

CHAPTER 9

WHAT IS 'THE LOVE OF THE TRUTH' AND WHY DOES TRUTH MATTER SO MUCH TO GOD?

"----For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice"

John 18:37(b) (RSV)

⁴⁷Jesus saw Nathanael coming to Him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit!"

John 1:47 (NASB)

Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,....
Psalm 51:6(a) (ESV)

*²²Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD,
but those who deal faithfully are His delight.*
Proverbs 12:22 (NASB)

*⁷No man who practices deceit shall dwell in my house;
no man who utters lies shall continue in my presence*
Psalm 101:7 (RSV)

in hope of eternal life which God, who never lies, promised ages ago
Titus 1:2 (RSV)

For all who do such things, all who act dishonestly, are an abomination to the LORD your God.
Deuteronomy 25:16 (RSV)

Why does truthfulness matter?

Very few people are completely truthful, especially when it is costly. In fact, few people ever think about truthfulness as an issue at all. I cannot remember ever hearing it preached on in any church. Perhaps some preachers feel uncomfortable speaking about something that they know they do not always practice themselves? At any rate, it is a subject that is rarely ever taught about, but which ought to be. God feels very strongly about us being totally truthful at all times, even down to the smallest details. He condemns deceit and falsehood very firmly:

*⁷He who practices deceit shall not dwell within my house;
He who speaks falsehood shall not maintain his position before me.*
Psalm 101:7 (NASB)

*¹⁴Justice is turned back,
and righteousness stands afar off;
for truth has fallen in the public squares,
and uprightness cannot enter.*

*¹⁵Truth is lacking,
and he who departs from evil makes himself a prey.
The LORD saw it, and it displeased him
that there was no justice.*
Isaiah 59:14-15 (RSV)

Moreover, God is continually watching and taking note of everything we say and do. He is aware of all our ways, even those we keep secret. Every lie we ever tell is immediately known about by God:

*²¹For the ways of a man
are before the eyes of the LORD,
and He watches all his paths
Proverbs 5:21 (NASB)*

God detests crookedness, but takes delight in those who are 'blameless'. Remember, that does not mean sinless. It means being sincere, faithful, honest and true.

*²⁰The perverse in heart are an abomination to the LORD,
but the blameless in their walk are His delight.
Proverbs 11:20 (NASB)*

Moreover, there will be blessings and rewards for those who are truthful and who live with integrity:

For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show his might in behalf of those whose heart is blameless toward him.....

2 Chronicles 16:9 (a) (RSV)

*³Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?
And who shall stand in his holy place?
⁴He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not lift up his soul to what is false
and does not swear deceitfully.
⁵He will receive blessing from the LORD
and righteousness from the God of his salvation.
Psalm 24:3-5 (ESV)*

God wants that truthfulness to go very deep inside us. He doesn't merely want us to be superficially honest on the outside, or by appearance, but to be truthful at our very core, i.e. all the way through to the innermost part of us:

*Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being,
and you teach me wisdom in the secret heart.
Psalm 51:6 (ESV)*

Our natural inclination is to be dishonest. That is what our sinful flesh nature will instinctively choose to do.

*The heart is deceitful above all things,
and desperately corrupt;
who can understand it?
Jeremiah 17:9 (RSV)*

When Jesus said that He is '*the truth*' what did He mean?

One day, when He was speaking to His disciples, Jesus made an unusual claim about Himself. He said He is....."*the way, the truth and the life*"..... For the moment, we need to concern ourselves with the second assertion, i.e. that Jesus is *the truth*. He does not merely say that He *has* the truth, or that He *speaks* the truth. He claims to *be* the truth:

⁶Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.

John 14:6 (NASB)

What does Jesus mean? It would seem that He is saying that, ultimately, He Himself is the source of all truth, and the standard by which all things are to be judged as either true or false. There is nobody else, besides Jesus, who so embodies truth as to be entitled to identify Himself as being *the* truth.

It also means that where we do not know what the truth is in some area of life, or don't know what is right or wrong in a complex situation, the answer is to be found in Jesus. We can ask Him, but we can also look at Him and ask ourselves what Jesus would do in that situation. When Jesus was on trial Pontius Pilate asked Him a very deep question to which Jesus gave no answer. Pilate asked Him "What is truth?"

³⁷ Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice."³⁸ Pilate said to him, "What is truth?" After he had said this, he went out to the Jews again, and told them, "I find no crime in him.

John 18:37-38 (RSV)

In fact, the answer was standing right in front of Pilate. Jesus Himself is truth. Everything about Him is whole, complete, consistent, and righteous. He is full of integrity and soundness. That is true of Jesus and also of His Word, the Bible. Given that truth is so important to God, and is the very nature of Jesus, we need to get ourselves into line with Him. Truth and truthfulness must become profoundly important to us as well, even if it makes us the odd one out, and even if it costs us.

If we ever think about truth at all, most of us are satisfied with being generally honest most of the time. We tend to view that as setting the bar high enough. But it isn't. When it comes to honesty we need to put the bar to the very highest setting. We must not settle for anything less than 100% truthfulness 100% of the time.

Anything less than that is compromise and, therefore, is not 'truth'. You can't have 99% truth. If you do, it is just a lie, the same as 50% truth is a lie. Likewise, if you only tell the truth 99% of the time, then that 1% still makes you a liar. So, those of us who feel satisfied and complacent about the issue of truth need to wake up and reassess this whole subject.

God wants us to be incorruptible and totally honest and reliable as witnesses and judges.

We saw in the previous chapter how the prophet Samuel was a completely honest Judge. Nobody in Israel could point to even one corrupt thing that he had ever done. What a testimony! That should be our standard. Most of us will never be judges, but we will probably be witnesses, at some point, whether formally or informally. When we are, we must be completely honest and incorruptible, not just 99% so:

¹⁹You shall not pervert justice; you shall not show partiality; and you shall not take a bribe, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of the righteous. ²⁰Justice, and only justice, you shall follow, that you may live and inherit the land which the LORD your God gives you.

