



Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter



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John Wesley on the Relationship Between Justice, Wealth and Hunger Part One (Reprinted from 2013)

Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. 2 Thessalonians 3:10b.

You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.” John 12:8

Recently Congressman Stephen Fincher from the 8th Congressional District in West Tennessee invoked the scriptures cited above to justify cutting food stamp assistance to millions of poor Americans, many of whom are children. He equated such use of taxpayer funds as stealing from taxpayers and suggested that such help to the poor was contrary to scripture and Christian teaching. The charge was somewhat ironic since Fincher is reportedly the recipient of around nine million dollars in Agricultural subsidies from those same taxpayers. But, since he chose to defend his stance by invoking scripture it brought to my mind some of the writings of John Wesley concerning the relationship between Justice, Wealth and Hunger because, indeed, the poor **have** always been with us.

First, let us look at the two scriptures in question. Fincher is taking the quote from 2 Thessalonians out of context. The full section in which the quote appears is cited below:

⁶ Now we command you, beloved, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from **believers** who are living in idleness and not according to the tradition that **they received from us.** ⁷ **For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us;** we were not idle when we were with you, ⁸ and we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it; but with toil and labor we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you. ⁹ This was not because we do not have that right, but in order to give you an example to imitate. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. ¹¹ For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. ¹² Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. ¹³ Brothers and sisters, do not be weary in doing what is right.

¹⁴ Take note of those who do not obey what we say in this letter; have nothing to do with them, so that they may be ashamed. ¹⁵ Do not regard them as enemies, but warn them as believers.¹ (Emphasis added)

¹ The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version. 1989 (2 Th 3:6–15). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Paul is addressing the community of believers, the Church, in Thessalonica. At this time many persons believed that the return of Christ was imminent and there was not any need to work or otherwise prepare for tomorrow's needs. After all, they reasoned, why put in a crop that would never be harvested because Christ would return before the harvest. They contended that it was better to simply pray and worship, awaiting the return of Christ. Paul told the church that such persons could not be a part of the community unless they worked to support the needs of the community. It was practical advice that, if not followed, would have led to the collapse of the church. In contrast, the vast majority of families who receive the very small amount of food stamp dollars often work one, two, three or more minimum wage jobs in a desperate effort to support their families. Indeed, they may work much harder than Congressman Fincher ever worked. To use this passage of scripture from 2 Thessalonians to deny the biblical command to help the poor is a misuse of scripture and poor theology.

As you may remember, I preached on the John chapter a few weeks ago. The verse quoted is a reference to a passage from Deuteronomy:

¹¹ Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, "Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbor in your land." Deuteronomy 15:11.

Rather than an admonishment that there is no purpose served by helping the poor, the passage from Deuteronomy, and the Gospels as well, reminds us of our obligation to help the poor.

From the beginning, the theology of the Methodist Societies founded by John Wesley focused on the biblical concept of Justice. Scripture first mentions 'justice' in connection with God's purposes for Abraham, including being a blessing for all nations.

*"I have chosen [Abraham], that he may charge his children and his household after him to keep **the way of the Lord** by doing righteousness and justice." Gen 18:19a.*

The justice to be practiced by Abraham will be an example for the world.

Under the laws of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, justice is equated with giving honest testimony in legal proceedings, not showing partiality to either the poor or the rich.

¹⁵ You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great: with justice you shall judge your neighbor. Lev 19:15.

¹⁹ You must not distort justice; you must not show partiality; and you must not accept bribes, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of those who are in the right. ²⁰ Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the LORD your God is giving you. Deut. 16:19-20.

Also appearing for the first time in Deuteronomy is a theme that will define the concept of justice for later generations of Jews and Christians. **Those in power have a duty to dispense 'justice,' defined as fair treatment, compassion and mercy, for the weak and those with no power base.** Thus, Deuteronomy admonishes the people to protect the rights of aliens, widows and orphans. Deut 24:17; 27:19. Scripture reminds us that, when we forget these priorities, God hears, and answers, the cries of those we oppress. (See, e.g. Ex. 2:23-25; 22:27; Ps 34:17)

The prophets also equated justice with fair treatment of the powerless. Amos condemns those who trample the needy into the dirt, and calls instead that they should “let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” Amos 5:24. Micah condemns the rulers who have perverted justice and equity. Micah 3:9. Micah then sums up the desire of God in these words:

He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” Micah 6:8.

Christ came to establish God’s Justice. Scriptures considered by Christians to foretell the coming of Christ speak of the establishment of God’s Justice.

*Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; **he will bring forth justice to the nations.**” Isa. 42:1.*

The coming servant’s **justice** will be a light to all the peoples. Isa. 51:4. Similarly, in the Book of Jeremiah we find this passage:

*In those days and at that time I will cause a righteous Branch to spring up for David; and **he shall execute justice and righteousness in the land.**” Jeremiah 33:15.*

Biblical Justice focuses on insuring that the powerless are not oppressed or crushed by those with power. The coming Messiah, Christ, would establish God’s Justice in the world.

