



# HONEST LIVING: INTEGRITY IN A DISHONEST WORLD



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## Introduction

Betrayed, arrested, and denied by his disciples, truth stood trial. On his way to the cross, leaders questioned the Truth. Pontius Pilate, the Roman Governor, gave Truth a chance to speak for himself. In a key moment, Jesus explained, “For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice” (John 18:37). The governor responded with a question that our modern age either neglects or distorts, “What is truth?” That is a question that demands our attention if we seek to live honestly and in accord with truth. Our social media platforms and news feeds often seem unconcerned with questions about truth. There is no shortage of people trying to capitalize on falsehoods in our online world. Fake videos, fake fitness routines, and fake personalities flood our feeds, vying to go viral. Quick searches turn up example after example of lawsuits against those caught in their fraud and deception. The all-natural diet plan turns out to be supplemented by steroids. The photo turns out to be an AI-generated image. Sadly, such technological advancement has not managed to behead “snake oil” salesmen. Dishonesty abounds, and so, like Jeremiah, there is reason to lament and say, “falsehood and not truth has grown strong in the land” (Jer. 9:3). In a fallen world, where can we find truth?

As Christians, we know that truth is attainable. Not only is it attainable, but God has gifted it in the revelation of himself through his son, Jesus Christ. Furthermore, we know that God requires us to love the truth because it comes from Him. Our God and Redeemer is truth. He is the revealer of truth. His bride, the church, is called to act in accordance with truth as spoken by her faithful bridegroom. Honesty and truthfulness are beautiful qualities that believers are to shine in the world as God’s image bearers.

An honest life *is a life committed to the truth, no matter the cost*. Through this study, I hope that your commitment to God will manifest itself in an honest life, even in this dishonest world. This kind of Christian honesty results from a radical experience with the truth incarnate, Jesus Christ. It is the result of a heart gripped by Jesus, only to be compelled by him to live honestly in the world. Once justified, Christians are set on an ever-brightening path of consistency and commitment to the truth, just like their God and Savior. To understand truth rightly, we must begin our study with the source and standard of truth: God.

## Part One: Honest God

*“And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.”*

*1 John 5:20*

The Bible speaks of a standard of truth that is synonymous with God himself. He not only is truthful, but he is the absolute truth. That is, he is the standard of reality. He is the true God in contrast to false idols. The way he designed the world in its detail is reality as opposed to any skewed perception we may have. He is the true and only living and reliable God. Jesus, “the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature” (Heb. 1:3), famously said, “I am the way, and *the truth*, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6). In other words, to be God is to be truth. Truth is to God as wet is to water, as heat is to fire, and as sticky is to glue. We cannot conceive of the one without the other as part of its definition. To be God is to be truth, truthful, and true. If any of us is concerned with God, then we ought to be concerned with the truth. If any of us claims to love Jesus, then we must also be lovers of truth. Our God and Redeemer is truth!

Scripture’s commands reflect this holy character of our God. Take any number of the 10 Commandments, for example, and you will see God’s justice, goodness, and purity. The commands are reflections of the absolute standard derived from the moral perfection and purity of God himself. One crucial scriptural command for our study reveals how God’s integrity is reflected in the truthfulness of His redeemed people. The ninth commandment says, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Ex. 20:16). Like specific genes are expressed in physical appearances, so God’s righteous character is expressed through his commands. Because God is truth, his commands are not arbitrary or misleading. If God be truth, it is no surprise that he etches truth into those redeemed and remade after the image of Jesus Christ. Lying is an abomination to God not only because it is rebellion against his command, but it also reflects the opposite of who he is (Prov. 12:22). Numbers 23:19 reinforces this idea: “God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind.”

This is excellent news. We have all experienced harm when friends, family, or a boss breaks their word. It can cause us to spiral down into doubt or discouragement. When words are broken, we may ask questions like ‘Does my spouse truly love me?’ ‘Does my boss mean that encouragement?’ ‘Do they actually think that?’ The reality is that our trust in someone depends, to some extent, on their track record of keeping their word. The absolute and unchanging God of truth can bear every ounce of our trust. Praise God whose truthful character flows into a blessed consistency in all that he says and does. That is why we must lean on him and his Word.

### *God's Word is true*

Because God is true, every word of his is true. No lie ever comes from his lips. This means we can trust the Bible, God's word. In the Bible, God has revealed himself to us. He has also shown us how we might have our sins forgiven—by trusting in the finished work of Christ. That is why, by faith, Christians bow before God in humble trust to understand what he has said. For God's words are salvation. Like Samuel in his calling, we say to the Lord, "Speak, for your servant hears" (1 Sam. 3:10). In our regeneration, the Holy Spirit turns on the lamp of our hearts and minds to see Scripture as it truly is, God's own word (1 Thess. 2:13). Having received such a gracious work in our hearts, we go to our God, whose integrity pervades every syllable of his revelation. As the scriptures say, "God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?" (Num. 23:19). As the Psalmist praises, "The sum of your word is truth, and every one of your righteous rules endures forever." (Ps. 119:160).

We can also thank God that he so generously and graciously reveals truth. Though creation itself proclaims the glory and power of God, our sin often taints this form of revelation into an intricate system of idolatry. We live in a fallen world that breeds lies that must be checked against the reality of God's Word. He gave us the Old and New Testaments to see clearly, lest we fumble in the dark. His word is like a flashlight to shine on our path so that we may have confidence in each step until we reach glory. Before someone is committed to the truth, they must know where to find it. The Bible we hold in our hands is the true and truthful words of our true and truthful God. He will not deceive us. We can be sure that God has not uttered one false word. God's people can cast their hope in his promises revealed in Scripture because God "never lies" (Titus 1:2).

### *Sanctification in the truth*

The Bible we hold in our hands and store in our hearts is like an infrared scan that reveals where the truth lies. The more we steep ourselves in God's truth, the more we can see the heat of truth amidst lifeless falsehood. This renewed scan of the world helps us sift through the good and the bad—the true and the false. We need our minds renewed by God's word to discern "what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Rom. 12:2). In fact, Christian maturity results from a long and steady journey in God's truth, distinguishing "good from evil" (Heb. 5:14). As one theologian notes, "The Bible is a pure source of truth, like a fountain of pure water in a world where all other sources have been contaminated by harmful substances and the activity of corrupt humanity." To live with Christian integrity, we must test everything by the standard of God's trustworthy and transformative word.

### *Satan: The Father of Lies*

If God is truth and his word is truth, then it is no surprise that Satan represents the opposite. Satan, as the enemy of God, stands in opposition to all truth and truth-telling. He is the father of lies, assailing God's people with doubts about God and his word. He is the prince of the power of the air, making

unbelievers live by his lies. Christians must not be naive to ignore or minimize this reality. The clash of spiritual warfare happens when Satan deceives and persuades people with lies, when he shrouds sin in temptation, or leads people into falsehood.

Don't believe this? Look to the garden. Adam and Eve were in perfect bliss in the abundance of God's creation. They enjoyed fellowship with God as they carried out the creation commands of fruitfulness, multiplication, and dominion. But Satan slithered in to attack Adam and Eve with a lie. He tempted them with a question: "Did God really say?" "If God were really good, he would have told you to take some of this fruit." The question from Satan ultimately caused them to question if God was good. Satan presented God as a liar. He tempted Adam and Eve to doubt him and his Word. Satan's schemes today are as old as the beginning of the world.

Or look to the early church. Paul takes the time to remind the Corinthian believers of this war with Satan when they were threatened with the false wisdom of the Sophists. No matter the bombast or eloquence, these false teachers were breathing out lies. Skilled in the art of persuasion, they attacked the wisdom of the cross (1 Cor. 1). But no matter how powerful the opponents may seem, Paul also reminds these believers of the weapon of truth. In another letter, he deals with the false teachers by reminding them: "For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ" (2 Cor. 10:4-5).

The dishonesty and vicious schemes of Satan ought to put us on guard. The Word of God and the Holy Spirit of God are the weapons of our warfare to fight the lies that assail us, either individually or corporately as a church. Satan wants us to believe lies and live by lies because it is consistent with his scheme of rebellion against God. Paul continues this concern, "But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3). Christian, take up the sword of truth to slay the lies of the Evil one. Your God is the true God and his words are true words. To live honestly in the world, you must come to him, the fountain of truth.

