



Trinity United Methodist Church Newsletter

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John Wesley on the Relationship Between Justice, Wealth and Hunger Part One

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.

Firstly, 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 others in 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 Way of the Lord is righteousness and justice. 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 and fair dealing 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 proclaims 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 British 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 of 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 **Scarcity** 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.

Companions in Christ Class Meeting Sunday Mornings

Sunday's at 10:00: "Companions in Christ" - The Small Group Sunday School Class will be talking about how to be better companions to our fellow Christians, discover what our spiritual gifts are, and dig deeper into what we believe and why. Please come and enjoy this time with your church family and deepen your spiritual connection with God. We will meet in the Youth Sunday School room. All are welcome! *Nanette Noffsinger.*

Graceworks' Fuel Bag Program

As I have mentioned a number of times from the pulpit, around 250,000 children go to bed hungry in Tennessee some part of every week. That figure has grown over the years. Their families are what is called "food insecure." There is rarely enough nourishing food in the home to be certain of providing for the needs of the children. Some of those children live right here in Williamson County.

Graceworks ministry has a program to provide food for children in need to take home over the weekends. These "Fuel Bags" provide nutritious food that the child can eat without preparation or with minimal preparation. The Children's Sunday school class is organizing Trinity UMC's support of this program. We need the following contributions:

Graceworks Fuel Bags

Please pick up a few items when you are at the grocery store to include in the fuel bags:

Boxed Milk
Raisins/Fruit Snacks
Peanut
Butter Crackers
Cheese Crackers
Cereal Cups
Pudding Cups
Microwaveable Meat Meals
Easy Mac
Tuna & Crackers

Thanks for your support of this ministry.

Still Looking for Worship Leaders

The Worship Ministry is central to any church because it involves the majority of the members every week. Central to the Worship Ministry is the leadership of the laity. Judy Richardson and I are trying to organize the worship leadership schedule so that it is easier for people to plan in advance when they will be serving as **Greeters, Liturgists, Ushers and Counters**.

I would very much like to see greater participation in worship leadership from the laity. If you would like to make worship leadership part of your ministry in the church, please contact either Judy Richardson or Rev. Meaker.

Bishop McAlilly Promotes a 40 Day Period of Prayer Leading Up to Annual Conference

40 Day Walk



Daily devotionals of **The 40 Day Walk With God** will post each morning on the Bishop's Blog during our season of intentional prayer. If you would like to Follow the Bishop's Blog during this time, posts will be delivered to your INBOX daily – enjoy them each morning on the device of your choice!

To download a copy to your computer for reading or printing, please follow the instructions below:

1. [CLICK HERE](#) to download .PDF file (you may “right click” and “save as” to your desktop or destination of choice)

1a. NEW: If you're here to download the Children's prayer guide, [CLICK HERE](#) to download (.PDF)

2. The cover image below also provides a link for download

3. NOTE: The .PDF prayer guide is 84 pages, please allow ample time for downloading depending on your connection speed

The Problem of Personal Information

At one time it was not unusual to distribute lists of birthdays and other personal information within the Church. Such lists can still be created today if people wish to add their names to them. However, despite many requests to the contrary, I have chosen not to put information about birth dates, other than birth month, or other personal information, in the newsletter. Once this information has been posted in an online newsletter it is available to everyone. Our birth dates are an important piece of personal information that can be used as part of an effort to steal someone's identity. For much the same reason we do not post addresses and telephone numbers of members and we do not publish information about who is in the hospital. If a thief knew that someone was in the hospital they might take the opportunity to target that person's home for a break-in. The potential misuse of online information is something that we all need to be careful about.

Prayer Ministry

The following persons have agreed to be part of the prayer ministry at Trinity UMC:

Elva Beard	Sarah Jordan	Kenneth Stevens	Judy Richardson
Larry Eastwood	Mac McAfee	Patricia Stevens	Charles Wilson
Leslie Eastwood	Rachel Newman	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

June 2, 2013: A Different Gospel: Paul was tasked with the problem of proclaiming the Gospel to a world that had never heard of Christians. But he wasn't the only Christian engaged in proclaiming the gospel. Some offer a "different Gospel." My texts are Luke 7:1-10 and Galatians 1:1-12.

June 9, 2013: Who Are You To Preach the Gospel? This is not a question directed solely to the clergy. We are all ministers of the Gospel. What are your credentials for preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ? My texts are Psalm 146 and Galatians 1:11-24.

Worship Leaders Schedule

June 2nd

Liturgist: **Marty Bauguess**

Greeters: **Rodger and Cherry Klein**

Ushers: **Sam Richardson and Larry Eastwood**

June 9

Liturgist: **Charles Wilson**

Greeters: **Mike & Elaine Rohrig**

Ushers: **Rodger & Cherry Klein**

Announcements

Sunday School Adult Classes: There are two adult Sunday School classes to choose from. One meets at 9:45 in the Fellowship hall and the other meets in the classroom next to the Nursery at 10:00. Faith development is part of our discipleship commitment.

Wednesday, May 29, 7:00pm Choir Rehearsal

The **61st AVE. UMC** is in need of men's clothing. When you clean your closets, please consider donating men's items of clothing to a worthy cause. Bring clothes to the church and they will be taken to 61st AVE. UMC. The dates for our church to prepare and serve dinner at **61st Street** are as follows: **August 17, and November 16**. We will also be participating at the Christmas Toy Store, dates TBD.

May Birthdays

Tommy Cotton, Sam Richardson, Jim Winton