

Justice

Third Series – Sermon Thirty-One

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The sermon "Justice" is the first reflection on series three's theme of Kingship. It is our first glimpse into what the King and His Kingdom will look like for all eternity. A King who serves His citizens with justice, giving each one fair-play.

"Justice" is unique in the *Unspoken Sermons* for MacDonald departs from his characteristic positive presentation of his beliefs for a direct assault on what he does not believe. The mischaracterization of our Father's heart by systems of thought, human inventions that create a god more like us in our self-righteous anger, than our God and Father seen in the face of Jesus Christ. The Father's anger and wrath is His love expressed against all that is killing us and keeping us from living Their Life!

Our heavenly Father does not hide behind inventions of legal justice. What you do is what you get! The New American Standard version says of Psalm 62:12, "*And faithfulness is yours, Lord, for you reward a person according to his work.*" Paul in Galatians 6:7 says it this way, "*Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a person sows, this he will reap.*" However, our sins do not change His Fatherhood into that of a judge. We answer to our Father face-to-face as His children. His love is justice for us. We make mistakes, and His grace allows us to learn and grow from them, a family dealing with life as a family.

The pattern is death and resurrection, falling and rising again. None of us learn the easy way!

Outline

PART 1 - Atonement

What is Divine Justice? – Psalm 62 defines justice in a nutshell.

The Thief, an Illustration – Justice, in the end, is a relational matter.

God's Justice and Mercy Together – Justice can only be justice if it is “fair!”

God's Punishment is Redemptive – God’s punishment, like His judgment, is always redemptive!

God's Obligation to Destroy Sin – What is needed is for His children to leave sin behind and return to His heart!

God's Purpose is Repentance – “God forgive me, make me clean, or let me die! Then, justice, that is, God has conquered sin, and not until then!”

Justice brings Unity – God is our Father, who made us out of Himself, distinct from Himself, and capable of being one with Himself.

Justice is Fair-play - To not allow us to reap the consequences of our actions is to create and sustain the lie that this present darkness is actually Life!

PART 2 - Theories

No Atonement Theories! - Here MacDonald departs from his usual intention and style as a vision caster of the good and beautiful to address the harmful deceptions of invented human theories head-on.

No, to Satisfaction – Our Father has no need in Himself for our punishment and suffering that needs satisfying.

No, to Substitution – Our Father has not given up his Fatherhood because of our sin and become a judge. He requires no suffering from His innocent Son to balance the scales.

No, to Vicarious Sacrifice – Our Father is not an angry and wrathful deity that requires a sacrifice, one to take our punishment for us.

None! – These theories are works of fiction, human inventions, designed to supply a remedy that does not heal the disease of selfishness and sin!

PART 3 – Jesus is Our Atonement

My View of Justice - (MacDonald in his Own Words) *"I believe that Jesus Christ is our atonement; that through him we are reconciled to, made one with God. There is not one word in the New Testament about reconciling God to us; it is we that have to be reconciled to God."*

Jesus is God's Atonement - What the Trinity will not be satisfied with is a universe without Their precious ones at Their sides in play!

God's Nature of Forgiveness - The conclusion is simple, these inventions of faithless men have conditioned us to live in a poverty-stricken faith. A faith that is without trust. Trust that is in the goodness and character of our Loving Father, His Son, and Their Spirit and Life. The Father judges no one. He has turned all judgment over to the Son. Who in His incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension has already judged us worthy of entry into Their Kingdom of Light!

Psalm 62:12 KJV

"Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy; for thou renderest to every man according to his work."

PART ONE - Atonement

What is Divine Justice?

In the English Bible, the translators use mercy, in others kindness and goodness. I presume there is no real difference between them. However, to the religious mind, educated in the theories of the so-called religious world, there is a departure here from the prevailing view. To make it work for them, it would need to say, "To thee, O Lord, belongeth 'justice,' for thou renderest to every man according to his work."

Let us leave for the moment my reason for choosing this passage for the sermon's reference, for I do not intend to build a logical argument upon it. Instead I wish to determine what we mean when we use the word *justice*. **Then in order to determine whether this meaning is correct, especially in reference to God, we need to come nearer to understanding what is meant by the justice of God. It is His justice, in the live and active form, in which the idea of justice exists in our minds and hearts. The reason we are capable of knowing justice and why we have the idea of justice so embedded in us is because He is Just.**

What is the ordinary meaning of justice? Is it not the execution of the law, the assigning of penalties according to offenses? Therefore, a just judge administers the law without prejudice or personal influences. So, where guilt is evident, the punishment is given appropriately as the statute requires. Is it possible then that we may not have achieved justice? The law itself may be unjust. Therefore, the judge makes a mistake, or the lawyers more likely hinder justice for their own gain. So even if the law is good and administered correctly, it does not necessarily mean we accomplished true justice.

The Thief, an Illustration

What if my watch was stolen and I caught the thief and took him before a judge. Suppose he was found guilty and sentenced to a just imprisonment. Can I go home satisfied with the result? Have I received justice? The thief may have received justice, but where is my watch? It is gone, and I remain harmed.

Who has done me wrong? The thief. Who can make this right? The thief, and only the thief. No one but the one that harmed me can make it right. God may be able to move the man to make it right, but God alone cannot right it without the man.

Suppose then, that my watch was found and restored to me. Is the account settled between the thief and me? I can forgive him, but is the wrong removed? Of course not. Suppose he cannot return the watch but wants to repent. He comes to me and says he is sorry he stole it and begs me to accept a small sum as the beginning of his restitution. So, now, how should I regard the matter? Should I feel he has gone far enough towards restitution for the harm suffered? Is there not an appeal to the divine brotherhood in me in the thief's confession and initial restoration? Would this amount be enough for an atonement between us? If he agrees to what I ask of him, should I think it necessary to inflict a particular suffering as demanded by righteousness for the sake of justice? I could still have a claim for my watch, which he could not return, but should I let it go? The one who commits the wrong is the only one who can make it right.

The one thing that this illustration makes clear is that no punishment of the wrong-doer can make atonement for the harm done. How could the thief's punishment make up for me the stealing of my watch? The wrong would be there all the same. I am not saying that punishment should not happen. Far from it. I am only saying that the sentence does not make whole the one harmed. Suppose the thief were to whip himself. Would that lessen my injury or make anything right? Would it atone? Does he have a right to my watch? Punishment may be good for the offender, but that is a different matter altogether.

Another clear thing, even when the return of the watch is impossible, is that repentance removes the offense which no suffering could. I could at least feel that I no longer had an issue with the thief. I could even think that the restitution he gave me, giving to my heart a repentant brother, was infinitely beyond the offense. True, he owed me both himself and the watch, but the gift of himself exceeds and includes the watch.

If you object because, "You may forgive, but the man has sinned against God!" then is not forgiveness a part of divine mercy? Can a man be more forgiving than God! Can a man do what would be too merciful for God to do! Then mercy would not be a divine attribute, for it might exceed what God can give. Mercy would not be infinite and could not be a part of the nature of God.

God's Justice and Mercy Together

Could mercy be against justice? Never! If you understand justice as I do. If anything were against justice, it would not be mercy but cruelty. "To thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy, for thou renderest to every man according to his work." **There is no opposition or strife between mercy and justice. Those who say justice means the punishing of sin, and mercy not punishing it, and attribute both to God, would be to create a split in the very character of God. And so this brings me to the question, what is meant by divine justice?**

Human justice is but a shadow and distortion of divine justice. The justice of God is perfect. We cannot frustrate it in its working, but are we "just" in our idea of it? If you ask people in the church today, nineteen out of twenty would say the justice of God is His punishing of sin. Stop and think about this for a moment. What would we say about a person who punished every wrong? A Roman emperor or a Turkish cadı might do that and be the most unjust of men and judges. Ahab could be just on the throne of punishment and at the same time when in his garden be a murderer of Naboth.

