Dishonest Gain in the Light of God's Righteousness – Part 3

To better understand how serious this sin is — a sin most people ignore — we will look at the subject in depth.

In Romania, the relationship between the citizen and the state rests on a **social contract** founded on the principle of **solidarity**. This contract involves rights and obligations on both sides. The state is responsible for providing public services — education, health care, infrastructure, social protection — and the citizen is obliged to help pay for them in proportion to his income. This contribution is made through the **payment of taxes**, which is regulated by law. Citizens who earn income — from wages, self-employment, rent, investments or other sources — are required to contribute to the state budget. **Income tax** applies to income from any source, and the rate is **10%**.

The aim is not merely to collect money, but to redistribute resources fairly, taking more from those who earn a lot and giving more to those who earn little, so that no one is left without support. So education is free for every child, hospital care is available to all, and roads, parks and street lighting serve everyone equally — the poor man and the rich man alike.

Seen from the standpoint of the social contract, **hiding income** is a way of cheating your partner — that is, the state, which serves as the means of organising and protecting society. In this sense, the benefits we receive from the state (education, health care, infrastructure and so on) are paid for by the contributions of honest people, and to enjoy them without contributing is a form of **indirect theft**.

A practical illustration. To understand the sin of hiding income, let us take an example. Suppose that for years I have ignored my obligation to the state, hiding my income and dodging the tax I owe. The state — not knowing it is being cheated — has kept providing me with public services: my children have gone to school for free, received free medical care, and been given child benefit and scholarships. I have enjoyed paved roads, sewers, gas and electricity.

All these services were funded with money collected from citizens, including the tax that others paid honestly, while I chose not to contribute.

If I have three children in school, and the standard yearly cost of educating one child, according to the official public budget allocation, is about 10,000 lei (the Romanian currency), then the state spends roughly **30,000 lei** a year on their education alone. This sum covers teachers' salaries, school maintenance, utilities and other basic educational services, and it is paid entirely from public funds.

On top of that comes the free medical care given to children. Besides education and health care, I also receive a monthly child benefit — 290 lei for each child — which comes to about **10,400 lei**

a year for the three of them.

If my monthly income is 5,000 lei, my income tax is about **6,000 lei** a year. So even if I paid my tax honestly, the state would still be giving me more than 38,400 lei in benefits over and above my contribution. It is an abomination to hide my income so as not to pay those 6,000 lei, while the state — which I regard as "heathen" — gives me **44,400 lei** paid for by honest people who pay VAT, duties and taxes.

A lesson from the lives of **Abraham** and **Judas**. Picture the Bible scene in which Abraham, the patriarch of faith, loses his wife Sarah. The people of the land offer him a burial place — a cave — free of charge, as a mark of respect. But Abraham refuses to take it without paying. Why? Because he did not want to take advantage, not even when something was offered to him for nothing. He wanted to stay clean and to live uprightly, both before God and before men.

Now picture the opposite: someone receives help from the state — subsidies, grants, benefits, social support, free medical care — and accepts it all as though it were his by right, and on top of that he chooses to cheat the one who does him so much good. He hides his income, works cash in hand, off the books, or games the system without contributing. It is as if someone offered to help him with money to build a house, and instead of saying thank you, he stole money from his benefactor's wallet.

Abraham wanted nothing for free, even when he could have taken advantage. When we are faced with help from the state — that is, from everyone's contributions — we are called to choose the same path: honesty. Let us not steal from the common storehouse, from other people's bread, from the labour of those who have contributed honestly, but let us too be among those who contribute gladly. Only then can we truly receive child benefit and free medical care — not as freeloaders, but as honest citizens who give first and then receive what is due to them.

This picture becomes all the more troubling when I compare it with my own choice: I have benefited from what was not mine, and I have even stolen from and cheated the one who gave to me, by hiding the truth. And why? Because I loved a reward, a tainted wage, just as Scripture says in Hosea 9:1.

I have applied for subsidies, grants, social assistance, firewood and heating allowances — and I have taken them with both hands wide open, as though they were owed to me, without asking whether I was truly entitled to them. But when the time comes to pay what I owe, my hands seem sewn into my pockets.

