

Lying

HN 12/06/05 pm

Reading: Proverbs 6:1-23, Ephesians 4

Study Text: Deuteronomy 5:20

Sing Psalms: 24:1-4, 15; 51:6-10; 27:11-14

Who is telling the truth? So much time, money and effort is spent getting an answer to this simple question. It is question asked in the classroom, in the lounge room, in the boardroom and in the courtroom. Did Michael Jackson molest the boy or not. Millions of dollars have been spent seeking the truth, but will the truth be forthcoming. Did Miss Corby own the drugs she had or were they planted in her luggage? What is the truth?

It seems such a simple matter. If everyone spoke the truth and we could all believe one another – wow what a different world it would be! Lies cost a lot of money, lies bring a lot of suffering, lies destroy many relationships, lies cost many lives, lies bring death to many souls.

In the beginning there were no lies. Man and woman hid nothing from each other. But then sin came into the world. Sin corrupted the human heart and the tongue brought forth deceit and lies. Cain hated his brother and deceitfully led him in to field to kill him. Abraham spoke falsely about his wife – he spoke half the truth with the intent to deceive. Jacob lied, telling his blind father that he was Esau, in order to get the birthright.

Lying started in Eden and it continues without let-up till today. Lying begins in the cradle and it continues to the coffin. How quickly and how naturally the infant comes out with ‘it was not my fault he did it’ when their sin is found out.

Children of the devil Jesus called the Jews (John 8:44). When he lies he speaks his native language. We all have this natural ability. Some like to develop it and become habitual liars. The command God has given is desist, to turn from lies and speak the truth always – to all people in every situation.

God is the God of truth. *God is not a man that he should lie* (Numbers 23:19). God cannot lie (Titus 1:2). Like father like son – God’s children must not lie. God *desires truth in the inward parts* (Psalm 51:6). *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour* is the commandment the Lord God gave through Moses to his covenant people.

Law Court and Oaths

This command is set against a legal background. ‘The thought of bearing false witness points to a law court situation in which a fellow member of the covenant community was on trial’ (Harman). In elaborating this command Moses stipulated that a false witness be punished in the manner he intended for the accused. Two or three witnesses were required to establish a matter (Deuteronomy 19).

In his ‘sermon on the mount’ Jesus made reference to this commandment. He spoke against swearing oaths, something typical of, but not exclusive to, a formal law court setting. The Pharisees had

managed to twist this command and undermine as they did the others. In their legalistic way they started to categorise what object it was that people swore by. To swear by the temple was different to swearing by the gold in the temple (Matthew 23:16). Jesus condemned such attempts to avoid the clear import of this command. Do not swear by anything he said, but let you yes be yes and your no, no.

It is very easy to fall into this trap, the trap of the devil. People like to distinguish between fibs and lies, between white lies and black lies. Children swear saying ‘cross my heart and hope to die’. The Jews in a similar way swore by their head it seems (Matthew 5:36).

Lying, like other sins, very easily becomes a habit. Little fibs quickly turn into big lies. You may say ‘Oh I would never tell a lie under oath in a court’. But if you habitually tell lies to your children, and to your neighbours, then what is the difference? Any lie has the potential to harm your neighbour. To live with people who rarely speak the truth is horrific.

What about withholding the truth? What about remaining silent when false witness is being given? Are you responsible if the innocent suffers while you remain silent? *To him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin* (James 4:17). You are responsible to speak the truth and not remain silent, lest an innocent person suffers.

Our Lord Jesus knew what it was to be falsely accused. The Jewish leaders arrested him and then sought to get people to witness against him- they wanted to be seen to be upholding the law. Many gave false witness against Jesus – but their testimonies did not agree. Then the High Priest put Jesus under oath *Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God* (Matthew 26:63). Jesus told the truth and they condemned him for blasphemy. Jesus knew this would be the consequence but he still told the truth.

Everyday Life

The phone rings but you are busy. You ask your daughter to answer the phone and say ‘Mum is not at home, can I take a message’. What indeed is the message your child is getting. When your child wags school what will they say to the teacher – they will tell a lie. When they are late home from school and you ask where they have been what will they say – they will tell a lie.

Why do we do this? Why are we so quick to tell a lie? It is so easy, it is so effective. But is it not just as easy to tell the truth. Mum is busy and cannot come to the phone right now – can she call you back. Is this not just as easy to say? Of course if we are doing something wrong, or aresome where we should not be, it is not so easy to tell the truth. It means we have to confess our sin. But in the long run this will be to our advantage. *Confess your sins to one another and pray for one another that you may be healed* (James 5:16).

There are two main reasons why we speak falsely – because of hatred for our brother or because of pride in our own heart. The command specifically mentions *your neighbour*. You must love you neighbour as yourself – that is the sum of these ‘second table’ commandments.

Hatred

Whoever hides hatred has lying lips and whoever spreads slander is a fool (Proverbs 10:18). *A lying tongue hates those who are crushed by it* (Proverbs 26:28). False witness is often given because of

personal hatred. Slander is false witness. This includes half truths and rumours that are propagated in order to do harm to your neighbour. James reminds us of the power of the tongue. It is especially powerful to do evil, to speak evil of another – unless it is trained to speak the truth in love.

As we have seen Jesus himself was the victim of false accusations stirred up by hatred. The Jewish leaders were jealous of his power and authority. They would not listen; they would not heed his word. Still today men who declare the whole truth of God with power and authority from the Holy Word and the Holy Spirit are often hated and become the targets of slander and false accusations.

Pride

The sinful heart is a selfish heart, a heart full of pride and self seeking. We think of ourselves more highly than we ought (Romans 12:3) and we want others to think of us highly also. Many lies are told in an effort to impress others. People ‘embellish’ their CV’s and even add false data in order to make a good impression and get the job.

Ananias and his wife Saphira colluded to give a false impression of their self sacrifice and generosity to the church. They sold a possession but gave only part of it to the apostles. They wanted Peter to believe they were giving all the proceeds to the church. Severe judgment came upon them – judgment directly from God. *You have not lied to men but to God* said Paul. *Satan has filled your heart to lie* he said (Acts 5: 3-4). Great fear came over the whole church when they heard what happened to these two people who lied.

God hates a lying tongue. He hates a false witness who speaks a lie (Proverbs 6:16). *He who speaks lies shall perish* (Proverbs 19:9). Lies destroy relationships. They undermine mutual trust. A lie is a lie no matter where it is spoken; no matter for what purpose it is spoken. God is a God of truth. He hates a lying tongue.

Lies are often told in order to cover up faults, and to hide sin from others. But remember you cannot hide anything from God. All will be exposed by the light (Ephesians 5:13). Confess your sin, don’t try to hide it. Confess and turn from sin. Lying will not cover it for long.

Evil words and lies come out of a sinful heart (Matthew 12:35). *God desires truth in the inward parts* (Psalm 51:6). He desires *truth in the heart* (Psalm 15:2). Out of the heart come every evil thought and every false word. If we truly love God we will seek to please him by speaking the truth at all times.

If you truly love your neighbour as yourself, you will speak only truth about them, and the truth to them. You will not speak lies or innuendo or half truths to slander them. As children of God we must *speaking the truth in love that we may grow up in all things into Christ who is the head* (Ephesians 4:15). *Put away lying and let each of you speak truth with his neighbour, for we are members of one another* (Ephesians 4:25).

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon