

Start With Hell

by Lynn Andrew

This is a transcript of a recording sent to me by H. (you would recognize the young man's name) which he made when visiting Melchior. His singular purpose at that time was to ask the sage why hell is necessary and why God does not reform every person.

H: I wanted to ask you why the Bible talks so much about hell. I mean, couldn't God reform everyone and make them all believe in him and do everything they're supposed to?

M: People have to choose to do the right thing, but there's a problem with that: choosing good over evil isn't possible.

H: Really? I think everyone chooses to do good most of the time. That's what I see when I look around.

M: The natural man does not see good or even believe in good. What he calls good ultimately is not good.

H: I don't believe that. There are lots of people trying to do good, and they're not even followers of Jesus.

M: It seems that way, but really they're not judging good and evil from God's point of view. They're not making wise choices. Their souls are corrupt, and they have no ability to turn out their corruption.

H: Okay, then, if that's true, why did God create people that way—so they can't turn away from corruption?

M: It's the same stabilizer that keeps you focused in any direction. Animals have it to the nth degree. Humans need stabilizing too, or they would be unable to concentrate or settle on

doing any one thing. You would be trying to go in all directions at once if your brain lacked this feature. It's so strong in some people that they seem never to change. If it's too weak there is insufficient internal strength to maintain stability, and external forces overwhelm. You will find, if you think about it, that to contemplate a great change in yourself is scary. That's your stabilizing mechanism at work.

H: Okay, but we have free will, don't we? People can change if they want to badly enough, can't they?

M: Yes, it is possible. It's possible because you have been endowed with the ability to make choices that adjust the mechanism by which you prefer things. This is a feature that animals do not have at all. It has nothing to do with stability, except that excessively stable people make little use of it. It's a tool for making adjustments in what you like.

H: What do you mean? Can't people just decide what they like and what they don't like?

M: No, it's the other way round. Likes drive the deciding. You can only change your likes indirectly.

H: Why would anyone want to change what they like? It's like, I mean, like, it's liking what you don't like.

M: Ha! Very good! It seems like a contradiction, doesn't it? But it's the way free will works: liking something good produces choices which reinforce the will—the desire, the liking—for more good choices; likewise, an evil choice is the result of a liking which, when satisfied, increases the desire for another evil choice. So the quality and type of liking gradually evolves.

H: Then is everybody stuck with going one way—getting better or getting worse?

M: No, not quite. First, because the process is not as simple as I've portrayed it: your likes sometimes disappoint you, and while the tendency is to keep trying to get satisfaction, sometimes you will try a slightly different direction. Then there are ways to master desire, which take a lot of effort and dedication on an unnaturally high plane. But sharp changes in direction toward either good or evil can, and often do, come from something outside yourself.

H: I see what happens if a person gets started liking something bad, but why does liking bad things sometimes seem good?

M: It comes from trusting yourself beyond reason—in other words, a faulty opinion of your actions which you try to defend. Nature abhors falsehoods and will drive them to destruction by making them seem good until the weakness is fully developed.

H: How can you avoid trusting yourself? Do you have to hate yourself?

M: That would be trying to maintain a falsehood too. You can only hate yourself by loving yourself in a perverse way and calling it hate; so don't go there whatever you do because if you try to unravel perversity and look into its depths, you'll find no bottom.

H: It can't be that hard to be a normal person!

M: No, you're right, of course. It isn't hard at all. Thanks to your

stabilizer, you seem okay and normal to yourself. But that doesn't mean you're out of the evil zone by God's measure.

H: I don't see how trusting yourself is evil, though.

M: The evil comes about when there's a conflict, which you can hardly avoid. It seems paradoxical, but the only way to love yourself, or anyone else, safely is to love Jesus Christ with all your heart. Thereby you love Yahweh God and fulfill his first and most essential commandment.

H: I wish I could do that.

M: In the beginning everyone did.

H: And everyone was happy?

M: Certainly.

H: Even Satan?

M: No doubt.

H: Then how did Satan become evil?

M: There are edges and boundaries even in blessed life where you look down into the abyss; and if you had never experienced evil and the abyss was blank and empty, it would be possible to step dangerously close to the edge.

H: So Satan did that and fell into the pit?

M: We can't very well imagine how things work in heaven, but I suppose evil originated in a rivalry. The potential for rivalry existed when the Creator made a splendid being who might possibly consider himself a rival to God, but by the same token his service and loyalty would be of a very high order.