Deuteronomy 16:19-20 (RSV)

To take a bribe does not only mean to do so literally, i.e. to receive money corruptly as a judge or police officer. Any of us can also face the temptation to take a metaphorical bribe by agreeing to help someone who needs us to tell a 'small lie' for them, or to fiddle something for them, in return for some past or future favour. That is just as much a bribe as if money had changed hands. It has caused us to act corruptly.

The problems caused by deception and lies

I have been a police officer, and then I was a solicitor and businessman for many years after that. If I had to say in one word what is the greatest single cause of difficulty within the workplace, I would say it is dishonesty. I mean that in its broadest sense, not just in what we *say*, but in what we *do* and what we *are*. In Great Britain it has now become normal to be dishonest. Things which would have been considered shocking even 20 years ago, let alone 100 years ago, are now commonplace.

The MPs expenses scandal in the House of Commons some time ago, and which is still ongoing, is a prime example. An alarming number of our politicians (not all) were milking the system for all they could get, regardless of right and wrong. The concept of truth probably never entered into the minds of many of those MPs.

They were acting as if there was no God and no day of judgment. They were doing things which would not have been done by the MPs of the 1980s, and certainly not by the politicians of the 1930s or the 1880s. There has been a collapse of integrity amongst the majority of our nation. Genuine honesty is now so rare that the dishonesty of the wider population is accurately reflected in the MPs who represent us.

They are like a mirror, reflecting back at us what we are like ourselves. The public felt a lot of anger when the expenses scandal broke in 2010. However, the reality is that the majority of the British people would have stolen exactly the same, or even more, than their MPs did, if they had been in their position.

The effect of this exponential increase in dishonesty in the Western nations is that there is now no basis for trust. In the past many business deals were done on the basis of a handshake. There was no serious expectation of either party failing to keep their promises. Now that would be wholly unrealistic. Any business which enters contracts anticipates that other people may well break those agreements.

Therefore provisions are made in many contracts to specify in advance what has to be paid if the contract is broken. That said, many people would have no intention of abiding by that provision even when they sign up to it. They would only pay those damages if they could be tracked down and forced to do so. They would not feel honour-bound to pay, in the absence of coercion.

I can say that with some authority because I spent many years in commercial litigation and have seen at firsthand how dishonestly people behave. Even the very word 'honour' now seems outdated and quaint in our culture. It is rarely ever used. It is a concept which was widely understood 100 years ago, or even 50 years ago. It was taken seriously then, not only by businessmen, but by husbands and wives, neighbours, politicians, soldiers, doctors, teachers, lawyers, journalists and so on. That is not the case anymore, at least not for the vast majority of us.

I have an unusual vantage point from which to view what is going on in the world. I have not only got my own experiences to go by, but also those of my staff and of the clients that we acted for. I have observed that people at all levels now seem able to lie effortlessly and without any embarrassment, guilt or anxiety. I have had school teachers lie to me and also lawyers, policemen, medical staff and business people. I have had my own staff, even solicitors, look me straight in the eye and lie to my face. Then, when exposed or challenged, they feel no shame, only resentment at being caught out and thwarted.

When I was a policeman in the 1980s I was shown how to interview witnesses and suspects. I was taught to look at their faces closely as I questioned them and to watch their eyes in particular. When a person told a lie they would feel uncomfortable about it. They would then look away from me, even if only for a split second, at the exact point when the lie was being told. That way you could usually tell quite accurately where the lies were in the story.

That technique still works up to a point, but it is less effective today. It relies on the person having at least some residue of a functioning conscience to make them feel awkward when they lie. But as people's consciences have got weaker, or been entirely switched off, that discomfort factor has been diminishing. Therefore that technique works less effectively today.

I also remember a Solicitor colleague in a previous law firm who said to me one day, quite openly, that if ever her "own neck was on the line" she would definitely lie to save herself. I looked surprised and said "Surely not!" She replied "Of course I would, if my neck was on the line." It was said as if it was obviously the only practical approach. She thought I was odd for being surprised. But what she said isn't right. Telling lies is wrong and will always cause harm, especially to ourselves.

Whenever we lie to try to save our own skin we anger God, which will bring Him into opposition to us. In the short term we might get ourselves out of some tight corner by lying, but if we do that, we are sure to arouse God's opposition. We may even bring His curse upon ourselves, such that we end up with far bigger problems later:

³²*For the devious are an abomination to the LORD;
but He is intimate with the upright.*

³³*The curse of the LORD is on the house of the wicked,
but He blesses the dwelling of the righteous.*

Proverbs 3:32-33 (NASB)

In the book of Zechariah we are actually told of a specific curse that God Himself deliberately sends out and which attaches to every person who steals or lies. This curse then causes that person to be cut off and to be punished and suffer loss:

³ *Then he said to me, "This is the curse that goes out over the face of the whole land; for everyone who steals shall be cut off henceforth according to it, and everyone who swears falsely shall be cut off henceforth according to it. ⁴ I will send it forth, says the Lord of hosts, and it shall enter the house of the thief, and the house of him who swears falsely by my name; and it shall abide in his house and consume it, both timber and stones."*

Zechariah 5:3-4 (RSV)

The choice between having God's help, or provoking His opposition, is no small thing. How can it make sense to tell a lie for some short term gain or advantage but put ourselves on an inevitable collision course with God Himself? It would be much better to lose out financially, or miss out on a promotion, than to make God into your opponent.

Remember also that any lie you tell today will be raised with you by Jesus at the Judgment Seat. Moreover, there is good reason to think that it will be exposed *publicly*. (See Book Four in this series, concerning The Judgment Seat of Christ)

Our hearts and consciences become hard and leathery once we start to tell lies, such that it gets easier and easier, until it becomes habitual

Once a person begins to lie, they will do it again in bigger ways, and with increasing frequency. Then lying gets easier, in the following ways:

- a) Our conscience is slowly turned down in volume, until it is eventually switched off completely. This is how one gets a hard heart, or a seared conscience. It no longer receives any 'signal' from God about what is right or wrong. When that point comes we are in great danger because our conscience, which is a God-given safety device, has been switched off.
- b) We get more imaginative in the lies we tell. They become more elaborate and extensive.

