

BE TRUTHFUL

Introduction

It has been said that the two biggest lies are the following: We're from the government and we're here to help you. The check is in the mail.

When newspaper columnist Ann Landers asked her readers to nominate the third biggest or most frequent lie, she received a flood of responses (*Our Daily Bread*, 1/10/93):

- You made it yourself? I never would have guessed!
- It's delicious, but I can't eat another bite.
- Go ahead and tell me, I won't be offended.
- Having a great time, wish you were here!

Some of these examples are so common or so absurd that they are humorous. Laughable and absurd as these particular expressions of deceit may be, the fact is, falsehood is no laughing matter when it occurs in our daily speech and conduct.

Our Lord Jesus Christ spoke and lived the truth. Why? He did so because He belonged to the truth: *"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life'"* (Jn. 14:6a.) Furthermore, He did so because He had nothing to hide. Speaking to the Jews, the Lord Jesus asked, *"Which one of you can convict me of sin?"* (Jn. 8:46a.)

As Christians, we are called by God to become like our Savior; we are to be controlled by the Spirit of truth, whom the Lord Jesus has bestowed upon us:

I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—¹⁷the Spirit of truth. The world cannot receive him; because it does not see him, nor does it know him. But you know him; because he stays with you and will be in you. (Jn. 14:16-17)

Let us now give our attention to this next topical study from the Book of Proverbs: Be Truthful.

I. Be Truthful, by Recognizing the Evil of Deceit (Proverbs 12:22; Proverbs 13:5; Proverbs 12:17)

Lying lips are detestable to Jehovah, but he delights in those who deal truthfully. (Prov. 12:22)

Proverbs 12:22a is an extremely emphatic statement revealing the LORD's revulsion to deceit; literally it reads: "*Detestable to Jehovah are deceitful lips.*" Note, also, Proverbs 6:16-19,

There are six things that Jehovah hates; indeed, seven things that are detestable to him: ¹⁷haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, ¹⁸a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are swift in running to mischief, ¹⁹a false witness who utters lies, and a man who sows discord among brothers. (Prov. 6:16-19)

Why is this the case? First, this is the case because truth is an integral part of the very character and being of God. God is the source and embodiment of truth: "*whoever pronounces a blessing in the land will do so by the God of truth; and whoever takes an oath in the land will swear by the God of truth*" (Isa. 65:16a.) Secondly, this is so because God is the depository of truth: "*you heard him and were taught by him. Since truth is in Jesus*" (Eph. 4:21.) Third, God is ever faithful to the truth because He cannot go contrary to His own nature and character: "*God ... cannot lie*" (Titus 1:2.) Deceit is in opposition to and at enmity against all that God is; it is the characteristic of the devil:

... 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)

Note that Proverbs 12:22 contrasts "*lying lips*" with "*those who deal truthfully.*" The second half of the verse broadens out the demand for truthfulness as something that includes conduct and motive as well as speech.

A righteous man hates lying; but a wicked man is loathsome and will be put to shame. (Prov. 13:5)

Note that the righteous man does not only abstain from the practice of deceit, but he has a moral revulsion to it: he "*hates lying.*" A righteous man holds the same view as the LORD God Himself; he regards lying and all forms of deceit to be contemptible and detestable.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the perfectly righteous man, indicated by His conduct at His trial that it is better to die than to lie: *The high priest said to him, "I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."* ⁶⁴*"Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied. "But I say to all of you: In the future you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven."* (Matt. 26:63-64) The Lord Jesus testified to the truth, even though He knew that by doing so the Jews would accuse Him of blasphemy, (a crime punishable by death,) which they indeed proceeded to do: "*Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, "He has spoken blasphemy! Why do we need any more*

witnesses? Look, now you have heard the blasphemy. ⁶⁶What do you think?" "He is worthy of death," they answered" (Matt. 26:65-66.) Such is our Lord's respect for the truth and His commitment to the truth; such is His moral revulsion with regard to deceit.

A righteous man comes to understand that truth is sacred, because it originates from God and is part of His holy character. Also, he understands that deceit is either a malicious assault against what is holy or a self-seeking or self-preserving sacrifice of what is holy.