### **Discussion questions:**

1. What doubts do you have about who God says he is in the Bible?
2. What lies about God are you tempted to believe?
3. Are there influences in your life which tempt you to disbelieve God?
4. How have you grown in your confidence in God's trustworthiness?

## Part Two: Honest Gospel

*“Now, where he speaketh of the truth of the Gospel, he sheweth that there be two gospels, a true and a false gospel. Indeed, the Gospel of itself is one, simple, true, and sincere: but by the malice of Satan’s ministers it is corrupt and defaced.”<sup>1</sup>*

*-Martin Luther on Galatians 2:5*

*We were engulfed in falsehood and lies*

Christians have an honest gospel. Before God showed us mercy, we were under the dominion of the kingdom of darkness (Col. 1:13). We were dead in our trespasses and sins, walking in the way of the Father of Lies. Falsehood was the natural fitness of each of us soiled with sin. It was natural for each of us to twist and turn information to our advantage. With each lie, we attempted to take the throne of God for ourselves. One writer notes, “More often, we turn all of our skills to the task of modifying, reinventing, and massaging the truth so that it’s no longer quite so threatening and may become rather more friendly to what we want. We may do this by adding to the truth or by subtracting from it, but the result is the same: that fatal fall into illusion that is one of the bleak bits of human corruption.” Every human born since the fall of Adam and Eve has an inherent inclination to lies and dishonesty. We participate in lies because we believe it will benefit us in some way.

Our gospel, unlike our corrupt hearts, is honest in that it speaks to the true condition of humanity. The message of the gospel is not that we need to improve the basic goodness in all of us. The gospel is not that we need to discover our own beauty or live true to ourselves. It is not even that there is a void of happiness that can only be filled with God (though true!). The gospel begins with bad news. God says in Romans 3:10-18:

“None is righteous, no, not one;

<sup>11</sup> no one understands;

no one seeks for God.

<sup>12</sup> All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;

no one does good,

not even one.

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 97–98.

<sup>13</sup>Their throat is an open grave;

they use their tongues to deceive.

The venom of asps is under their lips.

<sup>14</sup>Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.

<sup>15</sup>Their feet are swift to shed blood;

<sup>16</sup>in their paths are ruin and misery,

<sup>17</sup>and the way of peace they have not known.

<sup>18</sup>There is no fear of God before their eyes."

Man's condition is one tainted by all sorts of falsehood. The gospel is first a call to agree with this reality. Our good and holy God created us, but we have rebelled against him. Our holy God is so pure and perfect that he cannot even look on evil (Hab. 1:13). On the day of judgement, every person will give account of every careless word spoken (Matt. 12:36). Sin and its fruits are as evil as they are devastating. Our sin causes separation between us and God. The gospel acknowledges that we are sinners deserving of just and eternal punishment in hell for our sins.

God in the gospel is concerned about truth rather than popularity. That's why it begins with such awful news about man's condition—because it's true. We are ruined sinners in desperate need of God's grace. There is no good news without this bad news. But God can help us hold fast. The early church prayed for boldness amidst opposition in Acts. The same is needed for any opposition we might face. The Holy Spirit dwelling in us strengthens our commitment to uncompromising truth in our evangelism. Despite popular belief, the honest gospel begins with our lack of honesty and the eternal punishment it deserves. Christian, this was us before we met Jesus.

### *The work of Christ*

While the bad news of our lie-spawning hearts is true, so is the good news of the one who was "full of grace *and truth*" (John 1:15). It was Jesus who spoke the truth and kept an unwavering commitment to truth on his lips and with his life. No lie or deceit can be found in his speech, but, as the perfect priest, "true instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips" (Mal. 2:6). Jesus came to reveal the truth, but also to live in accord with the truth as the sinless Son of God. From his birth, he told not a single lie, big or small. In his work, he cut no corners for wrongful gain. In his mission, he stayed on track with the task God assigned to him. All of this he did for the sake of his people.

But Jesus was not without opposition. Days after his baptism, the Holy Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to engage in a war against Satan (Matt. 4). Stepping into the narrative, we can see the similarities to Israel's wilderness journey, where they faltered under Satan's temptations. Will Jesus waver from the truth like Israel had done? Satan tries to do what he does best—lie.