Maybe Satan did not call the first evil choice evil but regarded it as a novelty. It might have been something like giving advice to an angel that only God had the right to do. We might assume Satan's choices in that direction were incrementally reinforced by gratification of apparent success. It made him the devil who corrupted God's good creation and is ever bent on attracting followers who are willing to fuel their likes with pleasures of evil. It appears that he is out to prove, through our universe of time and space, that evil is normal.

H: And so they keep liking evil and never desire good!

M: Yes, many are satiated with evil pleasure which they do not regard as evil. They are on good terms with corruption.

H: When will it end? You said nature abhors falsehood.

M: Satan knows that, and he wants to see civilization collapse and human life be annihilated before the kingdom of God gets established.

H: Why can't the devil and his followers be locked up?

M: That's what hell is.

H: But torture?

M: That's what isolation is.

H: I mean about burning. The fire. Hell is for the souls of people after they die, right? Can a soul be burned by fire?

M: No, spirits can't be harmed by fire, because fire is a physical thing. Therefore, we conclude that hell is for physical bodies, not just spirits. But the interesting thing is that the primary purpose of hell is to contain the devil and his angels.

- H: Can't it be explained another way? I think hellfire represents something spiritual.
- M: You can't derive theology; you have to take what's given or nothing. Jesus affirmed the reality of hellfire, so we have to respect that.
- H: It's like working backwards, starting at the end.
- M: Exactly. Otherwise you never get hell right.
- H: So are you saying the fire in hell is real fire?
- M: Yes, definitely.
- H: Most people I know don't believe in life after death, so when I explain that they can have eternal life, they don't see any need for hell at all because if somebody doesn't have eternal life then their life just ends. I have a hard time arguing against that. Why does anyone have to suffer on and on without end? Isn't missing out on eternal life enough of a punishment?
- M: All spirits are immortal as far as we know. Your spirit isn't bound to die when you die because your spirit isn't physical.
- H: Maybe a spirit doesn't get old like a body does, but it can cease to exist, can't it?
- M: If you say a spirit ceases to exist, you're talking about an event in time. But that makes no sense because time is a property of physical mass, as you well know, and spirits have no physical mass. So spirits are beyond time as we know it.
- H: Then how can spirits be contained by physical fire?
- M: That's a very good question. Well, spirits want to be attached to physical bodies because that's how they connect with time.

There is an attraction to human incarnation, which is only legitimate for human spirits, because of the capacity of the human body to host an image of God or even God himself. The potential for action and growth is almost unlimited in a human body.

H: Spirits grow?

M: Yes, indeed. Think of the body as the flowerpot in which the flower of the spirit is planted. It's not a perfect analogy because the spirit and body are well integrated, and the flower and the pot together are the whole person. So you can see that once attached to a body, the spirit hates to leave. Oh, I know there are cases reported where a person's spirit leaves the body, but usually it's because the body is unable to support the spirit for a brief period of time, and I think there is still a tenuous connection. And some say they can go traveling in their spirits at will, but that is very doubtful. The spirit loves the body and never leaves the body willfully. (Suicide is when it has run an unsustainable course of falsehood.) If a human body isn't available, evil spirits will possess animals rather than go without a body. It's not a satisfactory arrangement, but it is better than being timeless. Two or more can occupy one body, which is a terrible existence but even that is better than being without a body.

H: If a spirit is without a body, where is it? In the air?

M: There is no way for us to know the answer to that. All we know is our own time domain. When a spirit loses its connection to matter it loses its connection to time.

- H: I get it! The spirit could jump from one point in time to another like time travel.
- M: Any time we try to imagine the spirit realm we bring in our own time. But I assume that a disembodied spirit is a potential phenomenon because of its affinity for the time domain. It will seek to indwell a body where it can exercise some freedom—which requires time. So hell imprisons spirits in physical bodies and imprisons the bodies in the lake of fire. As long as the bodies are kept alive there is that connection with physical time processes, and the spirit is secure.
- H: Wouldn't the fire burn up the body?
- M: One would think so.
- H: Where is the lake of fire? If it's a real thing it must be located somewhere.
- M: Open your Bible to the last chapter in Isaiah and read the last two verses.
- H: "It will come to pass that from one new moon to another and from one sabbath to another, all peoples will come to worship before me, says Yahweh. And they will go forth and look upon the dead bodies of the men that have transgressed against me, for their worm will not die nor will their fire be quenched; and they will be an abhorrence to all people."
Is that talking about hell?
- M: It sounds like it. In the future, when Christ rules the world, people from all nations will make pilgrimages to Jerusalem, and while they are there they will be able to get a glimpse of

hell. In fact, the way it reads, it appears that they'll be required to view hell.

