

## **Liar, Liar, Pants on Fire**

Matthew 5:33-36

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Am I the only one that thinks this, or do you agree that there is there a lot of lying going on these days?

Every week, it seems that journalists are trying to determine who is telling the truth as they report the news.

Of course, a lot of people think that journalists are lying. In recent years, journalists and networks have been called fake, which is just another word for liar.

News networks have branded themselves in such a way as to say, “We are the ones that tell the truth.”

It seems that the days are gone, that just because a news anchor reports it, everyone believes it, like the old days with Walter Cronkite.

What’s going on?

Why is there so much lying going on?

Psychologists tell that as young as two and three we begin to learn to play loose with the truth. You will notice this when a child starts to conceal something he or she has done wrong.

Children are not very good at it, in fact. It’s comical to see these little people working on early efforts at hiding the evidence.

(<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/media-spotlight/201311/when-does-lying-begin>)

It’s not long before they have graduated to a more sophisticated form of lying called secondary lies. This occurs around age four when children begin to get creative with their lies. They might tell us that the dog ate the cookies, which is why the cookie wrapper is on the floor. (Ibid)

By seven or eight, lying has moved to a master’s degree level. A child might blend in some facts with his lies to create a very believable story. The dog climbed up on the table and got the cookies and he was trying to get the cookies away from the dog. (Ibid)

That’s believable and creative. The dog could have climbed up on the table, but it didn’t. The child may have been trying to get the cookies away from the dog, but that was only after the child got them out of the cupboard.

As a rule, adults teach children that lying is wrong. Problems develop when children observe and hear adults lying. Adults lie to each other and children observe this.

Adults also allow their children to lie to them. You don't think so?

Let me give you an example.

Let's say you are putting your daughter to bed and she says, "Daddy, I'm hungry."

Now what father is going to put a hungry child to bed?

So you let the cute little thing go into the kitchen for a bowl of cereal and after about five minutes you realize this child isn't hungry at all. You've been played by a five-year-old.

What you ought to do is call the child on the lie and make sure she understands that it is wrong to play that card to get out of going to bed.

Instead, you allow her to stay up and watch an episode of America's Funniest Videos until she falls asleep. You've just taught your child that it pays to be a liar.

(<https://www.vix.com/en/identity/525781/blame-your-parents-for-making-you-a-good-liar>)

The reason anyone lies, whether it's a child or an adult, is that we believe the rewards for lying are greater than the integrity of telling the truth. (Ibid)

We leave children very conflicted when we reward them for lying instead of holding them accountable. We also confuse them when we teach them not to lie and then they observe us playing loose with the truth.

If we believe the rewards for maintaining our integrity are greater than rewards for sacrificing it with a lie, we must demonstrate this with how we live.

One of the ways we have tried to teach children not to lie is through stories. (Ibid)

In the story of "Pinocchio," the wooden puppet boy's nose grows every time he tells a lie. (Ibid)

In "The Boy Who Cried Wolf," the boy cries wolf when there isn't one so many times that when there finally is a wolf, no one believes him and the wolf eventually eats him. (Ibid)

Then there is that story about "George Washington and the Cherry Tree." In this story, when young George was confronted about chopping down the cherry tree, he told the truth and he was rewarded for doing so instead of being punished. (Ibid) The ironic thing about this story is that it isn't true. However, of the stories about honesty, it teaches us the better lesson.

One psychological researcher was interested in how children learn to tell the truth and he discovered it comes best through positive reinforcement. (Ibid)

A study was done with 268 children between ages 3 and 7 were recruited as a part of a test group. (Ibid)

They used these negative stories as a part of their study and George Washington's Cheery Tree story in a controlled test. I'll spare you from all the details of the detailed research.

What they concluded was that "parents should talk to their kids about the positive outcomes of telling the truth, rather than the negative outcomes of lying." (Ibid)

Somewhere along the way, we miss this message. What's pounded into us is more of the negative.

Right now, I'm going to prove it to you. For all of you adults, I'm going to take you all the way back to your childhood.

Here is the situation. It's recess in grammar school. You have written a love note to my friend and you want me to pass the note on. I have told you that I will pass it along for you, but you are not sure you can trust me. You do not believe I am telling you the truth.

So you ask, "Do you promise? Cross your heart? Hope to die? Stick a needle in your eye?"

Now, how many of you remember saying something like that when you were a child?

What's this all about? It's silly, right? Yes, but it comes more from an adult world than you think.

As children, we learned that we should not trust other people and take them at their word. We were taught that people are naturally deceptive and cannot always be trusted.

Therefore, to ensure that people were telling the truth, we had to get them to take an oath or make a promise that they were telling the truth.