Satan uses three different temptations. Notice how the lie contains some truth. Satan twists scripture for his purposes. The first temptation (Matt. 4:3-4) was to doubt God's goodness and provision. Jesus slays that lie by quoting Scripture back to him. The second temptation (Matt. 4:5-7) misused Psalm 91 to abuse God's trustworthiness and protection. God indeed cares for those who trust in him. However, Satan took that as an opportunity to neglect other Scriptures. Jesus slays another lie by measuring Satan's suggestion against other Scriptures. The third temptation (Matt. 4:8-10) presents a false way to glory. It was true that Jesus was on a messianic mission that included glory. Satan offers a shortcut if Jesus would give him the worship that God alone deserves. Jesus slays yet another lie with the truth of God's word. Jesus conquered Satan by staying committed to the truth. He did this on behalf of his people.

Jesus maintained his integrity where everyone else failed. He upheld truth from the virgin womb of Mary to his death on the cross. Flawless both in his life and teaching, he went to the cross to die the death we deserve. Jesus was crucified for sinners, even the worst of liars, so that those who turn from sin and trust in him alone would have everlasting life. His truthful life becomes ours. Our lying life became his, and he suffered the curse as a result. Believers now rest in the righteousness of Jesus, who remained committed to the truth at the cost of his own life for our sake.

The Holy Spirit, who graced us with repentance and faith, also bears the name "Spirit of truth" (John 14:17). Jesus promised to send the Spirit of truth to dwell in his disciples that he may reveal the truth of Jesus and conform us to bear the image of Christ (1 Pet. 1:2). That's why we, as believers, are counted righteous (justified) by the righteousness of Christ received by faith. We are also made righteous (sanctified), being renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit working in us unto glory. Though we lied, Jesus remained faithful. And he sends us a helper to walk in the way of truth in which he walked.

### *Personal Gospel Integrity*

If the truth of the gospel is the freedom and salvation of the Christian, then it is no surprise that Satan would lob vicious attacks here. And the truth is that Satan doesn't stop attacking us when we become believers. As we are singled out by our baptism as children and friends of God, we are also marked as enemies of the father of lies. We were co-conspirators with him, but now we have changed sides on the battlefield. We fight with Jesus. Though defeated by Jesus, Satan still prowls around seeking someone to devour (1 Pet. 5:8).

"Did God really say" Christ took your sins, and his perfect righteousness was made your own? Consider how you may strive to obey God, all the while wondering whether God even loves you at all. "Did God really say" that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ? Consider what makes you afraid in your walk with him. "Did God really say", confess your sins to God, relying on Jesus for forgiveness? Consider what discourages you from approaching the throne of grace in prayer. "Did God really say", you are his child adopted in Jesus? Consider the ways we act as a stranger. "Did God really say", he is a father who knows what his children need and gives good gifts for our good and his glory? Consider the bitter

thoughts we harbor when we do not get our way at our preferred time. Gospel integrity means upholding the truth of the gospel. We need to consider the question Paul posed in Galatians 3:3, “Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”

Brothers and sisters, we need to soak ourselves in the gospel truth. Write down rich gospel texts to memorize and mull over throughout the day. Continually refresh yourself in the love of Christ for you. Consider seeking out another church member to study books on substitutionary atonement or discuss the truth of the gospel that you are struggling to believe. Self-salvation is the default sermon of fallen mankind. It can even come in religious forms that bear the name Christian. Take care to walk in the noonday sun of the gospel, and its light will expose anything that does not belong.

#### *Corporate Gospel Integrity*

The fight for integrity is not just an individual battle; it is a collective effort. In the opening chapter of Galatians, Paul begins with a heartfelt reminder of the church's salvation in Christ. The complete salvation provided in Christ sets the tone of the entire book. But this tone, though full of praise, comes in a rebuke. Paul is in complete amazement that the Galatians have swerved from the truth of the gospel. He is clear—there is *one* gospel, and they have the responsibility to protect it. Paul asserts a standard that everyone's teaching (even his own, though he is an apostle!) must be tested. It does not matter a teacher's origin or status. The congregation must ask, does this person preach the gospel? If otherwise, God pronounces, “let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:9). If the Galatians or any local church would hold to their gospel integrity, they must first realize their divinely appointed responsibility to refuse teachers who teach something other than God's Word. They are not to gather pearly, white-teethed comedians, rhetoricians, or ear-ticklers, but men of God who will preach to them the gospel with integrity (2 Tim. 4:3). Your local church, Christian, is a “pillar and buttress of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15).

