

RESTITUTION

To get right to the point, moving forward is difficult until we have made the past right. This instructional Bible study is for those realize that their sin has wounded others and are as genuinely sorry as they are eager to obey and please God. However, sometimes in our rush to obediently cooperate with God, or to selfishly get out from under a load of guilt and regret, we rush headlong into the act of restitution and... End up making a bigger mess rather instead of cleaning things up! The stories I could tell! Stories that often end in great sadness instead of reconciliation. Hastily plunging into restitution can easily make new wounds, and frequently they are bigger than what we are trying to correct. If you are genuine about a desire to deepen your relationship with God by humbly going to another you have wounded in the past to try to make things right, read this study completely. The 25-30 thoughtful minutes you put into digesting this content before making a plan for bringing closure to a broken relationship will be time well spent if your motives are pure and not self-serving. Be encouraged, worst case scenario is that you get yourself right before God, and the best case is you win back a friend or loved one. What's to lose except a little pride that you could stand to live without anyway! Let's get started!

Memories & Kidney Stones

A problem that may quickly bubble to the surface as we talk about revisiting our past is that we may not want to go back and make things right because it requires us to resurface and relive it, including any hurt or damage we caused another. The pain and regret we feel can be so strong that we work hard to avoid the memory(s). Many of us have spent years ignoring and burying it instead of admitting it so acknowledging the hurt we brought to others, even if unintentional, is the last thing we want to do. It is right there next to passing a kidney stone! Unfortunately, as with kidney stones, you endure some temporary pain and deal with the past because it is the only path to a clear conscience and a good night sleep that is free from that nagging pain of regret and guilt.

So yes, in God eyes and to whatever degree that is possible, the wrong needs to be made right. God is a just God, and he expects justice from us. This is such a universal law of human relationships that even the worlds courts where God has no sway know that it is just and right to require that repayment be made for actions that have harmed another. Depending on the severity of the offense and the loss incurred, an apology may be all that is needed. Other times it requires that, beyond an apology, an appropriate material payment is made (restitution) before all is forgiven. And sometimes, when civil laws have been broken, it requires a more severe punishment in the form of punitive damages or even imprisonment. This insures the payment has been sufficient, especially when what was taken or damaged cannot be replaced because no price is sufficient. It also protects others from suffering the same loss at our hands when we have repeatedly acted against others. And it is viewed as a deterrent to repetition and to others so they will be less inclined to do the same.

The basic relational "law" is that if we cause someone to suffer pain and/or loss we should try to fix it and restore the relationship. Even if it was accidental, we should do

what we can to “make it right” by “making up for it” through an attempt to put things back the way they were before the lost happened. Human decency and a heart that is truly sorry for the harm they have caused another, will not resist making restitution. We may need to restore goods we borrowed but lost or broke, return things we may have stolen, pay for property we took, or even do what we can to repair a reputation that we soiled with our words.

A Gift We Get to Give, Even When We Are the Offender

When we offend another and then apologize, and make appropriate restitution, we force them to decide if they will respond with forgiveness or with some other choice. Part of making restitution is giving them the chance to make the right choice and forgive in response to our efforts to make things right. When we apologize it puts the choice directly before them, and when we make restitution, it shows our regret and may encourage them to release us and themselves via forgiveness. So restitution includes helping others find healing for their hearts by admitting our wrong and offering an apology. What we restore when we make restitution through an apology comes by presenting them with the opportunity to offer us their forgiveness in return. They need to do that in order to heal and restore their own hearts as well their relationship with God should they have taken up and hatred, anger and vengeance because of our actions against them. Our admission and apology brings restoration as their response of forgiveness sets them back into right relationship with us and God. That restores their heart to health by rescuing it from the sickness of bitterness and unforgiveness.

WHAT IS RESTITUTION?

Definition: There are two kinds of restitution depending on what was taken/lost.

1. Material Loss = To make material or monetary reparation, compensation, reimbursement, or repayment (or the equivalent) by restoring to another what was lost, damaged, or injured due to our (wrongful or accidental) actions.
2. Personal Loss = When it comes to relationships, once it is realized that we have wounded another, inadvertently or consciously, restitution is the act of retracing our steps for the purpose of attempting, as much as it is in our power to do so, to make right any offense, or restore any emotional or non-material loss endured by another due to our sinful or unintentionally hurtful actions, words, or other choice(s).
- Debt = The concept behind restitution is that we owe a debt to those we harm; the concept of “paying back” what was lost or damaged is consistent with the idea of debt; not paying back with vengeance of course but to right the wrong, pay or settle the debt, and possibly restore the relationship, the latter of which is not necessary for closure.

Peace Possible For All:

- Evidence = When we extend effort to make amends, to correct, to set right, to make up for, to attempt to bring back to its former state, it shows that we are sincerely sorry not just that we were caught but that we created loss for another; even when it is not possible to make restoration to its exact former state we make an honest attempt, even if we must bear personal loss, to heal material or emotional injury that our action or words caused another to show our genuine regret; the evidence of

restitution helps them release and/or reverse any sinful response to us.

- Test = When God reveals to us that our bad choices have involved others, I believe he tests our heart to see if we are serious about our repentance by requiring that we make amends for our deeds; David actually asked God to test his heart for him so that God could point out his wrong (Psalm 26:2; comp Psalm 7:9, 17:2-3, 139:23-24; Jeremiah 20:12); it is hard to serve and minister to another if there is still self-justification, self-defense, evil and ill-will in our hearts; this "test" speaks volumes to the one we offended and aides them in the response of forgiveness that they need to extend to us; once the restitution has been made it gives to all people involved a sense of finality that allows everyone to move on.
- Peace = The completion of restitution will appease our conscience; the idea that restitution is evidence or a test is for our own peace of mind because it gives, by way of the test, evidence to our own troubled conscience that we have let it go in our hearts and dispatched with the thing; it helps us know that we serious and so appeases and calms the conscience; and it releases others from the temptation to withhold their forgiveness till we the offender pays for their wrong since the payment has been voluntarily made by them.

WHAT NEEDS RESTITUTION?

Generally speaking (I use this repeatedly to infuse this subject with caution and the need for wise spiritual council before proceeding), common sense and what has customarily been observed among civilized people in the past will be the proper thing to do, or at least close to it, in any given situation. In fact, when you read the Bible you realize that what "civilized" restitution has ordinarily been, comes from the Bible. For example, the idea that a guy who seduces a virgin and talks her into having sex with him he should do right by her and marry her, comes from the Bible (Exodus 22:16)!

Generally speaking, any wrong against another requires that we attempt to make it right. The more that it is irreversible or the more valuable the item or great the loss, the more effort and payment is required. It is common sense. The punishment should "fit" the crime. Lost property is less critical than lost lives. Some offense or injury can be righted by apology, and some require legal, even severe, ramifications. Most of what we find in the Bible is not surprising if we have some common sense and are familiar with universal and widely accepted principals of jurisprudence and basic justice.

- **Negligence** – When loss occurs due to someone not taking the necessary precautions after being made aware that those precautions were needed (Exodus 21:28-30, 33-36, 22:5-6).
- **Burglary** – When the thing cannot be simply given or paid back, due to loss or inability to afford it, the restitution must be in excess of simply restoring what was taken (Exodus 22:1-4).
- **Borrowing** – If something is loaned to us at our request and something happen to it while in our possession, full compensation must be made unless the owner is present to help with the project or to make sure it is not damaged, then no compensation is necessary (Exodus 22:14-15).
- **Cheating, Stealing, Fraud, Perjury, Extortion** – Any way that we might use deceit for

our personal gain or protection, like finding lost property and lying about it, is sin against another, unfaithfulness toward God, and must be corrected by just payment of restoration plus an additional amount (Leviticus 6:1-5; Proverbs 6:30-31).

- **Slander** – This is false communication with the intent of injuring another;
 - The Bible – condemns slander and gossip and, generally speaking, using sharp and critical words to harm another; for example, Proverbs 11:13, 12:18, 16:27-28, 26:28, and elsewhere, Leviticus 19:16; Psalm 101:5; Ephesians 4:31-32; 2 Corinthians 12:20-2; James 4:11-12).
 - “Blasphemy” (“to speak harm”) – carries the same idea but is usually, but not exclusively, used in connection with speaking evil or disrespectfully about God (Leviticus 24:14-16; Exodus 20:7; Matthew 9:1-3; 1 Timothy 1:19), and was punishable by death.
 - The “Devil” (“slanderous”) – using lies and deception to attack and demoralize others is the primary strategy of Devil, who is the father of lies (John 8:44); it puts us in league with him and is just one place where harsh words are connect with the idea of physical wounds and murder, which require severe measures to bring restitution (Proverbs 12:6, 25:18; Matthew 5:21-22) as did blasphemy above.
 - “Defamation of Character” (a false claim heard by others that brings harm) via slander (spoken) or liable (written) – are again punishable in the civil and criminal courts of law; restitution is difficult because the loss is not primarily material but in reputation and in potential ability to earn; the apology accompanied by the truth should be as broad as the offense. (see “How Much to Restore”)
- **Personal Injury or Murder** – The justice for this must be equal to the offense and not in excess, including capital punishment (Leviticus 6:19-22).

