

Pastor Steven J. Cole  
Flagstaff Christian Fellowship  
123 S. Beaver Street  
Flagstaff, Arizona 86001  
[www.fcfonline.org](http://www.fcfonline.org)

## TO TELL THE TRUTH

Ephesians 4:25

By

Steven J. Cole

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Ephesians Lesson 32

To Tell the Truth  
Ephesians 4:25

One of the greatest moral issues that we all struggle with is that of telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. The book, *The Day that America Told the Truth*, states (p. 45) that 91 percent of us lie regularly (cited by Alistair Begg, "Cedarville Torch, Fall, 1994, p. 15). "Of the people interviewed, 92 percent said the main reason for their lying was to save face, and 98 percent said the reason they told lies was so as not to offend people" (*ibid.*).

Another survey of 20,000 middle- and high-schoolers indicated that 92 percent admitted to lying to their parents in the previous year, and 73 percent said that they told lies weekly. Despite these admissions, 91 percent of all respondents said they were "satisfied with my own ethics and character" (*Reader's Digest* [Nov., 1999], pp. 81-82). Their consciences were insensitive to their sin!

Lest you think, "Well, these surveys were probably taken among pagans," pollster George Gallup indicts us when he says, "church attendance makes little difference in people's ethical views and behavior with respect to lying, cheating, pilferage, and not reporting theft" (cited by Vernon Grounds, "Focal Point" [Summer, 1995], p. 8).

We bend the truth in many ways. There is the *half-truth*. You sort of tell the truth, but not the whole truth. You tell your employer, "I wasn't feeling well," which was sort of true. But, in reality, you were not so ill as to miss work. You just wanted to do something else. Or, there is the *white lie*, a supposedly "innocent" lie that doesn't hurt anyone. "Yes, your new hairdo is beautiful!" "Thank you, I just *love* fruitcake!"

There are the lies that *cover for someone or for ourselves*. The boss is in the next room, but you say, "He's not here right now to take your call." Often, the rationalization for cover-up lies is that the truth would hurt too many people. This was the excuse behind the Watergate scandal that brought down the Nixon administration. It would "hurt the country" if the truth were known!

Or, lies often go undercover as *exaggeration*. You stretch the story a bit to make yourself look better or to evoke sympathy. One of the easiest lies to fall into is *the silent lie*. This is where someone assumes something about you, which you know to be untrue. But, their mistaken view makes you look good, so you just let it go by and don't say anything to correct it. In a similar way, we use *evasive lies*. We change the subject or don't directly answer the question.

We also bend the truth by *cheating* on our income taxes, always with the justification that the government wastes so much money or that the tax system is unfair to the little guy (that's me!). We cheat on tests with the excuse, "everyone else does it." Or, we *pilfer* from our employer with the rationalization that they don't pay me enough. Or, if the clerk at the store makes a mistake to our advantage, we don't say anything to make it right. We figure, "They overcharge for everything, anyway!"

The Bible is brutally honest in exposing the failures of some of the great men and women of faith when it comes to lying. Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Aaron, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, Rachel, and David all lied, along with Peter in the New Testament. If these saints struggled with being truthful, then none of us is exempt! So we all need to take Paul's exhortation to heart (Eph. 4:25): "Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another."

"Therefore" takes us back to the preceding context. Paul has told us generally how we are to be different from our former life of corruption "in accordance with the lusts of deceit." Since God has changed us through the gospel, we are to live in light of the truth by putting off the old life, being renewed in the spirit of our minds, and putting on the new life (4:22-24). But, it's easy to hear that and think, "Amen, preach, it Brother Paul!" But we leave it out there in the realm of generalities and don't apply it specifically.

So beginning in 4:25 (and going through 6:9), Paul gets specific. He goes from preaching to meddling! He names a bunch of specific sins from our old life that we are to put off and godly behaviors that we are to put on. While there are some exceptions, his usual method is to state the sinful behavior that we are to put off, the godly behavior that we are to put on, and the motive or reason for the positive behavior. In 4:25 he is saying,

We who have experienced the new birth must lay aside falsehood and speak the truth, because we are members of one another.