Wesley on Justice

This was the understanding held by John Wesley when he began the movement that became the United Methodist Church. He most often used the phrase “Justice and Mercy” since he saw these as two of the inherent attributes of God. God was inherently and perfectly **Just** and God’s **Mercy** was likewise inherent to God’s nature and likewise perfect. An example of Wesley’s understanding of Justice was the problem of the poor getting a fair shake in Court. In his tract *A Further Appeal to Reason*, Wesley states:

And what redress? Suppose a great man to oppress the needy; suppose the rich grinds the face of the poor; what remedy against such oppression can he find in this Christian country [Great Britain]? If the one is rich and the other poor, doth not justice stand afar off? And is not the poor under the utmost improbability (if not impossibility) of obtaining it? Perhaps the hazard is greater among us, than either among Jews, Turks, or Heathens.

He then speaks of the ways that a rich man can tie a poor man up in Court, making the case that it is very difficult for the poor to get justice in the legal system. In that regard, little has changed. It is still possible, and indeed a common practice, for those with greater resources to use the American legal system to bury the just claims of the poor.

Another example is Wesley’s concern for Justice is his condemnation of colonialism in India:

What consummate villains, what devils incarnate, were the [British] managers there! What utter strangers to justice, mercy, and truth; to every sentiment of humanity! I believe no heathen history contains a parallel [to what England has done to India]. I remember none in all the annals of antiquity: Not even the divine Cato, or the virtuous Brutus, plundered the provinces committed to their charge with such merciless cruelty as the English have plundered the desolated provinces of Indostan.

*I looked over Mr. Bolt's "Considerations on the Affairs of India." Was there ever so melancholy a picture? How are the mighty fallen! The Great Mogul, Emperor of Hindostan, one of the mightiest Potentates on earth, is become a poor, little, impotent slave to a Company of Merchants! His large, flourishing empire is broken in pieces and covered with fraud, oppression, and misery! And we may call the myriads that have been murdered happy, in comparison of those that still groan under the iron yoke. **Wilt not thou visit for these things, O Lord? Shall the fool still say in his heart, "There is no God?" (emphasis added.)***

Likewise, Wesley was a firm abolitionist believing the system of slavery to be unjust and an affront to God. Speaking against Slavery he wrote this:

*This is the plain, unaggravated matter of fact. Such is the manner wherein our African slaves are procured; such the manner wherein they are removed from their native land, and wherein they are treated in our plantations. I would now inquire, whether these things can be defended, on the principles of even heathen honesty; whether they can be reconciled (setting the Bible out of the question) with any degree of either **justice or mercy.***

*The grand plea is, "They are authorized by law." **But can law, human law, change the nature of things?** Can it turn darkness into light, or evil into good? By no means. Notwithstanding ten thousand laws, right is right, and wrong is wrong still. **There must still remain an essential difference between justice and injustice,** cruelty and mercy. So that I still ask, Who can reconcile this treatment of the Negroes, first and last, with either mercy or justice?*

***Where is the justice** of inflicting the severest evils on those that have done us no wrong? of depriving those that never injured us in word or deed, of every comfort of life? Of tearing them from their native country, and depriving them of liberty itself, to which an Angolan has the same natural right as an Englishman, and on which he sets as high a value? Yea, where is the justice of taking away the lives of innocent, inoffensive men; murdering thousands of them in their own land, by the hands of their own countrymen; many thousands, year after year, on shipboard, and then casting them like dung into the sea; and tens of thousands in that cruel slavery to which they are so unjustly reduced?*

Wesley's concept of justice was based upon scripture. Wesley viewed the biblical concept of Justice as part of the nature of God and humans most often offend God's Justice when they oppress the poor with their power or wealth. Wesley went on to discuss this issue in an interesting tract regarding Wealth and Poverty called **Thoughts on the Present Sacristy of Provisions**. It was written in 1773 and explored the relationship between economic market forces and the starvation then being experienced by millions of the poor of England. I'll take that tract up in part two of this article.

Thursday Morning Bible Study

A group within the Church has expressed an interest in a Bible Study on Thursday mornings between 10:00 and 11:30. We will begin that study on August 20th. Anyone is welcome to attend. It has been my practice to allow the group to decide what parts of the bible they wish to study. I will be polling them in the weeks ahead. If you would like to be a part of this study and have a portion of the bible you would especially like to study please send me a note, give me a call or talk to me here at the Church.

