

**Spiritual Disciplines for Ordinary People**  
**Chapter 8: Honesty – Speaking Only Absolute Truth**  
**Pastor's Notes/Review**

A Gallup Poll asked Americans to rate the honesty and ethical standards of professions. The top six rated professions are: nurses (82%), pharmacists (67%), medical doctors (65%), high school teachers (64%), policemen (61%), and clergy (54%). The two lowest rated, not too surprisingly, are Telemarketers (7%) and Car Salesmen (8%). (Gallup Alert 12/5/05)

Mark Twain said a lie can travel halfway around the world while truth is still lacing up her boots. We live in a day when lying is commonplace. Spouses lie to one another in the name of keeping the peace, parents lie to their own children and children lie to their parents. Employers lie about upcoming pay raises and employees practice dishonesty in the workplace. Advertisers lie to sell products. Politicians lie in order to spin things their way. Lying is so commonplace that people don't even think of it as unusual.

It certainly isn't something new. Right from the beginning of time we find lying. The first time we see Satan in the Bible he is lying to man about God. The next time we find Satan is in the book of Job and this time he is lying to God about man. That shouldn't surprise us.

Jesus, describing the devil, said it well in John 8:44. *"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."* In contrast to this, Hebrews 6:18 says that it is impossible for God to lie. For one, lying is natural, for the other, lying is impossible. How we conduct ourselves reveals who we are imitating.

All along the 7 weeks we've been doing this series, we've been learning about ways in which God works in our lives, shaping us, molding us, so that our lives come in line with the nature and character of God. It shouldn't come as a surprise then, that if God's nature is one of truth, that God would not be pleased with dishonesty.

- Psalms 15:1-2 declares: *"LORD, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill? He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart."*
- In Matthew 12:34, Jesus said, *"Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks."* The problem, Jesus identified, is the nature of our heart.
- Psalms 51:6 *"Surely you desire truth in the inner parts."*
- Rev. 21:8 *"But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars--their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death."*
- Rev. 22:15 *"Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood."*
- And of course our text today tells us: *"...each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body."* Ephesians 4:25

We are dealing with a topic today that is a struggle for all of us. If we are truthful, we will admit that we have many ways to compromise the truth.

- There's the fib, which I'm not sure what it is, maybe it's like a baby lie. The problem with that, as shown in one of the early VeggieTales videos is that a fib starts small (almost cute even) and grows into a giant monster. Only the truth could overpower the monster that had developed.
- Besides fibs, there's the "white" lie which is maybe something like the "white" witch – a sanitized version of something evil. Either way; it is still evil. Then there's the half-truth, clever deception, misleading information, stretching the truth and of course, exaggeration.
- All of these serve the same purpose – to mislead someone from the absolute truth.
- Sometimes you might not even intend to say something dishonest, but before you know it you've crossed a line and in order to save face, you don't want to turn back.
- Paul writes to the Ephesians to "put off" falsehood. These are Christians he's writing to.

Some people have a hard time being honest about their age or weight. I don't have that problem. I'll readily admit I'm 39 years old and weigh 165 pounds. OK, that's not the truth. I'm in my 40's and under 200 pounds. But if the absolute truth be known, I'm actually 49.9 and 198.5 pounds. It is so easy to stretch or withhold information to make things look a certain way.

- We see this sort of thing happen quite often in things like tax returns.
- Or how about the work place. Have we ever claimed a days pay but didn't put in a honest days work?
- Have we ever cheated on a test? Have we ever lied to get out of trouble?
- Have we ever complimented someone when we didn't mean it?
- Have we ever kept silent when we should have told the truth? Made yourself appear better than you are? Lied to gain an advantage or get your way? Misled someone to save face?
- Have we ever said to someone, "I'll pray for you" or "I've been praying for you" when we haven't?

Can you imagine a world where everyone always told the truth? The fish that got away wouldn't be about twice as big as the ones that were caught. We would always trust everything anyone said. We would not have to have expensive legal agreements and contracts. There would be no such thing as "fine print". There would be no backlog in the courtrooms because the guilty would admit their guilt, and we could trust those who would say that they were not guilty. All salespersons would tell you the truth about their product, and the people who return things to stores would always be truthful. Best of all you could always believe your spouse (which I hope you do already) and never question the word of your kids when they tell you where they have been or what they have been up to.

- That's the way God expects us to live... *today*; but this kind of honesty doesn't come without a cost.

Cleveland Stroud had coached the Blue Collar Bulldogs for 18 years before his basketball team made it to the state championship. Stroud recalls that "it was the perfect night" when they won. "A night you dream of." He was carried around the gym on the shoulders of his players. The local paper put his picture on the front page. But two months after the championship, during a routine grade check, Stroud discovered that one of his players was academically ineligible to have been on the team. That player had played only 45 seconds during the regional qualifying tournament. Stroud struggled with what to do next. "Winning is the most important thing for any coach," he said "But your principles have to be higher than your goals." And with that mindset he reported his error to the league and his team forfeited the trophy. When he was asked why he did that, he said "You've got to do what is honest, what is right, and what the rules say. *People forget the scores of basketball games, but they don't ever forget what you are made of.*" [In Touch Magazine, January 1999, page 16].

- Just because being truthful is hard or because it might cause us inconvenience, doesn't make truth expendable. William Shakespeare wrote, "No legacy is so rich as honesty". How's that for something to leave your kids?

If God's people are to be anything, we need to be honest. We need to say what we mean and mean what we say and we need to represent the truth in all matters, being careful not to intentionally mislead anyone.

- Yet sometimes the hardest place for people to be honest is in the church.
- We want people to believe that we have it all together, that we have no spiritual problems.
- We hear the sermon and we think, "amen, preacher... my neighbor needs to hear that" never thinking that perhaps God sent that message for ourselves. It's like we have a spiritual pride.
- If the church is to be anything, it must be a place for honesty – both in the way we conduct ourselves towards others, as well as honest self-evaluation. Rom 12:3 says to "*think of yourself with sober judgment*". Only then will we be taking on the form of our master.

When you watch an old western (Gunsmoke, for example); you see the town with stores, saloons and some hotels. But none of them are real. They are not even empty shells, they are just fronts. There's nothing behind, there's nothing to back them up. They are empty behind.

- If we are not people of integrity, if our word isn't trustworthy, if our Christian life isn't real, and perhaps most importantly, if we don't have an honest evaluation of our lives, we are only building an empty front. And while it might look good, it is of no substance.
- As Christians, we need to be real, and the only way to be real is through honest self evaluation and integrity; speaking the truth in all matters at all times.
- By the grace of God, we can be people committed to Eph. 4:25; putting off falsehood and speaking truthfully.