NOTE 1: Animals vs. Humans - The Bible makes a clear distinction between human and animal, showing that their lives are not equal. Animals, who have no soul and therefor will suffer no eternal condition, are a lower form of life than humans. This is shown by the fact that life for a life is required for humans but only payment for a life of an animal. Cruelty to animals is clearly not right (Proverbs 12:10), nor is hunting for sport if the animal's life is wasted.

NOTE 2: Ignorance – If we genuinely believe that the speed limit is 40, but we are actually in a 30-mph zone, are we breaking the law? Yes. Simple as that. If we get pulled over we deserve a ticket. Negligence is not a valid excuse (Leviticus 5:17-19). Because we were trying to obey the law does not make us innocent. The speed limit may be ridiculously outdated and therefor much slower than is safe, but it is the law. No one is above the law. Because we know better does not make it right to break a law as long as it does not require us to violate our obedience to God's higher authority. We are supposed to obey earthly and civil authority because rebellion against them is rebellion against God (Romans 13:1-7). However, as it regards restitution, or paying for our crimes, intention should affect the punishment. Premeditated murder receives a more severe punishment than manslaughter which is accidental death at our “hands” without premeditation. The Bible consistently teaches that the punishment must fit the crime. Harm that we bring to another by accident without malice should receive more grace and leniency than that we plan ahead or perpetrate impulsively due to anger and hate, intended but not pre-planned.

NOTE 3: Capital Punishment - Regarding the death sentence, personally, I am not in support of capital punishment per the way our current judicial system handles it in America. I neither trust the accuracy of the system that is not based on finding the truth and administering justice but on the legal abuse of the system to manipulate the jury, and the agonizingly long process that requires people to wait and suffer for years, even decades, for the final verdict. That seems like cruel and unusual punishment to my way of thinking.

HOW MUCH TO RESTORE?

When someone wrongs another, it is a betrayal of God as well as their fellow human being, making them guilty before God and humanity. That is right, the Bible teaches that sinning against another person, on the horizontal plane, is to also unfaithfulness to (to sin against) God on the vertical plane (Leviticus 6:1-2; Numbers 5:6; Psalm 51:4-6). We are all God's, his special creation, to act against what is God's is to act against God. So when we think of making a wrong right, we need to remember this truth. Consider this narrative. In 2Samuel 12 there is a story about King David's treachery against one of his own soldiers motivated by a "burning desire" (irony intended!) to cover up his sexual sin with the guys wife that would soon become apparent in the form of a child. When he is confronted he admits his wrong and confesses his sin. The specifics of his prayer can be found in Psalm 51. Even though his sin was against his fellow countryman Uriah and his wife Bathsheba (who was not entirely innocent in the affair), David says that he has sinned against God and makes a valiant effort to apologize to God (v. 4). The whole psalm is worth reading and I encourage you to let it inform your prayers the next time to hurt another person. When we strive to make restitution for a wrong, we need to make amends with God as well with others, even if they or a relative are still around to make the physical payment to. That can be done as it was long ago, by bringing our restitution to the temple/church and/or God's representative, the priest/pastor (Numbers 5:8). It should not be taken personally by the churches representative but given to support the work of the church.