- c) We feel more comfortable and less convicted about our sinfulness. Our 'carbon monoxide detectors' are switched off. In the end we become so deeply comatose that we become oblivious to our own dishonesty, and no longer troubled by it.
- d) This hard-heartedness can also affect those who purport to be Christians. It is easy to convince oneself that all is well, no matter how great our sins may be. I am reminded of a man in a church in Northern Ireland who was a dentist. He had murdered his first wife 20 years earlier and got away with it. He subsequently remarried another woman. She was a Christian and knew nothing of his crime. For 20 years he attended church, while continuing to hide his crime. He had no repentance at all and no concept of God's impending judgment for what he had done. That is shocking, but how many of us who purport to be Christians have similarly hard and unrepentant hearts, even if our sins are less spectacular?

The more a person lies, the more they lose their sense of shame and become brass-faced about it

For an honest person, one of the most shameful and humiliating things imaginable would be to be caught out in telling a lie. Even the thought of doing that and being found out and exposed makes me squirm. But that is not how habitual liars see it. It would therefore be highly naive of you to imagine that they would feel any shame at being caught lying. They don't. All they feel is anger at being thwarted or confronted. They feel no shame at what they have done, or even at being caught.

That has been my consistent experience with every liar I have ever come across, in any context, whether they were strangers, work colleagues, church members, or even church leaders. Far from feeling ashamed, a liar feels aggrieved when he is exposed. He acts as if some wrong has been done to him, not by him. I was once involved on the sidelines of a dispute between two couples, watching what was happening and hearing what each side said. The first couple, who were Christians, were consistently telling the truth.

However, the second couple, who were non-Christians, were lying over and over again. At one point the second couple told a clear lie in a letter they wrote. The first couple then pointed out the lie to them and even referred to a specific entry by them on Facebook which proved that they were lying. However, on being caught out, the second couple just replied brazenly: "*So you've been snooping then*". The point was that they:

- a) weren't ashamed, or even embarrassed, at being shown to be lying
- b) spoke as if they had done nothing wrong (in lying)
- c) made no apology and felt no remorse.
- d) even portrayed themselves as having been wronged. They had the nerve to speak as if it was the first couple who were behaving badly, i.e. by checking up on things on Facebook, not they themselves who were acting wrongly by lying.

I can think of another occasion some years ago when I was in a private meeting with 'Rick', the leader of a church that I used to be in. I was the Chairman of the Trustees of that church and was confronting the leader about his improper behaviour, in particular his dishonesty. We were meeting in the presence of two witnesses from the Trustees of the same church, i.e. mature Christians. They had agreed to hear each of us and to try to mediate.

Rick lied repeatedly and brazenly throughout the meeting. I was astonished at hearing him lie, right in front of me. He did it with such a calm face, while looking the two witnesses straight in the eyes. After the meeting was over, the witnesses went home, with no solution having been found. Rick then turned to me and said in a relaxed tone: "*Can't you just let me off the hook?*"

By that he meant that he wanted me to stop holding him accountable and to stop pointing out where he was lying. I said "*Why did you lie to them?*" because I was amazed that he had felt able to do it. I was very naive then and had never previously experienced such blatant dishonesty from a church leader. It would not amaze me today. However, there was not even a flicker of shame or remorse on his face. He just replied: "*Well, I've got to defend myself*".

He spoke as if he had every right to do whatever was needed to cover his tracks, including lying his way out of trouble. It was an education for me as to how dishonest people can be, even in churches. Above all, it showed how shameless they can be about it. You have to grasp that last point or you will be misled by people's expressions, i.e. the fact that their faces show no trace of embarrassment.

You must not allow yourself to be thrown off course by that. So, don't allow the absence of shame in a person's face or voice to deceive you into thinking that they must therefore be telling the truth. That doesn't follow at all. It is actually quite normal for an habitual liar to be entirely unashamed when caught lying. Jeremiah spoke of this phenomenon:

***O LORD, do not your eyes look for truth?
You have struck them down,
but they felt no anguish;
you have consumed them,
but they refused to take correction.
They have made their faces harder than rock;
they have refused to repent.***

Jeremiah 5:3 (ESV)

***Were they ashamed when they committed abomination?
No, they were not at all ashamed;
they did not know how to blush.
Therefore they shall fall among those who fall;
at the time that I punish them, they shall be overthrown,"
says the LORD.***

Jeremiah 6:15 (ESV)

Each of the people that I have referred to above, the non-Christian couple and Rick, the church leader, had the same feature. They were all willing to tell whatever lies they needed to tell in order to suit their own purposes and to protect themselves. Their approach was entirely amoral. Right and wrong did not even come into it, and certainly didn't matter to any of them. That is why they could be so bold and defiant.

The other key feature is that none of them had any sense of impending judgment. That might be understandable in the case of the non-Christian couple. But it was equally the case with Rick, the church leader. He had no fear of God whatsoever. The idea of facing God in judgment one day, whether at the Judgment Seat of Christ (for believers) or at the Great White Throne (for unbelievers) did not matter to him at all. It made me shudder to think of what judgment lay ahead for him.

I actually felt the fear of God on his behalf, and still do, whereas he was completely immune to it. He had lied so often that it had become normal for him. His heart became progressively hardened until he eventually reached the point where he believed that he would get away with everything, insofar as he was thinking about it at all. He was like the people of Zechariah's day:

¹¹ But they refused to pay attention and turned a stubborn shoulder and stopped their ears that they might not hear. ¹² They made their hearts diamond-hard lest they should hear the law and the words that the LORD of hosts had sent by his Spirit through the former prophets. Therefore great anger came from the LORD of hosts.

Zechariah 7:11-12 (ESV)

What is “the love of the truth”?

