

Young People's Forum (II.2)

Dear Young People,

In the last installment I sent to you, I started to talk about the antithesis and what is really meant by that term. I said that, while Adam already had to practice the antithesis in Paradise, the antithesis was made stronger and sharper since Adam's fall plunged the whole human race into sin and brought God's curse on the creation (Gen. 3:17-19). But Scripture teaches us that God was sovereign also over the entrance of sin into the world. And so God had a purpose in Adam's fall.

That purpose was to send Christ, God's own Son, into the world. God told Adam and Eve that very thing immediately after they fell: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15).

There are a few things about this text I must mention. It is often called "the mother promise" because it is the first promise of salvation God made, and is the essential promise, of which all other promises in Scripture are a part.

In the first place, this promise was actually made as a part of the curse God pronounced on Satan. The serpent, which Satan used to tempt our first parents, was cursed above all animals. It would go on its belly and eat dust. But in cursing the serpent, Satan himself was cursed. That the promise of a "seed of the woman" would crush the head of the serpent means that Satan's defeat was certain. He would be destroyed by this "seed of the woman."

Secondly, the text speaks of the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. The seed of the serpent are all those who have the devil as their father (John 8:44) and do his lusts. The seed of the woman is Christ, the promised Messiah, and all those who believe in Him. So there are two kinds of people in the world: wicked people who do the lusts of Satan their father, and Christ's people who belong to Christ.

Thirdly, the relation between these two groups of people is one of enmity. "I will put enmity between thee and the woman . . ." That is, the two groups hate each other and are always fighting. And so this present creation is, for the Christian, not a playground, but a battlefield (See Eph. 6:10-17). That battle is the antithesis.

Finally, in that battle, the seed of the woman always has the victory. It is true that Satan bruises the heel of the seed of the woman. That bruising takes place throughout history when the people of God are persecuted. But it also takes place when Christ dies on the cross (Isaiah 53:5). But it is only a bruising of the heel. That is not fatal. Satan is bruised in his head; that destroys him.

There is a painting hanging in the art museum in Amsterdam, Netherlands that depicts the crucifixion of Christ. I have not seen it myself, but I have been told by others who have seen it. It is a painting of Christ dying. Behind the cross, in the dark sky is a figure of Satan. He has a leering look on his face that seems to say: "I have won at last. I

have destroyed the seed of the woman. I can now have my own way and do as I please. In the battle of the ages, I have the victory.” But, so I am told, the longer one looks at the figure of Satan, the more it becomes obvious that there is, behind the leering and grinning face of Satan, a look of puzzlement and uncertainty. It is almost as if Satan is saying, “I won! . . . , but did I? I have the victory! . . . , but do I really?”

The point is that although Satan may have thought he had the victory, the fact is that the cross of Christ crushed Satan’s head; that is, it destroyed all Satan’s power and with the destruction of Satan’s power, the power also of sin and death were destroyed. Christ arose from the dead and ascended into heaven. There He is exalted to a position of great power so that He rules over all God’s creation and is given the right and authority to execute all God’s counsel. He is sovereign, also over Satan and his demons.

There is a divine irony in the cross: that which Satan was convinced was his victory becomes, in fact, his defeat. Satan knows this too. He knows that he lost and that hell awaits him. One of the visions of John on Patmos tells us this. The text is found in Revelation 12. After the ascension of Christ is describe and Satan is said to be thrown out of heaven (verses 9-12), we read: “Woe to the inhabitors of the earth and of the sea! For the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, **because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.** And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman (the church) which brought forth the man child” (verses 12b, 13).

But the Scriptures teach us that Christ died only for His elect people who were given Him from all eternity. By dying on the cross, Christ smashed the head of Satan, destroyed his power, and established His own kingdom. So completely did the devil’s power get smashed that Christ now rules over the devil and all His evil demons as well as all else. They are under His control and they can do nothing without His will.

But Christ rules over His people by His grace. He regenerates them, converts them, makes them citizens of the kingdom of heaven, and calls them to faithful labor in the kingdom of heaven. And so, the new antithesis (new from the antithesis Adam was called to live in Paradise) is created by Christ Himself in His rule: He rules with a rule of **grace** over His people.

Now all this creates a strange situation here in the world. This creation belongs to God. God created it and God continues to uphold it by His providence. But the wicked claim this creation is their own and they claim that they have every right to do with it what they wish, without being answerable to God for what they do. They, consciously or unconsciously, because they are wicked, serve the purpose of Satan to make this world Satan’s kingdom. But Christ rules by His grace in the lives of His people.