Above & Beyond

Generally speaking, we confess (admit and apologize) and make full restitution to the person that was wrong at a rate that exceeds the strict calculation of the loss. The Bible often requires an additional 20% beyond what was taken or lost. That does not prevent someone from going way above what is required as in Zacchaeus' case, who was so zealous that he used 25% and 50% as a repayment rate (Luke 19:8-9)! But that was at his choosing and it was not forced upon him, that would have been unjust. If the person the restitution is owed to is dead, it still needs to be made, to a relative or then to God if there are none (Numbers 5:6-8a). In the end, we need to make the thing right with God at the very least if no other way can be found. Obviously, this is in reference to material property but it makes certain implications about all offenses. When we try to make things right we need to go above and beyond to do so, and not just a little. It should be enough extra so that the one we hurt cannot doubt that we have done more than what was strictly just or that makes thing even. That extra is akin to a law suit that contains a reasonable amount above and beyond the strict degree of loss to cover mental anguish and emotional distress, pain and suffering (punitive damages). And we

must not cop out if it is difficult to do, if the material cost is great, if our pride must take a significant hit, or if it may bring legal proceedings against us (Proverbs 6:30-31). Again, what is common in today's courts was established by God as the measure of justice in the Bible's teaching.

Restitution vs. Satisfaction

Again, generally speaking, if making restitution will require that the person pay a great deal more than the thing is worth, it requires that satisfaction only be made. If I borrow someone's car and wreck it, but replacing the exact make and model of car would cost way more than the car is worth, making satisfaction would mean that I pay the car's owner an amount agreed upon that better represents the loss instead of the huge sum that an identical replacement would cost. Knowing this guideline, do not loan out something that cannot be replaced unless you are OK with losing it and not being able to receive an exact replacement. Such as something with sentimental value that makes the thing priceless to you but only you. This is just common sense and it teaches that it is not just the borrower that needs to be sure they can afford to replace the thing loaned to them, but the lender must also do some calculations of their own.

Inability to Pay

In the spirit of the punishment meeting the crime, if the offender is unable to pay the cost of restitution, it can be made up in other ways. Like by offering a certain amount of mutually agreed on service to the other. It could also be agreed that payment will be made by way of final expenses, being put down in ones will to be made right at death. Of course, the one owed can always choose to cancel the debt and forgo any monetary repayment. On the other side, over-compensation, or the desire for it, is evil on part of the one who has lost, in that it is greed and covetousness.

THE RECEIVING SIDE OF RESTITUTION

I do not know if you have noticed but, except in a couple places, all that has been said thus far has sounded very cold, legal and forensic. However, restitution is about, first, our relationship with God, and second, our relationship with others. And relationships are not cold, calculating and strict. They do not respond well to heartless legalities. Further, the point of restitution is not so much to satisfy the law or "pay our dues" as it is to first, grow relationally closer to God, and second, move in kindness and love toward others. Make sure you are listening right here. For those of you with perfectionistic tendencies who are obsessive "i" dotters and "t" crossers, and those that like the simplicity, certainty and perceived security of rule keeping, you need to make sure your heart is fully engaged. In fact, the heart needs to be the primary driver, not your head or brokenness that uses rules and regulations as a means for trying to earn God's favor. That is exactly what Jesus was trying to break people of with his teachings and example. Stay with me for a very short but pertinent history lesson. It may seem like a detour but where I am going is important to understand, not just for making restitution, but for the whole of your God-loving life.

B.C. vs. A.D.

It needs to be pointed out that many, if not most of the verses used for this teaching,

are from the first half of the Bible, the Old(er) Testament, which is dated before Jesus came down, lived, died, and returned to heaven. That does not make them null-and-void necessarily, for example cancelling out the 10 Commandments or anything. It just places them before the gospel of Jesus Christ, the grace of Jesus Christ, and church of Jesus Christ. With Jesus, everything changed. What was taught previously, especially the "spirit" or heart that laid behind the law, was "fleshed out" in the person of Jesus. His life and teaching did not bring new a new religion, it lived out what they already had been taught. Jesus was the greatest illustration. He is our example. He lived in a way that fulfilled the old teachings about how to maintain a relationship with God. He showed what it would look like to practice the godly living that was being taught but over time hand mutated and been misapplied, over-applied in some places, and under-applied in others.

