

CHAPTER 10

HOW WE CAN DEVELOP 'THE LOVE OF THE TRUTH' AND THE CHARACTER QUALITY, AND HABIT, OF TRUTHFULNESS

*The LORD is near to all who call upon him,
to all who call upon him in truth.
Psalm 145:18 (RSV)*

*Keep your tongue from evil
and your lips from speaking deceit.
Psalm 34:13 (ESV)*

*Take heed lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them,
Deuteronomy 11:16 (RSV)*

*"..... and he who is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much"
Luke 16:10 (b) (RSV)*

*¹⁶ These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another; render in your gates judgments that are true and make for peace; ¹⁷ do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath, for all these things I hate, declares the LORD."
Zechariah 8:16-17 (ESV)*

*Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices
Colossians 3:9 (RSV)*

*So put away all malice and all guile and insincerity and envy and all slander.
1 Peter 2:1 (RSV)*

You have to make a clear decision to cut out all lies, without exception or compromise and then keep watch over your heart

I have come to the conclusion that the only way for a person to change the habit of a life time and stop being a liar is to come off it "cold turkey". Lying has to be stopped 100% and overnight. Lies are something that we learn to rely on and which we get used to. Therefore, they seem natural.

There is no safe level, or acceptable number, of lies that can be continued with after we become a Christian. They *all* have to go, however small they may seem to you. You have to declare to yourself "*No more lies, whatsoever, to anybody, any time*". Moreover, you need to mean it, because if you say that, you will certainly be tested on it:

*²³ Watch over your heart with all diligence,
for from it flow the springs of life.*

*²⁴ Put away from you a deceitful mouth
and put devious speech far from you.*

*²⁵ Let your eyes look directly ahead and
let your gaze be fixed straight in front of you.
Proverbs 4:23-25 (NASB)*

Why not do as Job did? Make a promise to yourself that you will not tell any lies at all to anybody. This is how Job put it:

*as long as my breath is in me,
and the spirit of God is in my nostrils;
4 my lips will not speak falsehood,
and my tongue will not utter deceit.
Job 27:3-4 (RSV)*

Go further and do as King David did. He resolved to walk with integrity of heart and not to set before his eyes anything that is base. He said that second point because we can easily be tempted into sin as a result of what we see. This is very true of men, so many of whom have a problem with pornography. I have been very surprised by whom I have had to counsel about this. It is a widespread problem. Therefore resolve not to look at it. Better still, set your computer to block it, as when it is set for a child:

*"... I will walk with integrity of heart
within my house;
I will not set before my eyes
anything that is base...."
Psalm 101:2(b)-3(a) (RSV)*

You have responsibility for the condition of your own heart. "*It is your most important stewardship*", as the Bible teacher, Chuck Missler, often says. What he means is that if you can guard and preserve your own integrity, and remain honest in all things at all times, then all other areas of your life will go well. If you don't take that stewardship of your own heart seriously enough, then the rest of your life will end up in a mess.

It has to be all or nothing. You must decide to cut out all lies, no matter what the circumstances and no matter what the cost. You also need to ask for God's help to achieve this new lifestyle of truthfulness and to deal with the repercussions which it will inevitably produce. Ask Him to help you. Also ask Him to expose, and remove from your life, anything that would tempt you to lie. That is how seriously you need to take this:

*7 Two things I asked of You,
Do not refuse me before I die:
8 Keep deception and lies far from me,
Give me neither poverty nor riches;
Feed me with the food that is my portion,
9 That I not be full and deny You and say,
"Who is the LORD?"
Or that I not be in want and steal,
And profane the name of my God.
Proverbs 30:7-9 (NASB)*

It would be far better to stay poor if becoming rich caused or required us to become a liar, either in getting the riches, or in keeping them. If that fact doesn't seem real to you and the awfulness of dishonesty still doesn't resonate with you, then ask God to change your heart attitude. Ask Him to give you His attitude to truth and to enable you to value it as He does, so that you become a modern day 'Nathanael'.

God promises to grant us anything we ask for, provided it is in accordance with His will. Therefore if there is one prayer you can be sure He will be delighted to answer, it is a heart-felt prayer to help you to become an entirely honest person and to give you the love of the truth. He will not refuse that request, if you really mean it, because it is undoubtedly His will for you to become such a person.

Having said that, neither will He do it all for you. If it is up to you to decide that you want the love of the truth and to be determined to choose truth over lies every time. God will not do that for you, but He will help you to change, if you really want Him to.

Then turn that decision to be truthful into an ingrained habit, so it becomes instinctive, without needing to think

Having made a genuine decision to eliminate all lying, no matter how small or seemingly justified it may be, you then have to take steps to turn that decision into an ingrained habit. That means sticking at it for a long enough period of time to enable you to adjust. It also means praying for God to give you the love of the truth. As soon as you make that your aim, you will find that you have to make a stand on all sorts of small issues, day after day.

Eventually, the habit of truthfulness will be solidly formed in you. It then becomes automatic and instinctive for you to come out with the truth when under sudden pressure, rather than tell a lie. Your reflexes will be changed, so that truth becomes your default-setting. All of that is possible, if you really want it. Any Christian can become totally honest if they truly want to be. The sad reality though, is that very few people do want to be. Few even consider this issue at all, let alone resolve to change their ways.

Succeeding in the future at the Day of Judgment matters much more than succeeding today.

Every lie will have to be accounted for, whichever judgment we go to. That is the one day of your life that matters more than any other. How a Christian is assessed at the Judgment Seat of Christ is the ultimate priority, after salvation itself. That assessment and its consequences are eternal.

What could possibly be above that? Therefore resolve never to allow the habit of dishonesty to tarnish the assessment that Jesus makes of your life. (See Book Four in this series which deals with the Judgment Seat of Christ)

Being truthful means swimming against the tide and refusing to compromise

If you seriously set out to become totally honest from now on then it will frequently mean swimming against the tide. You will stand out from the crowd and your honesty will not be liked or appreciated by everybody. That is putting it mildly. Many will actually hate and despise what you're seeking to do. It will lead you into all sorts of conflict, trouble and costly choices.

Telling the truth all the time is not easy, and it never will be easy, until after Jesus returns. Until then, you will usually be the odd one out, not only at work, or school, or among your neighbours. You will even be the odd one out among many Christians, and even among some church leaders. That is how rare real truthfulness is. It is rare even within the church, where deception, and especially self-deception, are now commonplace.

