

**Q&A -
The most
frequently
asked
Questions &
Objections
answered
by
Alastair
Buchanan**

1. WHAT IS RESTITUTION? ISN'T IT A POLITICAL WORD?

No, it is a word from the Bible (e.g. Exodus 20: 3). Many churches like my own have for years been involved in acts of mercy and that is excellent. However the use of the word Restitution is more about repentance than mercy. In our current political scene Restitution is used mainly in connection with the redistribution of land but the Bible uses it in connection with returning anything wrongfully taken or received (see also the New Testament example of Zaccheus in Luke 19:8). What have been taken are not only material things (although that receives so much attention because it is often the most contentious) but also such things as people's dignity, respect, humanity, self-esteem, education, skills, etc.

2. RESTITUTION IS LEGALISTIC. IT'S A GUILT-TRIP BRINGING CONDEMNATION AND KEEPING US BOUND IN THE PAST. IT IS CONTRADICTORY TO THE BIBLICAL TEACHING OF GRACE.

This teaching, far from bringing guilt and condemnation, brings us into our inheritance of liberty from false attitudes. Micah 6:8 says, "...and what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."

Surely it is because we love the mercy (grace) that we have freely received that we also desire to act justly and do all of this in a spirit of humble dependence on God. This call to restitutive justice is made in the knowledge that it is only because the grace of God has set us free that we are enabled to humble ourselves and admit that we need, by this same enabling grace, to right the wrongs of the past. Rather than being motivated by the guilt of our past we are motivated by the promise of the future blessings coming to us as God's people as we break free from the bondages of our past. Although like Lazarus we have been delivered from the spiritual death that trapped us in racial



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Reconciliation &

Restitution

The story of Joseph and his brothers applied to our land.

pride, we still have to have our "grave-clothes" of those attitudes removed (see John 11:44 and Ephesians 4:20-24). Titus 2:11 says, "The grace of God teaches us to say no to ungodliness" Also Romans 2:4 says, "...the kindness of God leads us to repentance" It is because we have been justified freely by grace without works (i.e. the kindness of God) that we are now free to receive the sanctifying grace that leads us to ongoing repentance from our dead works and attitudes of racial injustice.

3. RESTITUTION SOUNDS LIKE PAYING BACK A DEBT. BUT HASN'T JESUS PAID ALL OUR DEBTS?

It is only because Jesus has paid so fully and finally the debt of our sins against God that we are, from the abundance of what he has purchased, able to repay our debts to one another which we would otherwise be unable to do.

4. WHY KEEP ON TALKING ABOUT RESTITUTION? SURELY ONCE THOSE CHRISTIANS INVOLVED IN EXPLOITATION THROUGH APARTHEID OR COLONIALISM HAVE HUMBLER THEMSELVES AND CONFESSED THEIR SIN IT IS OVER? WHY CAN'T WE JUST MOVE ON?

If there are 2 teams in a game of soccer on an unlevelled playing field, it is not enough to stop the game, level the playing field and say, "Right, now we have leveled the playing field there is no more injustice, ...play on". If we level the playing field we CANNOT play on until we have also leveled the score too (i.e. The ad-vantages that the one side unfairly gained from playing on an unlevelled field.) Only after we have addressed the unequal distribution of wealth that racist policies caused can we move on. And since bringing ongoing justice in these matters (mentioned in point 1 above) involves tackling major strongholds of racial pride, rejection, division and Mammon, we will only be able to do this with the Holy Spirit's intervention.

5. AND WHAT ABOUT FORGIVENESS?

Those who perpetrated the terrible racist policies of our past have been shown great forgiveness in good faith. It is because of that that those forgiven should now respond likewise in good faith and take the appropriate steps in an appropriate attitude of humility to attempt to restore the damage done.

6. RATHER THAN PROMOTE RECONCILIATION, RESTITUTION KEEPS US REFERRING TO ONE ANOTHER IN OUR OLD RACIAL DIVISIONS AND SO CREATES FURTHER DIVISION.

All of us hate having to refer to our painful racial divisions. We long to treat one another as truly one and fully reconciled in Christ. But most black people in this country (and an increasing number of whites) are recognizing that our reconciliation is still largely only superficial. We cannot ignore the past racial categories of privilege until they have been more thoroughly dealt with. It is great to see attitudes changing, dignity being restored, etc, but until we correct the financial and material injustices of the past as well, reconciliation will remain superficial.

7. HOW MUCH SHOULD BE PAYED BACK AND WHO IS TO SAY WHEN IT IS ENOUGH?

Ultimately, all that the Christian owns is not his or hers anyway. We consigned it all to Christ when we gave our lives to him and were born again. Now we are no longer owners but stewards of all we possess. Therefore since it was this stewardship that we who were unjustly advantaged took from the disadvantaged, each of us has to obey his conscience about which possessions to restore to our brothers and sisters and how God wants us to do it. This conscience needs to be informed by the will of God expressed in the Bible and taught by those godly pastors and teachers gifted to the church for this purpose.

If we look into the racial dispute over the material distribution in Acts 6:1-7 it appears the church's leadership resolved the matter by calling on the church to choose "men full of the Holy Spirit" The church chose representatives of the community which felt that they were being deprived. It seems only right that those seen as godly representatives of the ones who have been wronged should be the ones who decide when this matter is settled.