I hide, I declare less income, I dodge responsibility. My heart is trained in greed, just as Scripture says: "an heart they have exercised with covetous practices" (2 Peter 2:14). Not only have I taken advantage, I have also hidden the truth, driven by selfish desires and an insatiable craving for gain.

Abraham, on the other hand, hungering for righteousness, lived in the integrity God gave him, choosing not to covet anything that belonged to his neighbour, not even a thread, keeping himself clean before the Righteous One. Although he did not have the commandment written

out on tablets — "nor any thing that is thy neighbour's" (Exodus 20:17) — as we have it today, God had engraved it on his heart. When the king of Sodom offered him riches as spoils of war, he flatly refused, saying: "I will not take from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that is thine" (Genesis 14:23). Moved by God's righteousness, he did not want to profit from the labour of others.

He chose the light of righteousness, led by faith and justice. I was driven by selfish desires, he by a clean conscience before God. Faced with the same temptation, he chose to stay clean; I chose to soil myself.

The deeds of my faith do not resemble those of Abraham, the father of the faithful, but those of **Judas**, who stole from the common purse, of whom it is written: "he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein" (John 12:6). Judas, driven by the love of money, chose wickedness. He stole from their little storehouse — a purse that covered the expenses of the disciples who went about with the Lord Jesus. He took for himself what was not his, hiding behind the mask of service.

Between these two men lies a moral and spiritual gulf as wide as heaven is from earth. Abraham's integrity was the fruit of faith, while Judas's greed was the expression of a heart estranged from God. The one builds up; the other destroys.

So if I want to be an heir of the Kingdom of God, I must have the faith of Abraham — not the greed of Judas. As it is written, the promise is sure "to that also which is of the faith of Abraham" (Romans 4:16). The inheritance of the Kingdom is not for those who merely carry a religious name, but for those who live out the faith of Abraham — a faith that shows itself in righteousness.

Not paying taxes is an abomination before God. It is a deed that reflects the character of Judas — driven by greed and followed by a false sense of spiritual security. That I resemble Judas rather than Abraham shows that I do not thirst for righteousness. It is a serious warning sign: my deeds betray a false faith, empty of the fruits of obedience and integrity.

Scripture warns us how God views this attitude, even when it is dressed up in social or economic arguments. In Isaiah 57:17 God says: "For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him: I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart." This greed is not merely a moral problem; it is rebellion against order and justice.

When someone refuses to contribute, even the little he owes in proportion to his modest income, he is stealing from the common storehouse. He benefits from services that others pay for, without giving anything in return. It is a hidden form of injustice, profiting from collective solidarity without taking part in it. Even a small contribution has value, because it expresses responsibility, honesty and respect for the common good.

If Judas's greed is plain to see in his stealing from a small storehouse, our deed is no less serious just because the storehouse we take from is bigger. The fact that what I take seems to "go unnoticed" does not change the nature of the deed. The greed is the same, and theft remains

theft, whatever its size. God does not judge by the size of the storehouse, but by the integrity of the heart. Such a man is a cheat and a thief, like Judas; he therefore does not deserve to enjoy the benefits of the system, but deserves to be condemned, because he chose to cheat and take advantage rather than to contribute.

That is why the state has laws that punish tax evasion — not only because it breaks the social contract, but also because it violates the moral and ethical standards on which a just society rests. Tax evasion is not merely an economic offence; it is a form of injustice towards the community, a betrayal of the solidarity that upholds the common good.

Working off the books is legally defined as **tax evasion** and fraud, since it involves receiving or paying money in secret without meeting one's legal obligations to the state. It is governed by:

- **Romanian Law No. 241/2005 on the prevention and combating of tax evasion**, Article 9, which states: Hiding income, or failing to record it in legal documents… are offences punishable by imprisonment of 2 to 8 years.

- **The Romanian Labour Code – Law No. 53/2003**, Article 260, paragraph (1), letter (e), which states: Employing a person without a written individual employment contract before the work begins is an offence punishable by imprisonment of 1 to 2 years or a criminal fine.

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