Congratulations to The Disciple I Class

On July 9th the Disciple I class completed its study of the Bible. Over 34 weeks, beginning last September, these people have read and studied the Bible from Genesis to Revelation:

Jason Aldred
Lindsey Aldred
Jan Bell
Stacy Bell
Houston Hartsock
Dawn Stevens
Richard Stevens

For almost 30 years Disciple Bible Study has helped tens of thousands of United Methodists, as well as people of other traditions, to develop a deep understanding of scripture and its meaning in our daily lives. Disciple Bible Study challenges us to hear the Living Word of God for our lives and then to live that Word. Please congratulate these bible on their faithful study of the scriptures and also ask them how the experience has affected their lives.

New Disciple Bible Study

As noted above, Disciple Bible Study is a powerful experience that can open the bible up for the participants. I would be willing to begin a new class this Fall if at least seven people desired to undertake the 34 week study. I could do this study on Monday or Tuesday nights between 7 and 9. If participants would prefer to meet on a week day that could also be arranged. If you are interested please contact me at the Church. If you desire additional information for yourself or to give to a friend I have some explanatory booklets available.

The Poverty and Justice Bible

⁶ The LORD said: I will punish Israel for countless crimes, and I won't change my mind. They sell honest people for money, and the needy are sold for the price of sandals. ⁷ They smear the poor in the dirt and push aside those who are helpless.

Amos 2:6-7 CEV

Amos was a prophet to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Based upon historical and archaeological evidence we know that Israel was both a wealthy nation and a nation with a wide wealth gap. There were the very rich and the very poor with few in between. No Old Testament prophet seems to speak to our society as clearly as Amos. The poor were sold into slavery for trivial debts (the price of a pair of sandals) and the poor had no rights. Amos spoke his judgments to individuals and to the rulers of Israel.

You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me.” John 12:8

This passage also appears in Matthew and Mark. As noted earlier, Jesus is quoting Torah. Deuteronomy says that we will always have the poor with us so we must always help the poor. Failure to care for the poor is probably the most commonly named sin in scripture.

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The Poverty & Justice Bible is a bible that highlights each passage of scripture that deals with the issues of poverty and justice. There are more than 2000 references in scripture to poverty and justice, as opposed to four or five on such controversial subjects as homosexual acts or marriage. Yet many Christians seem to think that helping the poor is a pointless and even harmful act. As an on-going part of this newsletter, I will be providing citations to passages from the Old and New Testaments each week that deal with what scripture tells us about poverty and justice. If you are interested in learning more about *The Poverty & Justice Bible* you can check on Amazon.com or go to www.Justicebible.org.

Prayer Ministry

The following persons are part of the prayer ministry at Trinity UMC:

Elva Beard	Mac McAfee	Kenneth Stevens	Judy Richardson
Larry Eastwood	Rachel Newman	Patricia Stevens	Charles Wilson
Leslie Eastwood	Erin McKibben	Sam Richardson	

The members of the prayer ministry of Trinity United Methodist church covenant with one another to pray daily for:

- Those concerns on the prayer list of the Church and for healing of body and spirit for all persons listed;
- For each ministry of the church that each ministry would work to bring the Gospel to those within our community and most especially to bring the Gospel to those who have not yet accepted Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior;
- For all the members of the Trinity UMC community that they be led and enabled to live as the Body of Christ;
- For our local community and all its needs, especially for those who are struggling with the burden of poverty;
- For our nation and our world that God help lead the people of the world to live in peace with God’s Kingdom.

If you would like to be a part of this ministry (or if you have already spoken to me about it and were inadvertently left off the list) please let me know and I will see that you are added.

Up-Coming Sermons

July 26th: You Feed Them. But that would require a miracle, wouldn't it? The Disciples think it's impossible. Do we even think that it's a good idea? My texts are Ephesians 3:14-21 and John 6:1-21

August 2nd: The Duty of Constant Communion. Why should we celebrate communion? How often should we celebrate communion. These issues are hundreds of years old. John Wesley had some thoughts on the subject from over 300 years ago. My texts are Isaiah 25:6-10 and 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

Worship Leader's Schedule

July 26

Mike Fetting, **Liturgist**
Mike & Elaine Rohrig, **Greeters**
Jan & Stacy Bell, **Ushers**

August 2

Linda Robinson, **Liturgist**
Maurice & Joyce Edwards, **Greeters**
Rodger & Cherry Klein, **Ushers**

Announcements

The "**Companions in Christ**" Sunday School class has begun the sequel to "Knowing God." **This study is, "Loving God."** We have extra books and extra chairs if you would care to join our class. **The class will be meeting promptly at 9:45 rather than 10:00.** All are welcome to this time of learning, refreshment and fellowship.

Don't forget: The **Men's group** will meet this **Saturday, July 25 at 8:30 AM.** All men are encouraged to attend.

July Birthdays

Mac McAfee, Leslie Eastwood, Linda Robinson, Renita Hartsock

Happy Birthday to each of you!