H: It reminds me of something Jesus said. Where is it? In Mark, I think.

M: Mark chapter nine, verses 43 and 44.

H: "If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better to live your life maimed than have your two hands and go into hell, into the unquenchable fire where their worm never dies and the fire is not quenched."

I always wondered about that.

M: You see, Jesus is saying how difficult it is for a person to get rid of corruption within themselves, yet not doing it is the worst thing you can imagine.

H: If we think we're okay, how do we know if we actually have corruption?

M: Turn to Revelation 21:8.

H: "But for the cowardly, the unbelieving, the detestable, for murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death."

M: If you fit in there somewhere, you're headed for the lake of fire. What life has come to is pretty grim when you get God's point of view. We're used to the devil's version.

H: How brave do you have to be? And exactly what are we supposed to believe?

M: Christ will be the judge of that.

- H: But isn't there a way to know in advance if we're okay or not?
- M: Jesus left us with some pointers. Look at Matthew 5:22.
- H: "Everyone who is angry with his brother will be in danger of the judgment, and whoever insults his brother will be brought before the council, and whoever will say, 'You fool,' will be in danger of the hell of fire."
- M: That gives us an idea of the standards of conduct that would apply in a perfect world. In other words, if the world had not been corrupted by Satan, people would live under such strict laws and be blameless. There will come a time when those rules will be in effect, which is what Jesus was saying: notice the future tense.
- H: But I want to know about *now*.
- M: If you want to know God's point of view, that's it. Obviously in this fallen world everyone would be in danger of hellfire along with Satan if Satan had his way. But Jesus Christ stepped in and spoiled Satan's work, baring his own arm to the deadly venom of the serpent. So now there is hope in the world.
- H: I never heard it put that way before, but I think you're saying that we can avoid the second death if we put our hope in the death that Jesus died as being transferable to us.
- M: That's right. You have to like God's plan to keep you out of hell so much that you buy into it with everything you've got (which isn't much). In fact you have to get to the point where you love him more than your life. Unfortunately, that's a leap

of adjustments to one's likes that no one can do on their own, and a jolt from the outside won't do it either. But you can sign up for the course, and once you've been accepted, the Spirit of Christ becomes your schoolmaster, and he works with you.

H: What if I'm not paying attention in class? I think I might be flunking the course already.

M: I never heard of anyone failing in the Holy Spirit's school. Whatever it takes, he will get you through.

H: Even if I don't understand what's going on?

M: You never will understand his working in you because he has taken over the process of adjusting your likes. You still have free will as much as before, but you find that what you like and don't like may be a little surprising.

H: Is there a limit to how many he will accept? That's my original question: why doesn't God reform everyone instead of sending them to hell?

M: Well, the short answer is that Satan has done some real damage. It isn't a game: it's serious warfare and there are soldiers on both sides. Satan's troops are driven by hate for the way God does things, and propaganda keeps them proud of their alliance with the rebel cause. The invitation to switch sides goes out from both sides. Who responds? It's like the winds on the lake: we don't have much influence or control over which way the wind blows. In the end Satan will still be able to raise an army who have rejected God's invitation. God has the nuclear option, and at some point the war must end.

H: I won't ask what the long answer is.

M: And I don't know it.

H: After evil is gotten rid of, let's say someone starts doing the same thing Satan did. Then does the whole process ...

M: As long as there is free will.

H: Then the war starts up again? I don't see how it could ever end!

M: Remember that last verse in Isaiah—you wondered why everyone was required to look down into hell?

H: I see. Hell must never be forgotten.

M: Yes, and must be believed.

H: If it's literal, why are there corpses?

M: For proof of what it is. There is life too.

H: You mean the worms?