Vipers vs. Shepherds

Many, but not all, of the religious leaders and teachers of Jesus day were strict rule makers and keepers, being very meticulous when it came to exact observance and precise obedience, most of which was never intended by God. This nit-picky exactitude created such a weight of responsibility for people that it crushed them beneath its heavy demands (Matthew 23:1-4, 23-28). What is worse, those religious teachers did little or nothing to help people carry out those demands. They offered little or no comfort or encouragement because they wanted to be seen themselves as very devote. So they purposely made the people feel disloyal and unholy while making a show of their own hypocritical religiosity (Matthew 6:14-18). There often was no a lot of grace for people, or hope, or kindness, or much motivation at all to strive to live better lives because they felt oppressed and hopeless right from the get-go. The religious leaders had reversed their roles and instead of bringing guidance and assistance and hope, as shepherds who care and protect, they dished out despair, condemnation, and rejection, using and abusing folks, like wolves (Matthew 10:16) or a brood of poisonous snakes (Matthew 3:7, 12:34, 23:33). Something Jesus was constantly calling them on, and in turn, it garnered their aggressive and murderous hatred.

You have come this far, stay with me for couple more paragraphs. If we look a bit deeper, we find that much of that legalistic spirit that existed in the religious leaders of Jesus' day was because of what had happened to the Jewish nation ever since the glorious days of the kings of Israel. The people had strayed from God and become unfaithful so God had attempted to turn their hearts back to him by keeping his promises to discipline them, like any good parent would, if they turned away and became unfaithful. This parental correction included being conquered, deported, and made into slaves far away from their homeland. Those who remained or returned to Jerusalem endured enemy occupation in the heart of their motherland. This was the case in Jerusalem of Jesus' day.

Double Down vs. Deep Devotion

Now this is where it gets revealing! For many of those religious leaders, they mistakenly believed that they needed to double down on the rule keeping in order to please God and get in his good graces again so that he would vindicate them against the Roman occupation. But their religion was largely external and they failed to turn their hearts

back to him, which was God's intention in the discipline to begin with (1 Samuel 15:22-23, Psalm 40:6-8, 50:7-15; Isaiah 1:11-20; Jeremiah 7:21-24; Hosea 6:4-7; Matthew 9:9-13). God had made it clear from early on that he wanted their hearts - their love and devotion - not just their rituals, observance and superfluous, superficial religion. Somehow they had missed this glaring truth - God wanted their hearts as well as their hands, their love and devotion as well, yeah, even more than, their religious yet heartless actions. Outward religion with a cold heart is worse than no outward religion at all. Things like the 10 Commandments were not designed to be oppressive but to free people to love and obey God in faithfulness by showing them what it looked like. Relationship with God is possible when we are a people who live like we are loved by God. God commands that we "be holy as I am holy" is an invitation into relationship, not perfect rule keeping (Leviticus 22:32; Ezekiel 20:12; 1 Corinthians 1:2; Hebrews 10:10; 1 Peter 1:13-16; 1 John 3:24)!

And How is This Useful?

Many in the religious crowd of Jesus' day feared that his apparent laxity with the laws and additional made-made regulations would increase God's displeasure and would prolong the discipline, putting off the great day that they were rescued from the oppressive alien Roman invasion that had taken up residence in the midst of Israel. Many of the religious leaders felt that if they let Jesus spread his version of devotion to God, it would mislead the people. So they believed they needed to protect them from Jesus for their own good and for the sake of Israel collectively. Their intention may have been good and their motivation, however skewed, pure. But their initial assumption - God wants us to keep the rules perfectly regardless of whether or not our hearts are in it - was way off. Consequently, their whole approach to God was disastrously tainted and twisted.

They believed that the rules were greater than love. Rules were clear and uncomplicated, love was messy and uncertain. They put the weight of perfect rule-keeping on themselves and others out of ease and simplicity, as well as fear, and ultimately a misunderstanding of devotion, of what God wanted from them. They thought he demanded dutiful religion more than, or instead of, loving relationship. Now, in the midst of that oppressive religious atmosphere of the day, Jesus showed up trying to correct their error. He attempted a realignment with word like these: ²⁸ *"Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest. ²⁹ Walk with me and work with me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. (Matthew 11:28-29, The Message)*

That must have sounded like such an unexpected and hard to belief... relief. What a welcomed message. A welcome similar to the relief from hearing "I forgive you" when you are facing the huge cost of restitution. This clarification of what God wants from us informs the whole of our lives as Christians. But particularly for our topic of restitution, it has forceful implications. But this time it is for those who find themselves on the receiving end of needed restitution.