Peer pressure is real and very powerful, both outside, in the world, and also inside the church. There is a strong pressure on all of us to fit in and not to rock the boat by objecting to things that those around us have decided are good. However, if you follow your conscience, or if you stand up for what the Bible says, then you will find that you regularly end up as the odd one out.

It is inevitable, because the majority of people, even within churches (in the West) are not following either the Bible, or their consciences, but the standards of the world. (See Book Seven)

You will find yourself in positions where you believe a certain thing is wrong, but all of the people around you, including leaders in the church, may agree unanimously that it's right. At least they may say that is 'acceptable' or 'can be justified'. However, where that happens, you must always follow your conscience rather than following the crowd, even if it means that you stand entirely alone:

“Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd,

Exodus 23:2 (NIV)

Such situations are very difficult and painful to deal with and they can also be costly to you. But you still need to brace yourself and insist on listening to your conscience and on following God's Word, even if that puts you out on a limb as the only person who thinks as you do. That is very hard to handle, but the alternative is far worse. That is to fit in with current orthodoxy and to go along with whatever those around you are saying or doing.

The problem with just following the crowd and fitting in with the world's standards is that you will then end up disobeying, or even opposing, God, simply to win the approval and acceptance of those around you. That is a tragically foolish bargain. Therefore, never be willing to call evil things good or good things evil. Always insist on staying true to what the Bible says. Also always obey what your conscience says about how to apply the Bible in practice:

Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!

Isaiah 5: 20 (RSV)

Truthfulness will inevitably make you unpopular with some people

Refusing to tell lies can make you very unpopular. I vividly remember my first day on patrol as a police constable in November 1983. I was put with my designated 'tutor constable', whose task was to teach me the practicalities of how to do the job. He had to accompany me all the time for my first 10 weeks in the police. As we sat in the police car he said to me, at the start of my first day: *"Let's get one thing straight - whatever I write in my pocket book, that's what you will write in yours."*

I knew immediately what he meant, and that I needed to take a firm stand, there and then. Basically, he was saying that no matter what I saw or heard, my evidence would have to be whatever he said it was. He was insisting that I did not contradict him or write anything different. I knew what he meant and I also knew that it would lead to problems.

Therefore I replied, as politely and deferentially as I could, that I would be happy to be guided by him as to how to write up my evidence, *so long as it was all true*. When he heard that last point he became furious. He went back to the police station at lunch time and began to spread the news to the entire station, of over 100 officers, that I was a menace and that I was not safe to be with!

He told people that I could get them into trouble because I would just write down whatever I saw and heard. He believed I could even get people the sack, for revealing that they were doing wrong, breaking rules, or telling lies. A large proportion of the station then 'sent me to Coventry', or it seemed so to me. Very few people spoke to me for months and most were wary of going on patrol with me.

It was a very painful time indeed. It's one thing to look back on it all now, but it was agonising at the time, especially as I was so young and inexperienced. However, I'm not sure what else I could have done. I had to make a stand, or my integrity would have been compromised. If I had buckled to the pressure I would soon have ended up writing something false in my pocket book.

Moreover, it wouldn't have ended there. I would then have had to copy that false evidence from my pocket book into witness statements and reports for senior officers to look at. I would then have had to sign those to certify they were true. I simply couldn't have done it, and I knew that.

Even worse, I would, eventually, have ended up in a Court, having to testify on oath, in front of Judges, Magistrates and juries, that what I had written in my statement and my pocket book was the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. I would then have had to stick to that false or incomplete story and look the judge and jury in the eye when cross examined about it.

I knew I just wouldn't be able to go through with any of that, even if I had wanted to. I would never have had a single night's sleep during my years in the police if I'd allowed myself to be compromised in those ways. Also, my personal witness as a Christian would have been ruined.

How could I ever look another officer in the eye and tell him what the Christian Gospel is if both he and I knew that I was a liar? My testimony as a Christian would have become worthless. That was how I saw it, and I think I was right to see it that way. Though He allowed me to suffer for a while, God later honoured me for the stand that I took. He also had pity on my sad plight and solved it all for me.

Four months later the Coal Miners' strike began, in March 1984. I suddenly found that I was sent out in carrier vans, every day, for very long shifts on the miners' picket lines. I had to spend 10 or 12 hours a day with 6-12 other officers cooped up in a van. Moreover, because we were doing a lot of overtime, I got to spend sustained periods of time with officers from other shifts too

They were the ones who had heard bad reports about me, but who had never really met me. It put an end to my enforced isolation. They were all forced to get to know me and, as they did, their wariness of me diminished and then disappeared. In the end, I was fully accepted by all of them. However, I had to suffer for four months beforehand, due to the stand I had taken.

Another much smaller problem came up a year or so later, when a group of us were sent in a carrier van to police a football match. We got back from it at a certain time, say 6.30pm. However, the Sergeant told us all to write in our pocket books that we had got back later, at about 7.00pm, so as to claim an extra 30 minutes worth of overtime.

That would have been OK if we could have openly said that we actually got back at 6.30pm, but that we were being awarded that extra time as a bonus. I'd have been happy to do that, provided it could be done legitimately and openly. However, that was not what the Sergeant meant.

So I announced, in front of the whole carrier van of police officers, that I was going to write down that I had got back at 6.30pm. That meant they all had to do the same, even the sergeant. They had no choice. They all therefore lost the extra 30 minutes overtime pay. As you might imagine, that went down badly, but nothing like as badly as the first time I took a principled stand.

They must have been getting used to me by then, because nothing came of it. I found after that that I had fewer problems. I suspect that, in part, that was because some officers modified their behaviour whenever they were with me. Therefore, there was nothing improper for me to see or write about. All our evidence was true.

That, in itself, shows something important. The clear and resolute stand that I took saved me, in the end, from witnessing all sorts of wrong things that would otherwise have happened in front of me. It modified other officers' conduct. So, it worked to my advantage and, I believe, to the advantage of the police force and the public.

It is more important to have a good name than to be successful or rich

It is more important to preserve our good name and reputation than to be rich or successful. However, how many of us actually believe that? It cannot be very many, or we would not behave as we do. Yet the Bible says that it is true:

*A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches,
and favour is better than silver or gold.*

Proverbs 22:1 (RSV)

Note that it says that a good name is to be "chosen" rather than great riches. That is because it frequently is a choice. We may find that the opportunity arises for us to have one, or the other, but not both, and we need to choose between them. Don't be confused by the reference to 'great riches'. It is not only talking about the very wealthy. When it comes to wealth, all figures are relative. Therefore we all face this dilemma, however much, or little, money we may have.

