

Th122 Foundation Doctrines

Lesson Th122 - 6 Repentance: Restitution

His wife did not want him smoking in the apartment, so he went outside and stood on his balcony. He had almost completed smoking a cigarette, when his wife called to him from inside. Without a thought, he threw the cigarette butt off the balcony and went in. After all, he was on the fourth floor, what harm could it cause? The cigarette butt, still smoldering, drifted down and landed on a stack of paper on the balcony of apartment 104. First there was smoke, and then there was fire. Soon the fire spread to the apartments around it. The fire would gut Tower 4 of the Al Baker apartment complex, leaving 120 families homeless. The man never thought that his careless act of throwing a cigarette off of his balcony would hurt anyone.

This is so typical of sinful behavior. People seldom think about how their sins can impact those around them. But sin not only affects the person who is sinning; it often affects others. We have discussed how repentance begins with Godly sorrow, which leads to confessing our sins to God. Sometimes when we have offended others, we should confess to them also and ask their forgiveness. In some situations, repentance will lead to restitution.

The Romans conquered the land of Israel 100 years before Jesus was born. They set a provincial government to rule over it. This led to heavy taxes being placed upon the people. There were taxes on almost everything and thus Rome required many tax collectors. Now the tax collectors were not government officials. They were actually small businessmen who had to purchase the right to collect taxes at a government auction. They did this by prepaying to Rome the taxes they were to collect. Rome would pay them interest on the prepayment of taxes. But they would have to work hard to collect the taxes due, in order to recover their investment and make a profit. The tax collectors were called publicans and, as you might imagine, were hated by the general population. Sometimes a person could not pay their taxes. So, the publican would loan them the money to cover the taxes, but at a high rate of interest. It was a common practice to cheat and overcharge people.

One day Jesus was on a trip that would cause him to pass through the ancient city of Jericho. The towering walls of Jericho had not protected its original inhabitants from being conquered hundreds of years earlier. Joshua and the people of Israel had marched around the walls for seven days. On the seventh day they marched around Jericho seven times. Then, with the blowing of rams' horns and shouts from the people, God caused the walls of Jericho to fall! Its people had been conquered.

Jesus' arrival in Jericho caused quite a stir. Not only were his 12 disciples with him, a crowd had gathered. They wanted to see the man who had healed the sick and fed the hungry. Living in Jericho was a wealthy tax collector named Zacchaeus. He also wanted to get a look at Jesus, but he was very short and could not see over the crowd. But Zacchaeus was used to getting what he wanted, so he ran ahead of the procession and climbed up into a sycamore-fig tree. Soon Jesus and the procession were passing in front of him. His view from the tree allowed him to see Jesus clearly. But it also allowed Jesus to see him as well. To his surprise, Jesus stopped right in front of him and then spoke. "Zacchaeus, come down from the tree

immediately. I must stay at your house today." A murmur quickly spread through the crowd. Why was Jesus speaking to this man? Didn't Jesus know that Zacchaeus was a publican, a hated tax collector? Everyone knew that publicans cheated and stole from the people. They were considered the lowest of the low and chief among all sinners.

Zacchaeus climbed down from the tree and pushed through the crowd to stand before Jesus. He was overwhelmed that the Master would stop to speak to him. He knew what people thought of him. He also knew that the Master was incurring great shame by being willing to go to his home. Soon Jesus, his disciples, and Zacchaeus were at his home eating a meal together. People stood around and listened to Jesus teach. Zacchaeus felt the Holy Spirit convicting him of his sin. He wanted to become a follower of this man Jesus. "Look, Lord!" Zacchaeus said. "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 then answered him, speaking to everyone present, "Today salvation has come to this house, because this man, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:1-10).

Zacchaeus experienced something very dramatic that day. He was so moved that he was willing to give a great sum of money to the poor. He also vowed to make restitution for any harm he had caused. What could make a man do such a thing? We can imagine what might have been going through his mind while Jesus spoke. Surely he felt godly sorrow. Along with this was the desire to confess and repent. But he was a man of action and his desire for repentance had to be demonstrated by his action. He would give half of his wealth to the poor and make restitution for any sins he had committed against others by cheating them.

Part of the repentance process is to make restitution when possible. For some sins, restitution is impossible. But, when it is within our power to do so, restitution is a powerful part of repentance. Do not be deceived into thinking that restitution is what causes our sins to be forgiven. Forgiveness comes to us through Jesus' death upon the cross. He has paid for our sins and it is only through making Jesus our Lord and Savior that we are saved and forgiven. But restitution accomplishes two distinct things. First it helps restore our relationships with those we have offended. Secondly, restitution is a powerful witness to everyone that God has done something amazing in our lives.

This lesson is **important** because it uses the story of Zacchaeus to illustrate that true repentance often includes making restitution for wrongs committed.

The **main truth** of this lesson is that although forgiveness comes through Jesus, restitution, as a part of repentance, helps restore one's relationships with people and serves as a witness to God's transforming power in a life.

Let's **review** this lesson:

1. What was Zacchaeus' profession? [Pause]

A. If you said, "Zacchaeus was a tax collector," you are correct.

2. Restitution can be an important part of repentance. How did Zacchaeus demonstrate restitution? [Pause]
 - A. If you said that Zacchaeus said that he would pay back four times any money that he had cheated people out of, then you are right.

3. List the five aspects of repentance. [Pause]
 - A. If you said, “Godly sorrow, a change of heart and direction, confession, and restitution,” then you answered correctly.

Your **assignment** for this lesson is to watch this lesson at least three times. Then find someone and teach them about repentance, by telling them the story of Zacchaeus.