

EPHESIANS #65 4:25 4-14-13

PEOPLE OF TRUTH

(Ephesians 4) We are at a point in our study of Ephesians that calls for, at least a little bit of review, lest we lose sight of the forest for the trees. In chapter one we studied God's eternal purpose which He was bringing to pass through the work of His Son and His Spirit. In chapter two we studied God's way of reconciling spiritually dead sinners to Himself. We looked at the all-important role of grace and of faith. In chapter 3 we focused on the great movement of the kingdom of God to include Gentile believers. We studied the wonderful prayer of the apostle. And then we came to the major divide at chapter 4. Chapter four begins to tell us how to live, beginning with our responsibilities in the church. But when Paul is done with that he takes eight verses, from 4:17-24 to teach us about the great change that God has made in us and is making in us. We spoke last week about the old self and the new self. Verse **24** *Put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.* The Lord want us to see ourselves in just this light. We are new people. We are new creations. We are not as we were born. And that awesome teaching and reality forms the basis for what follows - which I will introduce with this question: Is Christianity a religion of dos and don'ts? Huh? Is Christianity a religion of dos and don'ts? The uninformed unbeliever out working on his lawn this morning would probably say what? He'd say, "yeah." As best he figures it, Christianity means there's a lot of stuff you can't do and a lot of stuff you gotta do, and that's exactly why he don't want it. But what if I asked that question of church people, of better informed, well-taught evangelical protestants. Is Christianity a religion of dos and don'ts? I think a good number, a majority in fact, would say, "no." Some of you would say, "*Christianity has to do with faith, not dos and don'ts.*" Or, "*Christianity has to do with a relationship with God thru Christ, not dos and don'ts.*" And you know what? You would be partly right. But let's face it. You cannot read the Bible without finding there an great man dos and don'ts. Those rules for living, statutes, commandments, proverbs, precepts, don't make up the heart of our faith however. In that you would be accurate. As you read the book of Ephesians you see this flow from the sovereign saving activity of God, to our response of faith, to our understanding of what God has done, but it all leads somewhere. And that somewhere is to a lifestyle of personal morality, of holiness and obedience to the law of God.

I say all that because we are getting into a section of Scripture that is loaded with dos and don'ts. The next several verses read a whole lot like the book of Proverbs and are given to us in that style of dos and don'ts or more accurately don'ts and dos. In each case there is something representative of the old life that you are to put away and something that marks the new life that you are to put on. The first one, our verse for the day is in 25 *Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.* Our outline is as follows: We will look at the exhortation, the explanation, the temptation, and the application.

The exhortation has two sides to it, but is one coin. It says to quit speaking falsely and start speaking truth. There was a man who went to a psychiatrist and told him, "*Dr., Everyone thinks I'm a liar.*" The doctor said, "*Aww, I don't believe that.*" I thought that was funny. Anyway, you should know that God thinks you are a liar, by nature. The Scripture actually says that all men are liars. That is something closely connected to your fallenness, your natural depravity. And it is one of those things that must go out when Jesus comes in. The text says simply, "*Don't lie. Speak truth.*" You get it? That's the exhortation.

The explanation is given next. With the duty is a rationale, a motivation for truth-telling 25 *Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.* God gives us in this verse two reasons for being men and women of truth. One comes before the exhortation and one comes after. The explanation prior to the exhortation we looked at last week and is connected to our text by the linking word, "*therefore.*" *Therefore* means, "*because of this.*" Because of what? Because, Ephesians 4:22 says *you have laid aside the old self* and 4:24 says *you have put on the new self*. The old self you laid aside was marked by lust and lies. So those things have to go. The new self, it says, is created in the likeness or the image of God. Colossians 3:9-10 *Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices,* ¹⁰ *and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge according to the image of the One who created him.* It's even plainer in Colossians. You aren't to lie because you put on a new self who is being transformed into the divine image. And lying is completely contrary to the holy character of God. God is called the God of truth. The Holy Spirit is frequently referred to as the Spirit of truth. I John says that God cannot lie. This is part of the very nature of our Maker. And Jesus even said *I am the Way and the Truth*. When you oppose truth in any way shape form or fashion you have positioned yourself against God. And when you position yourself against God, guess whose side you are on? Whereas God is called

*Truth and the Spirit of truth, the devil is called the deceiver and the father of lies. In John 8, Jesus is speaking to the Jewish leaders who were out to get rid of him and He says in verse **44** You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. It is the lie that Satan used against Eve in the garden. The lie is his best weapon, dare I say, even his only weapon. It expresses the very essence of who he is. There is a cosmic battle raging around us. It is the kingdom of God which is called the kingdom of light, vs. the kingdom of Satan which is the kingdom of darkness. It is a battle for the allegiance of the human race and it is the war of truth against falsehood. God's truth against the devil's lies, and my friend, every time you lie - it matters not how small the lie may seem- you cast your vote for the devil, the father of lies, and against the Lord who is Truth. Few sins are as direct an assault upon the character of God as this one. It is anti-Christ. It strikes against the very nature of God. And --.it provokes His wrath. Proverbs 12:**22** *Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord. But those who deal faithfully are His delight. 22a Lying lips are an abomination* or the NIV says, *The Lord detests lying lips*. Either way it speaks of extreme hatred and displeasure. Proverbs 6:**16** *There are six things which the Lord hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him*. Then you get the list of seven, two of which pertain to speaking lies. God hates **17a** *Haughty eyes, a lying tongue. 19a A false witness that utters lies*. God absolutely hates lies. He tells us that with emphasis. I think too of the story in the New Testament of Ananias in Acts 5 and how he lied about how much money he was giving to the church. You may remember from that passage Peter saying to him that he was not lying to men but to God and the Holy Spirit and Ananias died for that lie as an example of God's hatred of this sin. The sin of deceit is anti-God and therefore completely out of bounds for one who is being renewed into the image of God.*

The second aspect of Paul's explanation behind the exhortation is that we must not lie because of the nature of our relationship with each other. We are the body of Christ. We are one. So we read **25bc** *speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another*. Our relationships are to express this unity of the body which we studied earlier in this chapter. And the foundation of any relationship, marital, contractual, spiritual is trust. Sometimes when I talk about this with engaged couples I almost come out of my chair because I've seen how destructive, and how very difficult to repair is a breach of trust in a marriage. Honesty is an

essential of happy relationships. I remember when I was a teenager, I was very close to my mother since it was just the two of us at home. About two months after I got my drivers license I got a speeding ticket. I didn't tell her about it but she found out later and my mother never chewed me out before or since like she did on that occasion. Do you know why? It wasn't the ticket that bothered her, it was my deception. I didn't come home that night and say, "Hey, Mom I did not get a speeding ticket tonight." But, in close relationships, silence becomes a form of lying, pretending that all was okay when it wasn't and my mom's fury taught me something. She saw that if she could not trust me that precious relationship we had would be destroyed; and she was right. As parents, Beth and I always wanted to be able to trust our kids and so we tried to teach them that deceitfulness is very serious and the most severe spankings (yeah, we did that) our kids ever received were when they were caught in a lie. The oneness God gives us in His family is a precious thing. Don't ruin it with lies. Preserve it by speaking the truth in love.

Those are the two reasons Paul lists here for being truth-speakers. I could give you more, but those two are enough to raise the question. If lying is so damaging to relationships and so grievous to God why do we find ourselves doing it anyway? Here we look at the temptation to lie. Why do we lie when we know it is wrong?! Well the answer to that is quite simple. Lies come in very handy. You think about the little boy whose mother kept calling him to come home. He ignored her and ignored her. Mom kept calling and eventually he did come home. His mother asked him, *Didn't you hear me calling you home?* He said, *Not until the third time.* What is a lie? Someone said, "A lie is an abomination to God and a very present help in time of trouble." That is true. Lies, seemingly can do us a great deal of good. The first of our three reasons for lying is convenience or ease. When someone calls me up and asks if they can use our building to get married in on June 10 the easiest thing for me is to say, "I'm sorry, our building is already booked on that day." Easy, effective. But honesty usually requires me to go beyond that and tell the inquirer what it would take for them to be married in our church and possibly go thru the steps of arranging that for them. That is a hassle. One little lie could save me the trouble. I'm motivated to lie by laziness, my addiction to ease and convenience.

Then too we lie in order to look good and avoid looking bad. This may be the biggest reason for most of us. Our arrogance makes us lie. We want to be liked, accepted, get our own way, exalt ourselves, defend our opinions, cover our tracks - so we lie. We exaggerate our successes, understate our failures, we falsely deny blame and take credit. When something goes wrong at

work and the boss says, “Who did this?” Everyone says, “Not me.” In the cartoon *The Family Circus* they sometimes bring out this character called “Not-me” who is a little ghost that gets blamed for everything. Who got the sink dirty? Not me. Who let the dog out? Not me. He is a creation of dishonesty which is promoted by pride. We want so much to be admired or liked by others that we lie! It goes back to fearing man more than God. It is a terrible thing. This is what motivated Ananias to lie about his giving. He was trying to look good before his Christian buddies so he lied about his giving. Peter wanted to look good before his non-Christian peers so he lied about knowing Jesus. You misrepresent who you are and what you have done because you crave approval and praise of men and it may lead you to be rejected by God.

