

UPWARD CALL

Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but this is my one aim: to forget everything that's behind, and to strain every nerve to go after what lies ahead. I press on toward the finish line, where the prize waiting for me is the upward call of God

IN KING JESUS.

(Philippians 3:13-14)

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by – Stuart H. Pouliot

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Making Full Restitution

If a man borrows anything from his neighbor, and it is injured or dies while its owner is not with it, he shall make full restitution. (Exodus 22:14 NASB)

Recently, an article appeared in a newspaper that was entitled: *Webb panel looks at toll of incarceration*. Senator Jim Webb from Virginia is asking the U.S. Congress to examine the high incarceration (imprisonment) rate in the United States. The article cites statistics from a Joint Economic Committee. Here are a few:

The U.S. has the highest reported incarceration rate in the world, with 750 inmates per 100,000 people, compared with a world average rate of 166 per 100,000 people.

Although crime rates have fallen since 1990, the rate of imprisonment has continued to increase.

States spent \$2 billion to build prisons in 2006. Nationally the combined expenditure for law-enforcement and corrections exceeds \$200 billion annually.

Much of the growth in prison population is due to changing policy, not increased crime, and drug-policy changes have had the greatest impact on criminal-justice policy.

These statistics are staggering and almost beyond belief for a nation in which 90% of the people say they believe in God and that has the highest percentage in the world of ones who call themselves *Christians*. When one adds to this the fact that our nation was founded by men, many of whom were professed Christians, the response should be a cry for answers: How did we get to this place? What has happened? What is the solution? Senator Webb should at least be commended for raising the issue. But one wonders if the leaders of our day have the wisdom to resolve the matter, especially if they continue to reject God's law as the absolute answer to dealing with mankind's lawlessness. Man's wisdom is foolishness, but God's wisdom is a winner every time.

Reading this news article reminded me of a book that I read recently entitled *God's Law on Restitution* by Dr. Stephen E. Jones (God's Kingdom Ministries) If you are interested in a history of our modern prisons and God's solution, then I recommend that you read this book. In his book, Dr. Jones describes how, under our current system, everyone loses, not only the so-called *criminal* but all of society.

Here are a few quotes from this book:

"No matter how we build the prison cells, we have not solved the most crucial problem—Justice. Instead of a single victim of the crime, we now have three: the original victim, the taxpayer, and the criminal himself. Is there any answer to this horrible situation?"

"It may be hard to believe, but the Bible has the answer. God's justice restores all losses to the victim of the crime without making the taxpayers liable, and the thief is restored to a productive position of full citizenship with justice and forgiveness to all."

"In a nutshell, it is a principle of Bible Law that *justice has not been done until full restitution has been made to all the victims of injustice*. In other words, the original lawful order must be restored, rather than creating new injustices to try to balance or patch up the old ones. Whenever the nature of the crime is such that restitution is impossible, or when the thief refuses to make restitution to restore the lawful order, the penalty is death. And finally, the thief must take full responsibility for his actions and is the only one liable for his crime."

"There is only one true solution. As a nation we must repent of our own way and turn to God's perfect Law. We must stop teaching that God's Law is somehow authored by a cruel or unjust God (or Satan). We must search the Scriptures to see what God really has to say about property crime and how to resolve it as a nation. As Bible believers, let us work toward that end."

God's law on restitution for property crimes is found in the books of Exodus and Leviticus (e.g., Exodus 21:33-34; 22:3; Leviticus 5:16). The purpose of God's law is to bring about restitution, which means "compensation" or "amend." It is not about punishment but about restoration, that is, restoring the loss to the person who was harmed by another, bringing about forgiveness between all parties, and rehabilitating or restoring the thief. Is forgiveness biblical? Absolutely! Love your enemies is the command (law) of the Lord (Matthew 5:44). How can one love an enemy unless there is forgiveness?

"For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions." (Matthew 6:14-15 NASB)

In our day, it is very common to hear families of ones who have suffered loss at the hands of another cry out: "I hope he rots in hell"; or, "I hope he is locked up and the key is thrown away." This is not the heart of restitution or of forgiveness; it is the heart of bitterness and anger that demands justice through punishment. There is no concern in such a response to see the matter settled to the benefit of all, including the one who caused the hurt in the first place.

Just consider how much would be accomplished if a thief were required to pay back in full or replace whatever it was that was stolen. Often thieves do not have the money to repay the loss, but under the law of restitution, the thief is required to make full restitution by working until the full debt is paid. In some cases, the thief may be required to pay off the debt plus extra, such as 20% more. Jesus reinforced restitution in the parable of the wicked slave.

Then having called him near, his lord said to him, Wicked slave! I forgave you all that debt, since you begged me. Ought you not also to have mercy on your fellow slave, as I also had mercy? And being angry, his lord delivered him up to the tormentors until he pays back all that debt to him. So also, My heavenly Father will do to you unless each of you from your hearts forgive his brother their deviations. (Matthew 18:32-35 LITV; also see Matthew 5:26)

The Lord Jesus has forgiven us all our debts, and we must learn, both individually and as a society, to forgive one another. How often are we to forgive? Seventy times seven! (Matthew 18:22).