It all is sort of like a very powerful king who lives in a far country. He has a kingdom also in another land than his own, far away, but that kingdom has been taken over by unscrupulous men who keep the country completely under their control. But the powerful king is determined to regain that part of his kingdom taken over by wicked men and so he secretly recruits a small band of men within that other country and gives them the charge of representing his cause against the wicked men who have taken over.

This world is pretty much under the dominion of the wicked in this world. They occupy all the positions of power in every country. They have taken over the schools, including the colleges and universities and use them to promote their wicked views.

They have on their side the highly educated so that almost all the inventions and development of technology are the fruit of the work of these evil men who try to steal God's world from Him. They had 99.9% of the wealth of this world at their disposal and for their use. These wicked men build hospitals, send rockets to the moon and to Mars, invent TV, cell phones, jet planes and automobiles. But they use everything they invent to sin.

By the work of regeneration and conversion, Christ makes citizens of the kingdom of heaven from those for whom He died – although at one time they were part of the kingdom of Satan. He tells the citizens of this kingdom of heaven that they are to represent the cause of God in the world. While the wicked shout their false doctrine and evil ideas, the citizens of the kingdom of heaven are to shout loudly the lessons they heard in the school of Christ. While the wicked boast of doing whatever they want to do because this world belongs to them, these citizens of the kingdom of heaven insist that Christ is King, the creation is His, and Christ will surely come in judgment upon all these wicked to destroy them. And then He will give this world (cleansed, renewed, glorified) to His people.

These people of Christ are told to do their work and perform the obligations of their calling in two ways: one way is by confessing the truth and condemning evil; and the other way is by living as citizens of the kingdom of heaven.

Now this latter calling is the hard part. They are to live alongside of the wicked – go to school with them, live in the same nation in which the wicked live, buy things they need in the same stores, often go to the same schools, work in the same workplaces to earn their daily bread: in short, they are to live in God's creation and make use of all the things in God's creation, but in such a way that they serve Christ their King and are obedient to Him. They are to show in their lives too that this creation belongs to God and not to the wicked. They are to live in allegiance to Christ in such a way that their lives testify that this creation belongs to God and not to the devil.

They are to do all these things as a very small group of people in a world that is powerful, mighty, rich, far and away in the majority, and with hatred in their hearts for God and for Christ's cause. These people are so small in number that the Bible calls them a hut in a garden of cucumbers, a besieged city, a very small remnant (Isaiah 1:8, 9, Rom. 11:5). They are a little flock surrounded by fierce wolves who howl in the night, attack the flock, and try to drag off and kill the sheep (Luke 12:32).

And, as if all this is not bad enough, these few people who represent the cause of Christ in the world are themselves sinful and weak. The enemy has control of their natures so that they are perpetually trying to get from under the rule of Christ and join with the wicked. The pleasures of sin draw them like a flame draws a moth. The glittering palaces of pleasure inhabited by the wicked are so powerfully enticing that they draw God's people like a powerful magnet. Companionship with wicked men seems desirable and the ideas promoted by those who hate Christ are appealing.

To top it all off, the wicked are cruel and heartless. The wicked try to entice God's people to join them in their mad pursuit of earthly things so that they at last are identified with all that is opposed to Christ. And if enticement does not work, the wicked bare their teeth and threaten persecution. Loss of jobs, suffering torture, imprisonment, and slow, excruciatingly painful death. These things they have done to Christ; these things they will

do to the people of God (John 16:33, Matt. 10:22, 24:9, Luke 21:17, John 15:18, 15:19, 24, I John 3:13).

This is what the antithesis is all about. It is living in the world as members of the party of Christ. It is to use God's creation and all its powers to glorify God. It is to defend the truth with vigor and enthusiasm. It is to live fearlessly in a world that hates us. It is to walk in obedience to God when all men mock at such narrow mindedness. It is to be fully aware of persecution, but not to be afraid. It is to know our own sins and weaknesses and fight against sin in ourselves. It is to put on the armor of faith and fight the battle of faith without flinching. And because faithfulness brings suffering it is to be Jesus' disciple by denying ourselves, taking up our cross, and following Christ.

But it is also to know with absolute certainty that we are victorious through Christ – even if it seems as if the saints go down to crushing defeat. It is to live here for a while and to enjoy what is over there, beyond death, forever. It is to exchange a cross for a crown, armor for white robes of righteousness, a sword for a palm branch of victory, and a world of sin and death for life everlasting with Christ. “As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. . . , for nothing shall separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 8:36, 37, 39).

With love in the Lord,

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