“The love of the truth” is a technical phrase used in the Bible. It refers to having a heart-attitude which values and pursues the truth for its own sake, not just because we want to avoid getting into trouble for lying. In the verse below, apostle Paul refers to the love of the truth in the context of explaining why so many people will follow the antichrist when he comes.

They will be deceived by him precisely because “*they did not receive the love of the truth*”. The truth does not matter to them enough, or even at all. Thus, in the end, God will allow them to lose the very ability to tell the difference between truth and falsehood at all. Then they will become fully deluded, such that they will even follow someone as wicked and deceitful as the antichrist:

⁸Then that lawless one will be revealed whom the Lord will slay with the breath of His mouth and bring to an end by the appearance of His coming; ⁹that is, the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, ¹⁰and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. ¹¹For this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they will believe what is false, ¹²in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.

2 Thessalonians 2:8-12 (NASB)

If we keep on rejecting and despising the truth, there will come a point at which God Himself will respond by deliberately taking away our capacity even to know what is true. The taking away of that faculty will leave us very prone to being deceived. But such deception would still be our own fault, because the very reason we lost the faculty of discernment was that we did not value the truth when we had the chance to see it.

That is we had no regard for the truth in the past, while we were still capable of recognizing it. We need to ask God to help us to develop this quality of absolute truthfulness. We need to love the truth very deeply, such that truth really matters to us, purely for its own sake, not for what it can do for us. If that is our approach, we will be protected from countless problems, and from arousing the opposition of God Himself. More importantly, we will be doing what is right.

As well as loving the truth we must also hate falsehood

We don't often think in terms of a Christian hating anything. But there are actually some things that we have a duty to hate. One of those is falsehood. Most of us are far too laid back and casual about this. We might say that we regard falsehood and falseness as wrong. But many of us don't feel very strongly about it. It doesn't bother us very much and we don't feel motivated to do anything about stopping it. However, we should be bothered and it should concern us very strongly indeed. In fact, like the Psalmist, we should hate it.

*I hate and abhor falsehood,
but I love thy law.*

Psalm 119:163 (RSV)

We are supposed to hate all falsehood, wherever we come across it. We are to hate lies, deviousness and manipulation. We are especially to hate the compromising and misrepresenting of God's Word, the Bible and also dishonest preaching. Above all, we are to hate falsehood when we see it in ourselves. All of us have hearts which lie. We even lie to ourselves. In fact, probably most of the lies we tell are told to ourselves.

Therefore we are to hate all kinds of falsehood, deceit, evasiveness, insincerity, manipulation and hypocrisy. We need to confront it zealously, especially within ourselves, and to expose it all and root it out without compromise. And we must not be too easily satisfied that we have completed the job.

We must be entirely without guile, as Nathanael was

One of my heroes in the Bible, whom I would most wish to be like, is Nathanael. We rarely hear of him, but he was singled out by Jesus, who especially commented on Nathanael's lack of guile. Evidently, Jesus considered that absence of guile to be remarkable, precisely because it is so rare:

⁴³ *The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. And he found Philip and said to him, "Follow me."*
⁴⁴ *Now Philip was from Beth-sa'ida, the city of Andrew and Peter.* ⁴⁵ *Philip found Nathan'a-el, and said to him, "We have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."* ⁴⁶ *Nathan'a-el said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?"* Philip said to him, "Come and see." ⁴⁷ *Jesus saw Nathan'a-el coming to him, and said of him, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile*

John 1:43-47 (RSV)

In saying that there was no guile in Nathanael, Jesus meant that he was entirely without pretence or hypocrisy. There was 'no side to him', as the saying goes. Nathanael was the type of man who really meant what he said and said what he meant. He did not have hidden agendas or ulterior purposes. If he wanted something he would openly and honestly say what he wanted and why. He would not trick or manipulate people. Neither would he use anybody.

Above all, being without guile means that we are ruthlessly honest with ourselves and about ourselves. A guileless person, when he reads about certain sins or faults in the Bible, or hears them spoken of in a sermon, readily accepts that those sins are to be found in himself. He also knows that the main reason those sins are mentioned at all is to enable us to see the same sins in ourselves.

He then directs his mind to himself and the way in which he exhibits those sins. He does not assume that he is without those sins and that they are only to be found in others. Guileless people are sincere and genuine and have a quality of innocence about them. They are tender rather than hardened and the truth really matters to them. The following two references in the psalms refer to this kind of person:

³ *Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD?
And who may stand in His holy place?
⁴ He who has clean hands and a pure heart,
Who has not lifted up his soul ¹to falsehood
And has not sworn deceitfully.
⁵ He shall receive a blessing from the LORD
And righteousness from the God of his salvation.*
Psalm 24:3-5 (NASB)

*How blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity,
And in whose spirit there is no deceit!*

Psalm 32:2 (NASB)

Another example of a guileless person is Nicodemus

Look now at this lengthy passage from John's gospel where Jesus has a detailed conversation with another man called Nicodemus. He too was very transparent and honest, as Nathanael was. Note

the sincere, almost child-like, questions which Nicodemus asks Jesus. He does so despite the fact that he was a prominent man in Israel and a highly educated teacher of the Law of Moses.

His earnestness and unpretentiousness come across very clearly in the simplicity of his questions. He evidently had the love of the truth. He was not trying to justify himself or to impress anybody with his own knowledge or sophistication. He just wanted to understand Jesus better and had no other agenda.

Therefore Jesus took the time to give him a full answer. Jesus was clearly impressed by the humility of Nicodemus and his love of the truth. Therefore he opened up to him. Yet Nicodemus was a Pharisee. Indeed, he was a very senior Pharisee. Some say that he was the most senior teacher of the Law of Moses in all Israel.

The fact that a Pharisee could be a good and honest man might come as a surprise to some. Many of us tend to assume that all of the Scribes and Pharisees were proud and hard hearted, always trying to catch Jesus out rather than to learn from him. That is not the case. Many of them followed Him, as did Nicodemus. Here is the account of his conversation with Jesus:

Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicode'mus, a ruler of the Jews. ²This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do, unless God is with him." ³Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God." ⁴Nicode'mus said to him, "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born?"