Can we imagine such a distinction of office and character in God? God is one, and it is the depth of foolishness in theology to talk about God holding different offices with different characteristics in each! This idea creates a contradiction in the very nature of God Himself. It represents Him as having to do as a magistrate what He would not do as a Father!

Oh, the folly of any mind that would try explaining God before obeying Him! One who would try and define the character of God without knowing Him instead of crying, "Lord, what would you have me to do?" **Our Father is no magistrate. If He were, it would be an office to which Fatherhood alone gave Him the right. His relationship as Father is above every right we can think He possesses.**

The justice of God is this that He gives every man, woman, and child and everything that has being, fair play. He returns to everyone according to their work, sowing and reaping. And in this fair play lies His perfect mercy. Nothing else could be merciful to the man, and nothing but mercy could be fair to him. God does nothing that any just man, having the matter fairly and fully before him so that he understood, would not say, "That is fair."

Who would say a man was a just man because he insisted on prosecuting every offender? A villain might do that. Yet the justice of God, undoubtedly, is in His punishment of sin! A just person cares and tries to give fair play to everyone in everything. So when we speak of the justice of God, let us be clear about what we mean by justice! Justice may involve the punishment of the guilty, but it does not constitute the whole of it for God any more than it does for us.

Jesus is displeased when we do not judge rightly. Claiming on the authority of the Bible that God does something no honorable person would do, is to lie about God. Claiming the lie as correct is to lie against the very Spirit of God. Upholding a lie for God's sake is to be against God, not for Him. One cannot lie for Him because He is truth. When we cannot see the rightness of something, it would be better to say God could not do such a thing than have us believe that He did something wrong.

If it seems reasonable that God might have done something wrong, it would be better to say, "There must be something about this I do not know or understand." God can have no duty that is not both just and merciful. More is required of our Maker, by His act of creation, than is required of us. More and higher justice and righteousness are required of Him, the Truth. If any say that God does something that seems unjust, then either I do not know what is true, or God did not do it. If, for instance, we say that God visits the sins of the fathers on the children to mean by "visits" that He punishes, and the children to mean innocent ones. We ought to say "Either I do not understand the statement, or the statement is untrue, no matter who says it." God may do what seems wrong to us, but it must appear to be because God is working on a higher and more perfect principle than we who are selfish, unfair, or unloving can understand. But not a lower principle of human justice that He would be unjust in doing.

God's Punishment is Redemptive

The common view is that the justice of God consists of punishing sin. It is in the hope of broadening your perspective of God's punishment of sin that I ask, "Why is God bound to punish sin?"

"How could He be just and not punish sin?" Mercy is a good and right thing, but unnecessary if not for sin. So, we are encouraged to forgive and to be merciful like our Father in heaven. These two principles cannot be in opposition to one another. When God punishes sin, it is merciful to do so. When He forgives sin, it is just. We are required to forgive on the basis that our heavenly Father forgives. So, it is right and good to forgive, and every attribute of God must be infinite as He is infinite. He cannot be infinitely merciful and unmerciful at the same time. He cannot be just and unjust. Mercy is in the character and nature of His Being and needs no theological arm twisting to justify it!

Do you mean that it is unmerciful to punish sin? Therefore, God does not punish it? Certainly not! He punishes sin, but there is no conflict between punishment, mercy, and forgiveness. Punishment may be essential to the possibility of forgiveness. So, I repeat, does God punish sin? Yes, because sin deserves punishment.

Then how can He tell us to forgive? He punishes, and having done so forgives? No, that would hardly do. If sin requires punishment and the proper response is given, then the offender is free. Why should he need forgiveness? We need forgiveness because no amount of punishment meets what we deserve. I will expand on this more later.

Then why not forgive at once if punishment is not essential and God can overlook some transgressions? Why bother with the process if it is not enough anyway? What gain would there be? You may answer, "God will take what He can get."

And this brings me to the fault in the whole idea.

Punishment cannot offset sin. Foolish people sometimes, in a self-promotional pity, will say, "If I have sinned, I have suffered." Ok, but so what? There is no merit in it. Even if you had punished yourself, what did that do to make up for the wrong? You are better because of the suffering and that is good for you, but what good is that for the one you wronged? This idea is a false one altogether. **Punishment, that is deserved suffering, is no balancer of sin.**

There is no point in placing it on the other side of the scale. It is not a balance for anything. Suffering offers no counterbalance to sin. It is not of the same kind, not under the same laws any more than our mind and matter. We say someone deserves punishment, but we do not always feel it is wrong when we choose to forgive without penalty. Neither, when we do punish, should we think that amends have been made for the wrong-doing. **If it were an atonement for wrongs, then God would be bound to punish for punishment's sake, but it cannot be, for He forgives.** So, it is not punishment for punishment's sake as a thing necessary to be done, but for the sake of something else, a means to an end, that God punishes. It is not for justice's sake, or He could not show mercy, for that would be an injustice.

God's Obligation to Destroy Sin

God is not primarily bound to punish sin. He is obligated to destroy it. If He were not our Maker, He might not be obligated, but I do not know. God chose to create creatures who have sinned. Therefore, sin followed His creating act and came into the world. Because of His righteousness God is obligated to destroy it.

"But that is to have no mercy."

No, that is not true. God is constantly destroying sin. And I trust He is killing sin in me. He is always saving the sinner from his sin, and that is destroying it. But, vengeance on the sinner, a tooth for a tooth, is not the heart of God, nor His way. So, if the sinner and the sin in him are one, and are the absolute object of His wrath, then indeed there is no mercy. And the end of sin by its destruction is the end of the sinner as well. But in this destruction, there would be no atonement achieved. God would have done nothing to right the wrong He allowed to come into being through human freedom in creating us. There must, I say, be an atonement, a making up, a bringing together that cannot be completed except by the one who has sinned.

Punishment, I repeat, is not what God requires, but the absolute destruction of sin. What better is the world, the sinner, God, and the truth that the sinner suffers continually through all eternity? Would there be less sin in the universe? Would there be any making-up for it? Would the suffering justify God in creating in a way that He knew would bring sin into the world, justified in making creatures He knew would sin? What redemption would come in the sinner's suffering?

If justice demands it, and if suffering is the counterpart for sin, then the sinner must suffer, and God is bound to require his suffering and not forgive. So, the creation of man would be the act of a tyrant, an act of cruelty. However, I agree the sinner deserves to suffer, but no amount of suffering can atone for his sin. To suffer for all eternity would not make right one unjust word.

Does this mean, then, for one unjust word, I deserve to suffer for all eternity? The unjust word is indeed an eternally evil thing. And nothing but God's mercy in my heart can cleanse me from the evil I spoke. However, does this mean I perfectly understood the act and its consequences, and therefore, eternal punishment would be justified?

Sorrow, confession, and self-abasing love will make up for an evil word, but suffering will not. Evil known only abstractly cannot be justified, even if it is an eternal one. But by despising, hating, and withdrawing from it with specific and determined resistance, can we be saved from it. The only vengeance worth having on sin is to make the sinner its executioner!

Sin and punishment are not antagonistic to each other for us, any more than pardon and punishment are to God. They can perfectly co-exist. The one naturally follows the other, punishment being born of sin, as evil exists only because of the existence of good, for it has no life of its own, being itself a shadow, death. **At the same time, sin and suffering are not natural opposites. The opposite of evil is good, not suffering, and the opposite of sin is not suffering either, but righteousness. The path across the gulf of unrighteousness is not fire, but repentance. If my friend has wronged me, will it console me to see him punished? Will that restore my loss? Will his agony heal my deep wound? Would we be ready for friendship even if it were an enemy? But, would not the beginning of repentant grief, the light of reviving love on his face, heal my heart no matter how deep the hurt?**

Take any of the people in Dante's hell, and ask them if their punishment served justice. Again, I am not saying it is not right to punish them. What I am saying is that justice is not, and never can be, satisfied by suffering. There is no satisfaction in or from human suffering, resentment, revenge, or hate!

