

The Everlasting Burnings

by G.W. North

The sermon explores the nature of evil, sin, and death, and how self-sacrifice is a fundamental principle of eternal life in God.

Scripture: Genesis 2:7, John 10:17, Romans 5:12, Hebrews 12:29

Topics: "Self-Sacrifice", "Evil and Good"

Description

G.W. North emphasizes that all principles, including the existence of evil, originate from God, asserting that evil is a perversion of good. He explains that death, introduced by sin through Adam, is not annihilation but a transition into another state of existence, with both heaven and hell characterized by everlasting burnings. North highlights that true life is found in self-sacrifice, modeled by Jesus, who willingly laid down His life for others, contrasting this with the perversion of self-interest seen in humanity. He argues that the essence of God's love and life is selflessness, which leads to acts of sacrifice, and that this principle is foundational to eternal life. Ultimately, North concludes that the sacrificial nature of Christ establishes a divine order of love and life that persists among the redeemed.

Transcript

It is quite impossible for any principle fundamental to the function or 'mechanics' of any person or thing to exist in this universe except first it existed in God. Evil itself could never have existed except, in another form, it had first existed as good. Evil is not an eternal principle, it is the perversion of an eternal principle. Its author, the devil, could never have existed if he had not been originally created good Lucifer by God. Death came into the world by sin as by one man, Adam; but God did not create Adam in sin, nor sin in Adam. The man was created to pass on fullness of life to his progeny and if he had abode by the true principle of self-sacrifice as demonstrated in his Creator he would have succeeded. Instead of doing so, however, he co-operated with the devil and received and operated the power of sin from satan the pervert; consequently he was the human instrument who introduced present death into the world.

The article of death itself as known among men is simply the act of final departure of the spirit from and cessation of personal conscious being in one particular state and form and passing into another. Death is not annihilation, a going out of existence in one form and for ever ceasing to exist in any state or form; it is an experience, and a state or condition and a destiny. Since the entrance of sin, the ultimate terminus of all unregenerate spirits is the state of death; this condition is entirely irremediable; it is unending existence in a state strangely like -- yet absolutely opposite to God's.

'Our God is a consuming fire' -- so, apparently, is hell. Just what is the difference between these two states we will not discuss here, but simply note that whether in heaven or hell, men finally have to dwell with everlasting burnings. It would seem that the difference between these two destinies lies as much in the kind and quality of spirits that reach them as in the fires themselves. This in turn brings us to consideration of the life of God, the original consuming fire.

The Lord Jesus found no difficulty in suffering death. He only found the death of the cross so distasteful and revolting because it was associated with the God-forsaken condition of sin. He had always been familiar with that death which He called 'laying down His life'. He spoke of this with joy; it is the principle of life. His Father loves Him because He laid down His life that He might take it again. He loved the thought of doing that; He was only going to repeat as Son of Man on earth what He had ever been doing as God the Son in heaven. He had ever done it there as God for God, so on earth, while still doing it as God for God, He was going to do it also as man for God and God for man. He was going to do it because of sin also, but chiefly for men and for God and at His Father's commandment.

That which is known and called death by man has only become an enemy because of sin. To understand this properly it is necessary to master Paul's argument in Romans chapter 7. That which is good can never be made death to us, but sin that it might appear sin to us. Its exceeding sinfulness lies partly in that it makes something which is good and beneficial appear evil. Sin turns friends into apparent enemies and good into apparent evil, because to the mind it loads the innocent and innocuous with the vicious and harmful. That which is called death by men is only the enemy of the body. It debases this temple of the Holy Ghost to worms and dust; truly is the body called the body of humiliation. For the children of God it never need be the body of sin, but it has ever been the scene of man's humiliation.

What is now humanly known as death is quite an involuntary act among normal people; but in its perfect form it was originally known and still is functional in God as the voluntary act of laying down one's life for sheer love to another. In Him this is an eternal principle of life. It did not then, nor does it now, entail cessation of existence, or mean ceasing to exist or be manifest in one form and changing into another. Following Lucifer's fall and the later creation of physical existence it did come to mean that and still exists as that among men, but it was not so in the beginning with God. In the eternal love of God in heaven it meant that one Person of the Godhead, in His humility, by an act of will, laid down His life in order to promote the glory of the other.

Self-sacrifice is an indispensable condition and a basic principle and practice of eternal life; without it it cannot be. Humility is a state of mind; it is also a condition of spirit: it results in a permanent attitude, innocent of pride and precluding self-exaltation. It brings about that state of selflessness which enables love to seek not its own but always another's glory and promotion, giving itself constantly to work to that end. This state of lowliness to the point of nothingness, so characteristic of God, has been warped and changed by sin and transplanted into the human race as death, but with this difference -- in Him it is a necessary causal virtue, but in men, because it came via satan and Adam, it is a noxious perverted result. Nevertheless, the virtue is so real that any person displaying absence of self-seeking and concern for others' good is sometimes spoken of as being dead to self. Thereby we reveal that unconcern for self is thought of and described in the same terms as is death to the physical body. Such selflessness or freedom from self-interest always leads to self-giving, developing into acts of self-sacrifice.

It must not be inferred from the above that any person of the Godhead thinks of Himself more highly than He ought to think. Self-worth or any kind of self-evaluation is never taken into consideration in the act of

self-sacrifice. The thought of personal value does not lie at the root of sacrifice in God; self-esteem is not part of love. Not one of the persons of God counts His life dear unto Himself or thinks He is of greater worth or of more importance than the others. One does not think that He must sacrifice Himself in order to impart His life or devote Himself to the other in order to give Him some worth, standing or being. Sacrifice only came to bear that meaning and assume that character when it was later adapted to man and applied to his spiritual needs, but it was not so originally with God.

This may at first appear very strange to us, but the eternal Life which is God, is this kind of life and can be no other. Therefore, because sacrifice is basic in the highest form of life, it is necessary to all other which is made in its image. As already mentioned it was incorporated in an adapted form into creation when God made man and woman, the highest form of animate life on earth.

Sacrifice is sacred offering. Among men it is always looked upon as sacred offering of something or someone to some higher being, greater in degree or power than the person making the offering. In scripture it is associated with the ideas of approach to God, as in 'approach' or 'ascending-offering'; it is always linked with the altar and fire, so that we read of the burnt-offering or offering made by fire.

These are to be carefully distinguished from the sin-carcass. This had to be burned without the camp because it was totally unacceptable to God and could not be brought into His presence. Unlike Jesus, of whom it dimly spoke, being made sin it remained sin for it had no power to overcome sin. In the type the animal passively received sin by an act of transference from the sinner by imputation through the laying on of hands accompanied by confession of the sin over it. It had no active righteous life which of itself could combat and overcome sin, nor could it rise from the dead to confer its victorious life upon others for justification. But the Lord Jesus rose from the dead triumphant; His life had overcome the sin which He bore in His own body on the tree. To this day His life is the active combative force which overcomes sin in whomsoever He now dwells by the Spirit. This is only possible because of who He was and what He had always done in the Godhead before the world was, or ever the need arose among men for sacrifices to be offered to God.

That it should be the Son who offered Himself to the Father is only right and proper; Jesus said, 'my Father is greater than I'; so the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world. The Father person of God begat the Son person on earth and then had Him slain by man so that, without intermission, under all circumstances, the Son could offer Himself in perfect love to His Father. In this way the eternal principle of life and the everlasting order of love was established on earth among men also. According to the will of God these things shall remain for ever the same among the redeemed.

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