

Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People
Chapter 2: Restitution – Making Things Right
Pastor's Notes/Review

Last week we began a new series of messages that are all about God working in our lives, changing us, so that we become the Masterpiece that God has in mind for us. What a privilege!

- Today we're going to look at one area of our lives where God often works in us.

In the movie, "Flywheel" we find a salesman who has had a change taken place in his life.

- Prior to his renewed Christian faith, our friend took advantage of people he sold cars to.
- As with anyone who sells anything, the temptation is to get the most you possibly can, even if it means withholding some vital information.
- The way this man responded to the growing conviction in his heart, he not only changed his practice, but with time he came to realize that he had to make things right with those he wronged previously.
- He went back and gave refunds to the customers he had charged too much. That's restitution.

Restitution is going back and making things right; for things you took or the people you hurt.

- It is "restoring" to the original owner what is rightfully theirs -- property or respect and reputation.
- Restitution is returning a toolbox taken from the company years ago. It is paying for a stack of office supplies you slipped out of the office without anyone's knowledge.
- It is paying taxes on income you didn't report on your tax return.
- Restitution is large utility companies granting refunds because they illegally overcharged their customers.
- It is an airline giving rebates to travelers because they have been guilty of unfair competition.
- It is paying back in full for improperly gained money or property.

Returning property; that was the easy part. Restitution deals with more than property. It is also going back and making things right for hurtful things I've said or done.

- Restitution is asking forgiveness for harsh words, relentless gossip, quick tongue, or cutting remarks.
- It is asking forgiveness from a brother you hurt, a mother you caused heartache to, or a former spouse whose name you tarnished.
- Restitution is confessing and seeking forgiveness from an old business partner, neighbor, or roommate.

Restitution is a discipline in humility. Pride and restitution are incompatible.

- It's not popular. And it isn't easy. It is one of the most painful disciplines of the obedient life.

But it is biblical. It is the Christian way. Anyone who seriously wants to follow the teachings of Jesus Christ will walk the painful path of restitution from time to time, returning to the offended party to make things right. It's the Christian way.

Jesus confirmed the idea in the New Testament, even recognizing restitution as one of the evidences that "salvation has come to this house" (Luke 19:9). Not that making restitution can save a man or woman.

- Nothing we can do will bring salvation, except trusting Christ. But the Bible expects restitution to be the kind of thing you do if you follow God. It's consistent with all other teaching in Scripture.
- The reason we don't like it is not because it's unbiblical; it is because it is in total opposition to our pride. We hate to be humbled, embarrassed, humiliated. It goes against our nature. So, we would rather save our pride than make restitution.
- But the Word of God doesn't change just because we have a hard time following it.
- The single best reason to make restitution is because God said to do it. It's a matter of obedience.
- Jesus told his followers, "If you love me you will obey what I command" (John 14:15).

Knowing that we need to make restitution; the question becomes how do we do it... wisely?

1. Start with the key unmade restitution.

Begin by asking yourself what God is pointing out to you. What is he making you aware of? What is he impressing upon you?

- Sometimes it's the "biggest" thing, and sometimes it's not.
- Whatever it is, deal with it. You need to start somewhere.

2. Prepare your speech.

Think through what you are going to say. In Luke 15, in the story of the prodigal son, when the son came to his senses he thought through what he was going to say to his father (Luke 15:18-19).

- Prepare what you need to say. You need to be clear with yourself and with the person you offended exactly what your offense was.
- Were you being harsh with someone? Critical? Did you take something that wasn't yours? Were you unkind, angry, vengeful?
- Identify it clearly and then prepare what you're going to say.
- Say something like: "I was wrong in my ___ (fill in the blank) ___ toward you, and I ask you to forgive me; will you forgive me?" That's it, just a simple statement of confession and request. Anything more and you're liable to cause more problems than you solve.

And, if you're having trouble saying, "I was wrong," since they were wrong too, remember you are not affirming that they were right. You are simply asking forgiveness for the wrong that you are liable for. Their wrongdoing is their problem, not yours. So think through what you want to say carefully and prayerfully.

3. Pick the right time, place, and means.

Usually, the sooner the better, but don't approach someone when they are especially busy, tired, or irritable. And you don't usually want to do this in public.

- You should limit the restitution to the offended parties. In other words, don't make a public restitution if the offense was a private one between two individuals.
- Sometimes restitution can do more harm than good, so we need to be careful and make certain we are acting on what God would have us to do. Use your head, get some advice from a Christian you respect, and do what seems best.

4. Don't combine witnessing with restitution.

Simply make your restitution and get on with life. If they inquire, answer their questions. Otherwise, don't advertise how spiritual you are now that you've come back to make things right. You are not trying to impress anyone about your spirituality by making restitution.

5. Give a full confession.

Come clean. We are always trying to make ourselves look better, even while making restitution.

- Don't make excuses for your wrongdoing.
- Don't say, "You know, I've been thinking of how we were wrong when..." Don't include others in the fault, just say, "I was wrong; will you forgive me?"
- Don't say, "I apologize," either. You apologize for minor misunderstandings and comments. When you were wrong say, "I was wrong; will you forgive me?"
- Don't say, "I'm sorry." Of course you're sorry. So are they and everyone else -- that the whole thing happened. Being sorry is not enough. Simply say, "I was wrong; will you forgive me?"
- Don't say, "I didn't mean to..." as if it is their fault they were offended.; they should have not misunderstood you. The thing to say is, "I was wrong; will you forgive me?"

Saying I was wrong and making things right is not easy, but it is what Christ expects. It is part of our spiritual growth, or to put it another way, if we don't "come clean" through restitution, we tend to get stagnant, spiritually.

- Perhaps that is why Jesus said, when someone has something against us, we should go and make it right immediately -- (Matthew 5:23-24).

Restitution is never easy... but it is essential if we are going to be the people God wants us to be.