The third reason why we sin this way is to get something we want. We are motivated to lie by our lusts. You want more money, so you lie about the condition of the car you are selling. You lie on your income tax form. Oh no, I know you don’t do these things. I’m just saying that for the sorry bunch of sinners in our TV audience, Okay? A little boy and his parents were getting tickets from an airline agent. The little boy, who looked to be around five, told the ticket agent that he was only three years old. The agent looked at him sternly and said, “Young man do you know what happens to little boys who lie?” The kid said, “Yes, sir, they get to ride for half-price.” Have you ever felt that temptation to fudge on the truth a little to save some money? Right after my oldest daughter, Sarah, had turned 3 she went with her mom and brother to Disney World. The difference in cost between a 2 year-old and a 3 year-old is currently \$83. It wasn’t that much then, but it was plenty. And Sarah still looked and even acted like a 2 year-old. No one had ever checked on her age before and I’m sure no one would have this time. I bet there were plenty of other 3 year-olds getting in free that day. What difference would \$40 make to a big outfit like Disney? But the rules said she had to pay. What do you do in a situation like that? Make a deal with God that you will give half the savings to the church? 90% of the savings to the church? Or do you do what is honest and pay the price? On that occasion we paid the price. I’m not pleased to tell you that we faced a similar situation years later at the Outback Steakhouse and did not do so well. This time Sarah had just turned 12. The Outback had some good kids meals for \$2.50 but the menu said they were for kids under 12. Not 12 and under. Under 12. Sarah did not qualify. I knew that, but I ordered her the kid’s meal anyway. It was dishonest and I put saving a buck over my integrity. Bad decision! Proverbs 19:1 says it’s better to be a poor man with integrity than a rich liar.

You can easily see why a lie would be attractive, can't you? These are what lead us to lie: our laziness, our lusts, and our pride. These are the attributes of the old man. This is the way unbelievers live. And that is yet another reason we are tempted to lie. We live in a lying society. We see people all around us lying and it makes us feel disadvantaged that we can't. The world basically says that deception is okay if you can get away with it. On March 19 of this year, this man, Steve Alford, signed a contract to be the basketball coach at New Mexico for ten years, just like Jaime Dixon did here in Pittsburgh. In accepting this position, Coach Alford said: *This is a commitment that I wanted to make more than anything else, because I found an institution, I found an area of the country that I really, really like.* Really? He said "really" twice, but eleven days later he broke that contract to sign a more lucrative one with UCLA. These are the men we ask to teach our sons. It's hard to be people of integrity in a world like this. Newsweek recently reported about the epidemic of cheating on college campuses. The magazine says, *cheating is so prevalent in U.S. schools and colleges that the cheater seems almost to be the normal student. So widespread is the practice of cribbing that many students do not look upon it as being morally wrong. They call it "The Good Neighbor Policy" or "The Wandering Eye."* Let me tell ya folks, God doesn't call it that. But a frequent scenario is this: The American young person who values career success above all else struggles valiantly to the top by lying on his loan application form. He then manages to graduate by cheating on his tests and papers. When he gets out of school he becomes a crooked businessman who never pays back his college loan, cheats on his taxes, and his wife and his partner. That is our world. And sometimes we don't see the church doing a whole lot better. I hear our great leaders talking about how their ministry hasn't been able to pay their bills in months and I wonder how they can justify that. Closer to home we live with the routine problem of church members who say, "Yea, I'll do that and don't." Christians may not be lying about the big things as often as others but we don't seem to be committed to saying only what is true and doing precisely what we say. So, feeling strongly about our need to do better in this area I move on to point #4 which is the applications. Three things we can do to display more integrity and honesty.

First of all, let's work on developing a hatred of this sin of deceit. I say that a lot don't I? We should hate this sin and that. I believe it is true and that certain sins are so attractive that if you don't hate them you will never stop them. You gotta hate lying. God hates it. Proverbs 12:22a *Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord.* He hates a lying tongue and one who utters lies. God

hates it and I want to hate anything God hates. Think about what we have seen -- that lying is anti-God, anti-others, anti-self. We get very angry when we are lied to. Don't you? Don't you hate being deceived? If you get caught as a politician being sexually immoral you can still get elected but if you get caught lying you are in trouble with the public. We don't like being deceived, but you know I don't think there is any area of ethics where we hold a more blatant double standard. It is wrong for them to deceive us but its okay for us to deceive them. We have to hate this sin in others and especially in ourselves.

