Restitution: A Step Towards Genuine Repentance

Before we step into the Kingdom of God, **genuine repentance** requires more than regret and confession of sin. It also means putting right the wrong we have done.

If you have stolen, cheated or taken advantage of others, a sincere return to God begins with **restitution**: giving back what does not belong to you. God cannot declare righteous someone who keeps what he gained through injustice and enjoys the fruits of wrongdoing. He does not overlook injustice that has never been put right.

Although the Lord Jesus paid the penalty for the sin of theft, that does not cancel our personal responsibility to repair the harm we have caused. Restitution remains a moral and spiritual obligation. True repentance does not stop at words. It proves itself through concrete acts of making things right.

Scripture warns: "Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house" (**Habakkuk 2:9**).

Trying to build security on injustice is an illusion, and God condemns it without hesitation.

To understand better why restitution is required as an act of justice, we can look at a concrete example, one that human justice treats with the utmost seriousness and fairness. A citizen caught in tax evasion is not merely given a criminal sentence. He is also required to pay back the entire sum he withheld, together with the penalties and interest for the period in which the state was deprived of that money.

The justice system is not satisfied with a conviction alone. It demands that the damage be repaired. If restitution were not compulsory, many would be tempted to steal large sums, accept a few years' sentence, and then live comfortably on what they had stolen. That would be a blatant injustice towards honest people, who choose to live uprightly without taking advantage of anyone.

Restitution is a precondition for the new life to begin. Being born again is not only an inward change. It is a transformation that shows itself in what we do.

As Scripture says: "If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die. None of his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned unto him: he hath done that which is lawful and right; he shall surely live." (**Ezekiel 33:15-16**)

Here we see clearly that the new life, a picture of the new birth, depends on compensating the one who was wronged. It is not enough to say you have changed. You must prove that change through restitution, even when it is no longer possible to repay the person directly.

In the Kingdom of God, justice is not optional. It is an essential expression of righteousness. If someone has stolen, cheated or taken advantage of others, he cannot regard those things as his own. No one has the right to keep what was gained through injustice, whether money, possessions or positions. Divine justice is not satisfied with simply admitting the wrong. It also demands that the wrong be put right.

To make this clear, let us take two practical examples. Suppose that from the age of fifty until I reached retirement age, I avoided paying income tax by working cash in hand, off the books. All that time I paid my pension contributions myself, out of my own pocket, as though I had no income, just so I could draw a pension in old age. During those years my children and I benefited from child benefit, free schooling, healthcare and other public services, all funded by the contributions of people who honestly paid their taxes.

A few days ago I retired, and yesterday I turned to God. The state does not know that I lied to it and cheated it until just three or four days ago. And now that I have become a so-called believer, I think I can draw my pension without paying back the tax on the income I concealed, on the grounds that the authorities know nothing of what I did. If the state knew the real situation, it would restore justice and take steps to recover what it had lost.

The same principle of justice applies in another case. For several years I drew a disability pension obtained by deception. When I reached retirement age, I started receiving the ordinary state pension. The state, the very institution I deceived without its knowing, pays me my pension every month, respectfully, correctly and on time. It is a troubling picture: I, who stole for years, receive money every month from the one I cheated, while he goes on treating me impeccably, unaware that he is the victim of an injustice.

So the question is this: can I live with this lie and at the same time be born of the righteous God?

Scripture's answer is unequivocal: no. Genuine repentance is not only regret. It also means repairing the injustice. To keep what you gained through deception, even after you have become religious, is to live in sin. The fact that the person you wronged does not know does not cancel your guilt. God sees what is hidden, and He demands justice, not excuses.

It is morally abhorrent for me to accept this money with a clear conscience without repairing the damage. It is as though I were sitting at the table with the man I robbed, and he offers me his bread, not knowing that I secretly took it from him.

To go on drawing the pension without confessing and without making restitution means living a lie and enjoying the fruits of deception, while the one I wronged remains unaware and goes on showing me goodwill.

Scripture says in **Proverbs 28:13**: "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy." To cover up sin is to keep it alive. God does not show mercy to the one who merely regrets in secret, but to the one who sincerely confesses and parts with his sin.

In both cases, whether I worked off the books and avoided paying tax or obtained a disability pension by deception, true repentance involves not only admitting the wrong but also making good the loss. If I have stolen what was not mine, I must give back everything I stole. Only then can I live in truth and righteousness before God.