He who speaks the truth proclaims righteousness; but a false witness proclaims deceit. (Prov. 12:17)

Proverbs 12:17a literally reads, "*He who breathes out truth proclaims righteousness.*" Truth has become as natural to him as breathing; this is what Christ is like and what we are to become as those who are in spiritual union with Him: "*Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices ¹⁰and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator*" (Col. 3:9-10.)

He who breathes out truth "*proclaims righteousness.*" He, by his commitment to truth, demonstrates that he is a servant of righteousness. His own life is governed by righteousness, and his speech and conduct support the cause of righteousness.

What about the question, "Would you lie to the Nazis to protect the Jews?"

Note the subtle way in which God's truth is presented as operating against life—as posed, the question implies that the choice is between truth **or** life—instead of promoting life, note John 14:6, "*Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life.'*"

By way of practical consideration: If the Nazis actually suspected you were giving refuge to Jews, would they simply accept "No" as a satisfactory answer? Would they not further pursue the matter and make an investigation?

Here are some things to seriously consider: In this hypothetical situation you are being asked to depart from God's standard of truth because of the "unique" situation—the question implies that the "right" choice would be to lie in order to save the lives of the innocent victims of tyranny. But, if you depart from God's standard of truth in this allegedly unique situation, by so doing you are indicating that you have no confidence in the LORD. You are actually maintaining that this is a situation that is not under His control, here is a situation where His standard does not apply. If you depart from God's standard of truth in this allegedly unique situation, you are opening the door for other "unique" cases and you are in danger of making God's standard relative: His standard only works in "normal"

situations, not in “unique” cases, and **we** must decide which cases are “normal” and which are “unique.”

For biblical guidance on this subject, consider the situation described in 1 Samuel 16:1-5, and the provision the LORD gave:

And Jehovah said to Samuel, “How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.”²But Samuel said, “How can I go? Saul will hear about it and kill me.” Jehovah said, “Take a heifer with you and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to Jehovah.’³Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what to do. You are to anoint for me the one I indicate.”⁴Samuel did what Jehovah said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. They asked, “Do you come in peace?”⁵Samuel replied, “Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to Jehovah. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me.” Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. (1 Sam. 16:1-5)

In this instance lives were protected not by resorting to falsehood, but by God’s gracious provision of further truth that concealed the original purpose for Samuel’s visit to Bethlehem.

Proverbs 12:17b declares that a false witness “*proclaims deceit.*” One who resorts to lies and deals in falsehood shows that he is a servant of deceit; his life is governed by deceit, and his speech and conduct support the cause of deceit.

Let us seek to be truthful, by recognizing the evil of deceit.

II. Be Truthful, by Appreciating the Transitory Character of Deceit (Proverbs 12:19)

The lips of truth shall be established forever, But a lying tongue is but for a moment. (Prov. 12:19)

In contrast to “*lips of truth,*” a lying tongue shall **not** be established; it shall not be permanent, secure and enduring. Note Proverbs 19:5, “*A false witness shall not be unpunished; and he who utters lies shall not escape.*” His deceit shall not go undetected; on the contrary, it will be exposed and condemned. Proverbs 19:9 is even more emphatic: “*A false witness shall not be unpunished; and he who utters lies shall perish.*” Far from being established, the one who practices deceit and resorts to lies will be exposed to shame and swept away to perdition before the truth of God.

Far from being established, a lying tongue is “*but for a moment*” (literally, “*for the blinking of an eye.*”) From the perspective of God’s eternal truth, falsehood is

“only for a moment;” it is short lived, fleeting, non-durable; it will be forever banished and consumed by the awesome truth of God. The prayer of the hymn writer, Lawrence Tuttiett, is expressed in these words:

O quickly come, dread Judge of all;
For, awful though Thine advent be,
All shadows from the truth will fall,
And falsehood die, in sight of Thee:
O quickly come.

Let us seek to be truthful, by appreciating the transitory character of deceit:

You love ... falsehood rather than speaking the truth...⁴... O you deceitful tongue!⁵ Surely God will bring you down to everlasting ruin. (Psl. 52:3-5)

III. Be Truthful, by Shunning Every Form of Deceit (Proverbs 20:14; Proverbs 21:2)

“It is no good! It is no good!” protests the buyer; then off he goes and boasts about his purchase. (Prov. 20:14)

“It is no good! It is no good!” protests the buyer.” The buyer insists that the article is of poor quality, it is not worth the price the seller is asking; the seller must lower his price if he hopes to make the sale. *“Then off he goes and boasts [about his purchase].”* After he has made his purchase at the lower price, the buyer boasts of “what a steal” he has made. Thus, he has not only cheated the seller out of a fair price, he now proceeds to mock the man he has just cheated.