⁵Jesus answered, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. ⁶That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. ⁷Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born anew.' ⁸The wind blows where it wills, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit."

⁹Nicode'mus said to him, "How can this be?" ¹⁰Jesus answered him, "Are you a teacher of Israel, and yet you do not understand this? ¹¹Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen; but you do not receive our testimony. ¹²If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things? ¹³No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man. ¹⁴And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

John 3:1-15 (RSV)

The way Jesus answered questions from His critics and enemies was very different from how He answered Nicodemus. Most of the Scribes, Pharisees and Sadducees were hostile to Him. When they asked questions it was not to find an answer or to learn the truth. Truth was not on their agenda. Their aim was to justify their own existing opinions and to discredit Jesus.

They did not care about finding out whether He was telling the truth, or whether they were mistaken. They were determined to maintain their own opinions, regardless of whether they were right or wrong. Indeed, many of the religious leaders were well aware that Jesus really was the Messiah. They knew it because they had seen and verified His miracles.

That was the very reason why they were following Him around, i.e. to check up on Him and find out if His miracles were genuine. However, some of them weren't willing to admit any of that to Him or to the people, or even to themselves. They hated Him even though they already knew He was the Messiah. They didn't like what he was saying, even if it was true, and they weren't willing to change.

With humble and sincere people, Jesus went into detail. But He gave very short answers to the proud and dishonest.

To proud, hard-hearted people such as them, Jesus choose not to go into detail or to give full answers. He would often say things to the crowds standing alongside so as to rebut or condemn the things said by His critics and enemies. But at such times He was really speaking to the crowd, not to the Scribes and Pharisees themselves. When His enemies and critics asked Him questions Jesus frequently chose not to explain Himself or to elaborate on what He was doing.

He tended to give them short answers. He would often just turn to the crowds instead and tell them what was wrong with the Scribes and Pharisees who were standing next to Him. Let's look at a few examples of how Jesus gave them short, abrupt answers, or rebuked them, or even gave no answers at all. It was evidently not an uncommon occurrence:

¹ One day, as he was teaching the people in the temple and preaching the gospel, the chief priests and the scribes with the elders came up ²and said to him, "Tell us by what authority you do these things, or who it is that gave you this authority." ³ He answered them, "I also will ask you a question; now tell me, ⁴Was the baptism of John from heaven or from men?" ⁵And they discussed it with one another, saying, "If we say, 'From heaven,' he will say, 'Why did you not believe him?' ⁶ But if we say, 'From men,' all the people will stone us; for they are convinced that John was a prophet." ⁷So they answered that they did not know whence it was. ⁸ And Jesus said to them, "Neither will I tell you by what authority I do these things."

Luke 20:1-8 (RSV)

They said to him therefore, "Where is your Father?" Jesus answered, "You know neither me nor my Father; if you knew me, you would know my Father also."

John 8:19 (RSV)

³⁷ While he was speaking, a Pharisee asked him to dine with him; so he went in and sat at table. ³⁸ The Pharisee was astonished to see that he did not first wash before dinner. ³⁹ And the Lord said to him, "Now you Pharisees cleanse the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside you are full of extortion and wickedness. ⁴⁰ You fools! Did not he who made the outside make the inside also? ⁴¹ But give for alms those things which are within; and behold, everything is clean for you."

⁴² "But woe to you Pharisees! for you tithe mint and rue and every herb, and neglect justice and the love of God; these you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. ⁴³ Woe to you Pharisees! for you love the best seat in the synagogues and salutations in the market places. ⁴⁴ Woe to you! for you are like graves which are not seen, and men walk over them without knowing it."

Luke 11:37-44 (RSV)

In the meantime, when so many thousands of the multitude had gathered together that they trod upon one another, he began to say to his disciples first, "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy."

Luke 12:1 (RSV)

¹⁰ "He who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much; and he who is dishonest in a very little is dishonest also in much. ¹¹ If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will entrust to you the true riches? ¹² And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? ¹³ No servant can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." ¹⁴ The Pharisees, who were lovers of money, heard all this, and they scoffed at him. ¹⁵ But he said to them, "You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts; for what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God."

Luke 16:10-15 (RSV)

Note the stark contrast between Jesus' direct but helpful response to Nicodemus in John chapter 3 and the way He gave short, sharp answers, or even rebukes, to some of the other Pharisees. God gives revelation, and understanding to those who have the love of the truth but not to people who don't. That is because they don't care about finding out what is true and what is false.

Compare the attitude of Nicodemus with that of some of his fellow Pharisees, as shown in this next passage. His colleagues are criticising Jesus and rejecting His message. By contrast, Nicodemus speaks up publicly in defence of Jesus, right in front of his fellow Pharisees:

³⁷ On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸ Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'"³⁹ Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

⁴⁰ When they heard these words, some of the people said, "This really is the Prophet." ⁴¹ Others said, "This is the Christ." But some said, "Is the Christ to come from Galilee?" ⁴² Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the offspring of David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" ⁴³ So there was a division among the people over him. ⁴⁴ Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.

⁴⁵ The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why did you not bring him?" ⁴⁶ The officers answered, "No one ever spoke like this man!" ⁴⁷ The Pharisees answered them, "Have you also been deceived? ⁴⁸ Have any of the authorities or the Pharisees believed in him? ⁴⁹ But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed." ⁵⁰ Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them, ⁵¹ "Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?" ⁵² They replied, "Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee."

John 7:37-52 (ESV)

Another example of a 'guileless' person is the Samaritan woman who met Jesus at the well.

Another good example of a guileless person who had no pretentiousness and was open to the truth was the Samaritan woman at the well. Jesus meets her in John chapter four. She was not a Jew and she had a lot of sin in her life, as we all do. Yet she had something of that same quality of sincerity, openness and guilelessness that we saw above in Nathanael and Nicodemus. Look at the conversation between her and Jesus when they met at the well.