Pastors are likewise tasked to teach only what is true and right. They are stewards of the mysteries of God and ministers of the truth. Unlike false teachers, pastors do not pollute the word with their filth or twist the truth with their lusts. But like Paul, pastors minister “by truthful speech, and the power of God” to God's people (2 Cor. 6:7). They are charged to preach the Word and not their own thoughts or worldly ambitions. “Able to teach” in 1 Timothy 3:3 does not merely mean the ability to communicate and influence a crowd. It also points to the accuracy of the pastor's handling of God's Word. A pastor's commitment and ability to communicate the truth matters to God. That's why you, Christian, should place yourself and your family under pastors who teach God's Word faithfully.

False gospels abound in our day as much as they did in Paul's. False gospels do not advertise themselves as such, but like off-brand soda at a store, closer attention will reveal that they are not the real thing. They may have many similarities, but their origin is from Satan and not God, no matter the Scripture they quote or the Christian T-shirt they wear. Remember, Satan can also quote Scripture. Are you committed to a church where the pastors and members hold to the gospel?

The gospel is of eternal importance, and its teaching must be treasured and defended. This good news is honest about the bad news so that the saving work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit may shine all the brighter. The gospel is honest. Are we honest in the way we speak it to others?

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. How does hearing from God that you are a sinner make you feel? Are you tempted to reject the bad news about your own sinfulness?
2. Take time to share with your mentor/mentee how you first came to believe the gospel of Jesus Christ.
3. How has having your sins forgiven changed your life?
4. Have you ever been tempted to tone down or outright lie to others about the gospel to be liked?

## Part Three: Honest Life

*“When there is no growth, there is no life.”*

-Archibald Alexander

### *More than a change of behavior*

When I was in college, I studied agronomy and soil sciences. I will never look at dirt the same way again. There is so much more to the ground than we might think. The forest floor fuels a lively ecosystem with dark organic matter from decomposed leaves, debris, and microbes we cannot see with our eyes. Those clumps of dirt I used to throw around as a kid now carry deeper meaning than ever before. That is often what happens in the Christian life. Once God floods his love into the soul of an unconverted sinner, there is more happening than meets the eye. The outward change and reform of behavior are evident, but something much deeper occurred. God forgives their sins through the blood of Jesus and renews their heart, establishing a life of increasing conformity to their Savior. The good soil of the forest produces rich vegetation. The Holy Spirit dwelling in a Christian produces good and honest fruit.

Honesty in the Christian life extends beyond our words. It is reflected by what we do. This should be no surprise after our study of God. If our triune God is truth, and he made us in his image, then we reflect him by walking in accord with the truth. Our sin marred this image. But Jesus came to save even the worst of liars. He died the death of liars so that his elect may have eternal life. He also sends the Holy Spirit to renew us and make us participants in the New Creation (2 Cor. 5:17). This renewal, as the new humanity in Christ, includes our commitment to the truth.

The reverse is true. The Bible has a category of people who speak the right words but live falsely in their lives. They may even say they are Christian and call out “Lord, Lord” with great emotion, but in the end, they will hear these words from God: “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness” (Matt. 7:23). Or as it says in 1 John 4, “Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a *liar*, and the truth is not in him.” They “swear by the name of the Lord and confess the God of Israel, but not in truth or right” (Is. 48:1). This is Grade A hypocrisy. From kindergarten, teachers try to instill this lesson in children. You may remember your teachers saying, “Character is what you do when no one is watching.” This is true before other humans. The saying speaks to a reality that your good character does not depend on whether or not others see it. Your good work is not a performance—it’s a reflection of your heart. Bad work is a form of deceit. It is dishonest. But as Christians, we know that no person escapes the sight of God. God cannot be deceived like your kindergarten class teacher, your parents, your friends, or your fellow church members.

The book of Titus repeats this concern. God’s elect have a “knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness” (Titus 1:1). The truth we learn from God and receive with an honest heart produces a life committed to its implications. If we are God’s children, why live as strangers to God? That was not the

case for those who were in Crete. Many who were with Titus professed the truth but denied it by their lives. God says of these people, “They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work” (Titus 1:16). In other words, the people who carry the name of the Lord on their lips contradict their professions by pursuing evil. Their profession is untruthful.

