

## Truth And Lies

### 1<sup>st</sup> Lesson: Exodus 20:16

“You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.”

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Lesson Colossians 3:1-10

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived.

But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.

### John 8:42-45

Jesus said to them, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I have come here from God. I have not come on my own; God sent me. Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me!

### MESSAGE:

In former times God spoke to his people through the prophets in different places and in various ways, but in these last days He speaks to us through His Son. And so we pray: “speak, Lord, for your servants listen.” Amen. In Christ Jesus, dear friends:

Of all the sins listed in the Bible, the one we struggle with the most is the sin of lying. We lie for different reasons and in different ways, but the truth of the matter is that we all lie. Lying is a unique sin in that while murder and adultery and stealing are sins against our neighbor, lying is a sin against ourselves. When we lie we mortgage our honor, our reputation and our credibility and invite public disgrace. And if we say we don’t care about our honor or reputation or credibility, we harden our hearts toward our neighbor, and ultimately toward God himself. And when we do that we imperil our salvation.

What exactly are we doing when we lie? That’s simple: when we lie we are attempting to convince other people to believe in a fictional reality that we have created which conceals our sins. Typically we’re motivated to lie in order to escape the consequences of some sin we have committed. We try to “lie our way out” of a situation we’ve gotten ourselves

into which could prove embarrassing to us. If we have stolen something we deny that we stole it. If we didn't outright steal it, but obtained it in a shady or unjust way, we lie about how we obtained it. We allege that someone else must have stolen it. Whatever the sin, we lie to escape the punishment we deserve by shirking our responsibility for it.

Another reason we lie is to enhance our image with other people. We try to make other people believe that we're more successful or richer or smarter than we really are. Sometimes we try to make our children—or grandchildren—appear to be more successful or smarter than other children. Ever heard anyone refer to, "my son, the doctor." Or "my son the judge." I've sometimes wondered whether Mary might have been tempted to refer to Jesus as, "my son, the Messiah." In either case, we are fictionalizing our lives and ourselves by playing games with the truth.

A large part of our problem is that we tend to trust lies more than we do the truth to keep us safe and make us happy. I was watching a TV sitcom once in which a teenage girl was babysitting for a neighbor at the neighbor's house, and her boyfriend came to see her. She knew she shouldn't let him in but she did, and when the parents of the child came home earlier than she expected and he was still there, she panicked. Her boyfriend immediately came up with a story. "Just tell them that you heard a noise outside and you were frightened and asked me to come over and check it out and make sure everything was okay." But she said, "Why don't we just tell them the truth and say we're sorry?" Her boyfriend said, "Why should we take a chance on the truth when we got us a good lie?"

That pretty much says it all. What the girl's boyfriend failed to realize--and what we fail to realize--is that when we speak the truth, we are not taking a chance, but when we lie, we are taking far more than a chance. When we lie, we're playing god with reality in order to make it conform to our wishes. In effect we are making god a liar and ourself God. And that is idolatry and idolatry will destroy us.

The appeal of lying is so great that almost everybody does it some of the time and some people do it all of the time. We start lying very early in our lives. When we're teenagers, for example, what do we want more than anything else? Why it's to do things our parents don't want us to do. So how do we go about doing them? We just don't tell them what we're doing. We lie.

Lying is fallen man's way of dealing with a fallen world. We try to defend ourselves with lies, we try to ingratiate ourselves with lies, we try to extricate ourselves from the messes we get into with lies. And therefore Jesus' words should impale all of our consciences: "you belong to your father, the devil...for he is a liar and the father of lies." As the saying goes, "what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive." Anyone who begins lying soon finds that he has to cover up one lie with another, and then that lie with yet another, and soon he becomes lost in the web of his lies. He can't remember where or what the truth was. In time he can't even remember who he is and he becomes a figment of his own imagination.

There is a way out of lying. There is a Balm in Gilead for us liars that is powerful and effective. It is called the truth. Truth scatters lies like the sun disperses darkness. And one thing about the truth is that it is always near us and available for us to use. And

unless your name is Pontius Pilate, you know what the truth is. All we need do is learn to trust the truth rather than “a good lie.” So why don’t we tell the truth? Because every fiber in our lying flesh rises up in protest against the idea. “Tell the truth??? You’ve got to be kidding!! If I did that--oh man...” Do these words sound familiar? If they do, if the thought of telling the plain truth makes you shudder, it’s for one reason.

Our unheavenly father in hell has successfully planted the greatest lie of all in your mind: that speaking the truth will bring calamity down on your head. So we say, “it’s better to leave well enough alone; things are peaceful; let’s keep them that way.” And so satan keeps his palace in peace and we remain docile prisoners of war who rest contentedly behind bars of mutual deceit. The hammer of truth could burst the doors open and let in the light, but darkness is comfortable and light reveals ugly truths that nobody needs to know about. So it’s better to leave things as they are: why make a fuss?

Lying is a malaise. A gut deep, blood-thickening disease that keeps us locked into ourselves and denies us the clean fresh air and sunlight of truth. We live and groan under the weight of our deceptions like bugs under a rock. We’re not aware of it because we’ve gotten used to its weight and assume it’s just part of life--like the air we breathe or the water we drink. The last one to become aware of the water is the fish. But the weight of our lies is there and it weighs us down whether we’re aware of it or not.

Even a church can be an incubator for lying. It’s easy to avoid telling the truth to each other and pander pleasant falsehoods in the name of Christian love. But lies are lies and you can’t serve the Kingdom of God with lies. Besides, when we excuse ourselves from telling the truth to each other, it can be tempting to tell that truth to someone else. There’s a name for that: it’s called gossip. Far better to speak the truth to the person involved. As St. John wrote, “love one another not in word or tongue, but in truth and action.”

The famous jazz artist and bandleader Duke Ellington was a deeply religious man. One of my favorite quotations came from his lips. He said: “we’re all afraid of each other, afraid that if we tell each other the truth we’ll be attacked. So we just shut up and refuse to tell each other the truth. We think: ‘I’m not going to tell you the truth because even if I did, you wouldn’t be truthful with me,’ and then when you don’t tell me the truth, I think: “see, you’re a dirty rat just like I thought you were.’ yet every time God’s children tell each other the truth in love, miracles happen.”

Lying is a disease. It is poisonous and it is addictive. And truth is the medicine the Lord has given us to eradicate this disease. It is free and available to anyone who wants to use it. So the next time you’re tempted to sweep the truth under the table—and you won’t have to wait long for that occasion—try telling the truth instead. Then get ready for miracles to happen. Amen.