Dante's justice keeps wickedness alive in its most terrible forms. In hell, the life of God would proceed, or at least give a home to victorious evil. Would God not be defeated every time one of those lost souls defied Him? All hell cannot make a sinner say, "I was wrong." God would be triumphantly defeated through this hell of His vengeance. And against evil, it would be but the vain and wasted cruelty of a tyrant. There is no destruction of evil through vengeance but an enhancing of its horrible power amid the most agonizing and disgusting tortures imagination could invent.

If sin should be kept alive, then hell must be kept alive. But, while I regard even a minor sin as infinitely horrible, I do not believe any person, never pure enough to see the essential horror of sin, could consciously sin to deserve such a punishment as eternal conscious torment!

I am not now, however, dealing with the question of duration, but with the idea of punishment itself. The idea is that a creature born imperfectly, no, born with impulses to evil that the person did not create and could not help having. This creature is one who has not and could not have ever seen the face of God. To condemn this one to eternal torment is as hateful a lie against God as could be held in anyone's heart. It could only be held in those who do not understand justice and are too wicked to look up into the face of Jesus. In truth, this lie could never find a place in any heart, although it can, in many a dishonest brain. There is but one thing lower than deliberately believing such a lie, and that is to worship the god of whom it is thought!

God's Purpose is Repentance

The vision of suffering that is deep, true, fit, and wholesome must be created in the wicked by a divine vision, a true sight. One that is adequate enough for the repulsiveness of their lives and of the horror of the wrongs they have done. Although physical suffering may be a factor in rousing this mental pain, it is not that pain which causes us the most anguish. The statement of Judas "I would wish I had never been born!" was not because of the hell-fire around him, but because he hated the self that had betrayed his friend, the world's Friend.

When a person hates their selfish self, salvation has begun! Punishment can help awaken one to this result. Not punishment for its own sake, nor the making up for sin. Punishment cannot exist for any divine revenge or horrible lies, and certainly not for any "divine" satisfaction of justice. Punishment is only for the sake of redemption and atonement! God is bound by His love to punish sin to deliver His creatures and by His justice destroy sin in His creation!

Love is justice! Love is the fulfillment of the law, for God as well as for His children. This justice is the sole reason for punishment and why justice requires that the wicked not go unpunished. Through the eye-opening power of pain, they would come to see and desire justice for themselves and make amends and so become just. Such punishment is about justice at its deepest level. For Justice, that is God, is bound in Himself to see justice's freedom for His children, released not in a mere outward way, but in their very being. He is bound in Himself to atone for the wrong done by His children and there is no atonement except by bringing about repentance in the wrong-doer.

When we say, "I did wrong." "I hate myself and my deed." "I cannot live with the fact that I did it." Then, I say atonement has begun. Without this repentance, all that our Lord did would be lost. He would not have realized atonement, repentance, restitution, confession, or prayer of forgiveness, with right living to follow as the sole and proper make-up for sin. For nothing less than this did Christ die!

When a man acknowledges the "right" that he denied before and says of the "wrong," "I reject and hate you. I see now what you are. I could not see it before because I was unwilling. God forgive me, make me clean, or let me die!" Then, Justice, that is, God has conquered sin, and not until then!

Justice Brings Unity

Every atonement that the Father cares about and that Jesus worked for on earth was creative because it works at reconciliation in every heart. **Jesus brings and is bringing God and man, and man and man, into perfect unity. "I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one."**

"That is a dangerous doctrine!"

It is more dangerous than you think about many things; it is about every evil and lie and about every false trust in what Jesus did instead of in Himself. Paul glories in the cross of Christ, but he does not trust in the cross. He trusts in the living Christ and His Father.

Justice requires sin's destruction, and not only that, but that it should be made right. Where punishment can work towards this end, it can help the sinner know what he has done and soften his heart to see his pride, cruelty, and wrong. This justice requires that God should not spare punishment. Therefore, the more we trust in God, the surer we will be, that He will not limit what suffering can do to deliver His child from death. If suffering cannot serve this end, then we need no hell but for the destruction of sin by the sinner's destruction. That outcome to me would be for God to suffer defeat, blameless in His loss, but defeated!

If God is defeated, He must destroy; that is, He must withdraw life from unredeemable souls so He will not keep sin alive throughout the ages of eternity. If there is no atonement, God remains defeated, for He created those who sinned and would not repent and redeem their sin.

To those who believe that God will suffer this defeat of souls, they must surely be among those who do not believe He cares enough to do His very best for them. He is their Father and had the power to make them out of Himself, distinct from Himself, and capable of being one with Him. Indeed, He will somehow save and keep them! Surely not even the power of sin itself can close all the channels between the creator and the created.

Justice is Fair-Play

The notion that suffering is an offset for sin is a foolish idea that by bearing the suffering, we are out from under the claim that my wrong-doing has subjected me. This idea, I think, comes first of all from my sense of satisfaction when the wrong done to me turns to grief. So, why do we feel this satisfaction? Because we hate the wrong and not being righteous in ourselves, we begin to hate the wrong-doer as well as their wrong. Therefore, we are not only pleased to see the law's judgment in their punishment

but righteously pleased with their suffering because of the impact upon us from their wrong. In this way, our natural sense of justice passes over to evil.

There is no pleasure for God in the suffering of the wicked as there is for us. To regard any suffering with feelings of satisfaction, with feelings other than that of sympathy with its healing quality comes from evil. It is inhuman because it is undivine, a thing God is incapable of doing. His nature is always to forgive, and because He forgives, He punishes.

Wrongdoing is so altogether alien to God and it so pains and troubles His heart, that when one of His little ones does something evil, I believe, there is no suffering to which He would not subject them to, in order to destroy the evil thing in them. A person might try flattery, bribery, or coaxing with a tyrant, but there is no refuge from the love of God. God's love will, for love's sake, insist upon the last penny.

"Well, that is not the kind of love I care about!"

No, how would you? I can believe it! You cannot appreciate this kind of love until you experience it. This deep and eternal love will not yield from delivering you from the selfishness that is killing you. What lover would surrender his lady to her passion for morphine? You may sneer at such love, but the Son of God who took on the weight of that love and carried it across the world, is pleased with it, and so is everyone who has experienced it. The love of the Father is radiant perfection. Love and not self-love is lord of the universe.

Justice demands our punishment because justice demands the destruction of sin. It requires that your heavenly Father do His best for us. Our Father is the God of justice, that is of fair-play, having created us as we are, apt to fall and capable of rising again, is in Himself bound to punish to deliver us! If not, His relationship to us is less than our earthly fathers. "To thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy, for thou renderest to every man according to his work." A person's work is their character. Our Father in His mercy is not unresponsive to us but responds to us according to our work.

The idea that the salvation of Jesus is a deliverance from the consequences of sin is a false, uncaring, and human one. The salvation of Jesus is deliverance from the most minor tendency or leaning to sin that is killing us. It is deliverance into the clear air of God's ways, thinking, and feeling. It is the freedom that makes the heart pure, by our will and choice. To such a heart, sin is disgusting. It sees things as they are, that is, as He sees them, for God sees everything as it is. The soul saved by fire would rather sink into the flames of hell than steal into heaven under the shadow of imputed righteousness. **No soul is saved that would not prefer hell to sin. Jesus did not die to save us from punishment. He was named Jesus because He would save His people from their sins.**

PART TWO - Theories

No Atonement Theories!

If punishment has no atoning qualities, how does that fact bear on our popular theologies that most of us are trained in? However, some of us have learned, thank God, that it is false and evil. A doctrine to be thrown from mind and heart.

Many imagine these theories dead and gone, but in reality, they still lie at the intellectual root of much of our thought and teaching in Christianity. Many think they have left them behind when instead they have merely omitted some of the clear and offensive ways of expressing these doctrines. It is discouraging to find how many honest people think they get rid of a falsehood by softening its statements. By doing this, they believe they can pass between those who hold it vigorously and those who are revolted by it if plainly spoken!

