

## GOD'S DEMAND FOR INTEGRITY

*4* <sup>25</sup>Therefore, getting rid of falsehood, "let us each speak the truth with his neighbor," because we are members with one another [of the same body]. <sup>26</sup>"Be angry, but do not sin." Do not let the sun set on your anger; <sup>27</sup>do not give a place to the devil. <sup>28</sup>He who has been stealing must no longer steal; rather, let him labor, doing honorable work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with the one who is in need. (Eph. 4:25-28)

### **Introduction**

Everyone in the office knew that Lillian was different. She had something the others didn't have. As a matter of fact, Lillian's daily life convicted those around her.

One day one of Lillian's co-workers brought to the office some little craft items—paperweights, earrings, etc.—she had made and hoped to sell to her fellow workers. She approached Lillian. "Lillian, you don't have to buy any of my things. But it would help if you just put your name down on my order sheet, indicating you were making a purchase."

For a moment Lillian said nothing. Then she replied, "I couldn't do that if I didn't actually buy something. To help you out, I'll purchase a paperweight. Put my name down for that."

Afterwards Lillian's co-worker thought about the incident. Lillian was saving every penny in order to go back to school. She couldn't afford to casually purchase a paperweight. Why would she make the sacrifice just to avoid a minor deception? It was a matter of integrity. She would not allow herself to have any part in anything that was deceitful and less than honest.

Sometime later Lillian happened to present that same co-worker with a gospel tract. Having seen the Lord Jesus Christ in Lillian, as manifested by her integrity, that co-worker surrendered her life to Christ. (*POWER*, 4/18/93, p. 8)

As Christians, by the grace of God, we are commanded to put off the old and put on the new According to Ephesians 4:25-28, that means exchanging the sinful attributes of falsehood and deceit for the godly attribute of integrity.

### **I. Because of God's Demand for Integrity, ...Let Us Put Away Falsehood (4:25a, 28a)**

The Christian is commanded to "*get rid of falsehood.*" We are called to be done with falsehood; to renounce it as a way of life and have nothing more to do with it, not even as a casual, part-time practice to be resorted to only in "emergency" situations.

Most obviously, falsehood involves speaking lies, as Colossians 3:9 exhorts us, “*do not lie to one another.*” But falsehood is not limited to just the telling of outright lies. What is in view here is every form of deceit; literally, we are here commanded to put away “*the lie.*” This demands that we distance ourselves from every form of deceit: half-truths, exaggerated claims, understatements, misleading statements, etc. Whatever is spoken with the intention of misleading or intentionally misrepresenting the situation—all such practices are to be put away from the Christian’s speech.

We must also take note of Ephesians 4:28a, “*He who has been stealing must no longer steal.*” Besides the practice of outright stealing, this commandment includes such things as shoddy workmanship, prolonged breaks on company time, shady business deals, dishonest tax returns, cheating on exams or homework, cheating at sports, and any other such practice.

Why do people tell lies and engage in deceitful practices? One reason they do so is in order to selfishly gain an unfair advantage or profit, note Proverbs 11:1, “*A false balance is an abomination to Jehovah; but a just weight is his delight.*” Rather than putting money and financial success as the foremost thing in our lives, as Christians we are to put Christ first. We are to be like Him, in serving others rather than using others; and we are to rely upon Him to meet our needs, rather than resorting to our own devices, be they honest or otherwise.

Another reason people resort to deceit is the effort to conceal guilt and the hope of escaping judgment for their misdeeds. Note Exodus 32:21-24, a passage that records Aaron’s reply to Moses when the latter questioned him concerning the constructing of the idolatrous golden calf:

*Moses asked Aaron, What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin? <sup>22</sup>Do not be angry, my lord, Aaron answered. You know how prone these people are to evil. <sup>23</sup>They said to me, Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we do not know what has happened to him. <sup>24</sup>So I told them, Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off. Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf! (Ex. 32:21-24)*

We must take our sins to Christ, honestly confessing them to Him and to those whom we have wronged. We can never conceal our sins from Him and eventually He will cause those sins to become openly manifested to all. It is far better to refrain from sin in the first place, rather than seek to futilely conceal our sins by means of deceit after we have committed them.

