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A DEBTOR'S OBLIGATIONS

AN INTERESTING AND PECULIAR CASE

A brother in England writes as follows:

DEAR BROTHER R _____:—I want advice. It is the desire of my heart to come over and see and talk with you and profit by your instructions; but at present that is impossible, but I may hope to some day (God willing); but as I cannot see you I will do the next best thing, that is write for help. Before I was converted I was a great rascal—gambler, drunkard, thief; but when brought to the knowledge that Jesus had died for me, that his precious blood cleansed me from all sin, I rejoiced in his salvation and was happy.

Some months after at a meeting a sister quoted the words, "Owe no man any thing," and said that if any had stolen anything previous to their conversion (doubtless thinking they had not done so after) they should replace it. I had never heard of this before, and was greatly disturbed. I had robbed my father and many others. I was in London at the time, and wrote immediately and told my father of my misdeeds. He was aware of them, to a certain extent. I knew not the full amount myself, as it was over a series of years; but I confessed as fully as I knew how, and he very kindly answered that whatever I had robbed him of he freely forgave me, and ever since then I think he has looked upon me as rather weak in mind. I went to some, and repaid and wrote to others. Among others was the Metropolitan Street Railroad Company of Boston, U.S.A. I was conductor of one of their cars for ten months, and defrauded them of a considerable amount; I know not how much.

Just then a work of C.G. Finney, the American revivalist, was placed in my hands. Therein he said that unless everything was returned that had been stolen (as far as the memory would serve) God *could not forgive* the sinner. I was nearly mad, my joy vanished, I was entangled in the bondage of the law, and for three days was distracted; until a dear brother came and conversed with me, and the bonds were cut asunder. I wrote acknowledging my fault to the M.R.R. Co., Boston, saying that although I had not the means then, should I ever have it I would send such a sum as would assuredly cover all my theft. I cried to the Lord to teach me his way, and enquired of all who I thought could help me, and although many gave their opinion, some one way and some another, yet none offered me evidence to convince me from the Scriptures, and that is my present difficulty. The question is, "What is our Father's will in this case?" The evidence, to my understanding, is conflicting. Mind, dear brother, I do not say the evidence is conflicting, but only

that, to my mind, it is; and I want my understanding enlightened to know the will of God more perfectly. Paul said, "Let him that stole, steal no more; but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing that is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth." (Eph. 5:28.) And although the Lord Jesus commended Zaccheus for restoration, that was under the old dispensation, as the sacrifice was not yet offered, and so the full benefit was not enjoyed according to Heb. 9:14-17, and as they that believe are justified from *all* things "without works," all covered by the precious blood (sacrificed life) of Jesus. I have thought thus, as God says, "Your sins and iniquities *I will remember no more,*" can it be that he, by his Spirit, is leading me to think of restoring, and in doing so try to add to the work of Jesus? or is it the enemy, as an angel of light, bringing me into bondage again and casting a slur on his work of redemption. (Heb. 9:14,15.) I have acted thus; when my Lord bought me he bought me thefts and all, and to him I owe this, for I through law am dead to the law, and I have by his grace acted upon Eph. 5:28, as he has given me more than to supply our need, myself and family, so have I distributed it according to the best of my judgment, not having saved anything whatever. But I am not at rest; I want "Thus saith the Lord," and that alone will satisfy. There are many that I know that are in the same difficulty. Could you find room in the TOWER for an article on this? You are perfectly at liberty to use this information in any way you please, not even keeping back the name, if you think that by doing so the Master will be honored. It is the crime I am ashamed of, not the confession of it. I have often thought if restoration is our Father's will, what a life of bondage a converted thief would have, in most cases utterly unable to restore, and with a heavy load all his days. Can it be so, or is it, "If the Son make you free, ye are free indeed"? Praying our heavenly Father to uphold you in every way, and give you boldness to speak the truth, and to preserve you to the end, I am, dear brother, your's very affectionately in the best of bonds, _____.