Your Only Option

This does not require much elaboration. Forgiveness is essential. It is Biblical. It is Christ-like. Jesus' example says it all. Before Jesus (B.C.) the rule held sway. After Calvary (A.D.), grace took over. If you find yourself on the other end of restitution, having been approached by someone from your past that wants to make things right with you, and you consider yourself to be a follower of Jesus, forgiveness is the only proper response.

However, that too needs to be rightly understood. To forgive does not necessarily mean the offender gets off scot-free. If you find yourself on that end of the relational equation, consider reading a bit about what Christian forgiveness is and is not. There is a lot that could be said here but since forgiveness is not the subject of this study, I will forgo laying it all out for you. There is a detailed resource on TRC's Life Coaching website (www.tworivers.church/life-coaching) on the Biblical idea of forgiveness. It clearly explains what healthy and Biblical forgiveness looks like. I will warn you, it is not what most people think it is. You do not have to check your brain or heart out at door to make it happen. Since it is your only option when another human being asks you for your forgiveness, you probably should know how to do it while still protecting all parties involved in the initial offense and any follow-up measures.

Loving other gets messy. Sometime justice is fulfilled only through the work of Jesus on the cross paying for our sins for us, not via our angry, vengeful enforcement of the full burden of the strict interpretation of the law, like the religious elite of Jesus' day would have done. You will not necessarily need to release another from all ramifications and consequences of their action in order to forgive, and indeed, it may be quite wrong to do so if it exposes others to avoidable harm. But you will need to be willing to release them from all debt if that is what God instructs you to do. Like Abraham on the mountain top ready to kill his only son if that was what God wanted, which it was not, he had already so determined in his heart to obey God at any cost, that it was as good as done, even though God stopped him from actually carrying through with it (Genesis 22:1-18). That is the spirit of surrender to God that you should bring into your receiving side of the act of restitution. As well as a gracious, Christ-like spirit of forgiveness.

Seeking Forgiveness?

A very quick word to those who are asking for forgiveness from someone else. Asking for it only because your Christian counterpart is required to forgive you, and then offering to make full restitution expecting that you will be released from having to do it, is evil, a misunderstanding of forgiveness, exposes your duplicitous heart, and is nothing like what Jesus or the Bible teaches. Your heart must be ready to pay whatever reasonable restitution is mutually agreed upon by both sides. To deceive another into believing you are sorry for the wound or loss created, for one selfish reason or another, is just a new wound. It will do nothing to remove your culpability before God and will most certainly increase it. Read the next section for some guidance on that.

HOW TO PROCESS RESTITUTION

Most any process of relational repair will benefit from outside, objective guidance. If two people who confess to be Christ followers have a disagreement that would normally be settled in the civil courtroom, they should rather let themselves be

defrauded than flaunt their dissent before non-believers. There has to be a few wise and godly people within the church who could help decide these little things among yourselves. The fact there is unresolved issues between two followers of Jesus that cannot be settled themselves is a defeat. Again, it would be better to drop your charges and suffer loss than to sue each other right in front of unbelievers (1Corinthians 6:1-8).

There are some fairly clear defined steps laid out in the Bible for taking a perceived wrong to another and solving the issue (Matthew 18:15-17). If we were to bring that guidance together with the 1Corinthians passage one above, and say maybe Romans 12:9-21, we would have a "process" that would look something like this. If you feel you have been sinned against, you go privately and have a face-to-face conversation with the other person. I realize these instructions were written long ago, long before the advent of technology and social media. However, as a general rule I use, social media should be used only to communicate facts and ideas and data, and friendly and maybe positive emotions. Negative emotions and relational struggles ought to be discussed in person, always. If on the receiving end of an "you sinned against me" type of discussion, we are to listen, hear them out, not get defensive, and apologize for any hurt we inflicted for the purpose of saving the relationship. As much as it depends on us we are to be at peace with others. It may even require that we choose to suffer some lose for the sake of peace. Putting ourselves or other in harm's way – physically, emotionally, verbally - in not required. We may disagree with their judgement but if feelings have been hurt we can always humbly apologize for that if we are determined to show kindness even to our enemies. If the person you speak to will not listen or rejects your attempts at relational unity, a thing which should never happen between two god-fearing people because one of the two sides should be willing to take the high road and deescalate the conflict, take someone else with you the next time and go back in private and try again. That third person is a witness more than anything but if we choose well they may be able to cast some helpful light on the subject. If no progress is being made, that is when you take the matter to the church proper. Most churches have a group of wise and respected men and women who are godly and have proven to be people of self-control and forgiveness themselves. If the churches ruling on the matter is rejected by either side, they have proven by that point that they are going to act like they are non-believing, non-Christ-following people and should be treated as such. The one with the offenses should have dropped the issue, or the of believed to be the offender should have made some sort of satisfaction. It should never have gotten to the church level, let alone to the point where one or the other refuses to end the argument.