It may be that for a particular man, even a few pounds would be enough 'riches' to entice him to choose to surrender his good name. If he does so then he is a fool, and well on the way to becoming wicked. For one thing, wealth obtained by dishonest means will not last. It will evaporate away later and will also lead us into other problems and traps:

*A fortune made by a lying tongue
is a fleeting vapor and a deadly snare.*

Proverbs 21:6 (NIV)

When the Bible speaks of having a 'good name' and of receiving 'favour', as we saw above, it does not only mean the opinions of other people. Their views do come into it, and they do matter, primarily in terms of whether or not you are a good witness or ambassador for Christianity. That's the main thing that matters when it comes to what people think of you. People could choose either to believe the Gospel, or to reject it, based on what they think of *you*.

So your reputation really does matter, if only for that reason alone. However, what the verse is really talking about is God's view of you. The crucial question is whether He is pleased, or displeased, by your life and by the choices you make. What could matter more than that? How could any purely temporary financial gain (for a maximum of about 70 years) be worth losing your eternal life?

Even if you didn't lose that, how could it be worth losing your eternal reward at the Judgment Seat of Christ? How much does having a good name matter to you? If you are a Christian then it ought to matter a lot. The people around you, at work and elsewhere, are very observant and discerning. They will notice if your life doesn't match up to what you say you believe.

If there's a mismatch, you will have no credibility from then on in sharing the gospel with anybody. Moreover, your reputation is the key to your promotion prospects, not only at your place of work, but in every context, including your service for God. You therefore need to guard your good name and never do anything to jeopardize it.

Whenever we are tempted to dishonesty, we need to pause and think of our reputation and what the proposed lie might do to it. The people around you will notice, and remember, any lie you ever tell and they won't allow you to forget it. That is true even where they themselves are much bigger liars than us.

Their hypocrisy is irrelevant, because they are not claiming to be a Christian. If you are claiming to be one, then they will judge you by a very different standard than they apply to themselves. But that is actually fair enough. They have a valid point. Why should they take your faith seriously if you don't take it seriously yourself, such that you are willing to do the same things as they do? You gain

the respect of non-Christians by being different from them and standing out, not by being the same and fitting in.

Lies are natural to the Devil and to demons. They lie all the time

Lying comes naturally to us. It flows out of our sinful flesh nature. It also comes naturally to Satan and to his demons. They are compulsive liars and lie continuously. Even if a demon says something which contains some true facts, there will always be a false twist to it, which renders it false overall. Therefore, whenever we lie we are following the example of the Devil and his demons. We are showing that the Devil is our real father:

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.

John 8:44 (NASB)

Lies are a demon's main weapon

See Books Seven and Nine for more details on how demons use lies as a device to control and manipulate us. They use lies on a daily basis to get us to believe what *they* say, instead of believing the truth. Believing those lies causes a huge amount of disruption and damage in our lives. In addition to lying to us, the demons also want to get us to lie to other people. They will tempt and lure you into becoming a liar and to make it habitual.

Our flesh nature is deceitful enough already, but the added influence of a demon whispering into our ear can lead to us going further than we would ever have gone by ourselves. The tendency to lie, especially where it has become habitual or addictive, is a strong sign of demonic involvement in your life.

Why do the demons want us to lie?

There are many reasons why a demon wants to get you to lie, and why they put so much effort into getting you to do it. Firstly, if they can get you to become a liar, then it brings God's curse upon you, as we saw earlier, in Zechariah chapter five. That then turns God Himself into your opponent. That suits the demon very well. It means they can get God to oppose you in ways that they are not capable of themselves.

Therefore, merely by luring you into lying, they can bring about serious damage in your life and in your walk with God. They also want us to lie because of the havoc that it causes in our marriage, relationships, career and church and because it ruins our credibility as a witness for Jesus Christ.

Lying is habit-forming and addictive. You can't just lie occasionally.

Lying is addictive. If you continue lying then it will become a settled habit. You can't set a limit on how often you'll lie, or on what level of seriousness of lies you are willing to tell. If you are prepared to lie at all, to any degree, then you will, inevitably, end up lying more and more. Eventually you will find that you lie almost all the time. You can't just remain at a certain level.

That's another reason why you have to come off it cold turkey and resolve to tell no lies at all. Then you will find yourself getting more and more truthful, until that too becomes a habit, just as lying used

to be. Eventually you will come to love the truth for its own sake, quite apart from the many benefits it brings.

What if telling the truth is costly or painful?

We have already seen that there is a price to pay when you tell the truth and sometimes a very high price. There's no denying that it brings trouble. However, the cost of *not* telling the truth is always very much higher. The price you pay for telling the truth is generally limited and short term. However, the cost of lying is unlimited and long term.

Indeed, whether we are a Christian or not, it is eternal. For an unbeliever, it leads to the Lake of Fire. For a Christian, it will lead to the loss of some, or perhaps all, of the rewards we would otherwise have received at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Either way, those are really tragic consequences. And they are both eternal.

"The truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth."

The above phrase comes from the wording of the oath which is used in Courts and Tribunals every day. But what does it mean? It is actually a carefully constructed phrase which forbids any kind of deception when a person gives evidence. It means that the witness is swearing to tell:

- a) **"the truth"** - i.e. that everything they say will be *true*
- b) **"the whole truth"** - i.e. that they *will not leave anything out*. Omitting something could alter the effect and impact of the evidence and make it untrue overall, even if no direct lie is told. In other words, it is to prevent the witness lying by the things he chooses *not* to say.
- c) **"and nothing but the truth"** - this is to prevent someone telling all of the truth, and leaving nothing out, but then *adding something untrue on top of it*, i.e. lying by adding a lie to what would, otherwise, be the truth.

Must we always tell the whole truth?