Once and for all, I will unburden my soul regarding these horrible deceptions. I have not changed my mind about it since I first began to write and speak, but have written little and said less because I did not want to merely talk against something. My calling was not to destroy the false, except when it was in the way of building the true. Therefore, I have spoken what I believe to be true in my heart, saying little about what I do not believe—trusting, as now I do, that the truth will cast out the false and this disharmony be rejected. Neither will I now argue for or against mere doctrine. My desire is not to change someone's opinion. Let everyone hold what they please. But I will do my best to refute those who think correct opinions are essential to salvation. I would stop them from laying additional burdens other than those of the Master's yoke and have them lose those that are already oppressing them. Lord Jesus, enlighten us!

One cannot have correct opinions concerning Christ unless they have the mind of Christ. We accomplish that through obedience to Him. Our opinions, even if they are correct are of no value to us, and these opinions most likely would make us worse, not better. It is not necessary that we think correctly, but that we live genuinely. Then there is the possibility of our thinking correctly.

One of the primary causes of unbelief in the world is that those who have seen something of the glory of Christ went on to theorize concerning Him rather than obey Him. In their teaching, they have not introduced people to Christ, but taught things about Him. They are more eager for theories than following, speculating from a condition of heart in which it would be impossible for them to understand. They presume to explain Him whom it would take a lifetime of obedience to comprehend. Therefore, their teaching of Him has been totally unacceptable to the common sense of those undeceived.

These teachers naturally push their theories upon others, insisting that you think as they think instead of pointing them to Jesus Christ and being taught by Him. This approach essentially stops all maturity and Life. I would gladly deliver the true-hearted from teachers such as these and their false teachings. Let the dead bury the dead, but I will do whatever I can to keep them from burying the living.

No, to Satisfaction

If there is no satisfaction of justice's demands in the punishment of the wrong-doer then what can we say of the idea of satisfying justice by the punishment and suffering of the innocent? What do we say about the concept of an absolutely innocent one's suffering giving perfect satisfaction to divine justice? Is the injustice done with the consent of the person abused make no difference? It even makes less sense, seeing they say that justice requires the sinner's punishment, and here is one perfectly innocent being punished.

They have now changed the ground of their thought from punishment to suffering that the law requires! Here I declare my absolute rejection of this idea in any form whatsoever. Rather than accept

a justice, a God, whose righteousness, that is fair-play, could experience any satisfaction for the wrong-doer that a man who did no wrong could suffer. I would rather leave a life among men to live among the animals that have not enough reason to be this unreasonable!

What! How could the God and Father of Jesus Christ be like this! His justice content with direct injustice! The supposed anger of Him who will not justify the guilty, appeased by the suffering of the innocent! God forbid! Notice: this evil concept substitutes for punishment, not just suffering, but a torture far from punishment, and this when, as I have shown, that even the most severe punishment can provide no satisfaction of justice! How did this idea ever come to be imagined? It sprang from a trustless dread that does not believe in the forgiveness of the Father. That cannot think that even God will do anything for nothing. That cannot trust Him without a legal arrangement to bind Him. How many of these people, failing to trust God, will find a passage or passages supporting their theory. This approach springs from the pride that needs to understand and define the infinite. That cannot happen before one obeys what it plainly sees of God. Those who need to understand first are vulnerable to believing lies. Lies from which revelation through obedience can alone answer and deliver them.

If anyone says, "But I believe what you despise." I answer, To believe these lies about the character and nature of our Father brings with it its own negative rewards. Its untruth is obvious that it is a poor and shameless work of fiction. It was invented perhaps without the recognition that it was being invented. A fiction meant to satisfy the intellect of its inventor. Otherwise, he would not have invented it. These systems of thought have seemed to satisfy many a humble soul, content to accept without question what is offered without challenging it. Those content that others should think for them, telling them what is the mind and heart of their very own heavenly Father!

If that works for you, so be it. I have no problem with you. That you are content with it just reveals your state of readiness to receive better. So long as you can believe false ideas of God, you will. God knows where you are. Opinions of any kind cannot save us. I would rather you had no opinions at all but set yourself to do the works of the Master. Because of false opinions, some teachers force evil ideas on their people, speaking or implying them from their positions of authority and influence. It is because of my agony and anger that I must speak. I want to save my brothers from having their natural concepts of God blotted out by lies.

No, to Substitution

If you ask how, if the doctrine of substitution is false, could it have remained so long as an article of faith to so many? I would say, the same way God took up and made use of the sacrifice's men had, through their lack of faith invented to please Him. Some children tell lies to please their parents, who hate lying. They will even confess to a wrong they did not commit, thinking their parents would like them to admit it because they are teaching them confession. God accepts men's sacrifices until He can get us to see that He does not care for them.

But again, you may ask, "From where has come the undeniable power of this doctrine?"

I answer, from it having in it an idea of God and His Christ, poor indeed and faint, but fitted to the weakness and unbelief of those that invented it. It was invented for man by man to meet and ease the perceived unbearable demand made upon that same weakness and unbelief. Thus, the leaven spreads. **The truth is there. It is Christ that is the glory of God. But the ideas that poor and slavish souls spread**

concerning this glory the moment they receive some light is quite another. Truth is indeed too good for most of us to believe. We must dilute it before we can take it in and dilute it before we dare share it. We must make it more human before we can accept it enough to get any good from it.

Unable to believe in the love of the Lord Jesus Christ, we invented a mediator in His mother so that we felt we could approach what we could not before. We, being unable to believe in the forgiveness of our heavenly Father, invented a way to be forgiven that would not demand so much from us, which might make it possible for Him to forgive us. **A method that would make sense to those who cannot believe in the goodness and tenderness of our Father's heart, for this goodness they found impossible. They thought that God was bound to punish for punishment's sake, as an offset for our sin. They could not believe in forgiveness that was free, for this did not seem to them divine. Forgiveness itself needed to be justified. So they invented for its justification a horrible injustice, involving all that was bad in sacrifice, even human sacrifice. They created a satisfaction for sin that was an insult to God. God seeks no satisfaction but an obedient return to Himself. What satisfaction might be needed He made Himself in His incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension to turn us from darkness to light!** The plan is too simple for complicated unbelief and arguing spirits. I would gladly help the followers of these doctrines to hate these thoughts of God, but for that, they must mature into better men and women. While they can be satisfied with these doctrines, there would be no point in convincing them intellectually that such ideas were wrong. They would remain what they are, children capable of thinking evil of their Father.

When the heart awakens and recoils from these lies, and discovers how horrible it is to have these ideas of God, then they will begin to search and see that they do not need to accept such statements concerning God's character. They will search after the real God to whom they can trust, a real God to deliver them from these terrible pagan idols. I write for these seekers who may not be to blame for holding them and not for those who love the lies. These leaders, like the Jews of old, cast out from their synagogues those who doubted the genuineness of their moral caricature of God. Those who doubted their distorted representation of the greatest truth in the universe, the atonement of Jesus Christ. Of these leaders, they will unhesitatingly declare they do not believe in such a false atonement. But a lie for God is a lie against God.

Instead of giving their energy to do the will of God, men of power have given themselves to construct systems. Systems to explain why Jesus Christ must die and the designs and necessities of God for permitting His death. Now, the men of power today, while casting away a lot of the teaching of the Roman Church, have clung to the morally and spiritually offensive ideas of justice and satisfaction. That is, human concepts of sacrifice supported by Jewish ideas. It would have been better for the reformers to have kept the concept of purgatory and parted with what is called the substitutionary or vicarious sacrifice!

The following is briefly their system of thought.

- God is bound to punish sin and punish it eternally. His justice requires that sin be punished. But he loves man and does not want to punish him if he can help it.
- Jesus Christ says, "I will take his punishment upon me." God accepts Jesus' offer and lets humanity go unpunished upon a condition.

