

To Tell the Truth

By Gene Frost

"But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." **(Rev 21:8)**

All liars shall have their part in the lake of fire!

The Christian is under a speech imperative: to tell the truth. "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor" **(Eph. 4:25)**. This commandment is no trivial matter it reflects the nature of the Creator Himself: it is "impossible for God to lie." **(Heb. 6:18; Tit. 1:2)** His "word is truth." **(John 17:17)** Therefore "lying lips are an abomination to the Lord: but they that deal truly are his delight." **(Prov. 12:22)** Yes, God hates lies. **(Prov. 6:16-17, 19:5, 9)**

Lying is of the devil: "there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it." **(John 8:44)**

The Effects of Lying

A lie is a "conscious and intentional falsehood" (Thayer's Lexicon, page 676). It is to state what one knows is not the truth with the intent of misleading or deceiving the hearer. It is an abomination before God not only because it is contrary to His nature, but also because it is detrimental to man's own welfare and to others.

1. Lies create delusions: cause people to err. **(Jer. 23:32)**
2. Lies destroy the innocent: judgment is perverted. **(Prov. 14:25)**
3. Lies rob the poor. **(Isa. 32:7)**
4. Lies undermine morals. **(Rom. 1: 25-26)**

Because of these things the wrath of God is incensed.

Why Do Men Lie?

What motivates men to lie? Why would one deliberately state what he knows is not the truth?

The Scriptures lay bare the human heart; it is a "discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." **(Heb. 4:12)** Through its pages we learn what motivates men to sin, including the sin of lying. Arbitrarily we classify three general areas of motivation. (This is not exhaustive.)

1. Some men lie simply because they delight in lies: "they delight in lies: -they bless with their mouth, but they curse inwardly." **(Ps. 62:4)** Some lie because they enjoy the discomfort of others, or for the thrill of deceit. (Cf. "Peace Child," *Reader's Digest*, January 1976.)
2. Some find safety (or an assurance) in lies. To protect their position, some will lie. **(Isa. 28:15; John 11:48-50, 53; Mark 14:55-56)** Some to save embarrassment. **(Gen. 18:15)** Others to have physical security. **(Gen. 12:11-13, 20:2)**
3. Some lie in order to gain power, political or financial. **(I Tim. 4:2, 2 Pet. 2:1-3)**

What Constitutes A Lie?

When the old prophet told the man of God, who came out of Judah to speak against the idolatrous worship of Jeroboam, "I am a prophet also as thou art; and an angel spake unto me by the word of the Lord, saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water," the record says "he *lied* unto him." **(I Kings 13:18)** The statement of the old prophet was not true, and he knew it was not. The untruth

was designed to deceive the man of God, which it did. The statement was a lie. It was a conscious and intentional falsehood planted in the mind of the hearer.

No one would argue that the old prophet did not lie, an act which cannot be justified. But what if he had used mental reservation? Suppose he had said, "I am a prophet of God, and you will not sin by coming into my house to eat bread and to drink water," mentally completing the sentence: "at a later time." Would he have *lied*? Some reason that since the complete sentence was true, he would have told the truth in his own mind, and therefore would not be guilty of lying regardless of the fact that the man of God was deceived.

And so the question is raised, Does truthfulness involve only the integrity of the mind of the speaker, regardless of the understanding of the hearer? Or, does it involve both the speaker and the hearer, so that if the speaker deliberately implants a false understanding in the mind of the hearer he is guilty of lying?

Only In The Speaker's Mind

Some define a lie as "a statement made at variance with the mind of the speaker." Thus some have argued that a deceptive statement is not a lie if it is not a variance with the mind of the speaker. This concept allows one to speak what to the hearer is a lie but with mental qualifications is true in the mind of the speaker. If one's conscience allows him to give a statement with mental reservation, even when he knows that the hearer will accept and act upon a lie, he himself will not lie in that he does not speak against his mind.

Some make a distinction within mental reservations, a distinction termed *broad* and *strict*. While rejecting a mental reservation which is *strict*, i.e. when a speaker restricts the meaning of words to what is not their obvious meaning so that it is impossible for the hearer to perceive the truth, some theologians justify a *broad* mental reservation. A *broad* mental reservation involves mental qualifications withheld from the hearer so that he draws a false conclusion, With the intent of withholding the truth from him. This is justified, it is argued, because of "external circumstances" or "common usage." "Common usage" is when many do it, e.g. when one says, "he is not in," you do not know if he is in or not; truth is withheld. "External circumstances" are where secrets are wanted to be kept, e.g. "I have no knowledge of that," i.e. "(it is privileged information and I know nothing of that (which I can tell you))."

Of course, God makes no such distinctions or provisions to deceive. Such conduct is not a reflection of truthfulness that characterizes Him. God is called a God *of truth* because His word can be safely relied upon - one is not, and will not, be deceived thereby. It is interesting to note that the term for truth in the Old Testament (*'emeth*) "suggests notions of firmness, stability, reliability, faithfulness." (Gordon Pinnock, *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, Carl F. H. Henry, ed., page 679.) The words for "lie," (*kazab* and *seger* the most common), carry the "underlying thought . . . of deceit or emptiness". (William Kelly, *Baker's Dictionary of Theology*, Everett F. Harrison, ed., page 323.) One can rely upon truth; he can act upon it safely. This is characteristic of God. That which is empty, upon which one cannot build safely, is a lie. One who cannot be safely relied upon because his word is empty, deceptive, does not reflect the character of God and cannot justify his lying as being approved of God!