The famous wording of the oath is clearly appropriate for use in *Courts*, because it is absolutely comprehensive and watertight. But it is not necessarily the right way to operate in our day to day lives. We do not always have a duty to tell the whole truth. We are not always under a duty to say all that we know, or all that is on our minds. To do so would sometimes be very unwise. Note the approach that Nehemiah took:

¹²And I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. I did not tell anyone what my God was putting into my mind to do for Jerusalem and there was no animal with me except the animal on which I was riding. ¹³So I went out at night by the Valley Gate in the direction of the Dragon's Well and on to the Refuse Gate, inspecting the walls of Jerusalem which were broken down and its gates which were consumed by fire. ¹⁴Then I passed on to the Fountain Gate and the King's Pool, but there was no place for my mount to pass. ¹⁵So I went up at night by the ravine and inspected the wall. Then I entered the Valley Gate again and returned. ¹⁶The officials did not know where I had gone or what I had done; nor had I as yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials or the rest who did the work.

Nehemiah 2:12-16 (NASB)

Nehemiah was heading to Jerusalem on a mission to rebuild the wall of the city. He knew that his project was going to come in for a lot of opposition from the enemies of God's people. Therefore,

although Nehemiah told no lies, he did not tell other people everything that God had told him to do. He kept some of it to himself.

Nehemiah's approach would be inappropriate in a criminal Court, or even in a civil court, where the system is based on finding out exactly what the whole truth is. That objective means that the Court must insist on total, unlimited frankness and for nothing at all to be held back. Justice is at stake. However, that is not always the case in our day to day lives, where we may be entitled to withhold certain facts, provided that doing so does not amount to a lie.

Nevertheless, in some situations, not mentioning something could amount to a lie.

However, there can be circumstances where to leave out, or fail to mention, some fact would amount to misleading someone and in a dishonest way. That can apply even where there is no Court involved and nobody is giving evidence. Our conscience has to guide us. In any given situation we have to decide whether we can, with integrity, choose *not* to say something. It is impossible to create a hard and fast rule, because every situation turns on its own facts.

You must therefore ask God to guide you in those specific circumstances. Then use your conscience to gauge what is right on that occasion. The more inherently honest and sincere a person is, the more they will tend to assume that total frankness and transparency are needed. However, that is not always wise, and it can sometimes be naive to think that way, depending on the facts.

We have to ask ourselves whether the person is entitled to be told the whole truth

A good question to ask oneself, when seeking to decide how much one is obliged to disclose, is whether the other person is *entitled* to be told the whole truth. They may, or they may not be. If they are a police officer, judge, tax official or officer of the Court, the likelihood is they would be entitled to 100% of what you know, without leaving anything out. However, if the other person is a work colleague, friend, relative, neighbour etc, they may not be entitled to know everything, or indeed anything at all.

It all depends on their position and yours, and also on any duties that may, or may not be, owed by you to them as a result. Imagine that a friend of yours has confided in you, but then another friend of both of you asks what you have been discussing. You have no duty to answer that question. It would be legitimate to fob them off by saying "*Oh we were just chatting about this and that*". Failing to give an answer would be no lie, because there was no duty to answer them at all.

We don't always have to answer the questions people ask us

One of the things that has caused me difficulty for many years is knowing what to do when asked a difficult question where I am not yet entitled, or willing, to reveal the truth, but where I may not tell a lie either. Often the only solution is to sidestep the question. Politicians have to learn how to do this and it does not necessarily signify that they are dishonest. Often it's for very good reasons.

The point is that we do not always have a duty to give people an answer. It depends on the circumstances, on who is asking the question, and on whether they have any right to receive an answer. Often they do not. Realising this fact has been a great benefit to me. I had previously felt obliged to give an answer all the time and that caused me many difficulties. Here is an example of Jesus brushing aside a question which had not been asked sincerely, and was only intended to trap Him:

¹⁹The scribes and the chief priests tried to lay hands on Him that very hour, and they feared the people; for they understood that He spoke this parable against them. ²⁰So they watched Him, and sent spies who pretended to be righteous, in order that they might catch Him in some statement, so that they could deliver Him to the rule and the authority of the governor. ²¹They questioned Him, saying, "Teacher, we know that You speak and teach correctly, and You are not partial to any, but teach the way of God in truth. ²²"Is it lawful for us to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" ²³But He detected their trickery and said to them, ²⁴"Show Me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?" They said, "Caesar's." ²⁵And He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." ²⁶And they were unable to catch Him in a saying in the presence of the people; and being amazed at His answer, they became silent.

Luke 20:19-26 (NASB)

Nevertheless, it's also possible to lie without saying any words at all, by choosing not to give information to those who are entitled to it.

Sometimes a clear duty to speak does exist, for example because you are acting in some fiduciary capacity, i.e. a position of trust. If so, then you must speak. To fail to do so would then be dishonest, whereas it would not be so if there had not been a duty to speak. It could therefore be a lie to say nothing, where your silence could be reasonably taken to mean something, so as to convey a false impression.

Let's imagine that at 12:00 noon you send an email saying, truthfully, that £x would be a fair price for some shares, or for a house. Then at 3.00pm some event occurs that changes everything, such that the value has suddenly gone up or down. Must you send another email to say "*Ignore my previous email*"?

It may be that you must, depending on your role and the position of the other person in relation to you. You would have to ask yourself: "*Do I owe this person a duty of care? Would my silence now be misleading? Is the other person professionally represented or not?*" It may turn on questions such as those, and many others.

What about "nothing but the truth"?

It is hard to imagine any circumstances, other than in warfare, where it would be appropriate to add facts that are not true. We can sometimes withhold true facts, but we may not add false ones. So, if we need to fob a person off or get them to stop asking questions, without indirectly betraying that some secret is being withheld, you may need to think of creative ways of changing the subject, as Jesus often did. But you still cannot lie in doing so, unless, as stated, there is a war on and you are being questioned by the enemy.

What about exaggeration?

Exaggeration is very common, but it is still lying. and it is a trait which can easily become a habit. It can be like the thin end of a wedge. Exaggeration is often seen as a more acceptable form of lying. It isn't. It's actually dangerous, because if it isn't eliminated, it can undermine your conscience and, gradually, lead you into telling much more explicit lies. I knew a church leader some years ago whom I'm calling Rick. I have referred to him earlier. He was particularly prone to exaggeration. He actually became well known for it.

People used to excuse Rick and speak of it as "*just his way*" and that he was "*evangelastic*". But it's actually very wrong. Exaggeration can easily escalate to the point where you aren't just being a little

rough and ready with figures, but increasingly wide of the mark. Therefore, make a decision never to exaggerate. It is wrong in itself, but it is also wrong because of what it leads to.

It is far better to make a firm decision that you will always just say exactly what you mean and no more. Do not allow yourself to embroider a story. Then, if you find that exaggeration is still a habit, make a further promise to yourself that whenever it happens you will always immediately correct what you've said. Do it there and then, in the presence of whoever else is there.

That correction repairs the damage, but the discomfort and embarrassment you will feel at having to correct yourself in front of others will help to put yourself off doing it again. It would be like getting an electric shock every time you exaggerate. Your sinful flesh nature doesn't like being embarrassed. Therefore you will quickly learn not to risk doing it again, provided you know that you really will force yourself to correct any exaggeration publicly. It's a good way to cure yourself of this habit.

Are we allowed to be tactful and diplomatic?

What about saying things which are not true just in order to be kind or diplomatic? For example, what if someone asks you whether you like their dress? In a situation like that you are entitled to ask yourself "*What is this person really asking?*" It is likely that what they really mean is "*Please reassure me*".

If so, you can honestly do so, whatever your real view, because it wasn't really a request for information, but for reassurance. However, there could conceivably be a situation where you knew someone's dress was a problem or that it would cause them humiliation if you were to say nothing. If so, it may actually be your duty to speak the truth. If so, then your task would be to do so as gracefully, and kindly, as possible.

Honesty in all our relationships

Truth is also needed in our personal relationships, not just where we are dealing with money or property. People can be distressingly false with each other. It is possible to be false without telling direct lies about facts and figures, or without even using any words at all, simply by misrepresenting your true feelings.

For example it is commonplace for people to pretend to be someone's friend to their face, but to be very disloyal behind their backs. It is a form of falseness which may involve words, but which doesn't have to. It involves being dishonest about your real feelings, intentions or affiliation.

That sort of falseness is distasteful to have to witness and painful to experience. Yet it's happening millions of times every day in Great Britain alone. It sickens me, and I feel sure it sickens God. Resolve to yourself that you will never act in that way. Never allow yourself to have two faces. Commit yourself to be true and real in every relationship you have. Never pretend to be, or to feel, anything which isn't real.

Honesty in business or at work

God also hates to see trickery and falseness in our business dealings:

*A false balance is an abomination to the LORD,
but a just weight is His delight.*

Proverbs 11: 1(NASB)

God detests cheating and every kind of scheme to swindle other people, whether they are our customers, colleagues or competitors. God loves it when our weights and measures are genuine and we don't 'short-change' people. Many times I have been in a shop or market stall and the assistant has handed me back my change, but it is 50 pence or a pound too little.

When I raise the matter it is quite apparent from their reaction, and from the look on their face, that they were fully aware, and that the 'error' was intentional. They were just waiting to see whether I would notice. Sometimes they look brazen, or even resentful, about it. They don't even mind that you know what they were up to. Amazing though it sounds, God finds time to concern Himself with every such incident. He notices, and it all matters to Him very deeply.

Sometimes in a workplace a person offers to tell a lie to "assist" you. He may even offer to do it expecting to be rewarded, or to be considered loyal, because of his willingness to lie for you. But I don't want staff who are willing to lie for me. I'm not even willing to lie for myself, so I'd hardly want them to do it on my behalf.

A person's willingness to lie for their boss may impress others, but not me. Besides being inherently wrong, a practical point to bear in mind is that if a man is willing to lie *for* you, he will be equally willing to lie *to* you later, whenever the need arises. Such a man cannot be trusted.

Many a time I have interviewed staff who have offered to pretend to be ill so that they can get time off from their current employer to come to a second interview. They somehow imagine that that will impress me. The moment they offer to do that I cancel the second interview.

If he is willing to lie to his current employer, then I know full well that he won't hesitate to lie to me later. And, if he's as open as that about it, he obviously doesn't even consider it to be wrong. That means his conscience is already badly seared. Therefore he will be dishonest across the board, not just in relation to lying to employers.

Honesty with money

With money, nothing less than 100%, meticulous accuracy and honesty is needed. Resolve not to take anything that is not yours, however small. Don't compromise, even at a microscopic level. If you do, you will inevitably find that the level of your dishonesty will start going up and up, until you are eventually embezzling large sums.

Every embezzler always begins by taking little bits of money, here and there, never large sums. If you harden your heart repeatedly with the little amounts, then your heart will, one day, let you down when it faces the temptation to take large sums. Therefore, win the honesty battle over the pennies, and there will never be any battles over major sums.

Honesty in our use of power or authority

Many people, at all levels, abuse their position of authority in order to use, control or manipulate other people. Some do it purely for the pleasure of asserting themselves, feeling a sense of importance and drawing attention to their position of power. They get pleasure simply out of having power over someone, even if they are only in a lowly role or responsibility. In fact, that is where it most often occurs. Those with only a small amount of authority are the ones most likely to behave proudly.

That abuse of authority is a form of dishonesty, because it is the misuse of a position for an illegitimate reason. Our employer did not put us into an intermediate managerial or supervisory role so that we could get a thrill out of lording it over someone else. He put us there to serve the legitimate purposes of the business, and for no other reason. So, misusing a position or role is not

much different from misusing a car or a piece of property for a purpose of which we know our employer would not approve.

Honesty in preaching and in teaching the Bible

Some might imagine that this point would not even need to be made. They assume that if a man is sufficiently mature and motivated to preach or teach the Bible then he would surely never lie, exaggerate, dodge issues or be misleading. If only that was true. At any rate, it has not been the case for a large number of the men whom I have heard preach. I have heard countless men treat the Word of God in an extraordinarily careless manner and say things which are plainly not correct.

In doing so, some have actually been fully aware that what they were saying was wrong, but they did not care. Others have been unaware of their errors, but only because they did not care enough about the truth, to take the trouble to find out. So, for a variety of reasons, they misrepresent God's Word and give people a false impression of Him.

I would never want to be in that position. Everything I say is what I sincerely believe to be the true meaning of God's Word, after much study. On many occasions, where I have felt unsure of the meaning I have either explicitly said so, or I have left it alone for the time being and spoken or written on some other topic instead.

That is the right approach. We must never take a cavalier or reckless attitude towards God's Word. When a man who stands up to teach, the responsibility placed upon him is very heavy, and so will be the judgment that comes upon him if he is not sincere and careful. Note what James tells us:

Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, for you know that we who teach shall be judged with greater strictness.

James 3:1 (RSV)

Nevertheless, I have heard a great many men make careless, or even reckless, statements while preaching, for which they have no biblical mandate or authority. They present their own opinions and preferences as if they were God's, and as if God's Word supported what they say, when it clearly doesn't. I would classify that as dishonesty, and of the most grievous kind. Indeed, can there be any more serious subject matter about which to lie or exaggerate, or even to risk making errors, than God's Word?

