

FRUITS OF REPENTANCE



John the Baptist implored the gathered crowds: 'Produce fruit in keeping with repentance'. Have an extra coat and food? Share with the one who has none. You tax collectors, don't collect excess money from the people. You soldiers, don't extort money or accuse people falsely.
- paraphrase from Luke 3

One sign of repentance is **restitution**. Zacchaeus was a typical rich tax collector in Israel. He was corrupt, but Jesus showed him unusual kindness. Zacchaeus had a change of mind and conduct. He decided to give half of his wealth to the poor and to pay back anybody he had cheated, four times the amount he had stolen from them. Jesus recognized that Zacchaeus had truly been saved - Luke 19. Jesus knew the **laws of restitution** written in Exodus 22:1-7. Chuck Colson, founder of prison fellowship, believed that our criminal system should emphasize restitution as a priority over imprisonment for non-violent criminals.

A LESSON FROM A DENTED DOOR

For a few decades, I have been a house sitter at times for various people in different places. In October 1985 I was asked by a neighbor to stay at his fairly new house in the woods down a quiet country dirt road. As I settled in for the evening, I decided to check all of the doors to see if they were locked. For some reason, the lock on the front door did not lock. I felt some fear as I did not want to sleep with the door unlocked, so I grabbed a chair and braced it under the doorknob. Unfortunately, I soon discovered that I had used too much force and caused a dent under the doorknob. Now I had an even greater fear. How I would explain to the owner about the dent in the new metal, I tried to put a little filler in the dent and put some paint over it but that seemed to make it look even worse, so I removed the paint and filler. After feeling a bit panicked, I finally tried to get to sleep as I thought to myself.....'Why do I do such stupid things?'

A week later when the owner returned home, I said nothing about the dented door. A few weeks later I went to Florida for the winter, but had a nagging conviction about the door for several months. By the time I returned to upstate New York the next spring, I had received notice that my visa application to return to England for long term mission work had been accepted. One day I happened to come to this verse in my Bible reading.

'If anyone sins and is unfaithful to the Lord by **deceiving his neighbor about something entrusted to him or left in his care** or stolen, or if he cheats him or he finds lost property and lies about it, or if he swears falsely, or if he commits any such sin that people may do - when he thus sins and becomes guilty, **he must make restitution** in full, add a fifth value to it and give it all to the owner on the day he presents his guilt offering.' - Leviticus 6:1-5 NIV

After reading this I knew that I must make things right regarding the door. How could I expect God to use me on the mission field if I was not a clean vessel for His use? I remember the morning I made the uneasy drive to the residence where I had stayed the previous October.

I was able to share with the owner the incident about the dented door and told him that I wanted to make things right. I was surprised when he said that he had not noticed the dent. He told me not to worry about it. I was relieved but also felt pretty foolish, as I could have avoided months of guilt if only I had dealt with the issue 6 months before.

In early June of 1986, I left for England with a peace in my heart. I had confronted something in my life, even though small, that was a big thing to God. It was an important lesson in my life. I had become a cleaner vessel, an instrument more suitable for noble purposes, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work. - 2 Timothy 2:20.

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