Both Speaker and Hearer Are Involved

Truth is not only what is realized by the speaker to be as things really are, but is conveyed to the hearer in the same way. There is no conscious and intentional effort to deceive, to cause the hearer to believe anything less than the truth. (This is not to say that the speaker is always compelled to tell all he knows in every situation. He may keep silent unless the situation demands that he speaks, but he may not lie. For example, a gossip may ask what one knows about the past conduct of a person - one is not to "spill all," but neither is he to lie.) An untruth is a lie when either deliberately told by the speaker or when deliberately and knowingly conveyed to the hearer. *The one who speaks it*, though his statement be a half-truth, an equivocation, with mental reservation, or with innuendo, *lies!*

It is sad to know that some who claim to be Christians will engage in lying. They may try to justify their conduct by appealing to mental reservation, etc., but lying has no justification. It demands only repentance and petitioning of the Lord for forgiveness.

Kinds of Lies

1. *The flat contradiction of truth is a lie.* An example is the old prophet, already cited. He said, "an angel spake unto me by the word of the Lord saying, Bring him back with thee . . . * ' The truth is, no angel spoke to him, What he said is in flat contradiction to the truth. He lied.
2. *A statement that is true only when fully stating the case is a lie when part is mentally reserved.* As with the example previously cited, for the old prophet to have said, "It is no sin to come," would have been to lie, even though in his mind he completed what would be true: "after you have obeyed God." The thought natural to the hearer is a lie, and the speaker is guilty of it!
3. *Equivocation with the conscious intent of deceiving is a lie.* To equivocate is to use words or expression susceptible of two or more meanings. When such a word is used with an unusual meaning in mind, when a different meaning is obviously conveyed to the hearer so that he reaches a false conclusion, the speaker is guilty of lying. Especially so when the false conclusion is stated as being the understanding, and the hearer remains silent. He is guilty of intentionally implanting a lie in the mind of the hearer, and the fact that he substitutes the correct meaning in his own mind does not deliver him from guilt.
4. *A statement out Of context is a lie.* In their attempt to bring witnesses against Jesus, the chief priests and council presented men who said, "We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands." (**Mark 14:58**) They made reference to the temple building in Jerusalem whereas Jesus "spake of the temple of his body." (**John 2:22**) In putting Jesus' statement in a different context, the Bible says they "bare false witness against him" (**Mark 14:57**).
5. *A statement or act expressed in duplicity is a lie.* Duplicity is "deception by pretending to entertain one set of feelings and acting under the influence of another." (Webster's Collegiate Dictionary.) For example, to bid one "God speed" while at the time undermining his influence and reputation is duplicity and the statement is a lie. To bid "God speed" is a statement of commendation and blessing. (**Cf. 2 John 11.**)

The action of Judas in betraying Christ is one of duplicity. When he came to Jesus, he signified with a kiss whom His enemies should capture. He saluted Jesus, "Hail, master," and kissed Him. (**Matt. 26:48-49**) The kiss is an expression of love and friendship, but such did not motivate Judas' action. His kiss was a lie!

6. *A lie may be unstated, but conveyed by silence or innuendo.* There are times when the occasion demands that one speak. To remain silent conveys one's answer, and if it is a false answer it is a lie, though unspoken. For example, in an exchange of vows, one is asked if there is cause why the marriage should not be contracted. Suppose a party involved has no right to be married, having a living mate, but says nothing. To all present, his silence conveys the conclusion, "there is no cause" " -but this is a lie. He cannot later, when confronted with the truth, plead innocence on the basis that he did not say there was no cause. By not answering when the occasion demanded an answer, he gave tacit affirmation that there was no cause the marriage should not be contracted. By silence he lied!

Innuendo is a "derogatory reference, especially to a person" conveyed not with direct reference, but by insinuation. Insinuation and innuendo "agree in the sense of covert suggestion, usually to a person's discredit. But innuendo frequently adds to insinuation, the idea of an equivocal allusion so framed as to point to something injurious to the Character or reputation of the person referred to." (Webster's Collegiate Dictionary.)

For example, partners in business owe a note. One agrees to pay his half and that of his partner on the condition that the partner satisfy his part with extra labor. The condition is met and the note is paid. But later

the first party relates to a third party that he paid his part of the note, but "for some reason" his partner did not pay his part and so he paid it all. Without the facts one would conclude that the partner had been unfair, had failed to honor the contract. The conclusion conveyed a lie. The failure to state *the reason* and suggest "for some reason" was a conscious and deliberate act to implant a false and injurious conclusion against the character of his partner. Though the false conclusion was not explicitly stated, it was conveyed through innuendo. It was a lie.

No Justification

Men have a tendency to minimize sin. Some reason that even though one intentionally tells a falsehood, if the result is considered to be good, then the lie is justified. But lying is not an option with the truth for the choice of the situation ethicist. There is no justification for lying. All *liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone.*