Perhaps the main reason why so many men behave like that when preaching is because they feel no fear while handling God's Word. But we should. It is such a heavy and serious matter that it should actually make us tremble, for fear of misrepresenting God and misleading people about Him or His will. No less a person than Isaiah tells us that God wants us to tremble at [His] Word:

***All these things my hand has made,
and so all these things are mine,
says the LORD.
But this is the man to whom I will look,
he that is humble and contrite in spirit,
and trembles at my word.***
Isaiah 66:2 (RSV)

Likewise, the Psalmist tells us that he trembles at both the prospect of God's judgment and the responsibility of dealing with His Word:

***My flesh trembles for fear of thee,
and I am afraid of thy judgments.***

Psalm 119:120 (RSV)

*Rulers persecute me without cause,
but my heart trembles at your word.*

Psalm 119:161 (NIV)

An example of a preacher who was not honest in handling God's Word

In spite of all that, the mishandling of God's Word, and even outright dishonesty while preaching and teaching, are far more common than most of us would ever imagine. I can think of a particular leader, some years ago, who gave a series of talks on the subject of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. He was a 'cessationist'. That is he believed that the gifts of the Holy Spirit ceased in the first century AD and are no longer in operation.

The Bible never says any of that. Nor does it even hint at it, to the slightest extent. In short, there is no biblical basis for saying it. It is a teaching which is based solely on what men have said, i.e. church tradition. So, this leader made a series of assertions, for which he had absolutely no biblical mandate. He could not point to even one verse or passage which expressly supported his position. That is because there aren't any.

Nevertheless, that fact did not prevent him from setting out many quite irrelevant passages and speaking of them as if they supported what he was saying. I could see that those verses did not prove his point, or even support it. Many of them did not even relate to this issue at all. They had other meanings and were therefore being misused.

He wanted people to think that those passages supported his theological stance, but they manifestly didn't. I can see two main possibilities. At worst, he was being intentionally misleading. At 'best' he was being sloppy and careless with God's Word and was bandying it about without a proper sense of reverence for what he was handling.

I actually questioned him twice during the talk, because the meeting was a kind of seminar, where that was possible. However, he dodged both my questions, either because he could not, or would not, answer them. Yet, at the same time, he did not withdraw or modify any of his claims.

I was told later by another person that someone else had also questioned him in an earlier seminar and that he had, likewise, given them no straight answers. He had sought instead just to fob off the questioner and to avoid answering them, rather than be put under pressure, or have his errors, or his ignorance, exposed. What then should that leader have done?

Firstly, he ought not to have claimed that God's Word supported his stance when it doesn't. That is he should not have twisted the meaning of verses that he was quoting from, to make them appear to be saying that the gifts of the Holy Spirit were only intended for a minority of people and, at any rate, only for the first century.

Secondly, on being questioned, he should have given honest, clear, straight-forward answers, even if that caused an upset or made himself look foolish or under-prepared. For example, he should have said: "*I don't really have any answers to that question, because. I don't fully understand this subject.*"

Or he could have said: *I haven't really studied the Bible for myself on this point. I have merely read what some other men have said and am stating their conclusions, without really knowing how, or why, they arrived at them. Indeed, I actually just downloaded most of this sermon from the internet.*"

He could even have said: “*What I am saying is the traditional stance of my denomination. I don’t really know why, or how, to justify any of it from the Bible. It’s just what I have always heard other men say and therefore I’m passing it on.*” Needless to say, he didn’t make any of those candid statements. Neither have I ever heard any other preacher say anything similarly honest.

However, they should say such things, or something equally explicit, if it describes their actual position, which it frequently does. Men don’t want to look foolish or to be diminished in the eyes of others. But isn’t it far better to be thought to lack competence but to be honest, than to be thought competent but to lack honesty? I would say so.

More to the point, it doesn’t matter, even if the audience does think you lack knowledge. What matters, above all, is that you are honest in your handling of God’s Word. Your fear of God needs to outweigh, and therefore displace, any fear that you may feel about your audience or concern for your reputation.

Moreover, if any leader is willing to be completely open and honest, and to handle God’s Word with the utmost care and reverence, then God would respond by increasing their knowledge anyway. It is precisely to such people, who “*tremble at [His] Word*”, that God looks, and to whom He will give revelation and insights.

When lies are used as weapons or to gain a competitive advantage

Although God is calling us to live lives of absolute truthfulness, the reality is that most of the people around us, and maybe even we ourselves, use lies as weapons. They are used routinely:

- a) to damage and undermine others who may be rivals, competitors or personal enemies.
- b) to gain assets, positions or any kind of competitive advantage for oneself.
- c) to avoid detection or criticism
- d) to cause strife, division and mistrust between other people. People often create discord deliberately, so that a particular person can be kept isolated and prevented from working together with others. Such cooperation might be a threat to the wrongdoer. In other words, they tell lies about the people they work with in order to “divide and rule”.

See Book Six, which is about identifying and dealing with wicked people, for further detail on these issues and the tactics which devious people use. Deception is an important part of the ‘armoury’ of the average unbeliever, whether he is only a fool or a fully-fledged wicked person. The people around us use lies as weapons and devices and they do so routinely, on a daily basis.

A high percentage of what we are told by our colleagues, bosses, staff, acquaintances, and even friends, is untrue, whether in whole or in part. That is not merely a possibility, but a virtual certainty. The real question is not *whether* one is being lied to, but *by whom*, and *on what issues*. Frequently it comes in the most unexpected ways and from the people one least suspects. Accordingly, we need to be on high alert for such lies. That said, our first duty is to root out deception from our own lives and to ‘unilaterally disarm’.

That means that we cease to use lies as a weapon ourselves. However, while doing so, we must also recognise that most other people will be continuing to tell lies to us, whether small or large, and whether rarely or frequently. Their lies will inevitably keep coming and we need to become equipped to identify those lies and to protect ourselves from their effect.

Winning without lying

God wants us to be overcomers. He wants us to succeed in life, to win our battles, and to overcome the problems that we come up against. So it's true that God wants His people to be winners. However, for success to be real it has to be achieved without resorting to deception, deviousness or manipulation, and also without using other people.