THE EDITOR'S REPLY

DEAR BROTHER: Your confession and abhorrence of former sins and your tenderness of conscience, relative to your duty in the matter of making restitution

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for wrongs done by you in the past, is to us a refreshing evidence of your present spirit being holy—in harmony with God's Spirit or mind on the subject.

Your reasoning above covers both sides of the question, so that I need only mention my opinion thereupon relative to the mind of the Lord in your case.

In my mind, we should consider the teaching of the above Scriptures to be that when you entered into Christ—when you, realizing your justification in God's sight through the ransom given by

Jesus, consecrated or sacrificed yourself wholly to his service, *then* all things past were reckoned DEAD—past hopes, aims, debts and ALL. You were from that moment, in God's sight, a "new creature," free through Christ's ransom from all things past, and *bound* by your covenant of sacrifice to a new service. Old things *then* passed away, and all things, so far as you were concerned, became NEW by this your *reckoned death*.

You should treat your former self, and all claims against it, as though you were *actually* dead. And from that standpoint I suggest that you take an account of all your property of every kind, and so far as it goes, use it in making restitution to those whom your *former self* had wronged, and then start out anew. This, of course, applies specially to wrongs such as that against the railroad company mentioned, and would not, in my judgment, apply to any debts contracted for your sustenance and clothing: these should be paid in full, as they were personal favors which you contracted for your necessities.

In this connection, too, it should be remembered that the very object of this reckoned cancellation of former liabilities is, that you may be reckoned henceforth a "new creature" in the service of another—Christ. Therefore if your time future shall be spent in labor for earthly wealth or superfluous comforts or luxuries, thus renouncing virtually the new life of sacrifice, now proposed and commenced, THEN you would be no longer free from the above-mentioned obligations: for inasmuch as your former self would thereby be revived, brought to life again, its debts and obligations come to life also. In either case, you are accountable for those debts and wrongs so long as you *live* to human aims and ambitions; and only freed when you become dead toward these and alive in the service of God as a new creature. Nothing but death cancels such an obligation so far as man is concerned. Your responsibility ends when you have made restitution to the extent of your ability at the time of your *reckoned death*. Christ, to whose service you give yourself, agrees to cancel *all* your debts of every kind, to God and man, which you are *unable* to settle when entering his service. And in the blessings of the Millennium, he will *far more* than compensate the world for all such obligations of those who entered his service. This line of reasoning harmonizes with that of the Apostle. Compare Rom. 7:4 with Gal. 2:18-21.

Nor would we advise you to publish or expose the errors of your former self as you would not expose needlessly the faults of any dead man. Send what money you have to send privately to those whom you alone know that you have wronged. When you came to the

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Lord you confessed to him, and have representatively confessed to the Church also, as we are exhorted "confess your faults to one another."

This rule is recognized in our civil laws. A debt or a crime, so far as man is concerned, cannot reach us beyond death, and whatever he possesses may be claimed by his creditors; but his offspring are not held responsible. The Apostle's words are in place here as indicating your duty. "Let him that stole steal no more; but rather let him labor with his hands, that he may have to give." The case of Zaccheus was commended by Jesus, not because of the dispensation, but because *true repentance* must always be accompanied by *restitution for the wrong* to the extent of one's ability. Had Zaccheus not made restitution it would have been proof that his repentance was not sincere, for he had wherewith to repair the wrongs done. In your case you must do the same; i.e., make restitution to the extent of your ability; then you are free from all the remainder if you are never able to do more, BECAUSE OF *service to Christ* as his steward and servants, possessing only time, money and talent, reckoned his and being used in his service. May the Master bless you, and own and abundantly bless your endeavors to serve him according to your covenant. May you be not only dead to self and the world reckonedly, but I pray that the spirit of truth may more and more vivify or quicken your mortal body in God's service (Rom. 8:11), and thus may you be prepared for the fullness of the divine nature when the present mortal body shall give place to a spiritual and immortal one, in which you can serve the Lord perfectly.

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— November, 1885 —



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