Note how open and childlike she was and how she took no offence at Jesus, even when He told her frankly of some of the sins in her life. She recognized Him as being a prophet and was wide open to receive information from Him. Therefore Jesus was equally open with her, so much so that He even told her plainly that He was the Messiah. It was a remarkably clear statement, which He made to very few other people, or at least not so directly:

Now when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John ² (although Jesus himself did not baptize, but only his disciples), ³ he left Judea and departed again for Galilee. ⁴ And he had to pass through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.

⁷ A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, "Give me a drink." ⁸ (For his disciples had gone away into the city to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a woman of Samaria?" (For Jews have no dealings with

Samaritans.)¹⁰ Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.”

¹¹ The woman said to him, “Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. Where do you get that living water? ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob? He gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did his sons and his livestock.” ¹³ Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴ but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” ¹⁵ The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I will not be thirsty or have to come here to draw water.”

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Go, call your husband, and come here.” ¹⁷ The woman answered him, “I have no husband.” Jesus said to her, “You are right in saying, ‘I have no husband’; ¹⁸ for you have had five husbands, and the one you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.” ¹⁹ The woman said to him, “Sir, I perceive that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, but you say that in Jerusalem is the place where people ought to worship.”

²¹ Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. ²² You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews. ²³ But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him. ²⁴ God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth.” ²⁵ The woman said to him, “I know that Messiah is coming (he who is called Christ). When he comes, he will tell us all things.” ²⁶ Jesus said to her, “I who speak to you am he.”

John 4:1-26 (ESV)

Moreover, because of the Samaritan woman’s openness and willingness to be told the truth, and to respond to it, many more people came to believe. She went out of her way to tell them:

Just then his disciples came back. They marveled that he was talking with a woman, but no one said, “What do you seek?” or, “Why are you talking with her?” ²⁸ So the woman left her water jar and went away into town and said to the people, ²⁹ “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did. Can this be the Christ?” ³⁰ They went out of the town and were coming to him.

John 4:27-30 (ESV)

³⁹ Many Samaritans from that town believed in him because of the woman’s testimony, “He told me all that I ever did.” ⁴⁰ So when the Samaritans came to him, they asked him to stay with them, and he stayed there two days. ⁴¹ And many more believed because of his word. ⁴² They said to the woman, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world.”

John 4:39-42 (ESV)

What is the difference between guile and shrewdness?

We have looked at what it is to be without guile or to be guileless. What then is the sin of guile and how does it differ from shrewdness, which is a good quality? To be shrewd does not require a person to be cunning, devious, crafty or manipulative. Far from it. A shrewd person is one who can correctly discern the character, intentions and motives of other people. A shrewd person is therefore harder to deceive. He does not overlook, or fail to appreciate, facts or events.

He sees what is really going on and what people are doing and he weighs them up quickly and accurately. However, none of that is sin. None of it requires the shrewd person to have any guile. A person who operates with guile will feel free to trick, manipulate, deceive and exploit other people.

He says one thing and means another. He hides his real intentions. He takes advantage of other people's ignorance or lack of discernment. He is insincere and crafty and he uses people.

Therefore guile and shrewdness are very different things and are manifested by very different types of person. We should want very much to be shrewd, but not to use any guile in achieving that shrewdness. The ability to see the deceit and falseness in others does not require us to display those same sinful characteristics ourselves.

We must be totally honest with ourselves when we read the Bible

Many people read the Bible in a superficial way, not really taking it seriously and not being honest with themselves about what it says. That is why most of us can read the Bible, or hear it read or being preached on, and yet be unmoved by it. It's as if we assume that when it's being critical, or speaking about sin, it obviously must be referring to someone else, not us. Or, we just filter it out completely, so that it does not even register.

A dishonest person will make that assumption quite easily. They will not be convicted, even when their own sins or character traits are very clearly what is being spoken about. If we are like that then we are just like the people of Ezekiel's day. They had the prophet Ezekiel in their midst but found it very easy to ignore, and disobey, what God was saying to them through him.

³⁰"As for you, son of man, your people who talk together about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses, say to one another, each to his brother, 'Come, and hear what the word is that comes forth from the LORD.' ³¹And they come to you as people come, and they sit before you as my people, and they hear what you say but they will not do it; for with their lips they show much love, but their heart is set on their gain. ³²And, lo, you are to them like one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument, for they hear what you say, but they will not do it. ³³When this comes--and come it will! --then they will know that a prophet has been among them."
Ezekiel 33:30-33 (RSV)

Some of us go to church and even read the Bible, but are not honest enough to really hear what God is saying to us through the Bible. We may like liturgy, or tradition, but not hear what God is saying, because we have a heart that is hard and closed off to Him. Jesus Himself spoke of this when He referred to some of the Pharisees and Scribes. They tend to have a bad name, but many of us are just like they were. We too can be hypocritical, with no love of the truth, and no willingness to be corrected by God, or to respond to His instruction:

⁵And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not live according to the tradition of the elders, but eat with hands defiled?" ⁶And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, 'This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; ⁷in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.' ⁸You leave the commandment of God, and hold fast the tradition of men." ⁹And he said to them, "You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God, in order to keep your tradition!"
Mark 7:5-9 (RSV)

If we want to avoid being hypocrites, as some (not all) of the Pharisees were, then we must develop a rigorous honesty and frankness with ourselves when reading the Bible. We should positively look for God's correction concerning our attitudes and ways. We must have no wish to defend ourselves from the Bible, or to justify or vindicate ourselves.

It is far better to be receptive to whatever God has to say to you, even if He wants to correct or rebuke you. If that is what He is saying to you, it's because you need to hear it, as we all do. Thus, we must never be angry or irritated about what the Bible says to us, as many people were when they heard Jesus tell them the truth about themselves:

²⁵*But in truth, I tell you, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the heavens were shut up three years and six months, and a great famine came over all the land, ²⁶and Elijah was sent to none of them but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. ²⁷And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of the prophet Elisha, and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian."* ²⁸*When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. ²⁹And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff. ³⁰But passing through their midst, he went away.*

Luke 4:25-30 (ESV)

A really honest person will want to find out the full truth of what the Bible has to say to him about his various sins and faults. He will positively seek for the Bible's constructive criticism. By contrast, a superficial person, who does not have the love of the truth, will avoid anyone or anything which confronts him with the truth about himself or his situation.

