

The Dialectic of Life and Its Origin

by Andrew Bonar

The sermon explores the dialectic of life, the fundamental instinct of all life, and the nature of self-hood, highlighting the choice between the kingdom of self and the kingdom of love, and the consequences of choosing the kingdom of self.

Scripture: Genesis 1:26

Topics: "The Nature of Desire", "The Conflict of Self and God"

Description

Andrew Bonar explores the dialectic of life, emphasizing the importance of understanding the origins of our existence and the opposing forces we face daily. He argues that desire is the primal energy of life, manifesting as both attraction and repulsion, and that our choices shape our character and destiny. Bonar highlights the necessity of reconciling the 'get' and 'give' instincts within us, which can only be achieved through Christ. He explains that the separation of self from God leads to the emergence of evil and hell, which are not created by God but are the result of free will choosing self over divine love. Ultimately, Bonar calls for a return to the kingdom of love, where true fulfillment is found in selflessness and unity with God.

Transcript

TO some minds, origins are of little interest; facts are facts and let them be faced as such. To others an attempt: at the explanation of the origin of things can alone satisfy the heart and mind. They must not only know what thing does, but why and how it does it. And in the things of the Spirit my own mind was not set at rest until, greatly helped by some of the mighty seers and expositors of the ages, and always endeavouring to keep within the confines of God's Word, some satisfying conception of origins was arrived at. It may well be controversial to some, difficult or unnecessary to others, even presumptuous to yet others, searching beyond where we need to search into the nature of "the eternal, immortal, invisible"; but it has helped me, and so, writing I trust in a spirit of reverence, I pass on this brief outline in the form of an appendix.¹

The problem which immediately meets us at all times is the right understanding and handling of the opposing forces in our daily life; for it is obvious at every turn and corner alike, in things large and small, that we are faced with that which pulls in a wrong direction, stirs in us wrong feelings, frustrates, depresses, raises impossible barriers. The answer to such questions as how these things come to be, how they affect us as they do, what their uses are, and what are to be our reactions, gives us the absolutely

necessary key to a continuous mastery over them; or, rather, to the proper and creative redirection of them; indeed, to making us see enemies as friends; for when all things and people, even oppositions and opposers, can be seen in a friendly light, the secret is ours.²

We must start at the beginning, although it may seem a long way back. We must start with the elemental power of choice, which is stimulated to action by the constant necessity of choosing between alternatives; then the fatefulness of choice, and the final fixation of choice in character and destiny. For here is the very substructure of life.

We find on analysis that the fundamental instinct of all life is desire, attraction to itself. In nature, the forces of gravity shew this; in physics, the unceasing attraction of the positive and negative particles of electricity, the protons and electrons which form the atom; or, at the other end of the scale, the power which maintains the solar system in equilibrium; all these have no different origin from the basic, all-governing instincts of selfpreservation, acquisition, achievement, propagation in man. All is desire. Desire is the primal energy of life. Desire in its perfected form of love is the foundation of God's nature: "Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created"; "the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself."

