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## **MISINTERPRETATION OF BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF RESTITUTION AS VIOLENCE AGAINST THE AFRICAN WOMEN**

***I.O. Adesanya***  
*Department of Religious Studies*  
*University of Ado-Ekiti, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria*

### **ABSTRACT**

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Restitution is recognized as one of the key aspect of Christian virtues to attain a greater level of spirituality. The beauty of restitution stems from the fact that it enables Christians to have a right relationship with someone wronged. However, restitution has had a negative effect on women particularly in polygamous home. This paper, therefore, critically appraises the teaching of the Bible on the subject, and the travails of women and children affected. The methods used are both library and field research .Selected respondents across Pentecostal Churches were interviewed with a view to determine their perceptions of the concept of restitution as it applies to women. The findings of the paper revealed that women who are second or third wife usually bear the brunt of restitution. Some women affected usually end up being a single parents or in a psychiatric home .These and other findings informed some recommendations, among which are, the need for religious leaders to do more in- depth research into biblical hermeneutics for proper interpretations of the Bible. Then, the helping professionals like counsellors, social workers, educationists, psychologists and the likes should ensure appropriate programmes are designed to help women whose husband restitute and children to live a normal life gain.

**Keywords: Restitution, Women, Church.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The biblical concept of restitution is being preached globally in the Christian circle to instil not only discipline, but also to enable adherents to come to terms with anyone wronged. Restitution is recognized as a key aspect of Christian virtues that are essential to attain greater spiritual heights, and to be in right relationship with God. Consequently, a closer examination of the book of Exodus 22:1-6, 14 and Leviticus 6:2-5 reveal that things wrongly acquired must be restituted. But as a matter of emphasis, the case of a man who has three to four wives was not specifically mentioned.

Ironically, in most Nigerian churches today, different interpretations are being given to restitution especially when it has to do with women who happened to be the second or third wife. Besides, terrible cases of women being maltreated as a result of the issue of restitution are seen around us. To worsen the situation, the man in question is not in anyway affected. He remains in the marriage and may even decide not to have the children of that relationship under his roof. Hence, the woman and her children are made to suffer untold hardship.

1. However, to know what is practically happening in the church, books and journals are not enough, hence interview was conducted. Churches that were selected for the study are the Pentecostals. The selection of the few Pentecostal churches was based on two reasons: first, reports of high incidence of the teachings of restitution Christians, secondly, the specific

forms of gender based violence, because of wrong interpretations of the biblical concept of restitution. To this end, the paper will focus on the biblical concept of restitution, the selected churches applications of restitution and the effects on women. The paper is rounded off with recommendations and conclusion.

### **THE CONCEPT OF RESTITUTION IN THE BIBLE**

The term restitution is from the Latin word *rēstitūtiō* from *rēstituere* to rebuild, from RE + *stature* to set up<sup>1</sup>. It is the repairing of wrongs done, and the restoring of what one has wrongfully taken from another are strictly enjoined in the scripture, and are necessary evidence of true repentance.<sup>2</sup>

The Dictionary of the Bible Encyclopaedia defined restitution" as the practice ordered by God of making good an act of evil, such as theft.<sup>3</sup> This view are obviously stated in both Old and New Testaments. In the Old Testament, the Israelites were under the law, which specified restitution in a variety of circumstances. If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters or sells it, he must pay back five head of cattle for the ox and four sheep for the sheep. A thief must certainly make restitution, but if he has nothing, he must be sold to pay his theft. If the stolen animal is found alive in his possession whether ox or donkey or sheep, he must pay back double. If a man grazes his livestock in a field or vineyard and let them stray, he must make restitution from the best of his own field or vineyard. If a fire breaks out and spread into thorn-bushes so that it burns stocks of grain or standing grain or the whole field, the one who started the fire must make restitution. If a man borrows an animal from his neighbour and it is injured or dies ..., he must make restitution. (Ex. 22:1, 3-6, 14).

Leviticus 6:2-5 covers other situation in which the stolen property is restored plus one fifth of the value. Also of note in this passage, the restitution was made to the owner of the property (not to the government or any other third party and the compensation was to be accompanied by a guilt offering to the Lord. The Mosaic law, then, protected victims of theft, extortion, fraud and negligence by requiring the offending parties to make restitution.<sup>4</sup> The amount of remuneration varied anywhere from 100 to 500 percent of the loss. The restitution was to be made on the same day the guilty one brought his sacrifice before the Lord. This implies making amends with one's neighbour is just important as making peace with God.

