

RESTITUTION

There is a scriptural pattern of restitution that is enumerated in the Old Testament, with some evidence in the New Testament. Restitution involves restoring to the rightful owner something that has been taken away, stolen, lost or surrendered.

Leviticus 6:1-5

*“Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying,
‘When a person sins and acts unfaithfully against the LORD, and deceives his companion in regard to a deposit or a security entrusted {to him} or through robbery, or {if} he has extorted from his companion,
or has found what was lost and lied about it and sworn falsely, so that he sins in regard to any one of the things a man may do;
then it shall be, when he sins and becomes guilty, that he shall restore what he took by robbery, or what he got by extortion, or the deposit which was entrusted to him, or the lost thing which he found,
or anything about which he swore falsely; he shall make restitution for it in full, and add to it one-fifth more. He shall give it to the one to whom it belongs on the day {he presents} his guilt offering.’”*

There are other references, too. A stolen sheep was to be repaid with four sheep (Exodus 22:1). For every breach of trust, whether involving an animal or another possession, the guilty party was required to pay double (Exodus 22:9). Slander against a woman by her new husband resulted in a 100 shekel fine (Deuteronomy 22:17-18). The person harmed was reimbursed for the loss and in some cases compensated over and above the loss.

In the New Testament, the term restitution is not mentioned, but the idea of restitution is seen in the story of Zaccheus, a tax collector.

Luke 19:8-9

“And Zaccheus stopped and said to the Lord, ‘Behold, Lord, half of my possessions I will give to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will give back four times as much.’

And Jesus said to him, ‘Today salvation has come to this house, because he, too, is a son of Abraham.’”

Notice that Zaccheus just had an encounter with Jesus and was about to accompany him to his house. His comments were not made out of necessity or with anyone’s prompting. He wanted to make restitution four-fold to anyone he had defrauded. This was the heart of someone who had just become a true son of Abraham, evidently prompted the Spirit to make restitution.

So, we too must be alert to make restitution if our sin has defrauded anyone – whether the loss involved a possession, one’s reputation, or a financial loss.