Examine desire further and we learn this. Attraction, by its activity, brings into being its opposite, repulsion. Thus if I draw something towards me, although the nature of my desire is to attract, grasp, hold-a-tightening, a hardening, immobilizing quality; yet the very fact of my drawing brings its opposite into activity, motion. Attraction causes a thing to move. But mobility is the opposite to the tightening, hardening, grasping of attraction: the nature of mobility is to go out from itself in outflow, output. Thus desire is seen to have a dual manifestation: at its heart is a conflict of equal but opposing forces, whose tension is the root of all manifested life. This is seen in the fact that all life is the contrast, tension and interaction of opposites; thesis and antithesis which make the working synthesis: male and female, light and darkness, spirit and matter, and so on endlessly. Nothing shows this more clearly than the twentieth-century discovery of the composition of the atom, once thought to be like a minute and indestructible billiard ball, now known to consist of various numbers of electrons, negative particles of electricity, revolving at immense speed around a nucleus consisting of positive particles, protons. The quality of tension causes the rotation. The proton, the positive, attracts towards itself; the electron, the negative, attracts towards itself in the opposite direction: the tension between the two, being of equal force, resulting in the rotation of the one around the other. Such is the vast power of their attraction that particles knocked by collision out of the atom are known to travel at 45,000,000 miles an hour!³ The one phenomenon of attraction, repulsion and rotation is shown to be the structure of all visible things; every particle of matter, every chemical substance. And, in the spiritual realm, these same threefold qualities form the nature of self-hood, the structure of desire: to grasp, and its opposite, to give; to draw to oneself, and its opposite, to go out to others; and the tension and interaction between these opposites form what James calls, in a significant phrase, the whirling "wheel of nature",⁴ the activity of all intelligent life. Now, it is at this point in selfconscious beings that choice takes the dominant position. Man stands in between these warring opposites of "get" and "give". Shall it be a constant raging, whirling struggle, first one in control and then the other? That is fallen nature with its endless restlessness and unsatisfied hunger. Or shall it be the yielding of the "get" instinct to the "give"? That is the nature of God reinstated in man by the Cross and the Spirit. For by that means the "get" nature is harmonized with the "give" nature, finding its pleasure (its "get"-instinct satisfied) in giving. That is the synthesis of the eternal nature. That is the Kingdom of heaven.

But it ought to be noted that this separation in the self, these warring opposites of our nature, which can only be reconciled in Christ, were never meant to be known by us in conflict. In God, the Three-in-One, they have been unified from all eternity and are only seen in the glories and graces of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

But we must remember that what is a derived selfhood in man and a created condition in matter has its origin in God. The idea that the world was created out of nothing is a myth exploded by the Bible itself. Thus it says of matter that "the visible was made out of the invisible";⁵ and of man that God created man in his own image and breathed His own breath into Him. The truth is that, each in their own measure, all creation has only one life in it, the life of God. All creatures are but God's love compacted into material form. That driving-wheel of desire seen in man and matter is first of all the foundation of God's own Being.

God is the Self from which all selves have come. All the tremendous forces that have created and conserved this universe issue from that one Self, the first quality of whose nature is this self-same desire. But God is not mere desire. His is sublimated, disciplined, desire. He is love. In Him, desire always has been but the raw material of love. The whirling wheel of self-hood has from everlasting been the hidden fuel; the driving force of the light and love and eternal self-giving of the Father of lights with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

We must speak as a man. We must divide the indivisible, describe the Infinite in finite terms in order to make the truth plain to our finite minds. We have already pointed to a basic selfnature in the Holy One which, as a fact, has never in a separate sense been manifest in Him. Only in the disruptive experience of man have this whirling wheel of anguish, these contrary forces, this naked self-hood, come to be known and felt; and, only to help man understand and readjust his chaotic nature, do we trace this self back to its source in God. In doing so we take apart what never has been apart in Him, till Lucifer made the severance. For, in the Eternal Being, those elemental forces of His nature are eternally centred, integrated and yielded up to the love of the Son, the second Person of the Godhead, who has eternally dwelt in the bosom of the Father. We say again, we are dividing the indivisible; but to explain it in human language we would say it is as if the Father represents the eternal desire principle, the selfhood; the begetting of the Son is, as it were, the moment when the Father "chooses" to pour all the energies of His Being out from Himself into the love of another, thus begetting what we know as the kingdom of heaven, as love, service, selflessness, meekness, goodness, grace. It is as if we see a Cross in the very heart of eternity, when the Eternal One "dies" to Himself and "lives" to His Son. As if, at that moment, a self which could potentially become a kingdom of darkness and self-seeking, became eternally immersed, sublimated, resurrected into a realm of light and love, an eternal will to all goodness, centred around His Son. Such is a mere human figure of speech, for in reality Father and Son have been coexistent from everlasting, one in the other; there has been no moment of choice or moment of begetting, no dying to "self" and rising to "others", but rather an eternal, indivisible unity of being, Father and Son together in their eternal embrace revealing an eternal nature of love; and from them proceeding the Spirit, their Spirit, Father and Son proceeding forth in action, as framer and artificer of all the glories and marvels of the universe; the love which has its source in the Father-Son relationship, but which, to fulfil its love nature, must overflow and outflow as Spirit in endless forms of self-expression, all created of love and by love to participate in the endless blessings of the happy Trinity.