To define our terms, *truth* is an accurate representation of the facts. Especially, truth is conformity to God's standards as revealed in His Word (John 17:17). God is the truth and He always speaks the truth. Falsehood or lying is any deliberate misrepresentation of the facts.

Also, keep in mind the directive of Ephesians 4:15, that we must speak the truth *in love*. We must be kind and gracious when we speak the truth. We need to phrase the truth in a way that is least offensive and most sensitive to the other person's feelings. We need to apply the golden rule: how would I want someone else to tell me this truth? I must speak it in the same manner.

Also, being truthful does not mean that we need to reveal everything we know about a matter. God does not do that with us. If you need to keep a confidence or if you think that making the truth known would be damaging, you may simply reply, "I'm not free to talk about that matter." Being truthful does not require sharing your thoughts on everything. If being silent would imply agreement when you disagree, you may need to clarify things. But, sometimes wisdom requires keeping your thoughts to yourself (Prov. 10:19).

With that as a background, let's explore Paul's thought here:

1. The new birth is the starting point for a life of truthfulness.

As I said, "therefore" takes us back to 4:22, where Paul has just said that we are to "lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of *deceit*." Deceit permeated the old life. We were deceived by sin and we deceived others by our self-serving hypocrisy and greed. It also takes us back to 4:24, where Paul said that we are to "put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the *truth*." Truth characterizes our new life in Christ. We are to live in accordance with the truth which is in Jesus (4:21). And, we are now to live as truthful people.

Some unbelievers are truthful people, but usually their truthfulness is self-serving. They take great pride that their word is good.

Or, they are truthful because they fear the punishment or shame that comes if their duplicity comes to light. But, only those who have received new life through God's grace can be truthful out of the motive of pleasing and glorifying Him.

One of my seminary professors told us about an incidence where he was at the bank with another of our professors. The teller gave this other professor too much change. He called it to her attention and gave the money back. She exclaimed, "Thank goodness that you're honest!" Many of us would have taken the credit, but he quickly replied, "I'm not honest by nature. I would have ripped you off, but Jesus Christ is now my Savior and Lord. He makes me honest." He gave the glory to Christ, as we should do. His saving grace is the starting point for a life of truthfulness.

2. Those who are new creatures in Christ must lay aside falsehood and speak the truth.

Maybe you're thinking, "Great, but how do you do it?" I suggest five strategies for becoming a person of truth.

A. Recognize the source of truth and the source of falsehood.

*God is the source of truth.* He is the only true God, whose word is truth (John 17:3). As such, He cannot lie (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18). Jesus Christ is the embodiment of the truth (John 14:6; Eph. 4:21). He spoke the truth (John 8:45). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth (John 14:17). On the other hand...

*Satan is the source of falsehood and lies.* Jesus called Satan "a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). Satan introduced "the lie" in the garden, when he implied that God was lying in the threat of punishment if Eve ate the forbidden fruit. He deceived Eve with the lie (Gen. 3:4), "You surely will not die!"

We need to keep in mind who is the source of truth and who is the source of falsehood because our culture strongly pressures us into compromising the truth. This is especially true with the post-modern philosophy that tells us that there is no such thing as absolute truth. I was talking last week with a pastor who lives near a major evangelical seminary. The seminary requires chapel attendance, which the students must report on. He was talking with the seminary chaplain, who said that many of the students skip chapel

regularly and then just lie on their report. They excuse it by saying that they don't get anything out of chapel and it's a better use of their time to do something else! This is a conservative, Bible-believing seminary! But I wonder how many of those students would glibly lie if they thought about the fact that when they lie, they are in league with Satan, the father of lies!

B. Recognize the importance of truthfulness to God.

*Truthfulness is important to God because He is the God of truth who hates lying and falsehood.* Since falsehood is contrary to God's holy nature and is, in fact, a part of Satan's rebellious nature, God hates it. In Proverbs 6:16-19, Solomon lists seven things which God hates. Two of the seven have to do with lying. Proverbs 12:22 states, "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal faithfully are His delight."