Yet another reason people resort to deceit is in an effort to make others like them or think highly of them without going through the hard work or sacrifice that would merit their good opinion and favor. Note Acts 4:36-5:4; a passage that

reports the efforts of Ananias and Sapphira to gain the same type of reputation as that of Barnabas, but without the sacrifice and service exhibited by Barnabas:

*Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas, (which means Son of Encouragement),<sup>37</sup> sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet. **5** Now a man named Ananias, together with his wife Sapphira, also sold a piece of property. <sup>2</sup>With his wife's full knowledge he kept back part of the money for himself, but brought the rest and put it at the apostles' feet. <sup>3</sup>Then Peter said, Ananias, how is it that Satan has filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money you received for the land? <sup>4</sup>Did it not belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, was not the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God. (Acts 4:36-5:4)*

As Christians, we should find our identity and significance in our relationship with God in Christ, rather than seeking to gain significance from human relationships whether they be legitimately earned or deceitfully contrived.

Why are we required to renounce deceit as a way of life and as a practice to which we may resort?

First, we are required to renounce deceit because such a life and practice is characteristic of the devil, note the Lord Jesus' description of his evil character: *"the devil ... was a murderer from the beginning and is not established in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he is speaking in accordance with his own [nature], because he is a liar and the father of lies"* (Jn. 8:44.) The devil engages in outright lies, daring even to falsely contradict the Word of God, as he did when he first tempted Adam and Eve. The LORD God had explicitly said, *"you shall not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die"* (Gen. 2:17.) *"But the serpent said to the woman, 'You shall not surely die'"* (Gen. 3:4.) The devil deals in all forms of subtlety; in Genesis 3:1 he is described as being *"more subtle than any beast of the field that Jehovah God had made."* The very fact that the devil approached Eve in the guise of a serpent bears witness to his subtlety and deceitfulness. In 2 Corinthians 11:3 Paul declares, *"Eve was deceived by the serpent's cunning."*

Second, we are required to renounce deceit because such a life and such practice is an abomination to the LORD. In Proverbs 12:22 we read, *"Lying lips are an abomination to Jehovah; but they who deal truthfully are his delight."* Deceive, in all of its forms, is completely contrary to God's holy character: *"God is not a man, that he should lie; nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?"* (Num. 23:19.)

The Christian life demands integrity, therefore we must put away falsehood in all of its forms and for whatever motivation.

## II. Because of God's Demand for Integrity, ...Let Us Practice Truthfulness (4:25b, 28b)

We as Christians are commanded to speak truth to one another: *"let us each speak the truth with his neighbor."* We should also take note of Zechariah 8:16-17, *"These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and execute the judgment of truth and peace in your courts; <sup>17</sup>do not plot evil against your neighbor, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this, declares Jehovah."* Note that the passage of Zechariah connects *"the judgment of truth and peace in your courts."* By so doing it is reminding us that a stable society is one that is built upon integrity; where integrity is lacking, the society itself is in danger of collapsing.

As Christians, we are commanded to live a life of integrity: faithfulness to our vows, our promises, and our commitments. The righteous man who is well pleasing to the LORD is the man who *"keeps his oath even when it hurts"* (Psl. 15:4b.) That is to say, he fulfills his commitment even when it is costly to him and he must take a personal loss. Living a life of integrity also means faithfulness in keeping a confidence: *"He who goes about as a gossip reveals secrets; but he who has a faithful spirit conceals a matter"* (Prov. 11:13.) Furthermore, a life of integrity involves earning a living by honest means: *"He who has been stealing must no longer steal; rather, let him labor, doing honorable work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with the one who is in need"* (Eph. 4:28.) Note that what is presented here is not only a change in practice (from stealing to honest work,) but also a change in attitude (from that of taking advantage of people by stealing from them to ministering to people who are in need.)

