

biblestudy: august 2018

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Based on the scripture lessons of Cokesbury’s Adult Bible Study Series

August 5, 2018 Text: Romans 2:1-12 “God’s Justice”

These verses in Paul’s letter to the Romans do not give us any hiding places. We may make believe that God overlooks or ignores our sin, but Paul is straightforward in saying that God is not fooled by the ways we have fooled ourselves.

Have you ever excused some wrong in your life because you know other people who are worse? Paul says, “You condemn yourself when you judge another person...” (Romans 2:1).

Have you ever made like that your evil doing was not so evil because you measured yourself against a false standard such as popularity? Paul says, “We know that God’s judgment agrees with the truth...” (Romans 2:2).

Have you ever assumed that God was so kind and good that God is okay if you don’t turn away from sin? Paul says, “Don’t you realize that God’s kindness is supposed to lead you to change your heart and life?” (Romans 2:4b).

Have you ever figured that it was enough to hear and understand God’s will? Paul says, “It isn’t the ones who hear the Law who are righteous in God’s eyes. It is the ones who do what the Law says who will be treated as righteous” (Romans 2:13).

Have you ever thought that your religious tradition is a notch above

other religious traditions? Paul says, “Gentiles don’t have the Law, but when they instinctively do what the Law requires...they show proof of the Law written on their hearts” (Romans 2:14-15).

Guilty as charged.

God’s love invites us to repentance, a change of direction, a new beginning. There is no hiding place. “God will judge the hidden truth about human beings through Christ Jesus (Romans 2:16). Ah, the Good News begins to break through! It is in Christ Jesus that we can come out of hiding and live full lives of grace and peace. Thanks be to God!

What Someone Else Has Said:

Roberta Bondi (*A Place to Pray, Abingdon*) quotes one of the ancients: “A soldier asked Abba Mius if God accepted repentance. After the old man had taught him many things he said, ‘Tell me, my dear, if your cloak is torn, do you throw it away?’ He replied, ‘No, I mend it and use it again.’ The old man said to him, ‘If you are so careful about your cloak, will not God be equally careful about (God’s) creature?’”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “You have found me, Lord...”

August 12, 2018 Text: 2 Corinthians 8:7-15 “Global Economic Justice”

Once John Wesley determined how much he had to spend for life’s essentials, he never spent more than that amount even though his income increased. Why would he do that?

St. Paul traveled over much of the known world of his day and was exposed to the range of values expressed in the world. One thing that impressed him was the generosity of the Macedonians even when they were in financial distress (2 Corinthians 8:1-2). Why were the Macedonians like that?

A few weeks ago I visited a United Methodist congregation several hundred miles from home. The pastor announced that she had been pastor at this church for three and a half years and for the first time was going to be preaching about money. Why do we hesitate to talk about money in church?

This week’s study text explores some biblical principles about giving. Paul says the core example is Jesus Christ Himself (2 Corinthians 8:9). Jesus was willing to take on the limits of humanity (Incarnation) in order to give His greatest gift (Philippians 2:6-11). It was not Jesus’ equality with God that led to His obedience on the saving cross; it was His humanity.

Paul says that in financial matters, it is not that some should have what they have at the expense of others, but that there should be an

equality (2 Corinthians 8:13). That is the CEB translation. NRSV calls it “a fair balance.” The ESV renders the word “fairness.” Weymouth says “reciprocity.” The title of this week’s lesson calls it “justice.” No matter how the word gets translated, one thing is clear: no one should be left in dire distress.

One unnamed writer in *The CEB Study Bible* points out that this issue of collecting for the saints in Jerusalem (mostly Jewish followers) was done as a way of uniting them with the Gentile believers in Corinth and Macedonia. In other words, money became a way of bringing together God’s people.

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *The Good Funeral* (Westminster John Knox), Thomas Long and Thomas Lynch have written: “Death and money are as close as our freewheeling society gets to taboo topics. Both lie close to the bone of our identity, and the exploration of them exposes the precariousness of the self. In their own way, death and money represent dire threats to our self-understanding, self-regard, our status as humans, our very existence, and to raise them in a pointed way is to transgress a sacred boundary.”

Prayer: As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Who needs me, Lord?...”

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August 19, 2018 Text: Romans 12:9-21 “Loving and Just Behavior”

Occasionally, when reading the Bible, I come across a passage that I am sure is intended for someone else, certainly not for me. These verses are one of those times.

For a starter, there is all this stuff about love without pretending (Romans 12:9). With a little practice most of us can make like we are nice, loving people, even when we are harboring nasty thoughts about someone else.

Then, there is this bit about enthusiasm, being on fire in the Spirit (Romans 12:11). Don’t you think your neighbors will think you are a weirdo if you get too excited about the Holy Spirit?

And what about this notion of welcoming strangers (Romans 12:13)? I don’t think Paul has seen some of the folks who hold up “Help Me” placards at the corner of I-85 and Guess Road.