This type of dishonest life often spreads in areas where cultural Christianity abounds, or where the definition of a Christian becomes muddled. When becoming a Christian means you participate in religious festivals, espouse relatively conservative ethical positions, have been baptized as many times as you have attended youth camp, and take the Lord’s Supper at least once a year at Christmas, it is no wonder hypocrisy abounds. Formalism can be practiced without love for Christ and in a pursuit of sin with a clear conscience. But this isn’t authentic Christianity. This false Christianity shows that its adherents do not know God in truth. These people’s works stand as evidence that they do not truly believe (James 2). The Christian is saved by faith alone, but that faith is never alone. God meets us where we are, but he never leaves us where we are. Though not saved by good fruit, a good root always produces good fruit. Those who are justified *are* sanctified (though not perfectly on this side of heaven).

Commitment to the truth in a cultural Christian environment may mean that you are considered puritanical if you insist on the biblical definition of a Christian. The examination begins with us. Are we really in the faith? Are you in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5)? This type of examination then moves to church membership. The church exercises the keys of the kingdom by admitting only believers to join their fellowship (Matt. 18:18). Are we born again? These are eternally important questions. Our honesty reveals whether or not we have truly grasped the truth in the first place (Heb 10:26).

#### *Living honestly*

Dishonesty in our lives can also manifest on a smaller scale. Growing up, you likely had a bedtime enforced by a parent. You can replay their voice in your head, “Alright. Lights out. It’s time to go to bed.” You pull the covers over your head and close your eyes until your parent walks out the door. The lights click, the room darkens, and you wait for the door to close. Then, you give a sigh of relief. “Phew! They are out of here.” Another click happens, and your bedside lamp pops on. The real party can now begin. The same childlike dishonesty happens in our adult lives. The coworker or boss walks out of the room, and we swipe right back to that social media page, wasting time while getting paid for our “work.” The teacher walks away, and our eyes linger on the test page across the row. It could even be our chameleon social skills. When we are out with coworkers, we act one way. When out with church friends, we act differently. Maybe our homelife is in shambles while we look put together by the time we reach the church parking lot.

Honesty can be challenged in many ways. Sometimes you are that one coworker or classmate who is a Christian. People know you as the “spiritual” one. You receive harmless jests and even take some jabbing questions, such as, “Do you really believe \_\_\_\_?” Perhaps others figure out a way to manipulate

the system and deceive those in charge, whether teachers or bosses. Honesty here may mean respecting the goal of your authority and avoiding the deceitful ways of others. You may receive flak for not participating. Your commitment to the truth may mean paying a social cost.

At other times, the cost of an honest life could be giving up something good. At high school soccer practice, our team used to run laps around the long rectangular field for conditioning. The whole team would start running to the same spot, and the fastest runners usually received praise from the coach. They could win the coach's favor and likely receive more playing time. Nothing is so tempting in that moment as cutting those sharp 90-degree corners that make you lose your speed and momentum. You can imagine that if you tracked the steps of the team, you'd conclude that a soccer field is one big giant oval. Corners can always be cut.

The temptation does not stop with high-school sports. The temptation is also there to cut corners in the office. The compromiser of truth might get the smile of their boss. Honest work might mean you miss a promotion while others move up the ladder. Or maybe the board of trustees wants you to do something shady to "save" the business. You comply or resign. Honesty means you remain committed to the truth that "no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account" (Heb. 4:13). God sees and cares. An honest life in this dishonest world may mean you give up gain.

The cost of an honest life could be your life. In parts of the world that are hostile to Christianity, many Christians are forbidden to meet as a church. They must meet "underground" or in secret to stir one another up as a church according to the command of God (Heb. 10:24-25). Simply singing or praying loudly may wake up the neighbors and bring persecution. Their phones could be tapped only to reveal the meeting place for their arrest. What is even more confusing for the national believers is that expats may encourage them to commit syncretism to avoid persecution. An honest life here does not mean to renounce all wisdom and prudence. It does mean a life devoted to the truth of Jesus' words: "any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple" (Lk. 14:33). Pray for those to have wisdom and courage amidst such opposition.