Scripture says in **Psalm 37:21**: "The wicked borroweth, and payeth not again." Although the verse speaks of borrowing, the principle applies all the more to theft, which is a far more serious act. A loan involves an agreement, a trust that was offered, even if that trust is later betrayed.

Theft, on the other hand, is a hidden act, done without consent, a direct violation of another person's rights. If Scripture calls "wicked" the one who does not repay a loan, how much more is the one condemned who steals deliberately and refuses to give it back.

Injustice lies not only in wrongfully taking, but also in refusing to give back. Keeping what does not belong to you, even after you have become a believer, puts you among those Scripture calls "wicked." God judges not only the original act, but also our attitude towards putting it right. Refusing to give back what you stole does not bring the sin to an end. It actively continues it.

Taken together, these two verses paint a clear picture: repentance without restitution is an illusion, and hidden sin goes on separating us from Christ. His Kingdom is built on truth, justice and purity, not on religious excuses or a convenient forgetting of the past.

Whether it is money, possessions or positions, such as materials taken from the workplace, firewood obtained dishonestly, a pension gained unlawfully, taxes evaded, or a qualification obtained by cheating in exams, whatever was acquired unjustly cannot be regarded as legitimate. To keep such things in your life is to live in continual offence against the holiness of God.

God asks sternly: "Are there yet the treasures of wickedness in the house of the wicked, and the scant measure that is abominable?" (**Micah 6:10**). This rhetorical question brings a grave reality to light: in the house of the wicked there are things obtained by deception, and God does not overlook them.

Tax evasion, for example, means keeping in your house money that is not yours, treasures of wickedness used as though they were honest gain. It is a way of squeezing the state, done in the dark, in secret. But God sees, and He will call us to account. He asks, "Can I still tolerate these things in your house?" And the implied answer, as in the case of Achan, is a resounding "no."

Even if everything seems well hidden, whether false contracts, cash-in-hand payments, undeclared income, or a disability pension obtained through lies, the things acquired this way become witnesses to the injustice. The house, the car, the bank account all "cry out" against the one who acquired them by deception, like the beam in **Habakkuk 2:11**.

So it is not only the unpaid wages of workers, as **James 5:4** says, "Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth," but any gain obtained by deception that has a voice before God. Injustice cannot be hidden. It rises

up as a testimony against the one who committed it, calling down divine judgement on the deed.

True repentance involves not only confessing sin, but also removing every injustice we still hold on to. **Micah 6:10** is a solemn warning: we cannot have fellowship with God while keeping in our houses treasures gained through wickedness. Genuine repentance means giving them up, giving them back, living in the light and bringing our lives into line with God's righteousness.

What was stolen cannot be kept on the pretext of grace. Grace does not cover up hidden sin. It exposes it in order to cleanse it. Only the one who rejects such unlawful gain and refuses to let it into his life will dwell in God's presence, as Scripture declares: "He that walketh righteously, and speaketh uprightly; he that despiseth the gain of oppressions... He shall dwell on high." (**Isaiah 33:15**)

The command to make restitution: "he shall recompense his trespass with the principal thereof" (**Numbers 5:6**). In the Kingdom of God there is no tolerance for dishonest gain. Forgiveness does not come without restitution, and if it is no longer possible to repay the person directly, what was stolen must be given to the Lord. Divine justice does not allow us to keep what was obtained by deception, whatever the circumstances.

The Bible is unequivocal: restitution is compulsory, even when it must be made indirectly. It is an essential condition of forgiveness and salvation. Anyone who has wronged another must repair the harm done. Where the injured party can no longer be compensated, as is the case, for example, with evaded taxes, Scripture offers a clear solution: the compensation must be brought before the Lord.

It is written: "Speak unto the children of Israel, When a man or woman shall commit any sin that men commit, to do a trespass against the LORD, and that person be guilty; then they shall confess their sin which they have done: and he shall recompense his trespass with the principal thereof, and add unto it the fifth part thereof, and give it unto him against whom he hath trespassed. But if the man have no kinsman to recompense the trespass unto, let the trespass be recompensed unto the LORD, even to the priest; beside the ram of the atonement, whereby an atonement shall be made for him." (**Numbers 5:6**)

These verses show plainly that there is no excuse for keeping what was wrongfully taken. Even when direct restitution is no longer possible, God requires that compensation be made by offering the goods or their value to Him. In this way the principle of justice is upheld, and repentance becomes complete.

Restitution is essential evidence of repentance and of the new birth. If you can no longer repay the injured person directly, you must give it to the Lord, because justice and holiness cannot be ignored. God does not accept half-hearted repentance. He requires reparation, sincerity and responsibility.