However we arrive at the conclusion that we need to make amends for a wrong we have done, there are a few wise cautions to consider so that our attempt to make things right does not make them more wrong instead.

1. **Counsel** = It is best to seek advice before proceeding with restitution. Well-meaning but over-eager disciples tend to get ahead of themselves. Usually enough carefully selected details can be given without mentioning the name of the other person, so that an advisor can guide us through the correction. There may be legalities that need to be considered and sometimes restitution does not need to be made. For

example, someone has held a secret hatred against someone who has no idea that they are hated or that they have done anything to another to cause such an issue. The hater is convicted by the Spirit of God that their animosity is sin and they confess it to God. But then they think they need to go and tell an oblivious person that they hated them and ask for their forgiveness. This is making more wrong, not making something right. Often it is well-meaning truly repentant disciples who's honesty and genuine desire to right with God and man that are tricked (by the enemy or their own remorse) into messing things up like that. This leads to the next point...

2. **Scope** = The general rule is that restitution need only be as broad as the offense. A private offense is settled in private and a public one needs to be settled in public. Outside of getting some counsel, if they are not part of the problem or part of the solution, do not involve them in the process. You are going to be getting close to crossing the line over into gossip and slander. If a thing is between you and God, as I mentioned in the above example, keep it there except maybe with an accountability partner. If the offense was a public one, say on social media, the restitution should include an apology on the same social media account. If the thing that needs to be made right includes a legality, a lawyer may need to be involved. However, it should be a Christian lawyer – not a lawyer who happens to be a Christian – because they will always advise against legal exposure. But if you stole something, it needs to be returned with interest. Sometimes that can be done anonymously. If so, fine. Often a way can be found to avoid involving the authorities but if God is leading, through conviction not condemnation, that the risk has to be taken. If you cheated on exams and make money using a degree you do not deserve, a professor or two may need to be approached instead of the institution, unless of course you cheat in every class you took. If you stole from your company you may be able to return the goods or make up for them in some quiet way, but of not the risk again will have to be made if indeed it is God that is moving you.
3. **Wait** = Restitution is often best after time is given a chance to work a deeper healing, allowing your heart to soften. It can prevent the old feelings from bleeding through your attempt. Even when our heart is clean we may still have bad habit that we practiced for a long time. Those may come through right after we have made our hearts right. Tone of voice and facial or bodily expressions that we do not know we give off are the two main ways the old anger or bitterness can bleed out on another. Serious disciples want to run right out and get things right, even believing that if they do not do it immediately that is another sin. Patience and self-control are two of the fruits of the spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) and when dealing with a long standing hurt, it is usually best to pray our heart into a better state for a month or so before proceeding with the restitution. God knows the intentions of your heart so if you are serious God will know and I believe will count it as already done. Waiting also give perspective once the emotion begins to die down and may change what you feel you need to do. Impulsivity seldom leads to godliness.
4. **Face-To-Face** = I said this above but it bears repeating, a face-to-face conversation is preferable to the phone, letters, e-mail, texts or social media. It shows sincerity

when we buck ourselves up and make things right in person. It helps prevent the recipient from misreading or misunderstanding motivations and heart. Love and sorrow is best conveyed in person. Misunderstands are fewer in person. There is nothing like appropriate physical touch that can move and restore hearts. When it is not possible, I think the next best option is to use Skype or Facetime or Google. It can still be face-to-face if not in person. Probably the phone is the next best choice after that if a good internet connection is not available. Some people who have lost to death the one who needed to hear the apology, find it therapeutic to go to the grave site and work through their sorrow and apology there.

I recently had someone from my past, a complete stranger really, find me on Facebook 40 years later and bring up an event between us that I needed to make amends for. I remembered the event and the person, even though it was the only time I remember that we were in the same place at the same time. I simply responded to her FB messenger attempt to reach out, brought up the event myself when God helped me realize who it was that had contacted me, and made my apology right there. It was gladly received and come to find out, it was why they had gone searching. The memory had surface and they sought an apology. The healing took place almost in an instant. It was all done with a couple messages on social media. This is why I suggest that counsel is sought. Sometime given the scope a personal contact needs to be made and other times, for a relatively small matter, it is not necessary.