Why are we as Christians required to practice a lifestyle of integrity and honesty? First, we are to do so because we are called to reflect the character of our Creator and Redeemer, of whom it is written, *"God ... cannot lie"* (Titus 1:2) and *"God is light, and in him is no darkness at all"* (1 Jn. 1:5b.) Second, we are to do so because integrity and honesty are a delight to the LORD; these are things that make Him happy and receive His blessing: *"Lying lips are detestable to Jehovah, but he delights in those who deal truthfully"* (Prov. 12:22.) Third, we are to do so because integrity produces trust and promotes stability, as noted above, Zechariah 8:16 indicates that truth leads to peace: *"Speak the truth to each other, and execute the judgment of truth and peace in your courts."*

What guidelines does the Bible give concerning a lifestyle of honesty and integrity? We are to minister the truth in a loving and gracious manner; we are called to practice *"the truth in love"* (Eph. 4:15.) That is to say, we are to speak the truth gently and for the benefit of others, not for the intention of their hurt. Note that we are also exhorted to accept the truth with a humble and teachable spirit: *"the wisdom that comes from above is first of all pure; then peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere"* (Jas. 3:17.)

Then, too, we are to speak the truth with discretion, as is indicated in Proverbs 12:18, *“There is one who speaks rashly like the piercings of a sword; but the tongue of the wise is health.”* Note that the words referred to in Proverbs 12:18 may be words of truth, but the lesson of the proverb is that even such words, if spoken rashly and thoughtlessly, can inflict unnecessary harm. By way of illustration: If your friend confides in you that he is a poor swimmer, you need not loudly announce that truth in front of everybody to his embarrassment. It would be more loving to merely inform the lifeguard in a quiet way for the sake of your friend’s safety. Sometimes the truth does not need to be spoken to everyone indiscriminately, and it is wiser and kinder to remain silent, speaking only to those who need to know the truth.

We are called to live a life of honesty and integrity for the welfare of Christ’s body, the church: *“getting rid of falsehood, “let us each speak the truth with his neighbor,” because we are members with one another [of the same body]”* (Eph. 4:25.) One reason for integrity is the fact that we are all members of one spiritual body. Just as it would be unnatural and unhealthy for the hand to deceive the mouth by offering it poisonous food; so, likewise, it is spiritually unnatural and unhealthy for there to be deceit and dishonesty among Christians. We need to develop not only the vertical dimension of the Christian life (our personal relationship with God), we need also to develop the horizontal dimension (our relationship with fellow believers)—we must do so by being faithful, honest, and dependable towards one another.

According to verse 28c, the reason we are to engage in honest labor is so that we may have something to give to the one who is in need. Note, again, the whole change in perspective and attitude: whereas the thief exploits others for his own selfish gain, the Christian is to work honestly and be ready to share a portion of his income with those who are in genuine need. Note also that the perspective is corporate (caring for one another), not just private (taking care of myself and my family.)

We must live a lifestyle of honesty and integrity also for the witness of Christ’s body. Integrity makes our witness to the world effective and compelling, (note again the case of Lillian referred to in the Introduction.) But lack of integrity contradicts our witness and nullifies its effectiveness, consider Romans 2:21,23b-24, a passage in which Paul refers to the negative effect of an inconsistent Christian life: *“You, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal?<sup>23</sup>... do you dishonor God by breaking the law?<sup>24</sup>As it is written: ‘God’s name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.’”*

The Christian life demands integrity, therefore, we must put into practice the godly attribute of truthfulness in our dealings with fellow Christians and with our neighbor.

## **Conclusion**

Integrity. Is it a characteristic of my life? It is the commandment of Christ for His people.