In other words, for a Christian, success is only real if we achieve it in a righteous *manner*, by operating in line with God's standards and principles. If we don't, then any supposed 'success' that we might achieve would count for nothing. God would not view it as success, but as failure. It would therefore be 'burned up' and counted as 'dross' at the Judgment Seat of Christ. No reward would be given to us for it.

On the contrary, we would be rebuked, at the very least, and probably punished as well. In other words, your achievements would only be viewed as a success in your own eyes, and possibly in the eyes of the people around you, but not to God. However, succeeding in God's eyes, and by His criteria, is the only form of success worth having, and the only type that will last.

The things we achieve for God, in accordance with His principles, and in response to His promptings, will last forever. We will be rewarded for them and those rewards, whatever form they take, will last for eternity. We will be allowed to keep them. However, anything achieved by deception, or by cheating, will not last. They will probably disappear or be taken from us, even in this life, but even more so in eternity:

***Bread obtained by falsehood is sweet to a man,
but afterward his mouth will be filled with gravel.
Proverbs 20:17 (NASB)***

The need to be truthful is one of God's main ways of guiding you - it makes it easier to decide what to do, because it automatically rules out every dishonest option, thus narrowing the choice.

We all struggle at times to know God's will and to get clear guidance from Him as to what steps we should take in complicated or difficult situations. However, one of the clearest forms of guidance God has given us this general principle of truthfulness, in whatever situation we face. The fact that we know that we are always meant to be truthful is a kind of permanent guidance.

This applies in all types of problems or circumstances. So when you face a thorny problem, and have to choose between two or more courses of action, you may well find that some of your options can be ruled out automatically. That is because they would involve an element of dishonesty, compromise, or something squalid or underhand.

Your conscience therefore tells you that one or more of the options would be wrong, or at least questionable. If so, then there is your ready-made guidance. You already know which way to go, or at least which way *not* to go, even without any specific guidance from God.

It is a kind of "standing order" as the Police say. The Chief Constable issues certain orders which always apply. He expects every officer to be aware of them, without needing to be told on each and every occasion. Accordingly, as Christians, one of our main 'standing orders' is that we should always act with integrity:

***The integrity of the upright will guide them,
But the crookedness of the treacherous will destroy them.
Proverbs 11:3 (NASB)***

Whenever you need guidance let integrity, and the need to maintain your honour and your reputation for honesty, be your guide. So, if a man is selling some goods so cheaply that you suspect they may be stolen, you don't even need to ask God for specific guidance as to whether to buy them from him on this occasion. You already know the answer will be no. The principle of integrity provides you with ready-made guidance:

***Righteousness guards the one whose way is blameless,
but wickedness subverts the sinner.***

Proverbs 13:6 (NASB)

Likewise, if we have integrity we will be secure. We may not necessarily end up as the biggest, or the best, or the richest, but at least we cannot be accused of any wrongdoing. That is what counts most to God. Thus our reputation, especially before God, will be secure, whereas other men's reputations may crumble, as they will be found out:

***He who walks in integrity walks securely,
but he who perverts his ways will be found out.***

Proverbs 10:9 (NASB)

As we have seen, a 'blameless' man is not sinless. It just means that he is sincere, earnest and godly and has a genuine desire to do God's will. His righteous life will, in itself, be a protection and will keep him from scandals and disasters:

O LORD, who shall sojourn in your tent?

Who shall dwell on your holy hill?

***² He who walks blamelessly and does what is right
and speaks truth in his heart;***

who does not slander with his tongue

and does no evil to his neighbour,

nor takes up a reproach against his friend;

⁴ in whose eyes a vile person is despised,

but who honours those who fear the LORD;

who swears to his own hurt and does not change;

⁵ who does not put out his money at interest

and does not take a bribe against the innocent.

He who does these things shall never be moved.

Psalm 15:1-5 (ESV)

Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?

And who shall stand in his holy place?

⁴ He who has clean hands and a pure heart,

who does not lift up his soul to what is false,

and does not swear deceitfully.

⁵ He will receive blessing from the LORD,

and vindication from the God of his salvation.

Psalm 24:3-5 (RSV)

Many of the people who are ruined in financial collapses fail because they made dishonest decisions, or took excessive risks, or over-extended themselves. They did so in ways which their consciences could easily have told them were wrong at the time. But they pressed on regardless, in pursuit of success, and put aside any feelings of uneasiness that they may have had. That is a sure way to end up in ruin.

The hardest form of truth - being honest with yourself

It is very rare to find people who are willing to be brutally honest with themselves. Most people cannot even see the issue here. The point is that the person to whom we lie the most is ourselves. Our own hearts lie to us and we justify ourselves automatically:

*"The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?
Jeremiah 17:9 (NASB)*

*All the ways of a man are clean in his own sight,
But the LORD weighs the motives.
Proverbs 16:2 (NIV)*

We are highly skilled at telling lies to ourselves and believing them, when even the most naive person, if he was standing nearby, would recognise it as a lie. We operate a hypocritical double standard. We judge ourselves, and our own motives, and actions extremely generously, without any inner debate or questioning of ourselves. Therefore, we give ourselves the benefit of the doubt, and are quick to justify our actions and excuse our failures.

We frequently block out, and therefore do not hear, any thought which contradicts, or even questions, our own actions or attitudes. It is exceptionally rare for a person who has been in a conflict or argument to sit down and say privately to themselves: *"Now let's examine my own actions and attitudes here. Am I out of order myself? How must my actions and words appear to others?"*

Those are obvious questions and we ought to ask them of ourselves daily. But most of us very rarely do so, if ever. If we did ask such questions we would then come to see ourselves as others see us. That would be a major revelation. It would also transform the way we live.

These points are completely obvious. We can see them clearly in the lives of the people around us. We just struggle to see them in ourselves. Even if we can see it in principle, and recognise the concept in abstract terms, we do not carry it over and continue to see this when we are actually in the heat of a conflict situation. Even those who can see that this point applies to them find it very hard to actually put it into practice while in an argument or crisis.

At such times, even if we know these things are true, we will tend to 'revert to type' and behave in a self-deluding way. This is an area where enormous personal growth is available to us if we can learn to cross examine ourselves. That is especially true if we can learn to do this even in the middle of a tense situation, where we are in an argument with another person, or even being mistreated by them.

This blindness about our own faults also arises within family life, and between husband and wife. It happens in the workplace too. In each of these contexts, we are required to live at close quarters with other people. Their ways and attitudes may, therefore, get on our nerves. But, at the same time, we are usually blind to our own faults and selfish ways, because what we do seems so normal and so obviously right.