- God's justice is more than satisfied by the punishment of his eternal Son instead of a world of worthless creatures. The suffering of Jesus is more valuable than that of all the ageless generations of mankind. Because he is infinite, pure, and perfect in love and truth, that is being God's eternal Son.
- God's condition, then, is that they believe in Christ's atonement as thus stated, described and understood.
- And a man must say, "I have sinned and deserve to be tortured through all eternity. But Christ has paid my debts by being punished instead of me. Therefore, he is my Savior, and I am bound by gratitude to him to turn away from evil and sin."

Some would doubtless insist that we confess a good bit more, but this is enough to make my point.

As to God's justice requiring punishment, I have said enough. That the mere suffering of the sinner cannot satisfy justice, I have also tried to show. If God indeed requires the suffering of the sinner, let it be so. But what can be said to confront the base representation that it is not punishment, nor the suffering of the sinner, but just suffering itself! No, this idea alone is enough to expose all the pagan representations as the ways of God. That is that the suffering of the innocent ones is unbelievably preferable in the eyes of God to the wicked, for restoration of wrongs! No again, this idea is the lowest of the low, that the suffering of the good, holy, loving, and eternally perfect One, could be supremely satisfactory to the pure justice of the Father of spirits! Not all the suffering of men could buy them a moment's relief, and their suffering does nothing to oppose and balance their wrongs. That is, the working of the law of equivalents, or an eye for an eye, can not, through millions of years be equal to the sin of a moment or pay off one penny of the debt. But through this idea of atonement so much satisfaction could be achieved through the suffering of the innocent one in satisfying the justice of God. However, in this lie of suffering, only a greater wrong is done! So, the sinners who deserve and should be punished for freedom's sake are set free.

I was raised in the very roots of these ideas, for it is embedded in the gray matter of Scottish brains, and when I reject it, I know full well what I'm rejecting. Through and for the love of the Father, my heart instinctively rose early against this unworthy invention. How strange in a Christian land that we would need reminding that punishing the innocent and letting the guilty go free is unjust! It is unfair to all, the innocent, the guilty, and God Himself. It would be the most confusing of all for the guilty to be justified in their wrongs and treat them as innocent. The whole thing is a piece of spiritual fraud, fit only for a snake-oil salesman. If the wicked should be punished, it is the worst possible perversion of justice to take the righteous and strong and punish Him instead of the sinner, however weak. This perversion is the poorest idea of justice's punishment, for it is essential that the sinner, and no other, should receive the punishment.

The strong being willing to bear such punishment might well deserve worship, but what of God's so-called justice he defeats? If you answer that it is justice, not God, that demands suffering, I say justice cannot demand that which is unjust; this whole system of thought ends up unjust! Our Father is absolutely just. And there is no deliverance from His justice, which is in complete harmony with His mercy. This whole system is ridiculous and unreasonable, a grossly deformed insanity. To represent the Father as part of such a mischaracterization of His actions, as to veil His true face with a mask of cruelty and hypocrisy instead of the true face seen in Jesus. This misrepresentation is to put false legalese into the mouth of our merciful and gracious Father. Rather than believe these lies about Him, those who

know Him, thirst for Him as the deer longs for the streams of water. I would rather say there is no God and so neither eat nor drink until I die! For sure, this one is not our God and Father! This one is not He for whom we have waited! Not the one in Jesus Christ in whom I have seen His face and heard His voice. The Father of Jesus Christ is our God, the One who fills us with gladness in our creation. I will not have the god of the scribes and Pharisees, whether Jewish or Christian, protestant or Greek and Roman, but the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! He is my God! If you say, "That this invention is our God, not yours!" I answer, "Your portrait of God is an evil caricature of the God found in the face of Jesus Christ!"

No, to Vicarious Sacrifice

To believe in a vicarious sacrifice is to think you need protection in the Son from the righteousness of the Father. It is to take refuge in His work instead of the Son Himself, a shelter in a theory of that work instead of the work itself. That is to take refuge behind a false quirk in the law instead of nestling into the eternal heart of the unchangeable and righteous Father. The merciful one renders to every man according to his work, compels their obedience, and admits no legal gamesmanship. He will never let us off with any fault. He must have us clean. He excuses us to the full extent that the truth allows, but no more. God is our Father and will have His children true as His Son Jesus Christ is true. He will not impute, that is assign, to us anything that we are not, (i.e., Christ's righteousness). However, God will not miss seeing the slightest good that we have. Nor will He put out our smoking wick or break our bruised and fragile reed, but sends redemption until we have the victory. He is our "Abba," which exceeds all that our hungry hearts could desire of love and righteousness.

If you say some of the best of us have held these opinions I describe as unworthy of God, I respond, "Yes, some of the best of men have held these theories, and of some of them, I have loved and honored heartily and humbly. Honored them because of how they lived, not because of how they thought. And they were honorable because of their obedient faith, not for their opinions. They were not better men because of holding these theories. But, in virtue of knowing the Father by obeying the Son they rose above the theories they had not seen clearly and so had not recognized them as evil. Many arrived through the maturing process at the point when they abandoned them. A friend I knew who did much good gave them up gladly and did good works that lead to worship of our God in many that held them. Therefore, I hate the theories all the more because of it. The theories are lies working under the disguise of the truth mingled with them. They burrow as near the heart of the good person as they can go. Whoever, from whatever cause of blindness, may hold these lies, they are still lies. And nothing false must mix with the justice we proclaim. There is no place but the pit of hell for lies. Yet, until we see them as lies, how else can we but believe them! Are there not mingled with them the shadows of the most beautiful truths of the universe? So long as we are capable of loving a lie we are incapable of seeing it as a lie. Those who are entirely true will know a lie at once and we must all come to that clarity and vision.

I do not write this for the sake of those who either make or heartily accept these lies. When they finally see the glory of God, what they will see is the eternal difference between the false and the true, and they will not understand until then.

Many who would never have invented them for themselves, received them as truth from those before them humbly, as recognized truth, instead of human inventions. However, it is through obedience to God that we come to know Him. Everyone who tries to obey the Master is my brother, whether he

counts me as one or not. But I will give no ground to a lie because my brother believes it. A lie is not from God; whoever may hold it!

None!

"Well then," many will say, "If you cast these doctrines to the winds, what theories do you propose to substitute in their place?" "In the name of Truth, I say, NONE!"

I will not put out any theory of my own to stir the whirlwinds of words, of dust, dirt, and straw mixed with holy words, hiding the Master's face in the talk about Him. If I had any theories, I would cast them on the road as I walked. Only eyes opened by the sun of righteousness and made single by obedience can judge even a poor moony pearl of formulated thought.

Will you take from me what I have faith in and offer me nothing to replace it? Your faith! God forbid. Your theory is not your faith, nor anything like it. Your faith is your obedience. Your theory, I do not know what that is. And yes, I will gladly leave you without any of what you call faith. Trust in God, obey His word, every word of the Master. This obedience is faith, and so believing, your opinion will grow out of an authentic life and be worthy of it. Peter says the Lord gives the spirit to them that obey Him. Gives the spirit of the Master, and that alone can guide you to any theory that would be of any use to you to hold. A theory gotten any other way is not worth the time spent on it. Jesus is the creating and saving Lord of our intellects as well as our more precious hearts. Anything that He does not think, is not worth thinking about. No one can think as He thinks, except he be pure like Him. And no one can be pure like Him, except they become followers of Him and learn from Him. You know what Christ requires of you is right. If you do not do what you know is true, no wonder you seek it intellectually. But do not call anything gained this way, The Truth. Obey the truth and let the theory wait. Theory may spring from life, but never life from theory.

I will not tell you what I think, but tell you what I believe, and I will tell you that now. Of course, some of what I say I cannot prove, but I can order and live my life by them.

PART THREE – Jesus is Our Atonement

My View of Justice

(MacDonald in his Own Words)

"I believe in Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, my elder brother, my lord and master;

"I believe that he has a right to my absolute obedience whereinsoever I know or shall come to know his will; that to obey him is to ascend the pinnacle of my being; that not to obey him would be to deny him.

"I believe that he died that I might die like him—die to any ruling power in me but the will of God—live ready to be nailed to the cross as he was, if God will it.

"I believe that he is my Saviour from myself, and from all that has come of loving myself, from all that God does not love, and would not have me love—all that is not worth loving; that he died that the

justice, the mercy of God, might have its way with me, making me just as God is just, merciful as he is merciful, perfect as my father in heaven is perfect. I believe and pray that he will give me what punishment I need to set me right, or keep me from going wrong.

"I believe that he died to deliver me from all meanness, all pretense, all falseness, all unfairness, all poverty of spirit, all cowardice, all fear, all anxiety, all forms of self-love, all trust or hope in possession; to make me merry as a child, the child of our father in heaven, loving nothing but what is lovely, desiring nothing I should be ashamed to let the universe of God see me desire. I believe that God is just like Jesus, only greater yet, for Jesus said so.

"I believe that God is absolutely, grandly beautiful, even as the highest soul of man counts beauty, but infinitely beyond that soul's highest idea—with the beauty that creates beauty, not merely shows it, or itself exists beautiful.

"I believe that God has always done, is always doing his best for every man; that no man is miserable because God is forgetting him; that he is not a God to crouch before, but our father, to whom the child-heart cries exultant, 'Do with me as thou wilt.'

"I believe that there is nothing good for me or for any man but God, and more and more of God, and that alone through knowing Christ can we come nigh to him.

"I believe that no man is ever condemned for any sin except one—that he will not leave his sins and come out of them, and be the child of him who is his father.

"I believe that justice and mercy are simply one and the same thing; without justice to the full there can be no mercy, and without mercy to the full there can be no justice; that such is the mercy of God that he will hold his children in the consuming fire of his distance until they pay the uttermost farthing, until they drop the purse of selfishness with all the dross that is in it, and rush home to the Father and the Son, and the many brethren—rush inside the center of the life-giving fire whose outer circles burn.

"I believe that no hell will be lacking which would help the just mercy of God to redeem his children.

"I believe that to him who obeys, and thus opens the doors of his heart to receive the eternal gift, God gives the spirit of his son, the spirit of himself, to be in him, and lead him to the understanding of all truth; that the true disciple shall thus always know what he ought to do, though not necessarily what another ought to do; that the spirit of the father and the son enlightens by teaching righteousness.

"I believe that no teacher should strive to make men think as he thinks, but to lead them to the living Truth, to the Master himself, of whom alone they can learn anything, who will make them in themselves know what is true by the very seeing of it.

"I believe that the inspiration of the Almighty alone gives understanding. I believe that to be the disciple of Christ is the end of being; that to persuade men to be his disciples is the end of teaching.

"The sum of all this is that you do not believe in the atonement?"

"I believe in Jesus Christ. Nowhere am I requested to believe in anything, or in any statement, but everywhere to believe in God and in Jesus Christ. In what you call the atonement, in what you mean by

the word, what I have already written must make it plain enough I do not believe. God forbid I should, for it would be to believe a lie, and a lie which is to blame for much non-acceptance of the gospel in this and other lands. But, as the word was used by the best English writers at the time when the translation of the Bible was made—with all my heart, and soul, and strength, and mind, I believe in the atonement, call it the a-tone-ment, or the at-one-ment, as you please.

"I believe that Jesus Christ is our atonement; that through him we are reconciled to, made one with God. There is not one word in the New Testament about reconciling God to us; it is we that have to be reconciled to God."

Jesus is God's Atonement

I am not writing, neither desire to write, a treatise on the atonement. My purpose is to persuade everyone to be atoned to God. However, I will respond to my questioners and say, that, without the slightest concern or expectation of satisfying them that I do not care about their opinions or anyone else's. But the Truth they hold in the atonement as the making-up for our evil toward God is of infinite importance to me and the universe. In this atonement I believe.

Did not Jesus Christ put Himself into the eternal gulf between their children and the Father? Did He not bring the Father with Him to us so that we could see Him in His face? So that by seeing the Father, we might know Him and come to love Him? Jesus believed and proclaimed the one truth of the universe, the one saving truth, that the Father was good just as He was good. Did He not remain faithful to the end, even in the face of contradiction and death? Therefore, Jesus laid down His life to persuade us to lay ours down as well at the feet of the Father. Has not the very life by which He died and rose become theirs that receive Him, recreating Theirs, so that now we live from the Life which alone *is* Life? Did Jesus not destroy evil by letting it spend itself against Him without resistance, their spending of their anger and rage, and falling defeated and spent at His feet? Indeed, he made atonement!

Do we sacrifice for God? It is the Divine through the Son that sacrificed Themselves for us! There was no other way except through Their incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension to gift Themselves into our hearts! Nothing but love was coming from Them, nothing but selfishness coming from us. This joy of knowing that the Father is like the Son is alone what makes life worth living, makes all this true in my heart and able to believe in the atonement of Jesus Christ! I believe it wholeheartedly, as my Father means it!

Jesus, again, is the power that brings us to the making-up for the wrongs done by man to man. Who could believe in Jesus' atonement and not want to atone to our brothers and sisters for the injuries we have caused? What repentant child, recognizing he has wronged his father, does not desire to make atonement? So, who is the source of this desire, the mover, causer, persuader, and creator of the repentance and passion that restores fourfold? It is Jesus, our propitiation and atonement. He is the head and leader, and prince of the atonement.

He cannot do this without us but leads us to the Father's knee. He leads us to make atonement.

Learning Christ this way, we are not only sorry for our actions, turning from them and hating them, but we become servants of both God and man with an infinitely high and genuine service. We can then offer our whole being to God to whom it belongs by the deepest right. Have I injured anyone? With Jesus to

aid in my restitution and being risen from the dead with Him, shall I not make suitable amends? Have I failed in my love for my neighbor? Can I not love them more now with an infinitely better love than was possible before? That I can and will make atonement, because of Him who is my atonement, making me at one with God and my fellows! Jesus is my life, my joy, my Lord, my owner, and the perfecter of my being through His own perfection. I dare not claim with Paul that I am a slave of Christ. But my highest aspiration and desire is to be that slave.

God's Nature of Forgiveness

"But you do not believe that the sufferings of Christ, as sufferings, justified the supreme ruler in doing anything which he could not have been at liberty to do but for His sufferings?"

I do not! I think the idea is unworthy of man's believing and is dishonoring to the Father! It has its origin doubtless in a healthy sense of sin, but a sense of wrong is not inspiring, even though it may not be far from the temple door. It is indeed an eye-opener, but upon corruption, not upon heavenly truth. It is not the revealer of divine secrets.

Also, there is another factor and flaw in your theories, and that is unbelief. That is our incapacity to accept the freedom of God's forgiveness. The inability to believe that it is God's nature to forgive. That forgiveness is bound in His nature. No atonement is required by Him except that we should leave our sins and return to His heart.

But we cannot believe in the goodness of God in forgiveness. Therefore we need help, so He has given us a mediator. But yet, we will not know Him either. We think of our Father as if He has abdicated His Fatherhood because of our sins and assumed the judge. If He were to release His Fatherhood, which He cannot, for it is an eternal truth of His Being, then He would put off with it all relations to us. He cannot reject the essential and keep the consequences. We should not, cannot, dare not, see that anything but His being our Father gives Him any authority over us. And that nothing but Fatherhood could give Him that perfect right.

These theorists regard the Father of their spirits as their judge and ruler! They give up the idea of the ancient of Days, "the glad creator," and put in His place a miserable, puritanical puppeteer of a God, who does not care for righteousness, but His rights, not caring for the eternally pure, but show. The prophets of such a God take all the glow, hope, color, and worth out of life on earth, offering us instead what they call eternal bliss, a pale, tearless hell. Of all things, turn from this mean and poverty-stricken faith! But if you live impoverished in your own mammon-worshipping soul, how could you believe in a greater God than could exist in that prison chamber of hell?