Remember, all Jesus had to do was compromise truth for ease, but he endured temptation with flawless obedience (Heb. 4:15). All Paul had to do was succumb to the fear of man and receive acceptance from the Judaizers, but his aim was the approval of God over man (Gal. 1:11). Living lives committed to the truth may cost your social/vocational status, your home, imprisonment, or even death. But we must look to Jesus and those who endured before us for strength: "In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood" (Heb. 12:4). Honest living in a dishonest world comes at a cost. Are you willing to pay?

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. In what ways are you tempted to be dishonest at home? At work? With your friends?

2. Have you ever had to pay a cost for the truth? If so, what was that like? Do you regret it?
3. What examples of honesty are in your life? How might you learn from them?

## Part Four: Honest Speech

When thinking of honesty, most people think of speech. Are your words honest? That is, do you speak what is true? Let's go back to the Ten Commandments, a summary of our love for God and our neighbor. These commands reveal the nature of God and what he requires of us, his image bearers. The 9<sup>th</sup> commandment particularly shows us that God is the God of truth. If God is truth, then his people are called to truthfulness. His people follow and promote the truth with their speech. The command "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" applies particularly in a court setting, but it also applies generally to all truth vs. falsehood (Ex. 20:16). In the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, pastors and theologians gathered in meditation on this command to consider how they should pass the teaching down for future generations. The result was the Westminster Larger Catechism Question 144. They wrote:

*"The duties required in the ninth commandment are, the preserving and promoting of truth between man and man, and the good name of our neighbor, as well as our own: appearing and standing for the truth; and from the heart, sincerely, freely, clearly, and fully, speaking the truth, and only the truth, in matters of judgment and justice, and in all other things whatsoever; a charitable esteem of our neighbors; loving, desiring, and rejoicing in their good name; sorrowing for, and covering of their infirmities; freely acknowledging of their gifts and graces, defending their innocency; a ready receiving of good report, and unwillingness to admit of an evil report, concerning them; discouraging tale-bearers, flatterers, and slanderers; love and care of our own good name, and defending it when need requireth; keeping of lawful promises; study and practising of whatsoever things are true, honest, lovely, and of good report."*

Convicting? Yes. Peaceful? Absolutely. We can only imagine a world that follows such a beautiful description of truthfulness. The sinful world we live in makes this an alien aspiration. Only consider the judicial courts acting in this way. Consider the ease of scrolling through modern-day media and not having to sift through falsehoods, half-truths, or slander. Consider a church with no sheep-like wolves leading those under them to their dinner plate. Can you only imagine?

Of all places in the world, the local church ought to be where such honesty exists. As participants in the New Creation, a church is where truth is loved, strived after, and promoted. Paul goes so far as to associate lies with our old selves, that is, our spiritually dead life before Christ shed his love in our hearts. He says in Colossians 3:9, "Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices." Or similarly in Ephesians 4:25, "Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another." Born sinners in Adam, lying comes as naturally to us as our breathing. Born again in Christ, our lies are crucified with the old man. As believers put off their old self and put on Christ, they put off falsehood and put on truthfulness.

### *Confessing sin*

As already mentioned, the gospel is honest about our sin. In turn, we should be honest about our sins with other believers. Scripture calls this walking “in the light,” and it is part of our fellowship with one another (1 John 1:7). We are commanded elsewhere to confess our sins to “one another” (James 5:16). This comes as part of our life in a local church. Membership in a local church means opening up your life to nosy questions offered by those who genuinely love you and want you to grow in your walk with Christ. Often, this takes the form of accountability relationships with a few brothers or sisters in Christ. Christians do not act as if they have everything together, but need forgiveness and the prayers of their people to look more like Jesus. Rather than covering up our sins like the world, the church is a place where sins are openly confessed. A good question to ask at the end of your time together is: “Have you lied about anything today? Is there any sin you sugar-coated?” Questions like these encourage honesty.

### *Lying to the Holy Spirit*

When we lie, that is, speak what is untrue to people whom it is their due, we lie not just to man, but to God. Acts 5 describes the seriousness of lying in the case of Ananias and Sapphira. In a time of overwhelming generosity among early Christians, a couple decided to put on a show of their “giving.” They claimed that they had been so sacrificial that they liquidated an entire piece of property to give to the church. But God knew what was going on. Their sin was not in holding back some of their private property, but in lying about how much they were giving. God exposed them through Peter by saying they were co-conspirators with Satan and were guilty of lying to the Holy Spirit. Ananias and Sapphira do not serve as a radical example of generosity, but rather as a sober warning of the works of Satan and the severity of lying.