*Truthfulness is important to God because truth is the basis for all communication.* The instant that Adam and Eve sinned, they experienced a breakdown in the close fellowship with God and with one another that they had known before the fall. They tried to hide from God and they were uncomfortable with their nakedness before one another. When God confronted Adam, he blamed Eve for his sin and she blamed the serpent. We all have struggled with communication ever since. When you think about it, it's ridiculous not to be honest before God, because He knows our every thought. But, we still try to hide our sins from Him!

At the heart of good communication and close relationships is trust. If you do not trust someone, you instinctively draw back and protect yourself. If you think that he will take personal matters that you share in confidence and broadcast them to others, you will not open up and share your heart. Distrust results in distance in relationships and dishonesty causes distrust. You can spend a lifetime building trust in your marriage or on the job, but one stupid lie can erode that trust in an instant. So, truthfulness is very important to God, because it is the basis for all communication.

C. Choose to obey God by making a prior commitment not to lie, but rather to speak the truth.

*First, you must choose to obey God.* When Paul addresses this subject, he does not say, "Go to a therapist and try to figure out why

you are prone to lying. There must be something in the way your parents treated you at the root of this problem!" Nor does he say, "Pray for victory in this area." Rather, he says, "Stop lying and start speaking the truth!" In other words, choose to obey God.

*Second, make a prior commitment not to lie.* In other words, you must decide not to lie *before* you get into a situation that hits you broadside. Paul says here that you must decisively throw off lying as you would throw off dirty, smelly clothes. It's part of the old life of corruption and deceit, so as a new creature in Christ, commit yourself to say no to the temptation to lie.

You have to make this commitment before the temptation hits because it's easy to get trapped into lying. Note how Satan set up Peter for his fall. The servant girl who kept the door said to Peter (John 18:17), "You are not also one of this man's disciples, are you?" The question begs for a negative answer. Peter fell into sin by replying, "I am not." Maybe your dad says, "You don't know how this scratch got into the fender of the car, do you?" Be careful! It's so easy to say, "No, what scratch?" And then, once you've lied, it's even more difficult to correct yourself and tell the truth the next time. So, you dig yourself in deeper with another lie and another one, until it becomes a habit pattern of sin.

*Third, make a prior commitment to tell the truth, even if it makes you look bad.* Usually, we lie because the truth will expose our sin. Or, we fear what will happen if we're honest. When Abraham went down to Egypt to escape the famine, he told Sarah to say that she was his sister, because he was afraid that if the Egyptians knew that she was his wife, they would kill him in order to take her (Gen. 12:10-20). He justified the lie because it was half true. She was the daughter of his father, but not of his mother. But, the truth was that she also was his wife. Not learning his lesson the first time, Abraham repeated the same lie years later with Abimelech (Gen. 20:1-18). Isaac later followed dad's steps with the same sin (Gen. 26:7-11). Each time, it was out of fear of what might happen if they told the truth. Such fear never stems from faith in God.

One way to begin this battle to become a person of truth is to resolve to speak the truth even in small matters. Invariably, those who fail in major ways, such as perjury, fraud, or illegal cover-ups, don't begin there. They lie about small things, until their conscience

is callused. Lying doesn't bother them anymore. Then, they get hit with a major temptation that could send them to prison. Out of habit and panic, they lie. It is far better to be scrupulously honest about everything.

So, to lay aside falsehood and speak the truth, recognize the source of truth and of falsehood. Recognize the importance of truth to God. Choose to obey God by making a prior commitment to speak the truth in every situation.

D. Confess your sins immediately, first to God and then to the ones you have sinned against.

We fall into a habit of lying because we don't want God or others to know about our sin. As I said, it's ridiculous to think that we can hide our falsehood from God. He sees the hidden thoughts of our hearts (Heb. 4:13). But, we mistakenly think that it is to our advantage to hide our sins from others. But it is not, because invariably the truth comes out and our sin is exposed. The more we have covered up, the more it erodes any sense of trust. It's far better to ask forgiveness even after a minor falsehood, to keep your conscience tender and to maintain trust in relationships. Proverbs 28:13 says, "He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion."