It is not my desire to cause arguments. I will myself argue with no one. But for the sake of those that these theorists' trouble, I have spoken my mind. I love the one God and Father seen in the face of Jesus Christ, as distinct from all copies of Jonathan Edward's portrait of God, however faded by time, and softened by the use of less glaring colors. To this image I turn with hatred! No such God as he represents was the message John heard from Jesus, "that He is light, and in Him is no darkness at all!"

CLIFFNOTES WITH ORIGINAL MACDONALD QUOTES

What is Divine Justice?

Let us endeavour to see plainly what we mean when we use the word justice, and whether we mean what we ought to mean when we use it—especially with reference to God. Let us come nearer to knowing what we ought to understand by justice, that is, the justice of God; for his justice is the live, active justice, giving existence to the idea of justice in our minds and hearts. Because he is just, we are capable of knowing justice; it is because he is just, that we have the idea of justice so deeply imbedded in us.

The Thief, an Illustration

Who has done me the wrong? The thief. Who can set right the wrong? The thief, and only the thief; nobody but the man that did the wrong. God may be able to move the man to right the wrong, but God himself cannot right it without the man.

One thing must surely be plain—that the punishment of the wrong-doer makes no atonement for the wrong done. How could it make up to me for the stealing of my watch that the man was punished? The wrong would be there all the same. I am not saying the man ought not to be punished—far from it; I am only saying that the punishment nowise makes up to the man wronged.

If it be objected, 'You may forgive, but the man has sinned against God!'—Then it is not a part of the divine to be merciful, I return, and a man may be more merciful than his maker! A man may do that which would be too merciful in God! Then mercy is not a divine attribute, for it may exceed and be too much; it must not be infinite, therefore cannot be God's own.

God's Justice and Mercy Together

There is no opposition, no strife whatever, between mercy and justice. Those who say justice means the punishing of sin, and mercy the not punishing of sin, and attribute both to God, would make a schism in the very idea of God. And this brings me to the question, What is meant by divine justice?

God is no magistrate; but, if he were, it would be a position to which his fatherhood alone gave him the right; his rights as a father cover every right he can be analytically supposed to possess.

The justice of God is this, that—to use a boyish phrase, the best the language will now afford me because of misuse—he gives every man, woman, child, and beast, everything that has being, fair play; he renders to every man according to his work; and therein lies his perfect mercy; for nothing else could be merciful to the man, and nothing but mercy could be fair to him. God does nothing of which any just man, the thing set fairly and fully before him so that he understood, would not say, 'That is fair.'

The lord of life complains of men for not judging right. To say on the authority of the Bible that God does a thing no honourable man would do, is to lie against God; to say that it is therefore right, is to lie against the very spirit of God. To uphold a lie for God's sake is to be against God, not for him. God

cannot be lied for. He is the truth. The truth alone is on his side. While his child could not see the rectitude of a thing, he would infinitely rather, even if the thing were right, have him say, God could not do that thing, than have him believe that he did it.

God's Punishment is Redemptive

'How could he be a just God and not punish sin?' 'Mercy is a good and right thing,' I answer, 'and but for sin there could be no mercy. We are enjoined to forgive, to be merciful, to be as our father in heaven. Two rights cannot possibly be opposed to each other. If God punish sin, it must be merciful to punish sin; and if God forgive sin, it must be just to forgive sin.'

'Then you mean that it is wrong to punish sin, therefore God does not punish sin?' 'By no means; God does punish sin, but there is no opposition between punishment and forgiveness. The one may be essential to the possibility of the other. Why, I repeat, does God punish sin? That is my point.' 'Because in itself sin deserves punishment.'

'Then how can he tell us to forgive it?' 'He punishes, and having punished he forgives?' 'That will hardly do. If sin demands punishment, and the righteous punishment is given, then the man is free. Why should he be forgiven?' 'He needs forgiveness because no amount of punishment will meet his deserts.' Punishment, deserved suffering, is no equipoise to sin.

If it were an offset to wrong, then God would be bound to punish for the sake of the punishment; but he cannot be, for he forgives.

God's Obligation to Destroy Sin

Primarily, God is not bound to punish sin; he is bound to destroy sin.

You mistake. God does destroy sin; he is always destroying sin. In him I trust that he is destroying sin in me. He is always saving the sinner from his sins, and that is destroying sin. But vengeance on the sinner, the law of a tooth for a tooth, is not in the heart of God, neither in his hand. If the sinner and the sin in him, are the concrete object of the divine wrath, then indeed there can be no mercy. Then indeed there will be an end put to sin by the destruction of the sin and the sinner together. But thus would no atonement be wrought—nothing be done to make up for the wrong God has allowed to come into being by creating man. There must be an atonement, a making-up, a bringing together—an atonement which, I say, cannot be made except by the man who has sinned.

Punishment, I repeat, is not the thing required of God, but the absolute destruction of sin. What better is the world, what better is the sinner, what better is God, what better is the truth, that the sinner should suffer—continue suffering to all eternity? Would there be less sin in the universe? Would there be any making-up for sin? Would it show God justified in doing what he knew would bring sin into the world, justified in making creatures who he knew would sin? What setting-right would come of the sinner's suffering?

Sorrow and confession and self-abasing love will make up for the evil word; suffering will not. For evil in the abstract, nothing can be done. It is eternally evil. But I may be saved from it by learning to loathe it,

to hate it, to shrink from it with an eternal avoidance. The only vengeance worth having on sin is to make the sinner himself its executioner.

Sin and suffering are not natural opposites; the opposite of evil is good, not suffering; the opposite of sin is not suffering, but righteousness. The path across the gulf that divides right from wrong is not the fire, but repentance. If my friend has wronged me, will it console me to see him punished? Will that be a rendering to me of my due? Will his agony be a balm to my deep wound? Should I be fit for any friendship if that were possible even in regard to my enemy? But would not the shadow of repentant grief, the light of reviving love on his countenance, heal it at once however deep?

I am not now, however, dealing with the question of the duration of punishment, but with the idea of punishment itself; and would only say in passing, that the notion that a creature born imperfect, nay, born with impulses to evil not of his own generating, and which he could not help having, a creature to whom the true face of God was never presented, and by whom it never could have been seen, should be thus condemned, is as loathsome a lie against God as could find place in heart too undeveloped to understand what justice is, and too low to look up into the face of Jesus. It never in truth found place in any heart, though in many a pettifogging brain. There is but one thing lower than deliberately to believe such a lie, and that is to worship the God of whom it is believed.

God's Purpose is Repentance

When a man loathes himself, he has begun to be saved. Punishment tends to this result. Not for its own sake, not as a make-up for sin, not for divine revenge—horrible word, not for any satisfaction to justice, can punishment exist. Punishment is for the sake of amendment and atonement. God is bound by his love to punish sin in order to deliver his creature; he is bound by his justice to destroy sin in his creation.

Love is justice—is the fulfilling of the law, for God as well as for his children. This is the reason of punishment; this is why justice requires that the wicked shall not go unpunished—that they, through the eye-opening power of pain, may come to see and do justice, may be brought to desire and make all possible amends, and so become just. Such punishment concerns justice in the deepest degree. For Justice, that is God, is bound in himself to see justice done by his children—not in the mere outward act, but in their very being. He is bound in himself to make up for wrong done by his children, and he can do nothing to make up for wrong done but by bringing about the repentance of the wrong-doer.

When the man says, 'I did wrong; I hate myself and my deed; I cannot endure to think that I did it!' then, I say, is atonement begun. Without that, all that the Lord did would be lost. He would have made no atonement. Repentance, restitution, confession, prayer for forgiveness, righteous dealing thereafter, is the sole possible, the only true make-up for sin. For nothing less than this did Christ die.

When a man acknowledges the right he denied before; when he says to the wrong, 'I abjure, I loathe you; I see now what you are; I could not see it before because I would not; God forgive me; make me clean, or let me die!' then justice, that is God, has conquered—and not till then.

Justice brings Unity

He brings and is bringing God and man, and man and man, into perfect unity: 'I in them and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one.'