8. I DIDN'T VOTE FOR THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT. WHY SHOULD I BE HELD RESPONSIBLE? AND WHAT ABOUT THE YOUNGER GENERATION TODAY?

Those who receive the material benefits and fruits of an injustice are also, according to the Bible, responsible for returning them to the right people. (See Exodus 22:9)

It is right that the children should not pay for the sins of their parents. It is also true that

unless they are humble and submitted to the Spirit of Christ on these issues, our next generation will, without always noticing it, pick up many of our own untested assumptions and racial attitudes. By saying, "But that had nothing to do with us" makes them the more vulnerable to this danger. Such prejudices are of course no respecter of either age or racial groupings.

9. IF THE STATE WAS THE CHIEF PERPETRATOR SURELY THE STATE SHOULD REPAY?

SURELY THE ADVANTAGED ONES HAVE ALREADY BEEN MAKING RESTITUTION THROUGH THEIR TAXES, WHICH ARE MUCH HIGHER THAN THOSE OF THE DISADVANTAGED?

It is true that the vast majority of the disadvantaged are now reaping some benefits from taxes heavily loaded in their favour. However as Christians we do not want just to leave this matter to the state for the following reasons:

- It is a completely different state now to the one responsible before.
- Since it was in the name of Christianity that these racially unjust policies were designed and executed, we as Christians should be eagerly in the forefront of initiatives (not dragging our feet) to right these wrongs. What an opportunity to bring honour again to our Lord Jesus whose Name and whose Gospel have suffered from being wrongfully associated with such racism.
- Although it's slow, the upper tax brackets are increasingly inclusive of the previously disadvantaged as the economy begins to get more evenly shared.
- For reasons of good stewardship, our desire is that the returned funds and property gets into the right hands and is not subject to corrupt officials.

Therefore this manner of restitution through the State, though not insignificant, is insufficient.

10. ARE WE NOT TRYING TO DO THE IMPOSSIBLE (LIKE TRYING TO UNSCRAMBLE AN EGG?) FOR EXAMPLE, TO WHOM SHOULD WE RESTORE WEALTH TO?

Where there are cases where the individuals or parties involved are clearly identifiable,

restitution should be made between them (e.g. A white Dutch Reformed church in Paarl who had taken over a church property belonging to the coloured Anglican community under the unjust Group Areas Act there, recently returned it). However for most of us, the advantages and disadvantages have been so general that our best suggestion is the formation of general funds. I recommend that these be administered by trusted and godly members of the communities concerned. This can mean interdenominational groups (see details below of The Restitution Foundation) or denominational or individual church restitution funds –as with Jubilee Community Church. (See also points 7 and 9 above).

The important point to note here is that this matter is primarily one of our heart-attitudes. It is our eagerness to “do the right thing” in God's sight first of all and then in the sight of those offended that is important. Obviously this has to include impeccable honesty, integrity and transparency in all arrangements made. We as Christians have to believe that God will help us in this difficult task and honour his word which says,

“ a broken and contrite heart, O Lord you will not despise”.

11. I AM STRUGGLING FINANCIALLY AND KNOW THERE ARE MANY PREVIOUSLY ADVANTAGED PEOPLE WHO ARE NOW BETTER OFF THAN I AM. SURELY THIS CALL TO RESTITUTION DOESN'T INCLUDE ME.

Obviously each individual will have to assess their own situation in the sight of God and their own conscience. It certainly is not going to help anyone for one to go further into financial difficulties. My own testimony is that only once I submitted my finances to God's word that I came out of financial difficulties. Sometimes that may be the cause of the difficulties. Nevertheless, Restitution is not limited to only the financial. Offering one's time, expertise, skills and training, as well as using one's property and vehicles can also be seen as Restitution too.

As to the wealth discrepancy issue: In 1994 the average white family in Cape Town earned four times that of the average black family. Eight years later that grew to 6 times more. Therefore it is obvious that the majority of people in this country are not experiencing any real improvement to the wealth distribution that existed prior to 1994. This objection therefore relates only to a tiny minority.

12. I HAVE BEEN DOING ACTS OF MERCY AMONG THE POOR FOR AGES BUT I HAVE NEVER SPOKEN ABOUT IT BECAUSE THAT WOULD BE BOASTING AND ANYWAY JESUS SAID WHEN YOU GIVE TO THE POOR WE SHOULD NOT LET OUR LEFT HAND KNOW WHAT OUR RIGHT HAND IS DOING.

Again (as in point 1), when Jesus spoke these words he was speaking about acts of mercy. He was not speaking of Restitution, which is more about repentance than mercy.

So, it is really not boasting to be speaking about the wealth and goods you have begun to pay back. Rather it is a confession of the failures of one's past. This is why it is essential to keep using the uncomfortable word "restitution" precisely because it keeps us from boasting.

The good part of this confession is that it is also a declaration of the grace of the forgiveness we have received through Jesus. Look at Zaccheus's obvious joy in Luke 19:8 and look at the corresponding delight that our Lord Jesus took in his response. I am sure this delight is every bit as much about the liberation of the one repenting as it is about the ones receiving it . Don't we all want Jesus to say this of our homes and our churches?

"Today salvation has come to this house,"