

## The Principle of Restitution

### 6. The Principle of Restitution

"1. The act of returning or restoring to a person some thing or right of which he has been unjustly deprived. 2. The act of making good, or of giving an equivalent for any loss, damage or injury; indemnification." Webster, Noah, and Rosalie J. Slater. *Noah Webster's First Edition of An American Dictionary of the English Language: Republished in Facsimile Edition by Foundation for American Christian Education ... Prefaced by an Article, Noah Webster, Founding Father of American Scholarship and Education*. Seventh ed. San Francisco, CA: Foundation for American Christian Education, 1993.

- a. Implicit in the theocratic judicial system as revealed in Exodus 22; Leviticus 5, 6, 22, 24; and Numbers 5.
- b. Required as a consequence when one is found guilty of a variety of offenses, usually concerning property. (Ex. 22:1-15; Lev. 6:1-5) - [note Lev. 6:3b "... or if he commits any such sin that people may do" and Nu. 5:6 "... wrongs another in any way and so is unfaithful to the Lord..." ]
  - 1.) If remorseful, the offender must restore/repay what was unlawfully taken plus a fifth more. (Lev. 6:1-7; Nu. 5:5-7)
  - 2.) If he is caught with another's property, he must restore/repay double what was taken. (Ex. 22:4, 7, 9)
  - 3.) If he has consumed or disposed of the property or tried to conceal his offense, he must repay four or five times what was taken. (Ex. 22:1; 2 Samuel 12:6 [David's response to Nathan's parable] & Prov. 6:30-31 prescribes a seven-fold repayment)
  - 4.) If the offender could not make restitution, he was to be sold in order to work off the debt. (Ex. 22:3b)
- c. The principle is illustrated in Jesus's interaction with Zacchaeus recorded in Luke 19:1-10. God clearly did a work of His grace in Zacchaeus's life, because Jesus declared "salvation has come to this house" (Luke 19:9). In response to what God had done, Zacchaeus put off his former practice of cheating taxpayers. In making restitution, he vowed to give half of all his possessions to the poor and declared that he would repay four times the amount of that of which he had cheated anyone. His true repentance motivated him to do more

to make restitution to those against whom he had sinned than Mosaic law required.

- d. In Ephesians 4:28 – *He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.* – Paul has clearly revealed that putting off the old self and putting on the new self (vv. 22-24) involves making restitution. This is because true repentance requires making restitution. Restitution is a “fruit in keeping with repentance” (Luke 3:8a).
- e. Repentance – a change of mind and turning away from sin – motivates the realization that, in order to “make things right,” one must restore what he has wrongfully taken, and he desires to do even more than that, as we have seen in the life of Zacchaeus.
- f. **One may make restitution without being repentant.  
But no one is truly repentant who refuses to make restitution.**
- g. The most important obligation one has when he has sinned is reconciliation – with God and with the injured party. Leviticus 6:2 and Numbers 5:6 reveal that sin against another is a matter of unfaithfulness to the Lord. The offender must make a sacrificial offering to the Lord, and he must make restitution to the one whom he has wronged. Jesus seems to be making reference to this as recorded in Matthew 5:23-24:

*23 Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.*

- h. Restitution as the restoration of that which has been wrongfully taken seems rather straight forward when it involves material things, such as stolen property or borrowed property that has been damaged or sold. The examples given in the Mosaic law typically present these kinds of offenses. But in matters of sinful attitudes and words and behaviors against another, determining what kind of restitution should be undertaken in order to make things right – to restore or repay what was wrongfully taken – becomes more challenging. In every sin, there is a breaking of trust, to some degree. (Ex. 22:9 – “For every breach of trust...”) It may be seen that restitution must involve the effort to rebuild and restore trust in the relationship. Though restitution certainly involves more than this, at the very least, the change in behavior from self-centered to others-centered should serve to evidence a trust-worthiness which can rebuild and restore trust. This is the example we see in Ephesians 4:28 and Luke 3:8-14.

- i. Strategizing restitution for sinful attitudes, words, and behaviors:
- 1.) True repentance requires:
    - a.) the cessation of the sin
      - Isaiah 55:7a – *Let the wicked man forsake his own way and the unrighteous man his own thoughts; let him return to the LORD...*
      - Luke 3:12-14 – *Even tax collectors came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?" "Collect no more than you are authorized," he answered. Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?" "Do not take money by force or false accusation," he said.*
      - John 5:14 – *Stop sinning...*
      - John 8:11 – *Go and sin no more.*
      - Ephesians 4:28a – *He who has been stealing must steal no longer...*
    - b.) the confession of the sin
      - Numbers 5:5-7a – *And the LORD said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites that when a man or woman acts unfaithfully against the LORD by committing any sin against another, that person is guilty and must confess the sin he has committed.*
  - 2.) Repentance and confession involve the purpose and promise to do differently, not simply the cessation of the sin; a change of mind from self-centered to others-centered.
  - 3.) The basic requirement of restitution in God's law (Lev. 6:1-7; Nu. 5:5-7) is that, when one is remorseful for his sin, he must cease his sin; confess his sin; make a restitution offering to the Lord (Leviticus 7:1-10); and return, replace, or repay an equivalent value for that of which he has unjustly deprived the one against whom he has sinned, plus additional compensation. This is how the principle of restitution applied legally.
  - 4.) The primary New Testament example we have illustrates the willingness of the penitent person to do considerably more than the Mosaic law

required of him (Luke 19:1-10), because of the spiritual transformation which had occurred in his life.

5.) Aspects of the principle of restitution:

a.) Recompense = To compensate; to make return of an equivalent for any thing suffered; to make amends by any thing equivalent.

- We see the concept of recompense forbidden as a response to evil suffered in 1 Peter 3:9 and Romans 12:17a, 19; see also Matthew 5:38-48 and Luke 6:27-36; Romans 12:14.
- Example of cheating on one's taxes.
- Example of returning a diploma.

b.) Replace = To put a competent substitute in the place of another displaced or of something lost.

- This replacement strategy would be to replace the sinful attitudes, words, and behaviors with righteous attitudes, words, and behaviors. [Luke 3:11, 14; Ephesians 4:28b]
- Infidelity would be replaced with faithfulness.
- Gossip and slander would be replaced with retractions and corrective witness to restore damaged reputations.

c.) Restore = To renew, rebuild, or re-establish after interruption.

- Romans 12:18; 14:19
- Hebrews 12:14a; 1 Peter 3:11 (Psalm 34:14)
- Revelation 2:4-5

d.) Reform = To abandon that which is evil or corrupt, and be brought from a bad state to a good state; to be amended or corrected.

- Ezekiel 33:14-15
- 2 Corinthians 5:17-21