More dangerous than you think to many things—to every evil, to every lie, and among the rest to every false trust in what Christ did, instead of in Christ himself. Paul glories in the cross of Christ, but he does not trust in the cross: he trusts in the living Christ and his living father.

Justice is Fair-play

No; how should you? I well believe it! You cannot care for it until you begin to know it. But the eternal love will not be moved to yield you to the selfishness that is killing you. What lover would yield his lady to her passion for morphia? You may sneer at such love, but the Son of God who took the weight of that love, and bore it through the world, is content with it, and so is everyone who knows it. The love of the Father is a radiant perfection. Love and not self-love is lord of the universe.

Justice demands your punishment, because justice demands, and will have, the destruction of sin. Justice demands your punishment because it demands that your father should do his best for you. God, being the God of justice, that is of fair-play, and having made us what we are, apt to fall and capable of being raised again, is in himself bound to punish in order to deliver us—else is his relation to us poor beside that of an earthly father. 'To thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy, for thou renderest to every man according to his work.' A man's work is his character; and God in his mercy is not indifferent, but treats him according to his work.

No soul is saved that would not prefer hell to sin. Jesus did not die to save us from punishment; he was called Jesus because he should save his people from their sins.

No Atonement Theories!

Once for all I will ease my soul regarding the horrid phantasm. I have passed through no change of opinion concerning it since first I began to write or speak; but I have written little and spoken less about it, because I would preach no mere negation. My work was not to destroy the false, except as it came in the way of building the true. Therefore I sought to speak but what I believed, saying little concerning what I did not believe; trusting, as now I trust, in the true to cast out the false, and shunning dispute. Neither will I now enter any theological lists to be the champion for or against mere doctrine. I have no desire to change the opinion of man or woman. Let everyone for me hold what he pleases. But I would do my utmost to disable such as think correct opinion essential to salvation from laying any other burden on the shoulders of true men and women than the yoke of their Master; and such burden, if already oppressing any, I would gladly lift. Let the Lord himself teach them, I say.

A man who has not the mind of Christ—and no man has the mind of Christ except him who makes it his business to obey him—cannot have correct opinions concerning him; neither, if he could, would they be of any value to him: he would be nothing the better, he would be the worse for having them. Our business is not to think correctly, but to live truly; then first will there be a possibility of our thinking correctly.

One chief cause of the amount of unbelief in the world is, that those who have seen something of the glory of Christ, set themselves to theorize concerning him rather than to obey him. In teaching men, they have not taught them Christ, but taught them about Christ. More eager after credible theory than after doing the truth, they have speculated in a condition of heart in which it was impossible they should understand; they have presumed to explain a Christ whom years and years of obedience could alone

have made them able to comprehend. Their teaching of him, therefore, has been repugnant to the common sense of many who had not half their privileges, but in whom, as in Nathanael, there was no guile.

Such, naturally, press their theories, in general derived from them of old time, upon others, insisting on their thinking about Christ as they think, instead of urging them to go to Christ to be taught by him whatever he chooses to teach them. They do their unintentional worst to stop all growth, all life. From such and their false teaching I would gladly help to deliver the true-hearted. Let the dead bury their dead, but I would do what I may to keep them from burying the living.

No, to Satisfaction

They have shifted their ground; it is no more punishment, but mere suffering the law requires! The thing gets worse and worse. I declare my utter and absolute repudiation of the idea in any form whatever. Rather than believe in a justice—that is, a God—to whose righteousness, abstract or concrete, it could be any satisfaction for the wrong-doing of a man that a man who did no wrong should suffer, I would be driven from among men, and dwell with the wild beasts that have not reason enough to be unreasonable.

What! God, the father of Jesus Christ, like that! His justice contented with direct injustice! The anger of him who will nowise clear the guilty, appeased by the suffering of the innocent! Very God forbid! Observe: the evil fancy actually substitutes for punishment not mere suffering, but that suffering which is farthest from punishment; and this when, as I have shown, punishment, the severest, can be no satisfaction to justice!

No, to Substitution

The truth is there. It is Christ the glory of God. But the ideas that poor slavish souls breed concerning this glory the moment the darkness begins to disperse, is quite another thing. Truth is indeed too good for men to believe; they must dilute it before they can take it; they must dilute it before they dare give it. They must make it less true before they can believe it enough to get any good of it.

They could not believe in clear forgiveness; that did not seem divine; it needed itself to be justified; so they invented for its justification a horrible injustice, involving all that was bad in sacrifice, even human sacrifice. They invented a satisfaction for sin which was an insult to God. He sought no satisfaction, but an obedient return to the Father. What satisfaction was needed he made himself in what he did to cause them to turn from evil and go back to him.

I know the root of all that can be said on the subject; the notion is imbedded in the gray matter of my Scotch brains; and if I reject it, I know what I reject. For the love of God my heart rose early against the low invention. Strange that in a Christian land it should need to be said, that to punish the innocent and let the guilty go free is unjust!

No, to Vicarious Sacrifice

To believe in a vicarious sacrifice, is to think to take refuge with the Son from the righteousness of the Father; to take refuge with his work instead of with the Son himself; to take refuge with a theory of that

work instead of the work itself; to shelter behind a false quirk of law instead of nestling in the eternal heart of the unchangeable and righteous Father, who is merciful in that he renders to every man according to his work, and compels their obedience, nor admits judicial quibble or subterfuge. God will never let a man off with any fault. He must have him clean. He will excuse him to the very uttermost of truth, but not a hair's-breadth beyond it; he is his true father, and will have his child true as his son Jesus Christ is true. He will impute to him nothing that he has not, will lose sight of no smallest good that he has; will quench no smoking flax, break no bruised reed, but send forth judgment unto victory. He is God beyond all that heart hungriest for love and righteousness could to eternity desire.

None!

'Well, then,' will many say, 'if you thus unceremoniously cast to the winds the doctrine of vicarious sacrifice, what theory do you propose to substitute in its stead?'

'In the name of the truth,' I answer, None. I will send out no theory of mine to rouse afresh little whirlwinds of dialogistic dust mixed with dirt and straws and holy words, hiding the Master in talk about him. If I have any such, I will not cast it on the road as I walk, but present it on a fair patine to him to whom I may think it well to show it. Only eyes opened by the sun of righteousness, and made single by obedience, can judge even the poor moony pearl of formulated thought.

My View of Justice

(MacDonald in his Own Words)

Jesus is God's Atonement

Did not the Lord cast himself into the eternal gulf of evil yawning between the children and the Father? Did he not bring the Father to us, let us look on our eternal Sire in the face of his true son, that we might have that in our hearts which alone could make us love him—a true sight of him? Did he not insist on the one truth of the universe, the one saving truth, that God was just what he was? Did he not hold to that assertion to the last, in the face of contradiction and death? Did he not thus lay down his life persuading us to lay down ours at the feet of the Father?

We sacrifice to God!—it is God who has sacrificed his own son to us; there was no way else of getting the gift of himself into our hearts. Jesus sacrificed himself to his father and the children to bring them together—all the love on the side of the Father and the Son, all the selfishness on the side of the children. If the joy that alone makes life worth living, the joy that God is such as Christ, be a true thing in my heart, how can I but believe in the atonement of Jesus Christ? I believe it heartily, as God means it.

He could not do it without us, but he leads us up to the Father's knee: he makes us make atonement.

God's Nature of Forgiveness

But men cannot believe in the forgiveness of God. Therefore they need, therefore he has given them a mediator. And yet they will not know him. They think of the father of souls as if he had abdicated his fatherhood for their sins, and assumed the judge. If he put off his fatherhood, which he cannot do, for it is an eternal fact, he puts off with it all relation to us.

I desire to wake no dispute, will myself dispute with no man, but for the sake of those whom certain believers trouble, I have spoken my mind. I love the one God seen in the face of Jesus Christ. From all copies of Jonathan Edwards's portrait of God, however faded by time, however softened by the use of less glaring pigments, I turn with loathing. Not such a God is he concerning whom was the message John heard from Jesus, that he is light, and in him is no darkness at all.