In the New Testament, we have the wonderful example of Zachaeus in Luke 19. Jesus visited Zachaeus's home, and the people who know the chief publican to be wicked and oppressive man are beginning to murmur about his associating with a sinner (v. 7). But Zachaeus stood up and said to the Lord, "Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount. Jesus said to him, today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. From Zachaeus' words, we gather that (1) he had been guilty of defrauding people (2) he was remorseful over his past actions (3) he was committed to making restitution.

The aforementioned explain things to restore both in the Old and the New Testament period. However, it needs be mentioned here that in the case of Zacheaus, he did it by initiative. Jesus did not ask him to refund the money he falsely took from people.

In any case, for a proper examination to be done certain vital questions must be raised here:

- a. if the Bible prescribed the restoring back of something that has been lost or stolen, should African Christians says a woman who is in polygamous home be restituted?.
- b. should African Christians merely superimpose monogamy upon their members when actually polygamy was never a crime in African society?.
- c. if the Christians teachings on monogamy is valid and anchored on creation accounts and the teachings of Jesus Christ, should women who find themselves in polygamous home suffered discrimination or being violently sent away together with the children?

In the light of the above attention will now be turned to the various application and the interpretations of the concept of restitution vis a vis the women experience below.

### **Interpretation of Restitution in Modern Christianity: Women's Experience**

The study of modern Christians' attitude to restitution here will be done within the context of women's experiences. In the churches (Deeper Life Assembly, The Redeemed Christian Church of God, Mountain of Fire a) where discussion was held on the issue of restitution, the general consensus is that, a man who has two to three wives should retribute the second and third ones. In The Redeemed Christian Church of God, for instance, the Zonal Pastor recently added another dimension to it. He said, "the issue of restitution is a sensitive issue that need to be handled with care<sup>5</sup>. From this submission, it therefore means that the church is not unaware of the implications of restitution. Why then are some other members or churches not sensitive to this while emphasizing restitution of second or third wife?

On the contrary, most critical commentators admit that, if a man decides to marry the second wife because of the love he has for her, he does not need to retribute.<sup>6</sup> This position seems correct because it is very possible the man legally married the two women by paying their dowry. Then the question is which among the two women should be restituted? Thus, one needs to see that our teaching on restitution is ignoring something fundamental. Even if the Bible specifies one man, one wife, then, where we do place men of old in the Bible like David, Jacob, Abraham and Solomon that had wives. They all worked with God and no instruction was given to them to retribute their second or third wife. Then, it needs be noted that Jesus too in the New Testament period did not prescribe the condition to follow. He only advised putting away adulterous woman or man. Above all, he even gives a place for forgiveness peradventure either of them were caught committing adultery.

But as a matter of emphasis the positions of the African Christians by the scholars, ministers or laity is not to condemn multiple wives. The African Christians should not be caught in confusion over allegiance. While the African past should be cherished, the message and position of the scripture and Christ should not be tampered with by undue polarization.

Even though the African concepts of multiple wives have its own shortcomings, but to the Africans, it was a blessing. This is because in Nigeria, like most of African country, polygamy or polygamy was the ordained style of marriage in the traditional socio- cultural set up, and as a rule, whoever had sufficient means married more women. 'Those who do not are rare exceptions', observed Westermann<sup>7</sup>. From this point of view, it could be rightly said that the teaching of restitution of second wife seems unfair. This is because the African man or family derived a lot of benefits from it as mentioned earlier on .Since modernity and Christian teaching has eroded the cherished culture, women who finds herself in a polygamous home become a victim to be restituted. Women are always at the receiving end while the man continues to enjoy his marriage.

Thus, it could be rightly said here that the teaching of restitution especially when it pertains to both sexes is not balanced. Women are always the object of attack. There is no doubt that the application of restitution in churches today gives room for injustice and gender bias. In a society where men are permitted to remain in marriage while the woman suffers, then there is a problem of gender discrimination. As remarkably pointed out by Okunna,

Gender relations in Nigeria are characterized by a lot of imbalance, to the disadvantage of women, tradition, culture, religion and other factors have continued to widen the disparity between Nigerian men and women by keeping women in subordinate positions to the men.<sup>8</sup>

This gender imbalance in the interpretations of restitution is also a form of violence against women. The Sun News of 26<sup>th</sup> December, 2009 reports this violence of restitution against women. There, it was reported that, a 55 year-old, Samuel Adejimi decided to expose his wife for not complying with his instruction to return their three children to the biological fathers. Samuel Adejimi who had just given his life to Christ in one of the new generation Pentecostal church was certified impotent, but had an agreement with his wife to sleep with men outside in order for them to have children. They had three children in the process, but later when Samuel became a born-again Christian, he dragged his wife to court seeking an order to force his wife to return the three children fathered by three different men ignorantly.

