

## *agape* BEARS NO FALSE WITNESS

Ro 13:9; James 1:26, 3:1-12; Ex 20:16; Ex 23:1-3; Zech 5:4; Jn 8:44

### I. PERVASIVE DISHONESTY (“CULTURE OF LIES”—ORIGINAL SIN CONSEQUENCE)

- A. Abundant Illustrations Documenting Sinful (e.g. propensity-to-lying & “living the lie”) Human Nature
  - 1. Biblical: Abraham re Sarah; Jezebel’s false witnesses against Nabath; Sanhedrin’s case against Jesus
  - 2. Secular history: Mussolini: “Our motto must be to lie in order to conquer.” Orwell’s *1984*
    - a. WW & FDR & LBJ promises to “keep our boys home” and win elections
    - b. Teddy Kennedy, Joe Biden *et al.* “borking” Robert Bork
- B. Jesus’ diagnosis: Satan & satanic powers (Jn 8:44)—“Father of Lies”
  - 1. Satan tempts Adam & Eve in Garden of Eden—disbelieved God’s nature & will
  - 2. Satan tempts Jesus in the Wilderness—misquoting Scripture, proposing misbehavior
- C. Biblical Correctives & Prescriptions—Ro 13:9; Ex 20:16; Ex 23:1-3

### II. YET BY NATURE WE’RE CREATURES NEEDING TRUTH-IN-ITSELF & IN-COMMUNION

- A. Individual well-being—Augustine: “truth is the food of the soul”
  - 1. Defining truth: idea-object, mind-reality (1) *correspondence* plus (2) *coherence* (internal harmony)
  - 2. Discerning truth: Logic (attuned to *Logos*) imperative—rightly ordering thoughts:
- B. Social well-being requires truthful discourse

### III. RIGHTLY DEFINING “LYING”—DIFFERENTIATING IT FROM or “ERRING” or “MISLEADING” or PRUDENTLY “WITHHOLDING TRUTH”

- A. Lying defined: both **content** & **intent** significant; deliberately stating an untruth, intending to either harm (i.e. malice) another or to wrongly excuse (avoiding punishment or embarrassment) oneself
- B. Various non-factual, but potentially ethical, statements (cf. Jewish midwives & Pharaoh’s edicts; Rahab the harlot protecting spies; Michel misleading Saul to protect David)
  - 1. Errs—inevitable, given our finitude & limited knowledge; thus “Bush lied” an actual lie!
  - 2. Jocose, jesting, joking, hyperbolic statements “unfactual” but not intended to harm
    - a. Hyperbole (in preaching, teaching, conversation)—Jesus’ parables—to make clear a point
    - b. Staging surprise birthday party & misleading honored guest
  - 3. Compliments—praise worthwhile (if oft-exaggerated), though devious flattery *verboten!*
  - 4. *Officious* (due to position) statements, deliberately misleading so as to secure others’ well-being—almost always by omitting some details or softening some statements (N.B. Dr. Johnson’s reservations)
    - a. Parents answering children’s questions too mature for factual correctness (e.g. “facts of life” or Santa)
    - b. Teachers refraining from devastating (if truthful) evaluations, thus encouraging poor pupils
    - c. Doctors shrouding diagnosis from patients too vulnerable to bear truth (knowing psychic needs)
    - d. Military Officers withholding details when ordering men into harm’s way (accentuating positive) or misleading evildoers intent on harming innocents (e.g. Admiral Canaris under Hitler)
    - e. Individuals (e.g. Corrie Ten Boom; *George Washington’s Secret Six* spy ring in Amer. Rev.)

### IV. SO IT’S PRIMARILY PERJURY (“Bearing False Witness” publically) THAT’S FORBIDDEN

- A. Perjury per se: Heb: “false oath”—dishonest testimony—severely condemned in Scripture (Zech 5:4)
- B. Perjury’s Daughters include:
  - 1. Slander (malicious untruths, gossip, cf. Ps 15:2-3; Prov. 10:18) condemned
  - 2. Libel (slandorous written materials) evil, especially when anonymous
- C. *Public* nature of perjury important—imperative to not bear false witness
  - 1. Trials (criminal & civil) depend upon truthful testimony
  - 2. Leaders’ declarations, promises, explanations re laws & wars, conduct, authority
  - 3. Teachers’ obligation (cf. James 3:1) to deal truthfully with subjects—Truth *THE* central to task (i.e. Norwegian teachers’ heroism compared with Postmodernism’s “truth is whatever you believe”)
  - 4. Preachers’ duty (cf. James 3:1) to carefully expound Bible, Christian Tradition, Reason, Experience
  - 5. Journalists, essayists, novelists *et al.* ought to seek to find & transmit truth
  - 6. Individuals (as parents, spouses, employers, employees, citizens)

## LYING/LIARS

- “A lie can travel half way around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes.” -- Mark Twain
- “The cruelest lies are often told in silence.” --Robert Louis Stevenson
- “A lie which is half a truth is ever the worst of lies.” --Alfred Lord Tennyson
- “A liar needs a good memory.” --Quintilian
- “We lie loudest when we lie to ourselves” --Eric Hoffer
- “The victor will never be asked if he told the truth.” --Adolf Hitler
- “Deceit and violence—these are the two forms of deliberate assault on human beings.” - Sissela Bok, *Lying: Moral Choice in Public and Private Life*
- “The least initial deviation from the truth is multiplied later a thousandfold.” --Aristotle, *On the Heavens*
- “. . . piety requires us to honour truth above our friends.” --Aristotle, *Ethics*
- “I have met many who wished to deceive, but not one who wished to be deceived.” -- Augustine, *Confessions*, X,23
- “Truth is so obscure in these times, and falsehood so established, that, unless we love the truth, we cannot know it.” --Pascal, *Pensees*, XIV, 864
- “*Johnson*. Nobody has a right to put another under such a difficulty, that he must either hurt the person by telling the truth, or hurt himself by telling what is not true.” --Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (Apr. 25, 1778).
- “We talked of the casuistical question, Whether it was allowable at any time to depart from Truth? *Johnson*. ‘The general rule is, that Truth should never be violated, because it is of the utmost importance to the comfort of life, that we should have a full security by mutual faith; and occasional inconveniences should be willingly suffered that we may preserve it. There must, however, be some exceptions. If, for instance, a murderer should ask which way a man is gone, you may tell him what is not true, because you are under a previous obligation not to betray a man to a murderer. . . . But I deny the lawfulness of telling a lie to a sick man for fear of alarming him.’” --Boswell, *Life of Johnson* (June 13, 1784).