E. Consider the consequences of lying.

Proverbs 19:5 warns, "A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who tells lies will not escape" (see, also, Prov. 19:9; 21:28). Although you may be able to cite cases of those that have lied and gotten away with it, they didn't get away with it before God! If you sow falsehood, you won't reap God's blessing. Ask yourself the following questions about lying:

*How could my lying bring glory to God?* Our chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Everything we do should be for His glory (1 Cor. 10:31). It is hard to conceive of how a lie could glorify the God of truth who cannot lie!

*How will my lying affect other believers?* We will consider this more in a moment. But, since lying erodes trust and leads to breakdowns in communication, lying is not for the good of others. You may think that it protects them, but invariably it hurts them.

*How will my lying affect my family?* If your mate has reason to doubt your truthfulness, it will create distance between you. If your children see you bending the truth, they won't need to be taught to follow your example! Rather, they should see you telling the truth even when it costs you. Use the occasions when a clerk gives you too much change to teach your children the value of honesty.

*How will my lying affect my testimony before unbelievers?* People read your life. They know that you profess to be a Christian and attend church. If they see you lying on the job, or keeping quiet about the truth when it is to your financial advantage, you have no basis for telling them about the Savior. If a boss asks you to cover for him by lying, you need to be ready graciously to refuse and explain why. He may not like you and he may even fire you. But your testimony is worth much more than a job!

*How will my lying affect my eternity?* I am not saying that you will lose your salvation by lying. As I said, some great men and women of faith were guilty of lying. But I am saying that if you claim to be a Christian, but you continue to live as you did before you became a Christian, you need to take a serious look at whether your faith in Christ is genuine. Those who are characterized by lying or who always excuse it in some way are not giving any evidence that they have been created anew in righteousness and holiness of the truth. Revelation 21:8 warns with regard to all liars, "their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." As Christians, we must fight our fleshly tendency towards lying. We must become people of truth. At the end of our verse, Paul tells us why:

3. The motive for laying aside falsehood and speaking the truth is that we are members of one another.

Paul already used the analogy of the body of Christ in connection with speaking the truth in love (4:14-16). Here, he brings it up again, citing Zechariah 8:16, where the Jews as the restored people of God are exhorted to speak truth with one another. But, Paul adds this reason, that we are members of one another.

The health of your physical body depends on truthful communication between the members through the nervous system. If you put your finger on a hot stove and your nerves do not relay to

the brain, “this is hot,” you will suffer severe injury. A person with leprosy lacks this communication between the nerves and the brain. He can actually destroy his own hand without knowing it.

This means that if you lie to your mate or to another member of the body of Christ, you are injuring yourself and, even worse, you are injuring Christ, because He is one with His body. So if you would not deliberately injure yourself, and if you don’t want to injure your family, and most importantly, if you don’t want to injure the Savior who gave Himself for you on the cross, you must develop the habit of laying aside falsehood and speaking truth, for we are members of one another.

### Conclusion

Augustine shrewdly observed (*Confessions*, Book X, chapter XXIII), “I have had experience of many who wished to deceive, but not one who wished to be deceived.” If you don’t want others to deceive you, then don’t deceive others. If the Holy Spirit has used this verse to convict you of falsehood, confess it to the Lord and to those whom you have wronged. Become a person who habitually speaks the truth in love.

### Application Questions

1. Is it ever morally right to lie? What about to protect someone’s life? What about to protect someone’s reputation?
2. Is lying a matter of degree or is it black and white? What if you withhold some of what you know—is this lying or prudence?
3. Why is it important to be truthful even in small matters? How should you respond when a host asks whether you liked a meal that you disliked? Etc.
4. Does being truthful require sharing your every thought? Why/why not?

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