Every careless word spoken will be brought before the judgment seat of God on a scale of precise justice like we have never seen before in this fallen world (Matt. 12:36). What we say matters. A dishonest world makes light of what God deems heavy. Of the sins God abominates in Proverbs 6:16-19, lying makes up two! Consider what else Solomon writes on the topic of lying:

Proverbs 10:18: The one who conceals hatred has lying lips,  
and whoever utters slander is a fool.

Proverbs 14:5: A faithful witness does not lie,  
but a false witness breathes out lies.

Proverbs 12:19: Truthful lips endure forever,  
but a lying tongue is but for a moment.

Proverbs 12:22 Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord,  
but those who act faithfully are his delight.

Proverbs 21:26: The getting of treasures by a lying tongue  
is a fleeting vapor and a snare of death.

Proverbs 26:28: A lying tongue hates its victims,  
and a flattering mouth works ruin.

Whether a lie, slander, false witness, flattery, or fake promises, all reflect a dishonesty in direct opposition to truth. A right fear of the Lord, as Proverbs 8:13 asserts, is a hatred of all evil, even our untruthful speech.

We would be incorrect to only look at the words we say. Jesus takes us deeper. He makes us look at our hearts. “For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34b). So, the lies we tell can teach us our heart troubles. When we are jealous of another, we make up accusations or rumors to disparage them. When we want to be seen as faithful church members, we play down the graces of others with a competitive spirit. When a respected person walks into the room, we kiss their feet with praise regardless of what sincerity demands. We make promises we have no intention or ability to perform in order to be seen as a kind person. We make up stories in our past to receive the praise, respect, or laughs of others. What heart sins are tempting you to lie?

### **Discussion Questions:**

1. Have you ever been caught in a lie? Share the story with your mentor/mentee. What lessons did you learn about the cost of dishonesty? /
2. What areas of your life are you most tempted to lie about?
3. Do you have people in your life who challenge your narratives? Who you confess sin to? Who challenge you to be honest with them and with God?
4. How does your church encourage honest living?
5. What are the benefits of living honestly?

## Conclusion

I hope that this study helped you weigh your life with God's standard of honesty and cling to the Lord Jesus Christ, the all-sufficient Savior. One theologian reflects,

"As *witness*, Jesus Christ is, literally, martyr: his life and existence, his word and work

are a pointing to, an indication of, the truth. He is simply and completely his testimony to what is really the case. He makes no compromises and undertakes no evasions. He does say what is not, and he does not fail to say what is. He is, as John's Gospel puts it, "full of ... truth" (John 1:14). And his witness is *faithful*—that is, his witness is persistent, unhesitating, reliable, and permanent. His truthfulness is utterly durable; it doesn't break down under the temptation to make a truce with lies or half-truth. It simply says what is, and acts in accordance with what is, and so rejects."<sup>2</sup>

Truth is not a hot commodity in our world. Rather than being seen as a treasure, sinners try to mold the truth like wet clay on a pottery wheel. But the truth is as unchangeable as God is unchangeable. Truth demands our allegiance as it comes from the God of truth. Truth shines in the face of Jesus Christ in the gospel. Paul exemplifies this reality at the close of his letter in 2 Corinthians 13:8. Christians walking in a clear conscience ought to be like those who "cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth." Does this describe you?

If not, remember the truth of the gospel: that Jesus died on behalf of his lying people, taking the punishment their lies deserve. He is truth. He acted with the truth. He told the truth. He never compromised in our compromising world. Jesus lived flawlessly on our behalf in accord with and in unwavering commitment to the truth. This Jesus is our righteousness, received by faith alone. By his blood, all the lies of his people are forgiven. By the power of the resurrection and the Holy Spirit, he empowers us to walk in commitment to the truth against the grain of the present evil age, even at the cost of our lives. If you are not a Christian, consider the lies you have told and the way you fall short of God's standard of holiness. Turn from your sin and place your faith in Christ alone to save you from your sins and the day of wrath when Christ returns in his glory.

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<sup>2</sup> John. Daniel J. Bush (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 70.