Secondly, work at being more careful in what you say. A couple of weeks past we saw how important it is to think before you speak. Well, when you do think about what to say the first thing you must consider is whether you are about to speak what is true. There are lots of lovely things written or spoken that are not true but the first test of any statement is the truthfulness of it. I could get up here and tell you that when I was eighteen God miraculously healed me of a fatal heart condition, delivered me from six demons and saved me from a life of crime and drugs. You may find all that highly encouraging, it may result in praise to God and people may get saved because of it, but since it is not true God would hate it. Man, if I wasn't locked into telling the truth I could be a fantastic preacher. I could tell you some stories that would knock your socks off. But God says we will give an account for every word.

God also says we are bound to do what we say. If you come to grips with that it will make you a heap more careful about what you say, if you understand that your words are your commitments. I know that certain personality types have more problems with this than others. Some of you are just very quick to speak, like Peter who said in Matthew 26:**33** *Even though all may fall away because of You, I will never fall away.* and two verses later **35** *Even if I have to die with You, I will not deny You.* What Peter did and what we often do is commit ourselves verbally before we have counted the cost and before we have committed ourselves inwardly. So often we say we will do things without any real intention of doing what we say. "Oh I'll pray for you or I'll be there to help." Ecclesiastes says that it is better not to vow than to break your vow. Jesus says that for His disciples a simple *yes* or *no* should be as good as a vow. So take care what you say. If are committed to doing what you say it is better not to say anything until you have reasonable confidence that you can do it. Wait before making commitments. Whenever I do wedding ceremonies the part that always gets to me is when I remind the couple that, "*by your words you*

will be bound for life. With a few words you will seal a commitment that will be lifelong.” That is heavy. That is the way it is. So let’s be more careful about what we say. That is application #2

Thirdly, work on being more committed to what you said. More careful about what you say, more committed to what you said. Once you said it, whether you thought it thru before you did or not, consider yourself bound. You are bound biblically to perform your word. And friends, that can be super, super tough. Many times I have talked with people who would do almost anything to get out of their marriages, they are so miserable and it all goes back to some starry night when they said, “yes I would love to marry you.” Then they stood before friends and family and promised to hang tough in love thru thick and thin until death. More than once I have heard an unhappy spouse say, “Surely God doesn’t expect me to pay for that one mistake for the rest of my life.” That may have been a tragically foolish choice, but when you gave your word it became a commitment to God among others and unless God releases you in some other way (and there are grounds for ending a marriage) you must do as you said. That is sometimes what it means to be a man or woman of integrity. Look with me at Psalm 15. This is one of those verses that my Father reminds me of time and time again. **1** *O Lord, who may abide in Your tent?*

*Who may dwell on Your holy hill? Who is the righteous man who has favor with the Lord? **2-4b** He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, And speaks truth in his heart.*

³ *He does not slander with his tongue, Nor does evil to his neighbor, Nor takes up a reproach against his friend; ⁴ In whose eyes a reprobate is despised, But who honors those who fear the Lord.* Now listen to this **4c** *He swears to his own hurt and does not change.* NIV says, *he keeps his oath even when it hurts.* That is the test of your commitment to being a person of integrity.

What does it mean to be a man or woman, boy or girl of integrity? It means that your word can be trusted. It means that you say what is true and you do as you say. You are a person whose word is your bond. There are two ways to violate God’s call to integrity. One is by saying what you know is not true, the other is by not doing what you said, not keeping your word. In either case you are deceiving others, you are violating a trust. And the basic issue is -- can you be trusted to represent reality when you speak. When you say *I’ll be there at 4:00* what is your word worth? Can I count on you to be there? Some people you can count on not being there so little do they care about their word. And when you tell me, “*Oh I’m late because my car wouldn’t start.*” should I believe that? You say, “*Oh those are such little things.*” Alright, they are little things but

where do you draw the line? Little lies are okay but big lies are awful? I don't see that in the word of God. What I do see is that truthfulness is our rule all the time. I need to be a man of my word whether I speak that word to the President or to my daughter. The issue is still the same. And the basic question you must face today is whether your word is your bond. Little issues, big issues, can someone believe what you say because you are a person of truth?

Last question. Will you be miserable for choosing this way? Will honesty hurt you by hindering your career and your family plans and your reputation? Friend, Psalm 15 says this is the type of man who will abide in the sanctuary of God and come into His presence. The Bible says that in the presence of the Lord there is fullness of joy. You will never regret honesty. Never. The devil will tell you otherwise, but truth will always set you free. Proverbs 12:19 *Truthful lips will be established forever. But a lying tongue is only for a moment.* 19a *Truthful lips will be established forever.* God will establish the person of integrity because He says in 12:22 *Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord. But those who deal faithfully are His delight.* That is what I want to be, a child who delights His Father. How about you? Let's stand for prayer.