There is no blessing on what is stained by injustice. The righteousness of the Kingdom of God tolerates no compromise. Treasure gained by a lying tongue, including through working off the books or dodging taxes, is a vanity that slips away. It does not last, it does not build, and it leads

to death.

True blessing comes only when we live in truth, justice and purity, in line with the standard of the Kingdom of God. Scripture is very clear on this: "The getting of treasures by a lying tongue is a vanity tossed to and fro of them that seek death." (**Proverbs 21:6**)

This verse highlights a profound truth: any gain obtained by deception has no real value and keeps a person in spiritual death. The "lying tongue" stands for every form of manipulation, falsification, cheating and deceit, whether in speech, in documents or in behaviour.

In some cases there is nothing left to give back, because what was wrongfully obtained has already been used up. Yet Scripture does not ignore this reality. It offers a just solution: "if he have nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft." (**Exodus 22:3**)

This command expresses a divine principle: genuine repentance does not exclude repairing the wrong that was done. The new birth cannot take place where a person refuses to part with shameful deeds and to put right the harm he has caused, which is an offence against the holiness of Christ. Repentance is not only regret. It is also the fulfilling of justice.

When the state recovers a loss and the guilty person has no assets to take, it deducts a percentage from his wages so that he can still live. In the same way, the one who has stolen must wholeheartedly seek a fair way to make restitution, even if he no longer has the means to repay it all at once.

The one who hungers for righteousness will not look for excuses to avoid putting injustice right. He will gladly accept any solution offered by the one he wronged, whether work, repayment in instalments or some other form of restitution, as an opportunity to fulfil the justice of God. His sincere desire to live in the light will make him accept with humility and gratitude any way in which he can repair the harm done, knowing that righteousness is measured not only in words but in deeds that bring restoration.

This can be done with the counsel and guidance of the body of Christ, **the Church**, which has been given for the growth of the saints and for the fulfilling of justice. God requires that, along with the turning of the heart, what has been broken should also be restored, because nothing unjust can exist in His Kingdom.

We can see this in David, who, although he was forgiven for his sin, still had to bear its consequences. When the prophet Nathan told him about the man who took his neighbour's lamb, David pronounced the verdict: "And he shall restore the lamb fourfold" (**2 Samuel 12:6**). This judgement, spoken by his own conscience, came back upon him, showing that forgiveness does not cancel the need for justice.

God cannot dwell together with sin. His presence is a place of holiness, truth and justice. To remain in sin, without repentance and without restitution, is to choose separation from God.

Zacchaeus and the law of restitution: repentance that leads to life. Genuine repentance shows itself in concrete deeds, and one of them is restitution. A true change of heart does not stop at words or intentions. It can be seen in actions that repair the injustice done.

When Zacchaeus met the Lord Jesus, he understood this principle at once. He said: "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold." (**Luke 19:8**)

This decision was not imposed by the Lord Jesus. It sprang from a heart that responded with repentance when God visited it. Zacchaeus did not look for excuses. He chose to put right what he had done wrong. That is what true repentance looks like: it admits the guilt, repairs the harm, and brings light where there had been darkness.

He fulfilled the verse in Ezekiel 33:15: "If the wicked restore the pledge, give again that he had robbed, walk in the statutes of life, without committing iniquity; he shall surely live, he shall not die." This verse underlines an essential principle of God's righteousness: genuine repentance is not only an inward change. It also involves concrete acts of justice. God does not give life to the one who merely regrets his sin, but to the one who repairs the wrong he has done. Restitution is a condition of forgiveness and of life.

Like Zacchaeus, who understood that he could not keep what he had gained unjustly and gave back fourfold what he had taken by false accusation, so the wicked, if he wants to live, must give back what he took unjustly. This is the evidence of real repentance and of a life in line with the standard of the Kingdom of God. After Zacchaeus made his decision, the Lord Jesus confirmed it: "This day is salvation come to this house."

This is the evidence of a transformed heart. Restitution is not merely a legal obligation, but an expression of justice, a sincere desire to repair the wrong that was done. God hates robbery because it is a direct attack on justice, on our neighbour and on the order He has established. Whoever robs and does not make restitution cannot dwell in God's presence, because he refuses to come into line with God's holy character.

Genuine repentance is not only regret or tears. It is restitution, reparation and transformation. Only a heart that loves righteousness and hates wickedness can be a dwelling place for the Holy Spirit.

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