5. **Intention** = If it is not immediately possible to follow through, as I mentioned above, God knows your intentions, accepts your willingness, and will not hold it against you if you wait till it can be done properly. For the sake of a face-to-face attempt at restitution, which is not the same as reconciliation, we may have to wait till the next family reunion to speak to that uncle or cousin that we feel we wronged years ago. I believe it is better to wait the necessary months or years to do it in person than to take the easy way out and do it another way. As long as it is not a secret attempt to get out of having to do the uncomfortable thing, which God will know, the wait is advisable.
6. **Substitution** = If it is not possible to make restitution to the offended person, you can go to a grave site, find a relative, or make it or give it to the Lord. Counsel will help you decide what is appropriate. Again, this was mentioned above, but it too bears repeating. And there is another twist that needs to be mentioned. It may be necessary to apologize as a representative of a group you belong to, when you have done nothing wrong. I have more than once apologize for the church and Christians in general when a counselee has been wounded by mean and evil people who present themselves as Christians. I have apologized for the male gender and the white race in general, as I felt appropriate. There is an example of this in the book of Daniel, where he apologizes to God for his people and their sins, evil and unfaithfulness he never committed (Daniel 9:5-6, see 1-19). It may or may not help, but for as often as I have watched it melt away pain and wounds I will continue to offer my humble apology if I can help another move one by doing so.

7. **Excuse** = Sometimes the issue we are considering for restitution is a minor one, and so correction seems silly for such a little thing. We do not think the person even remembers the event. We are looking for a reason, an excuse to not have to create such an awkward and uncomfortable moment. We are tempted to disobey the Spirit's leading because we have talked ourselves out of it for one reason or another. I suggest you not do that! Again, some spiritual coaching might be a big help but it is never a good thing to ignore or counter the Spirit's leading.

When making an apology, that is also not the time for excuses. Some will offer their confession, take breath, and begin the next sentence with, "But..." They proceed to list all the reasons why it was not really their fault or why they had no other choice. And they successfully cancel out the apology. It may very well do more damage than good to excuse yourself in the same breath that you attempt to make your restitution. It suggests a dishonest heart, ulterior motives, and a lack of real sorrow. We are still defending ourselves and proclaiming our innocence, which is the opposite of what an apology is. Actually, the shorter, more precise and specific the apology is, the better it usually is. Your apology can mention specific restitution or offer to make it per your mutual agreement. Finally, as I mentioned in the first section above, on the top of the second page of this study, end your apology with these words, "Will you forgive me." Wait for a response. Often people will want to think about it. Frequently, because people are unaccustomed to being apologized to, they will not know what to say. That may lead them to brush your confession off and even say that you have nothing to apologize for. My suggestion is to rephrase and repeat your apology and ask for their apology again. "Well, I felt very convicted by God that I was supposed to offer you my regret and say that I was sorry. Do you forgive me?" What you are doing is much more than clearing your conscience, which was done the moment you decided you would apologize. Actually doing it and giving them a couple chances to make a good and healthy decision of their own, is the blessing you give in return for the wound you caused, and is itself part of your restitution.

8. **Restitution Not Reconciliation** – This is explained in the booklet on forgiveness that I mentioned above in greater detail, but reconciliation is not the goal. The relationship may never go back to where it was before the disagreement or wound. However, it is unlikely that it will ever be restored, if it can be, without an honest apology and sincere restitution. We cannot control how people respond and we must not chide if our efforts are rejected. Their acceptance is not required for our conscience to be clear and our relationship with God to be free from the blockage of unresolved relationships. Reconciliation is certainly desirable in most cases, but there are some situations where, even though we have apologized, it would be unhealthy or unwise for us, and maybe for them, to resurrect the previous relationship. For example, maybe we were intimate with someone who was not our married partner, and we are apologizing for our sin against them. Well, reconciling the relationship might very well lead to a repeat offense against each other so a restored relationship is ill advised.

There you have it. I hope and pray that the time you just put into digesting this material

will help you be a better follower of Jesus and lover of mankind!