Of course, this silly talk about “consider everyone as equal” (Romans 12:16) narrows the comfortable gap we have created between “them” and “us.”

And, worst of all, is this caution to feed a hungry enemy and give Dr. Pepper to a thirsty enemy (Romans 12:20). At least, there is the comfort of knowing that this will heap burning coals of fire upon my ene-

my’s head. Hooray! Uh, oops. Jonah 3:6 suggests that ashes can be a sign of repentance. What could be worse than having learned to hate someone for an evil they have done and then, alas, learn that they have repented? What am I to do with my hate now?

So, you see, I think Paul had these injunctions in mind for people who lived in Rome, and not for me; after all, my address is not Rome; it is Bahama.

But they won’t go away. At so many levels, these verses convict me of my sin. It is almost as if the good Lord wants me to change my comfortable way of living into something more challenging. You don’t suppose that I need to bring more loving values into my life, do you? But these verses just won’t go away.

What Someone Else Has Said:

Paul Mickey wrote (*Essentials of Wesleyan Theology*, Zondervan) “The Scripture teaches that good works are not optional for the believer. Neither do they come automatically to new creatures in Christ. Good works come through purposeful discipline to witness in word and deed.”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Lord Jesus, when I try to hide from Your Truth, find me...”

August 26, 2018 Text: Colossians 3:5-17 “Practicing Justice”

You’ve probably heard the description of someone who is “so heavenly minded as to be no earthly good.” We can hardly make that accusation against Paul. In this letter to the Christians at Colossae, he certainly shows that he knows what “earthly life” is like!

Note the roll call of things that can separate us from God’s intent for us: sexual immorality, moral corruption, lust, evil desire, greed (Colossians 3:5), disobedience (Colossians 3:6), anger, rage, malice, slander, obscene language (Colossians 3:8), lies (Colossians 3:9). Has the apostle missed any of us in making this list?

Interestingly enough, many of the things on this list are not illegal. Paul does not use the standard of human laws as the prime definition of sin. In fact, Paul is in prison for some legal violation when he writes these words (Colossians 4:10).

The standard by which we are to live is clear: Jesus Christ (Colossians 3:10, 11, 13, 15, 16). One of the qualities of that standard is forgiveness. (Remember Jesus on the cross: “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they’re doing”—Luke 23:34.) The word Paul uses for “forgive” is *charizōmai*. I am intrigued by the fact that one meaning of the word *charizōmai* is “rescue.” When we forgive someone, in that sense of the word we are rescuing her or him from their brokenness.

If I rescue someone from icy waters, it gives that person another chance. When I forgive someone, it gives that person another chance. That is what Christ has done for us and we are called to do the same.

Finally, the overarching quality of these gifts of Christ’s presence is love (Colossians 3:14). This, of course, is not simply brotherly love or romantic love; it is *agape*, the self-giving love that is not based on the worthiness or desirability of the one loved. It is indeed the love we have received from God in Christ Jesus. It is the love we are called to live out “for earthly good.”

What Someone Else Has Said:

In *Christianity and Civilization* (Scribners), Emil Brunner wrote: “...it is not the divine commandment but the divine gift of love which is the basis of true personality....Not reason, but love is the truly human. Reason, spiritual activity, is subordinate to love. It is an instrument of love...(Humankind) cannot become truly human except by entering into community. (We) are called by the loving God into a loving relation to (our fellow beings).”

Prayer:

As you prepare this lesson, let your prayer begin: “Eternal and life-giving God, in Your love You have called me to love; in Your forgiveness You have called me to forgive. Save me now for life in this place...”



August 11, 10am – 2pm - Edenton Street UMC, 228 W Edenton St, Raleigh

The purpose of this summit is to inform, educate and inspire those involved in leading or participating in a C4C church/school partnership. Whether you are already involved in C4C or you are in the process of considering it for your church, you will find this event helpful.

C4C churches help children living in poverty by improving K-3 literacy, providing for basic needs, and helping to increase parent involvement. This year’s Summit program will include an overview of the Congregations For Children Initiative; practical tips on things your church can do; helpful insights from expert guest speakers (see bios below); time for interaction and discussion, helpful reference materials and lunch. You will also have an opportunity to hear from and meet Bishop Ward as well as a number of our conference C4C leaders.

Guest speakers are Jon David, District Attorney of Brunswick, Bladen and Columbus counties; Kathy Oliver, literacy specialist and coordinator of B.E.S.T. (Brunswick Early Success Team);

For Kids initiative; Mandy Ableidinger, Policy & Practice Leader for NC Early Childhood Foundation, and Leslie Boney, Director of NC State University’s Institute for Emerging Issues.

All NC Conference churches are encouraged to send at least one representative to this summit but groups are also welcome. For more info, visit <https://nccume.org/events/c4c-summit-2/>.