole universe outside of heaven) was to persuade Adam to join him. Satan had no direct access to the earthly creation, for he is a spirit and cannot live in a material creation. And Adam was created as the head of the whole creation so that the welfare of the creation was determined by Adam. So Adam's cooperation was necessary for Satan to gain his ends; he needed Adam as his representative in the creation.

Satan succeeded in persuading Adam to turn his back on God, thumb his nose at God's command, and agree with Satan in Satan's terrible plan to steal this creation from God. It is like a strong king in Japan who wants to conquer Australia and make it part of his kingdom. But he cannot be there in person, nor send anyone from Japan to Australia, and so he persuades some very important people in Australia to work for him and he promises them great rewards if they will succeed. These people, traitors to their own country, now work to bring Australia under the rule of Japan. So Adam, a traitor to God, worked with Satan to bring this earthly creation under the rule of Satan.

If Satan succeeded in persuading man to join forces with him, the earthly creation could be used to establish the kingdom of Satan and be used, not to glorify God, but to serve Satan and sin. Adam and Eve became Satan's allies; they agreed to cooperate with Satan. They believed his lie that if they would only eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would become as God. Satan's lie was clever. What Satan really said to Eve first and then through Eve to Adam: Now you must let someone else decide for you what you may do and what you may not do. That someone else is God. But if you do what I say, you will become like God and you can decide for yourself what you may do and what you may not do. You are the boss. You will determine what is right to do and what is wrong."

Isn't it true that ever since that terrible moment when Adam agreed, we all aspire to do that very thing? The world certainly does. The world says, "I will not let God decide for me what is right and what is wrong; I will decide for myself." A young person says the same to parents when told not to do something: "I am old enough to decide for myself what I may do; I do not need anyone else to decide for me." We say the same thing every time we break God's law.

The result of Adam's sin was that he dragged the whole human race down with him. The whole human race became totally depraved; that is, every man, woman and child is in agreement with Satan to do everything possible to make this world Satan's world where he rules as prince and king. But, you see: the antithesis works backward too. Anyone who agrees with Satan's purpose hates God and opposes him. There never is any neutral ground in this world, where believers and unbelievers can get along together. Their goals are at cross-purposes. The one loves God; the other hates God. That is why Jesus says, "He that is not for me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad" (Matt. 12:30). There is no possibility of

neutrality here in the world. No one can say: "I'll make up my mind later. I'm going to remain uncommitted." To refuse to say Yes or No to Jesus is really the same as saying No. If you are not for Christ, then you are not neutral; you are against Christ.

Now, we must be clear at once that Adam's fall did not just happen. It was not as if God was helpless to prevent the whole catastrophe. It was not that, while God commanded Adam to serve Him, he was helpless to do anything about Satan's temptation. God did not stand in heaven watching Satan tempt Eve, wringing His hands and wondering what Eve would do. It was all in the counsel of God and God remains sovereign over all.

The determining power is God's decree of election and reprobation. In heaven, with the fall of Satan and his co-conspirators, election and reprobation were accomplished. On earth, because the human race is only born over a period of some 6000+ years, election and reprobation takes place during the whole of history. But election and reprobation are critically important, because something very dramatic happened in Satan's kingdom that created the antithesis. That was the coming of Christ.

But we will discuss that in our next letter.

With love in the Lord,

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