

Looking to Writings of Jonathan Edwards Jr. To Explore The Use of Popular 19th Century Ideas and Theological Framings In Alma 42

Let me be clear from the start that I'm not suggesting any direct or willful plagiarism of Jonathan Edwards Jr. Rather, my intention is simply to demonstrate that these theological framings regarding the necessity of the atonement (which I once felt were incredibly unique and powerful, and once attributed to an ancient American prophet) are actually surprisingly reminiscent of the ideas and voicings that happen to have been making the rounds in Joseph's day. I think it is very challenging to hold the position that an ancient American prophet happened to have been expressing the same concepts that just happen to have been uniquely framed in such similar ways by theologians in Joseph's time period. Consider the following examples from "The Works of Jonathan Edwards Jr." All but three of these quotes are found between pages 131-142.

LIFE AS A PROBATIONARY STATE—A TIME FOR REPENTANCE

Alma 42: 4, 13:

Verse 10: And thus we see, that there was a time granted unto man to repent, yea, a **probationary time**, a time to repent and serve God.

Verse 13: ...according to justice, the plan of redemption could not be brought about, only on conditions of repentance of men in **this probationary state**, yea, this preparatory state.

Edwards Jr, pg 131:

...it is doubtless a wise constitution that **this life is the only state of probation**. Therefore it is not within the reach of infinite wisdom, to use any further means after this life for the recovery of those who are incorrigible here. So that this entire paragraph is begging the question; it takes for granted, that this life is not **the only state of probation, or that the endless punishment of all who die impenitent** is not a doctrine of divine revelation.

SALVATION ONLY ON "CONDITIONS OF REPENTANCE"

Alma 42: 13:

Therefore according to justice, the plan of redemption could not be brought about, **only on conditions of repentance** of men in this probationary state,

yea this preparatory state; for except it were for these conditions, mercy could not take effect except it should destroy the work of justice.

Edwards Jr, pg 135-136:

If divine goodness without respect to the atonement of Christ, which is foreign from the subject of this chapter, require the salvation of all men; it either requires that they be saved, whether they repent or not, **or it requires that they be saved on the condition of their repentance only.** (135-136)

...divine goodness requires the salvation of all men, on the condition of their repentance only... Repentance then repairs the damage done to the universe by sin, and so **makes satisfaction or atonement for sin.** The very essence of atonement is something done to repair the damage done by sin to the universe, so that the sinner can be exempted from punishment, without any disadvantage to the universe. (136)

SIN REQUIRES ETERNAL PUNISHMENT

Alma 42:16:

Now, **repentance could not come unto men except there were a punishment, which also was eternal as the life of the soul** should be, affixed opposite to the plan of happiness, which was as eternal also as the life of the soul.

Edwards Jr:

pg 134: And if the proof in Chap VI, that endless punishment is just, be valid, then **justice is not satisfied by any punishment short of endless...**

pg 141: Hatred of sin is as essential to the Deity as love of holiness ... The salvation of the sinner consists in deliverance from the curse of the law; **the curse of the law is endless punishment;**

pg 142: the public good requires his **endless punishment**

GOD MUST SATISFY THE “DEMANDS OF JUSTICE,” OR ELSE NOT BE WHAT HE IS

Alma 42: 13, 15, 24, 25:

Therefore according to justice, the plan of redemption could not be brought about, only on conditions of repentance of men in this probationary state, yea this preparatory state; for except it were for these conditions, mercy could not take effect except it should destroy the work of justice. Now **the work of justice could not be destroyed; if so, God would cease to be God.**

...to **appease the demands of justice, that God might be a perfect, just God,** and a merciful God also.

For behold, **justice exerciseth all his demands...**

What, do ye suppose that mercy can rob justice. I say unto you, Nay; not one whit. If so, God would cease to be God.