What does the Scripture command? First, we are commanded to see to it that our business transactions are to be characterized by fairness and honesty: *“A dishonest scale is detestable to Jehovah, but a just weight is his delight”* (Prov. 11:1.) Unscrupulous, unjust, deceitful business practices are *“detestable”* to the LORD; they are nothing less than an intolerable affront to His truth. Conversely, honesty and integrity in business are *“his delight;”* such are the things in which the LORD takes great pleasure and finds satisfaction.

Consider, too, Proverbs 21:6; *“Acquiring a fortune by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor for those who seek death.”* Wealth accumulated by dishonest means is described as *“a fleeting vapor,”* or, *“a vapor driven to and fro [by the wind.]”* Such wealth has no true durability; the rewards of deceit are just as fleeting as deceit itself. Men who resort to deceit as a means of accumulating wealth are themselves described as *“those who seek death.”* Far from enjoying “solid joys and lasting treasure,” such men find not only their ill-gotten gain to be in jeopardy, but their own soul as well. Whatever monetary or material gains we may temporarily achieve by means of deceit, they are more than off set by our spiritual loss: by violating God’s standard of truth, we alienate ourselves from

Him; by violating the commandment of love, we alienate ourselves from our neighbor; and by violating our conscience, we are deadening our ability to discern and respond to right and wrong.

As another form of deceit, consider the opposite of that described in Proverbs 20:4, namely, flattery: *“A lying tongue hates those it hurts, and a flattering mouth causes ruin.”* Note that *“a flattering mouth”* is put into the same category as *“a lying tongue;”* both are deceitful, and both are destructive. Flattery is a calculated manipulation of someone for personal gain: *“A man who flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his feet”* (Prov. 29:5.)

All of a man’s ways seem right to him, but Jehovah examines the heart.
(Prov. 21:2)

Yet another form of deceit is rationalizing: providing plausible but false reasons for one’s conduct.

Proverbs 21:2a declares, *“All of a man’s ways seem right to him.”* We can invent reasons to justify or excuse anything and everything we do. As Proverbs 16:2 expresses it: *“All of a man’s ways are pure in his own eyes, but Jehovah evaluates the motives.”* The Hebrew word rendered *“pure”* (טָהוֹר) is literally, according to the Old Testament commentators, Keil and Delitzsch (*Commentary on Proverbs*, Vol.1, p.335,) *“piercing [the eyes]”* —i.e.; by means of self-deception, self-justification and rationalization, all the ways of a man become dazzlingly bright and pure in his own sight.

Rationalizing is an extremely dangerous form of self-deception: the more one loses touch with the truth, the more one numbs his conscience and sears his soul. Consider the case of the Saul:

“What have you done?” asked Samuel. Saul replied, “When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Micmash, I thought, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought Jehovah’s favor.’ So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering.” ¹³*“You acted foolishly,” Samuel said. “You have not kept the commandment Jehovah your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time.”* (1 Sam. 13:11-12)

Saul had disobeyed Samuel’s instruction for him to wait for Samuel’s arrival. He took it upon himself to offer the sacrifice to the LORD that only Samuel as priest had the authority to offer. But now, rather than admit his wrongdoing, Saul rationalizes and re-interprets his sinful conduct, defining it as a heroic act.

But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?" ¹⁵Saul answered, "The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to Jehovah your God, but we totally destroyed the rest." (1 Sam. 15:14-15)

Saul disobeyed the LORD's command to completely destroy all the Amalekites and all their possessions. But now when Samuel confronts him with his failure to carry out the LORD's command, Saul once again rationalizes, this time re-interpreting his wrong doing by defining it as an act of devotion to the LORD. Let us take seriously the testimony of the Psalmist: *"Surely you desire truth in the inward parts"* (Psl. 51:6a.)

Conclusion

Our Lord Jesus Christ spoke and lived the truth. As Christians, we are called by God to become like our Savior.