Instead, he will go looking for preachers and teachers who will flatter him and massage his ego rather than those who will tell him the truth. They did this in Isaiah's day and people still do it today:

⁹*For they are a rebellious people,
lying children,
children unwilling to hear
the instruction of the LORD;
¹⁰who say to the seers, "Do not see,"
and to the prophets, "Do not prophesy to us what is right;
speak to us smooth things,
prophesy illusions,*

Isaiah 30:9-10 (ESV)

If we have got our doctrine wrong, or have given a false prophecy, we should welcome correction. We must then be willing to alter our opinion or our teaching rather than cling to it stubbornly.

If a person has the love of the truth then, when they realise that they have made a mistake or have got their doctrine or theology wrong, they are pleased to be corrected. They are not proud or stubborn and they don't resent being told that they are wrong. On the contrary, they appreciate the person who has corrected them. They then willingly alter their view, so as to abandon the wrong opinion or doctrine and adopt the correct one.

That is obviously what any sensible person would do. If you are wrong then, surely, it is a good thing to have that error pointed out, so that you can change your view? How could one possibly argue otherwise? Although that is undoubtedly the right approach, the fact is that most of us do not see it that way. The average person, even in churches, resents being corrected or challenged, even when the correction is entirely valid.

Indeed, they resent the correction all the more *because* it is valid. They prefer instead to maintain their existing beliefs, regardless of whether they are right or wrong. In part that is due to pride. However it is also because that person simply does not have the love of the truth. They would prefer to maintain the *appearance* of having been right, rather than change their view so as to actually become right.

Anyone who acts in that way is more in love with their own ego and reputation than with the truth. By contrast, consider two characters in the Bible who were very willing to be corrected. They were also prepared to change their view immediately and without any resentment or stubbornness. The first is the prophet Nathan. King David came to him and said he wanted to build a house (a Temple)

for the Lord. Nathan instantly gave his own opinion on this point. He told David to go ahead and that God was with him in that proposed idea:

¹Now when David lived in his house, David said to Nathan the prophet, "Behold, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of the covenant of the LORD is under a tent." ²And Nathan said to David, "Do all that is in your heart, for God is with you."

1 Chronicles 17:1-2 (ESV)

However, later that night God spoke to the prophet Nathan and said that He was *not* actually in support of this and that He did not want David to build the Temple. Instead, God wanted one of David's sons to build it:

³But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, ⁴"Go and tell my servant David, 'Thus says the LORD: It is not you who will build me a house to dwell in.

1 Chronicles 17: 3-4 (ESV)

Instead of sulking, taking offense, or feeling embarrassed at having got it wrong, the prophet Nathan immediately went to David. He told him that in fact God did not want him to build the Temple, but wanted his son to do so instead of him:

¹¹When your days are fulfilled to walk with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, one of your own sons, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹²He shall build a house for me, and I will establish his throne forever.

1 Chronicles 17:11-12 (ESV)

*In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David
1Chronicles 17:15 (ESV)*

Going back to David in this way can't have been easy for Nathan. He was a famous prophet, probably the most senior prophet in Israel, with direct access to the King. A lesser man than him may have been tempted to keep quiet about what God had said, so as to avoid losing face and appearing foolish. At the outset he had given his own honest opinion, i.e. that David should build the Temple.

He genuinely thought that would be God's will. Later when he had discovered that he was wrong, all Nathan wanted to do was to go straight to David to tell him what God actually wanted and to correct the mistake. His own image and reputation did not matter to him, or at least it did not matter in comparison to upholding the truth.

Let's consider a second example, this time from the New Testament. This concerns a very able lawyer called Apollos. He had become a follower of Jesus, but at this point in the book of Acts he only knew the baptism of John the Baptist, not Christian baptism. He was a very eloquent, persuasive man, with all the gifts of an evangelist and was enthusiastically telling people what he knew.

Then one day he met a Christian couple, Priscilla and Aquila. They were not lawyers like him, but they were mature believers. At any rate, they were more mature than he was and they knew the Gospel more fully and accurately than he did. So they corrected Apollos, told him about being baptised in the name of Jesus, and filled in some gaps in his knowledge:

²⁴Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. ²⁵He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him and explained to him the way of God more accurately

Acts 18:24-26 (ESV)

Like Nathan, Apollos did not take offence, or resist the correction. He humbly accepted what he was told. Then that added knowledge enabled him to increase his effectiveness as an evangelist even further:

²⁷And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, ²⁸for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

Acts 18: 27-28 (ESV)

So, Apollos, though probably more educated, and wealthy, than either Priscilla or Aquila, was willing to be corrected by them. He showed no pride or stubbornness. He loved the truth and positively wanted to be put right wherever he was wrong and to have any gaps in his knowledge filled. He was not aiming to impress anybody and therefore he had no fear of being made to appear wrong or to be lacking in any way.

Why should he, or any of us, fear those things? We are all wrong on many occasions and we all have gaps in our knowledge. Therefore we should never be reluctant to have our errors exposed and corrected. But even if we are reluctant, then we should just force ourselves to accept correction anyway.

I am also reminded of the eminent Bible teacher, the late Derek Prince. One of the reasons God used him so hugely, in a worldwide ministry, was the very fact that he loved the truth far more than he loved himself or his own reputation. He was a major academic, having won a scholarship to Eton and then to King's College Cambridge.

He was also a Fellow of King's College, being qualified to lecture in philosophy and also in Greek. Yet, when he was a young believer, only a few weeks after his conversion, he allowed an old, uneducated, working-class couple in Scarborough, England, to correct him and to tell him about the Holy Spirit. He was not too proud to be taught by them.