Edwards Jr:

pg 137: Any further punishment than this is unjust, and **any punishment short of this, falls short of the demand of justice.** At the same time that this is **demanded by justice,** it is demanded by the general good too...So that a just punishment of any crime is not only consistent with the general good, but is absolutely required by it... And if the endless punishment of sin be just; it is of course, on the proviso just made, perfectly consistent with the general good of the universe, and absolutely required by it, and equally **required by the goodness of God.** And to say that though it be just, it is not reconcilable with the divine goodness, is the same as to say, that though it be just, it is not reconcilable with justice.

pg 140: The voice of reason is, that divine goodness, or a regard to the general good **requires, that sin be punished** according to its demerit, in some instances at least; **otherwise God would not appear to be what he really is,** an enemy to sin... if God were never to punish it, it would seem, that he his no enemy to it....

pg 134: ...this end of future punishment is not the personal good of the patients, but **to satisfy justice, and support the authority and dignity of the divine law and government...** Now if the end of future punishment, whether temporary or endless, be to satisfy justice, and to support government, then the general good is promoted by the satisfaction of justice...

THE ISSUE OF “SATISFYING THE DEMANDS OF JUSTICE” WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY MAINTAINING GOD’S “DIVINE GOODNESS” AND PERFECTION

Alma 42:15:

And now, the plan of mercy could not be brought about except an atonement should be made; therefore God himself atoneth for the sins of the world, to bring about the plan of mercy, **to appease the demands of justice, that God might be a perfect, just God, and a merciful God also.**

Edwards Jr:

264: **“God must be just as well as merciful. He can never exercise one of his attributes so as to clash or interfere with another.”**

pg 134: But the divine law may, in some instances, be executed consistently with divine goodness.... **And who will dare to say that God has made a law, which he cannot in any one instance execute consistently with his own perfections; and that if he should execute it in any instance, his goodness and mercy must be inevitably given up?** Nay, he delights in cruelty?

137-138: I beg leave to ask... whether if Christ has not made atonement, it would have been consistent with the general good of the universe, that sinners be punished without end. If they answer in the affirmative, then **endless punishment is in itself reconcilable not with justice only, but with goodness too**, as goodness always acquiesces in that which is consistent with the general good. For if only in consequence of the atonement, endless punishment be inconsistent with divine goodness, it becomes inconsistent with it, not on account of anything in the endless punishment of sin or in the divine goodness simply; but wholly on account of something external to them both; and therefore that external something being left out of the account, **there is no inconsistency between the endless punishment of sin and the divine goodness in themselves considered.**

141: But whatever punishment is just with respect to any man, provided no atonement be made by a substitute, is necessary to the public good...and if the public good require it, the divine goodness requires it.

142: If the endless punishment of the sinner be just, and no atonement be made by a substitute, the public good requires his endless punishment, and the divine goodness of course requires it. So that if the sinner can be saved by free grace only, and no atonement be made by a substitute, the endless punishment of the sinner is not at all inconsistent with divine goodness; and to say that it is inconsistent with the divine goodness, and yet to say that all men are saved by

free grace, and can be saved no other way, implies, as I said, a direct contradiction....

IF THERE IS NO LAW, THERE IS NO SIN. LAW DISCOURAGES SIN

Alma 42: 17,19,20:

How could he sin if there was no law? ... Now, if there was no law given —if a man murdered he should die—would he be afraid he would die if he should murder? And also, if there was no law given against sin men would not be afraid to sin.

Edwards Jr:

pg 142: “Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. (For until the law sin was in the world; but **sin is not imputed when there is no law.**

pg 247: It will not be denied that **if there were no punishment threatened to the wicked, it would naturally and directly encourage them to persist in vice.**

pg 248: It is generally agreed that murder deserves death. But suppose a law should be made, by which no murderer should be punished with death, or with any other punishment to be continued longer, than tie he should repent. **Would not such a law as this, compared with the law as it now stands, naturally and directly tend to encourage murder?**

The source of all of the above quotes can be found here:

<https://archive.org/stream/worksofjonathane01edwa#page/130/mode/2up>