An earthly symbol of the Three-in-One is fire, light and life. Fire, as seen in the sun, is the source of all life on this planet. By itself it is a terrible and consuming power. Infringe the laws of nature and approach too close to it, and pain and destruction are the penalty. Yet from this flaming source radiate all the marvels

and beauties, colours and warmth of the meek and gentle light. No fire means no light. No light means no life on earth, for the light passes into all nature, quickens, sustains, gives colour and form to all things. To perform its life-giving function on the earth this trinity-in-unity must be in operation: the fire must burn, the light must shine, life must be quickened in plant and animal.

But to earth dwellers the sun is never meant to be known and felt except by its blessings of light and warmth. The fire, as it were, is only known and mediated to us in its eternal begetting of the light. We recognize that flaming centre, we realize that it is the burning source of the light, but we know our rightful relationship to it; we gratefully bask in its blessings, but we keep our proper distance. The laws of fire and light and their effect on the human body are fixed and we wisely obey them.

So it was meant to be when the Three-in-One first made created beings. They were to share in the kingdom of love by giving themselves to God; as Father is given to Son, and Son to Father, and Spirit to both. But first they must be selves, real selves, conscious of self-hood, conscious of those elemental forces inherent in their nature, derived by creation from the Father-self. Choice must be the deciding factor. As God, if we may so say, "chose" the way of love, the way of His eternal nature, so must His sons become fixed in the way of His Spirit by persistent choice. Desire, will, imagination, ambition, must be at work, the whirling wheel of nature.

Immediately then, there confronts them a fundamental selection of one of two ways, symbolized for Adam and Eve in a later creation by the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and the tree of life. By setting the will to the former, self chooses itself; the way of the kingdom of heaven by which all selves find full expression and satisfaction in the give and take of loving service, the FatherSon-Spirit way, is spurned in its garments of meekness and humility; the glorious plan of the ages by which each self, each creature, is a happy vital unit in a vast organic whole, each a member of one universal body, a chord in the harmony of heaven, is shattered: and the self makes the dreadful plunge back into itself; it shall be "I will", not "God wills"; the drive of its own desires shall be its only master; it shall be its own god; its own great powers of mind and will and passion shall carve out its own destiny. Thus the circuit is snapped which joins it in bonds of love and unity with all creatures and the Creator. Two kingdoms have come into being, where there was only one. The kingdom of self, created to be only the hidden food and fuel of the kingdom of love, has made its separate appearance.

An unknown monstrosity, named evil, has appeared on the stage. As a separate entity it had no original existence. At the dawn of creation, when the morning stars sang together, no such element was named or known. For it is a usurper, a thief. Our examination of it proves it to be misused, misapplied, good. That hidden self, having chosen to cut itself off from its source and its sphere of co-operative service, has come into the open as an independent, rival and antagonistic way of life. It will seek its own ends. It will satisfy its own lusts. It has powers of its own and will use them. It will be "free". It has formed a kingdom, a rebel realm. It is evil.

But is it free? Look again at this kingdom of self. It is "the back parts" of God. It is the underlying forces which vitalize His love, joy and peace. It is the fire which begets the light. These same forces, this same fire has passed from the Father into His offspring, and formed their separate -and free selves; yet, though separate and distinct personalities, we are still, so far as our basic nature is concerned, in Him and part of Him: "In Him we live and move and have our being." Our selves still remain part of His one Self, and derive their natural life from Him. But in turning away from our natural destiny, we perform an unnatural act; we break the laws of eternal nature and we meet with the consequences of all broken law. Fire begets

light. Infringe the laws of fire, plunge your hands into the blaze, the hot and fierce source of its blessings, and you receive not warmth and light, but burns and scars; blessings become cursings; gentleness, wrath.

