

Explore: When you want to blame others

May 30, 2014

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for June 15 focuses on Ezekiel 18:1-4, 21-23, 25-27, 30-32.*

The smart phone I carry with me has an app for a compass. On more than one occasion, that app proved valuable. Even though my car has a GPS system and can lead me wherever I want to go, there are times when I need to know which direction I'm headed in order to keep my bearing.

One reason we should worship God, privately and in community with others, is because it helps us maintain our moral compass. We are so overloaded with information from so many sources. Virtually all of it, even the simplest advertisements, carries moral information suggesting how we should live. Ours is increasingly a pluralistic culture.

It seems the only wrong is to say something is wrong. The cultural norm now is to not have a norm; ours is a “live-and-let-live” culture. If we don’t have an internal guidance system that helps us keep our moral bearing, we easily can find ourselves spiritually adrift.

Help to maintain our moral compass

The passages in this week’s lesson are meant to help us maintain our moral compass. They begin by telling us, quite simply, there is a right and a wrong way to live. The difference between right and wrong finds its source in the holiness of God. To venture in a direction that is a departure from holiness is to sin.

Some sin comes naturally, subtly. Other sin involves a conscious choice to

go our own way. Either way, sin is separation from God, and separation from God is separation from life and therefore death.

The first words of the prophet Ezekiel in this lesson compel us to take responsibility for our sin. We cannot honestly say of our sin that someone else made us do it or we simply were born that way.

We sometimes think of repentance as quitting a bad habit. In time, repentance may lead to the cessation of sinful habits but not until it has caused us to rethink how sinfully we think about ourselves and our place in this world, all based on how God has informed us, through God's word and the community of faith in which we worship.

Yet, despite our sin, God already has provided for our forgiveness. It's an amazing to ponder. God, in Christ, made our forgiveness possible millennia before we were born to commit our first sin.

In a Christian Life Commission seminar, Pastor George Mason reminded us God's forgiveness of us is "not the result of human repentance and confession that might allow us to be right with God and with one another. It is the beginning. ... 'While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us,' Paul says. Not, once we prove ourselves sorry enough for our sins and provide enough restitution to our victims" will God then forgive us.

Repentance is not perfect moral reform

Repentance is not perfect moral reform. Repentance is the moral choice to stop not believing in the forgiveness of God.

In my earliest years of preaching, I spent a lot of time trying to call people to repentance defined as shaping up, as moral self-reformation. I did this by coaxing or commanding or even shaming them into living better, like there was no unswept dirt under my sofa.

John the Baptist called on people to “bear fruit in keeping with repentance” (John 3:8). It’s important to listen carefully to what he was saying. He was calling on the people to let their lives produce evidence of a repentance that already had occurred, of hearts turning back to God’s forgiveness instead of away from it.

When Jesus first started preaching, he said, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Matthew 4:17). In Christ, God now was revealing more fully God’s love for mankind. “Stop leaning on your ability to make things right with God and trust what God has done to make them right” was the message of Jesus.

Can you imagine John 3:16 reading this way? “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believed in him and first shaped up would not perish but have everlasting life.”

Let go and let God

We only perish when we wander alone into the desert of spiritual self-preservation. Life is what happens when we let go and let God. Repentance is the moral choice to let what God has done in Christ be good enough.

Repentance is a relationship. We’ll never be consciously aware of all of our sins. Only God knows all. Repentance is more of an attitude toward God, a way of living in constant awareness of God’s presence.