Cross my heart. We might not have realized what we were doing as a child, but we were making the sign of the cross. This silly child's ritual goes back to times when adults based their promises of Jesus, who always told the truth.

Hope to die? No one hopes to die unless they are suicidal, so no one is going to make such a statement unless they are tempting fate. So, people would say, "Hope to die," after a statement to emphasize its truthfulness.

Stick a needle in my eye? This goes back to the idea that if you lie you are asking for suffering to be cast upon you. No one wants to suffer. So you say, "If I'm lying, I hope I have a needle stuck in my eye."

Somehow, all of this made one's statement more believable.

So, as children we learned that if you did not get people to cross their hearts and hope to die, you could not be sure if they were telling the truth.

We never knew as children that Jesus spoke against such silly children's ditties in his Sermon on the Mount. As it turns out, they are not so silly. To Jesus, these things were serious matters, but why?

They were serious because the root of the problem was that people in his day had accepted lying as a normal part of life.

What had become abnormal was the truth. Wow! That sounds more and more like our day, doesn't it?

Jesus was aware that the great temptation facing every human being is to not tell the truth, and that temptation had been around since Adam and Eve.

Adam and Eve lied to God. They tried to hide their sin from God after they disobeyed God in the Garden of Eden.

We instinctively know that about each other. We have learned that it is difficult to trust one another because there is so much lying taking place.

To convince people we are telling the truth, we say things like, "I swear to God that what I am saying is the truth."

"May God strike me dead if what I am saying is not the truth."

It wasn't unusual in the days before Jesus for people to make oaths and vows.

They would do so by invoking the name of God. Then some got into the habit of playing games with their vows by invoking the name of heaven, or the city of Jerusalem, or the earth, or their own head, to try and convince someone they were telling the truth when they were still telling a lie and had no intentions of following through with their promise.

It's like we used to do when we were children. We learned that you could lie if you had your fingers crossed, or your legs crossed. Then, your lie didn't count as a lie.

Jesus had an important word for those people. Jesus wanted them to know that God wasn't interested in their word games. Jesus said that heaven is the throne of God, and earth is God's footstool. Jesus said the Jerusalem is God's city and he said, "Don't swear by your own head because you don't have control over it either; you just think you do."

Jesus wants us to know and understand that just as God already knew that Adam and Eve's promise in the garden had been broken and they could not hide their sin from God, nothing we say escapes the knowledge of God.

We may fool some of the people some of the time, but very rarely do we fool all the people all the time, AND God is never fooled.

We become the biggest fools, fooled by Satan, when we believe our own lies. When we believe that fabricating the truth is beneficial for us and those around us, Satan has played us for the fool.

There are plenty of people who have evidence that it pays to lie. They will point to a job they got, a punishment they have avoided, and relationships they have maintained.

However, there is a saying that country people have that is very true: Chickens always come home to roost.

Like a Ponzi Scheme, lies might look beneficial in the beginning, but eventually the entire foundation will crumble.

Jesus wants us to live by a different code. For Jesus, honesty should be the standard. Because that is the way those who follow him live, we don't have any reason to swear to God. We don't have to add any emphasis to what we say.

Jesus says, just let your yes be yes and your no be no.

Jesus says that we should be people of our word.

Anything more than that, Jesus says, is just the work of the evil one.

Now this isn't about being so brutally honest that we say anything that comes into our minds to people for the sake of honesty, like Jim Carrey's character Fletcher Reede in "Liar, Liar."

Instead, Jesus wants our speech to be defined by an integrity that is honest, but with redeeming qualities. He wants our speech to be truthful, but not self-seeking; forthright without being mean-spirited; and direct without being unkind or uncaring.

The truth is that lying destroys relationships.

If you are fudging on the truth with anyone in your life, you are allowing the evil one to enter your life and like a house built on sand, the lies will eventually cause major problems.

Right now, I'd like for you to come clean before God and acknowledge any lying that is taking place in your life. What areas of deceit are you carrying around with you?

Are you cheating at school? Are you cheating in a relationship? Are your hands on money that isn't yours? Are you hiding things on your computer or cell phone from someone in your family? Do you make a habit of misleading people? Do you inflate your accomplishments? Do you lie to cover up something you have done wrong? Do you pass on misinformation on Facebook to promote your beliefs?

Remember, you cannot hide what you do from God.

This morning, as the Holy Spirit points out areas of your life where truth needs to win the day, the Lord wants your yes to be yes and your no to be no.

He wants this for you because He wants your life to be filled to joy and peace. Whenever we sacrifice truth, we sacrifice both joy and peace in our lives.

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