Thus it is that the hidden kingdom of self-hood, the root and raw material of the kingdom of heaven, becomes the kingdom of darkness; all evil passions flourish in it, all discord and disease, all hatred, lust and cruelty. It is the kingdom of Lucifer and his fallen hosts. It is foreshadowing of that lake which burneth with fire for ever. These know God, not as "the meek and gentle light of heaven", but in His hidden fire-root into which they have unlawfully penetrated. They have plunged their hands in the fire, instead of basking in the light. To the froward He shows Himself froward. And here we find the true explanation of hell.

How often has the question disturbed thinking Christians. How can there be a hell? How can a God of love condemn men to a lake of fire? How reconcile wrath and mercy in the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ? The answer is here given. The avenging fires of hell are a part of God, an inevitable part of His nature, for they are the very same fires which flame up in love in the heavenly kingdom. Never would they have been known or felt as fierce and hellish fires, had not Lucifer and his hosts, and then man through Lucifer's deception, turned back from God's light kingdom to His fire-kingdom. Natures that were made to live in union with the Father of lights in the beauties and blessings of the heavenlies had now chosen of their own free will to extinguish the light and plunge unlawfully into the dark fiery energies of the independent self-hood, only to find themselves in the resistless grip of their tormenting pride and wrath and passion, consumed of their own lusts yet never satisfied, in the unassuaged burnings of the whirling wheel of conflicting desire. Yet these very tumults and ragings are still the movings of God in them, not God in mercy but God in wrath. All nature, whether of angels, devils (fallen angels), or men, is but a flame from the central fire and remains eternally fed from its burning source; but, to the merciful, He shows Himself merciful in the gentle fire of love; by the froward He is found to be froward, a consuming fire of wrath that burns in the pride and malice and rage of that distorted self-hood. Such is hell. As much a part of the inevitable nature of things as heaven; for hell and heaven are really the two sides of the one eternal element, the consuming life-fire which is God's nature, burning in love or burning in wrath, just according to which we immerse ourselves in.

God does not make hell. God only made heaven and all things to have the nature of heaven. Lucifer and his rebel followers, by breaking themselves off from the heavenly meekness and love, discovered for themselves the hidden and unknown fire-source of heaven's light, the burning wheel of the elemental self-nature of God. This now became their kingdom, their hell-fire, both in themselves and in their sphere of activity, the earth which they corrupted. A God of wrath and judgment, rage and fury, is all that they can know, a God of vengeance, of tempest, of destruction.

Hell has become now, not first a place, but a condition. Wherever the rebel-self dominates, there is hell; there are the burnings of God's wrath. Within, where the fires of anger, hate, malice, lust, rage in the soul, there is hell; without, where war, rapine, disease and death stalk abroad, there also is hell. All is still God's kingdom, all are still God's children; but it is the kingdom of God's anger, the children of God's wrath.

With the wrath, on our earth, is mingled mercy, for this is still the day of probation and salvation. Two kingdoms strive within us and around, the realms of darkness and light. All things are compounded of mingled good and evil: if there are thorns, there are also flowers; if there is night, there is also day; if there are poisons, there are also health-giving foods. But the night cometh, the everlasting darkness in which the apostate angels already dwell, where no tokens of mercy mingle with the fruits of wrath, as on this

earth; no sun, no flowers and fruits, no friendly and beautiful creatures: only the anguishing wheel of apostate, insatiable self-hood, the rage, the selfishness, the unassuaged passions of men and angels whose characters have become fixed as devils.

Such is hell in its final form; the eternal home carved out in the outer darkness by the free will of free beings, who preferred the kingdom of self to the kingdom of God, and persisted in their choice. It is God's hell? Yes, for all is God's. Is such a hell God's plan and will and making? A thousand times no. It is the rebel will of His creatures that brought hell into existence. It is the unlawful penetration into the realm of forces in God and His creatures which only exist for universal blessing, and the perversion of these forces to selfish ends: the consequence being harmony transformed into disharmony; peace into war; love into hate; joy into pain; the very ingredients of the hellish state.

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