Another fatal practice was the case of a man who restituted his second wife. The woman as a result of the shock received from the husband when she was asked to go, ran mad and ended up in a psychiatric home. A woman too in Lagos suffered a similar set-back. In her own case, the ex-husband does not give financial support. She said, she had to work very hard to pay off debts and even her children's school fees. She also had to move from a comfortable house to a small apartment in an unsafe area. Similarly, another woman in Owo, a town in Ondo State said, she had lingering feelings of anger and resentment over the ways in which her spouse restituted her. The loneliness that overwhelmed her prompted her to plan how to kill the ex-husband, she said.

Apparently as these experiences show, the break-up of a marriage with second or third wife often deals a devastating financial and emotional blow to women. In fact, considering the

case of the woman in the first example given, one realizes that (1) it would be disastrous for the woman to start remembering men she slept with that led to the births of those children (2) the children had been subjected to emotional and mental tortures as a result of the revelations. This is because the children believed that Samuel was their biological father (3) it would be impossible for the children to impose themselves on a father who doesn't know them (4) the other men would be devastated most especially if the reason for their relationship with the woman is to satisfy their sexual orgies and not to have additional children.

It will therefore be imperative to add here that, God is not an author of confusion. Restitution is not an act that will bring will bring confusion; therefore, God cannot ask a man to do that which will bring disaster. The man in question can only retribute if the surrogate men are aware, but if otherwise, Samuel Adejimi needs to claim the paternity of the children. Also, people need to be aware that there are restitutions you make when the person involved is currently being hurt. For example, one only needs to retribute things that still cause pain to the recipient. On the whole, the apparent misinterpretation of the scripture on the issue of restitution and the associated effects on women is not in anyway justified. This attitude is merely prevalent because, as Nicola Slee wrote '... the dominant forms of thought and expression are determined by and reflect the needs of the society powerful gender group and under categories created by and appropriate to men.'<sup>9</sup> In any case, if a woman is asked to leave her matrimonial home, this has a lot of implications. The woman will not be the only person that would be affected. The children too will suffer part of the consequences. This will take us to look at the effects of restitution or implications on the women and the children.

### **EFFECTS OF RESTITUTION ON WOMEN AND CHILDREN**

From the discussion so far, the followings could safely be inferred as the effects of restitution:

- Many women in our culture never recover from childhood unkindness. Studies show that males and females who are violently humiliated and abused repeatedly, with no caring intervention, are likely to be dysfunctional and will be predisposed to abuse others violently.<sup>10</sup> Such is the case of a woman who is violently humiliated from her matrimonial home as a result of restitution. A young lady interviewed in Ado-Ekiti, who has similar experience says, "inside her, she battled monsters of rage, depression and insecurity, and does not have trust in men again."<sup>11</sup>
- The economic welfare of the woman being restituted and that of their children become a problem or burden. The kind of paid work they are doing might not be enough to take care of themselves and their children. Interestingly, there is every tendency for the woman to start having an affair with other men outside.
- Single parent are usually isolated in the society and in most cases, not given position of responsibilities.
- Single parent families suffer because when one parent is absent and the absence according to Omorugiuwa, impact the critical development of their children.<sup>12</sup> Parenting is stressful and demanding even when there are two parents in the home. Both single parent

and their children face an even broader range of stresses, including feelings of irresponsibility, task and emotional overload on the part of the parent and emotional, inter-personal and school problems on the part of the children.<sup>13</sup>

➤ Children in single parent homes are most likely than those in two parent homes to have two or more contact with laws, to be a truant, to have problems at school, to be runaway and to smoke regularly.<sup>14</sup> A particular child whose father restitutes his mother says, "the experience he had took away in him every child's birthright – the feeling of being secured and protected – and his protective wall crumbles too."<sup>15</sup> In order to solve the problem associated with some churches' wrong interpretations of restitution, the following are hereby recommended.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

To this end, the following are hereby recommended:

- ❖ Helping professionals like counsellors, social workers, educationists, psychologists and the likes should ensure appropriate programmes designed to help women whose husbands retribute and children to live a normal life again.
- ❖ The complexity of the misinterpretations of scripture by the so called religious leaders calls for more in depth research into biblical hermeneutics
- ❖ Men that have restituted their wives should enhance their status through economic and empowerment.

### **CONCLUSION**

The paper clearly bring to fore, the continual prevalence of gender abuse within the Nigerian Pentecostal churches. While acknowledging that biblical teachings are for the good and better living of man, there is by far a predominance wrong interpretation of scripture in most Pentecostal churches. Restitution as a valid teaching of Christians should not be done in such a way to affect the well being of the woman and the children. The multiplicity of problems associated with restitution of second wife and opinions demonstrated by the study clearly reinforces the need for thorough understanding and interpretations.

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