M: The Bible sometimes mentions that people are worms in the eyes of critics and enemies who regard them as the lowest form of life. For example, in Psalm twenty-two David says of himself and prophetically of Christ on the cross, "I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people." Isaiah quotes God calling Israel a worm in the eyes their enemies: "Fear not, you worm Jacob, and you men of Israel; I will help you, says Yahweh, and your Redeemer is the Holy One of Israel." Those are not references to literal worms, so someone might argue that the worms in the context of hell are likewise symbolic of "low life." But that interpretation is at odds with the text and contradicts the justice of hell. Job's

famous poetry imaging death as living with worms would be a reasonable interpretation of the worms pictured in the "second death" if it weren't for Isaiah's, "They will be an abhorrence to all people." Clearly the sight of worms crawling over the remains of human bodies is the best fit for that.

H: But I thought the whole purpose was to contain evil spirits.

M: Apparently a spirit will attach to any form of animal life to maintain its connection with time. So it could be that it prefers a worm to losing that privilege. Remember that even the smallest worms are sophisticated creatures with nearly all the parts that humans have, and spirits have no physical dimensions. Size is not as significant as it seems to us.

H: That's a creepy thought. Why don't the worms burn up?

M: Well, maybe they do cook and dry up but reproduce quickly enough to keep the colony going. Nematode worms have been found miles below the surface of the earth. A species nicknamed the "devil worm" has been found living in deep hot crevices of the earth's crust. Speaking of the devil, the Bible likens him to a dragon and a serpent. "Worm" is another name for that mythological beast that breathes fire and lives in a cave guarding treasure. Interestingly the so-called devil worms were first found in South African gold mines. The riddle of life in subterranean fire seems to have been on the mind of people for thousands of years. But nothing in underworld mythology competes with the Bible's picture of hell for being repulsive.

H: So, do you think every person in hell has become a worm?

- M: It's next to annihilation, isn't it? A square meter can host a million nematodes.
- H: Do worms have teeth? Where does it say there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth in the furnace of fire?
- M: Several times in the Gospels it is recorded where Jesus used that phrase. No doubt the bodies of the damned will be quite alive when thrown into the lake of fire. The worm phase comes later after the bodies are burned. Note that the unquenchable fire is in connection with the worms. Granted, it is remarkable that a human spirit would jump to a worm. When the legion of demon spirits was commanded to leave their host, they requested that they be allowed to enter pigs, which turned out to be rather unsuccessful. Apparently they were unable to control the reaction of the animals, who preferred death to being possessed. But notice that they had to ask to be transferred. So the transfer will have been arranged for the spirits of the damned to migrate to worms.
- H: Maybe the worms won't appreciate having those spirits either.
- M: Probably not. They would be wanting to leap into the lake of fire if they could leap. But there would be thousands of worms for each corpse, so if the spirits were forced to keep their connection with time by any means, the means would be available.
- H: It's incredibly gruesome.
- M: It's meant to be. What the Bible says when you put all the information together is quite different from classical pictures

such as Dante's *Inferno*. Hell is at once more disgusting to the onlooker and less torture to the inhabitants because they have been reduced to almost nothing. Remember Lewis' *Great Divorce* where hell is pictured as being insubstantial with respect to heaven. While a spirit covets the human body because it gives the most potential for growth, the worm would have the opposite effect, reducing the spirit to an innocuous thing.

H: It's incredible that a tiny worm like that could host a human spirit. The descent is more than I can imagine, really.

M: You're right there. It's more of a descent than anyone can truly imagine. But think of this: how awful was it for the Spirit of Christ, the Creator of the universe, to descend and become attached to a tiny human egg.

H: It really seems fantastic. I don't know if I could tell anyone about either of those things. Well, not the worms, anyway.

M: Yes, the classical pictures that omit the worms are out of style, and this one would empty the church if a preacher dared to broach it. But someday it will be required knowledge, or if not then Isaiah is a false prophet.*

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* Liberal and conservative expositors alike take Isaiah 66:24 to be (merely) an image of perdition derived from the refuse fires in the Hinnom Valley outside the southern wall of ancient Jerusalem where rubbish was burned and pagans once performed ritual child sacrifice. But no fires are there today, and the Millennial Jerusalem (which verse 23 must reference according to futurist and dispensational doctrine) certainly will not replicate the ancient arrangement. The common practice of commentators is to overlay with plentiful references and lofty platitudes that which does not support their preconceptions, giving the impression that any question remaining in the mind of the reader is not worthy of consideration.