That is why we need to begin to ask ourselves searching questions about how we must seem to other people and whether there is anything unfair, selfish or annoying in what we say or do. But to learn to ask ourselves obvious questions like that is like learning to speak in a foreign language. It is alien to us because it runs entirely against the grain of our sinful nature.

To begin to operate that way will require us to do what is contrary to our nature and the opposite of the habits we have learned. Likewise, at work, if your boss criticizes or challenges you then, instead of assuming that such a criticism is obviously unfounded, unfair, ridiculous etc, stop and ask yourself: *"How do my actions appear to other people? What can be done to improve my style, manner, technique, method etc?"*

Also, it's essential to ask God to help you to see what others can see in you and in your behavior. If not you are bound to fail because being honest and objective about yourself is extremely hard to do, even with God's help, let alone without it. In such situations pray something like this:

"Lord, please help me not to react hastily or selfishly, or to do what my flesh nature wants. Help me to calm down and humble myself. Help me to see this situation, and my part in it, as you see it and as others see it. Help me to be objective, fair, honest, unbiased and rational, even when evaluating my own actions. Please also open my eyes to see anything bad about myself that I'm currently blind to."

That is an unusual prayer. God doesn't get many prayers as sincere as that, so it will touch His heart. It is the sort of prayer that He delights to answer. God will pour out self-knowledge to a person who asks for it genuinely, and is not just seeking justification and vindication, but to truly see themselves as they really are. That's the key. Your prayer must be sincere.

Have you ever been in a situation where a friend or colleague asks you what you think of the rights and wrongs of a conflict they are engaged in? Have you ever tried to answer them, only to discover that they were not seeking an honest answer, but just your support and affirmation? Your prayer must not be like that.

Don't just ask God so that He can agree with you and take your side. Ask God with a real willingness to be corrected, and even to be rebuked. The more honest and open you are, the more gracious and polite He can afford to be. However, if you don't approach it that way then you leave God with only two options:

- a) to leave you in ignorance and self-delusion or
- b) to get some other person to speak to you. However, they are not going to be anywhere near as gracious as God would be in the way they tell you about your faults.

Though you may not realise it at the time, if you are in a position where you are not listening to God, then it is much better for you if He chooses option (b) above. Therefore He will make sure to send people into your life who will tackle you and tell you the truth about yourself. It was a revelation to me when I began to realise that such people, though they didn't know it, were all working for God. They were giving me some very blunt messages that I needed to hear.

As I look back at over 34 years as a Christian, I can see many such people whom God clearly sent my way to point out my faults and failings. God often uses bosses for this. They are one of His favourite types of 'sub-contractor' or 'agent' that He engages to do such tasks for Him. God uses our bosses to correct us because they have the right, and the need, to tackle us. It is also because we are obliged to listen to them and cannot ignore them.

God will also use older Christians, and parents, even non-Christian parents. We need to become willing and even eager to listen to all such people. In fact we need to go to them and seek out their honest views and to reassure them that we really do *want* them to be frank. You need to emphasize that. If not, people will tend to go easy on you, for fear of causing offence.

So, go looking for constructive feedback and criticism. Ask for it. Then it makes it so much easier for God's 'messengers' to speak the truth to you. As well as that, go straight to God and ask Him to speak to you directly, not just through other people. If you ask for that He will correct you in all sorts of ways that are far easier to take than being corrected or rebuked by others. God will speak to you through:

- a) the Bible - as you read it certain passages or words will 'leap out at you'. Some character in the Bible will be acting in a certain way and the Holy Spirit will whisper the thought into your head "*He's making the same mistake you make*" or "*His attitude is wrong, but so is yours*".

- b) other people saying things in passing - even where they aren't speaking directly to you. God will cause certain words or phrases to resonate with you. It could be something in a book or on the TV or radio. God will make it go 'fluorescent' or somehow make it resonate in your mind as being applicable to you.
- c) speaking directly into your mind or your spirit - this is similar to what has been said above. You may be just getting on with your work when God will plant a thought in your mind. It will contain some truth about you, your motives, or your shortcomings.

Whenever God chooses to speak to you, and whatever method He uses, the crucial thing is to be open to it. Don't brush Him aside or forget what He says. Be teachable and willing to listen. He will then speak to you more clearly and more often. However, the moment you start to become willing to listen to God's voice the demons who hang around with you will seek to join in.

They too will seek to plant thoughts in your mind. The only difference is that the thoughts that they put into your head are lies. So, you'll need to learn to discern the difference between God's authentic voice and the false whisperings of demons.

That requires you to be alert to weigh up both the *tone* and *content* of whatever thought comes in to your mind. Is it constructive, wholesome, consistent with Scripture, and in line with all of God's ways and principles? If so, it will probably be God's voice. However, if it is destructive, condemning, contrary to Scripture or clashes with one or more biblical principles, then it is demonic.

Once you start to analyse your own thoughts in this way it will become progressively easier to tell the difference. It's largely common sense. For example, if someone claiming to be from your bank rang up asking you to reveal your personal PIN number, you'd quickly realise something was wrong. At least you should realise it. Some naïve people don't, and just hand over the information.

Learning the real truth about yourself is bound to be a long and uncomfortable process of discovery. Coming to terms with what sort of person you really are, "warts and all", is a vital first stage to the project of changing. That's what God is really after. It requires this rare quality of being honest with yourself, no matter where that takes you, or what it costs. Make it your aim to cooperate with God as He seeks to build that level of honesty in you.

If you'll compromise on truth what else will you compromise on?

You may think I'm over-emphasising the importance of truth and focusing on it too strongly. I don't think so. It is at the centre and it holds everything together. That's why apostle Paul, in Ephesians chapter 6, refers to the "*belt of truth*". It holds all the rest of our 'armour' in place:

¹⁰Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. ¹¹Put on the full armour of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. ¹²For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. ¹³Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

¹⁴Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, ¹⁵and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. ¹⁶In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. ¹⁷Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the Lord's people.

Ephesians 6:10-18 (NIV)

A soldier's belt holds together all the rest of the kit that he wears and also provides a place to which he can attach ammunition and other equipment that he carries. It keeps it all in place. Likewise, truth, if we really love it and value it, will hold all the other parts of our lives together and keep us on the right path. If instead we are casual about truth, and willing to compromise on it, then every other part of our lives will become distorted and fall apart.