

Question: It seems like almost everyone I know tells lies when it seems to be to their advantage.

How can we convince people that there is a better way? What would Jesus do?

I prefer to believe that most people I know are truthful, but there is much evidence that truth has become a rare commodity in the marketplace of life. In their book *The Day America Told the Truth* James Patterson and Peter Kim summarized their research as follows: “Americans lie. They lie more than we had ever thought possible before the study.” This prevalence of lying is difficult to reconcile with what we would assume is a universal belief in all cultures that lying is wrong.

As a result of this widespread dishonesty, the social, economic and moral integrity of our American way of life is being seriously undermined. Sissela Bok has written: “A society, then, whose members were unable to distinguish truthful messages from deceptive ones, would collapse. But even before such a general collapse, individual choice and survival would be imperiled. The search for food and shelter could depend on no expectations from others. A warning that a well was poisoned or a plea for help in an accident would come to be ignored unless independent confirmation could be found.” In other words, where deception dominates no one is safe.

In addition, we have witnessed how dishonesty in some of our major corporations has not only brought financial hardship to the lives of thousands of employees and investors; but it also has had a damaging ripple effect on the economy of the entire nation. Dishonesty on the part of governmental officials has created distrust and resulted in expensive efforts to clean up and monitor the activities of our elected officials.

In contrast to the extensive deception of our world today, Jesus both proclaimed and practiced complete truthfulness in all things. He said, “Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one” (Matthew 5:37). Over seventy times in the gospel stories Jesus began his words by saying, “I tell you the truth.” To a group of Jews, he said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32). A little later he also said that the Devil “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” (John 8:44). Jesus didn’t just speak the truth, his entire life was the very embodiment of truth. He said, “I am the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6). Some of his opponents attempted to charge him with deception, but the charges would not stick (John 7:12). Jesus spoke the truth even when he knew it would bring painful consequences, including death, to himself (John 18:37).

From a study of his life, I believe Jesus would tell us that the problem of lying which we face today is a sign of Satan’s continued work among us. Thus, we should not be shocked when we see dishonesty in our world. Neither would he propose that we scold our neighbors for not telling the truth. While there is a place for governments to pass more laws or hire more police, the task of Christians is to follow the example of Jesus by living with integrity and speaking the truth in all things at all times. While advocacy of truthfulness is important, a greater impact can be made by consistently speaking the truth no matter what the consequences might be. Even liars have reason to respect an honest person because they can depend on what he says. People who “fudge” on the truth and are known to “fib” when it seems to their personal advantage will have difficulty finding respect and trust from anyone. Jesus clearly demonstrates for us that honesty is still the best policy in life.

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