Likewise, many years later, when he had become an internationally renowned Bible teacher, Derek Prince made a mistake by teaching that all Christians should have a 'shepherd', i.e. a pastor to whom they 'submit'. This wrong teaching led to what became known as the '*Shepherding Movement*' which quickly became domineering and oppressive.

However, when Derek Prince realised that what he had been teaching was wrong and harmful, he publicly renounced it and told all his listeners that he had been wrong to teach it. That was in the 1970s and from that point onwards his ministry multiplied and became even larger.

I feel that one of the key reasons for his subsequent success is that God was pleased by Derek Prince's humility and love of the truth, which had made him so willing to humble himself and to publicly admit he had been wrong. Accordingly, we must all decide that the truth is what really matters, not how we appear, or what people think of us. Therefore we need to be willing, and even eager, to be corrected whenever our opinions, or understanding of issues are wrong or incomplete.

The average person automatically believes whatever suits their own interests, regardless of whether it is actually true

A key feature of our fallen human nature is that we are self-centered. That has a very adverse effect on the way we behave. However, it also affects the way we handle information. It distorts the way we see and hear things and deflects us away from truth. Thus, the average person is particularly likely to be deceived about anything which has any bearing on themselves.

In short, they will believe whatever it *suits them* to believe i.e. whatever promotes their own interests, regardless of whether it is actually true. These things are not necessarily done consciously. They are usually done by long-established habit. Few people would go so far as to say any of these things out loud. Nevertheless, the average person will rearrange and reconstitute facts within their own minds, so as to be able to:

- a) believe the best of themselves
- b) see their own actions and motives in the best light
- c) see anything favourable to their own interests as obviously true
- d) see anything unfavourable to their own interests as obviously untrue
- e) see no faults in themselves, but only in others
- f) feel automatically entitled to things, without needing any evidence to justify that entitlement

In other words, most of us find it very easy to believe whatever we *want* to believe and to ignore or reject anything which we do not *want* to believe. In doing this, in either direction, there is no honest or rigorous examination of facts or evidence. It is all done instantly and automatically, without the need to analyse anything at all, and irrespective of whether those things are actually true or not.

In my experience that is pretty much the default-setting of the average person. It is rare for anyone, even in churches, to be different from the above. Therefore, if we are to grow as a disciple we have got to get to grips with this self-centered and self-biased way in which most of us have learned to think.

We need to cross examine and challenge ourselves and expose our selfish assumptions whenever they arise. We need to be ruthlessly frank with ourselves and believe things solely because they *are true*, regardless of whether or not it would suit our purposes if it was true.

Every lie will one day be exposed at the Great White Throne Judgment, which is for non-Christians

Every non-Christian will, one day, have to face Jesus Christ at the Great White Throne Judgment. Then, every lie they have ever told will be publicly exposed. All things will be put right and made straight. Any lies that a non-Christian has ever told will be publicly exposed and corrected there. Therefore they will be humiliated, quite apart from the eternal punishment that will then follow.

So, an unbeliever may appear to get away with a lie today, but it is inevitable that it will, eventually, be fully exposed. There is no doubt about that, and no escape from it. It would be like telling a lie today, knowing that it will be exposed as a lie next week by the Headmaster at school assembly, in front of all the staff and pupils of the school. Wouldn't it be stupid to tell such a lie today, knowing it will all come out publicly next week?

Why then does it make any difference if the exposure of that lie might be many years in the future? Why should the timescale matter? It will all still be publicly and humiliatingly revealed, whenever it happens. Perhaps you did not realise that before, but you need to realise it now. Let it act as a brake on your tongue. Let the prospect of it keep you from lying as you reflect on the absolute *inevitability* of being caught and exposed.

Even Christians will have to give an account of their lives at the Judgment Seat of Christ. Therefore it is better to ask for God's correction and judgment now, in this life.

It is not just non-Christians who need to be wary of telling lies. Christians will also have to face Jesus Christ one day in judgment. For them it will be at the Judgment Seat of Christ. The lies told by a Christian might not necessarily be publicly exposed, or punished, though my personal opinion is that they will be. But, at the very least, such lies will cause the loss of some, or perhaps even all, of the rewards that we might otherwise have received. (See Book Four for more details).

Given that you know that you will be judged in the end and that the consequences of that judgment will be eternal, it is much wiser to seek for God's judgment here and now. If you are in a dispute with someone and you are unsure whether your own conduct is right or wrong, or whether it is you or they who are acting in accordance with God's will, then positively ask God to judge between you now. You could do as David did when King Saul was hunting him and seeking to kill him:

May the Lord therefore be judge, and give sentence between me and you, and see to it, and plead my cause, and deliver me from your hand.

1 Samuel 24:15 (RSV)

I do not mean that you should ask for God's punishment upon yourself. Far from it. However, what you can and should do is to ask God to intervene and to do the following kinds of things now, in this life. That is much better than leaving it all to be dealt with later at the Judgment Seat of Christ. You can ask Him:

- a) to *expose* any wrongdoing on your own part and make those things very clear for you to see
- b) to enable others to see your error or wrongdoing as well and to prompt them to point it out to you
- c) to prevent you from doing any wrong to any other person, i.e. ask God to stand in your way
- d) to intervene and stop you, or redirect you, if you are handling a situation or person wrongly, unfairly or misguidedly.
- e) to expose any wrong motives on your part, even if the things that you are doing are right in themselves
- f) to prevent you from going any further in a particular direction if it is wrong, i.e. to close doors so that your way is blocked by Him
- g) to expose anything that you believe which is actually untrue, or about which you have been deceived

Why not pray to God along all those lines? Positively ask Him to expose your wrong behaviour, wrong attitudes or wrong beliefs, so as to enable you to change here and now. That way, you may feel some embarrassment or awkwardness now, but in the long term, and especially in eternity, you will gain, because you will:

- a) avoid being rebuked (or even punished) for those things at the Judgment Seat of Christ
- b) become eligible, instead, to be rewarded for what you go on to do from now on.