

When You Live in a Land of Liars – *Ephesians 4:25*

Introduction – As we dive into a wonderful cluster of ethical exhortations (vv25ff) it is important to remember from whence we've come. These are commands given to those who have "put off the old man" (v22) and have put on Christ; they are the new creation. If this is not the case, these exhortations become nothing more than "hosing off the hog" – (Douglas Wilson). But if we are living in the new man, then these exhortations instead become food for the inside of the sheep.

The Text: *Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another.*

Why is Lying Addressed First? – The first exhortation doesn't seem quite so terrible. We tend to think of the ninth commandment as a lower violation than many of the others. At the same time, as parents, we know that an outright sin is far easier to deal with than when the child attempts to cover up with lies. As we grow up, lying becomes a sophisticated activity with the need to spin stories upon stories in order to keep the lie believable. What happens is that we have to live in darkness, shrouding the truth in order to avoid detection. And this separates us from one another relationally more and more over time. If we do not speak truth to one another, relationships will be so broken that we will be unable to live out the other exhortations. Lying requires that we take up our own self-protection first – and often at whatever the cost. But when lying occurs in this community, the liars harm themselves and others. When we lie, because we are members of one another, we are like the eye seeing a serpent and not telling the foot; we are like the nose smelling a deadly drug but lying about it to the mouth (Chrysostom).

A Renewed People (Zech 8:16) – Paul highlights the importance of speaking truth in community by quoting from this OT passage where God is describing the renewed people, how He will bless them, and what they will be like as He restores them. Speaking the truth to each other is one of the ways in which this will be noticed. It will occur in the courts where the weak will not be taken advantage of, but this of course means that lying will not be a part of the community in general. Paul had said that when we "*learned Christ*," we heard Him who is truth (Eph 4:20-21). Jesus said "*you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*" (John 8:32).

The Father of Lies (John 8:44-47) – A habitual liar conveys the suggestion that he is still in the grip of the devil and belongs to his kingdom. That is not true of those who have put on Christ. The very first sin occurred because of the lies of the serpent. And so lying becomes one of the most prominent and common characteristics of the life of sin. We see here that the devil is "*a murderer from the beginning*" and "*a liar and the father of it*." Lying and murder are not that far from one another, liars and murderers both will find their home in the lake of fire (Rev 21:8). While God hates murderers, notice how many types of lying He hates as well (Prov 6:16-19, also Prov 19:9, 17:4, 26:28).

Let Your Yes be Yes (Matt 5:33-37) – Instead, we are to be the kind of community where we are known for our honesty and for keeping our word. The attitude of the Pharisees (the conservative religious types in Jesus' day) was that you could be less than truthful if you hadn't taken an oath. Jesus' response was not against all oath taking, but clearly against "swearing on a stack of Bibles" type swearing. Let your "Yes" be "Yes," he said. Along with this, there is the memorable proverb: A half-truth presented as a whole truth is an untruth.

Lying in Warfare – It has been argued, and we agree, that lying is a legitimate tool to use in warfare (and, by analogy, on the sport's field). God commends the Hebrew midwives for telling lies to Pharaoh (Ex 1:20) and Rahab is praised for hiding the spies (James 2:25). While this is true, it only makes the point more clear: lying is not something you do with those whom you are supposedly at peace.

Put Off and Put On – It's not enough for believers to put off lying; we do so by putting on a love for the truth and for speaking the truth with our neighbor. God desires "truth in the inward parts" (Psalm 51). We are to be lovers of truth and truth-telling, and this requires some explanation.

When is it Lying? – Bearing false-witness is far more than courtroom perjury. Lying includes direct falsehoods, exaggeration, and adding falsehoods to that which began as true. It includes cheating in school, on income taxes, and at work on your time cards or elsewhere. It comprises making foolish promises, not keeping your word, betraying confidences, flattery, and making excuses. Truth telling does not require always telling everything we know. There may be times where keeping confidences or other legitimate secrets are lawful and necessary. And it does not demand nor allow that we follow some modern psychological paths of always saying everything we think or feel about someone.

Mercy and Truth are Met Together – We are to speak the truth and we are to do so in love. When we correct, we are to do so in a spirit of gentleness (Gal 6:1). Is your home a place that provokes lying because there is so little mercy? We are to be a people who love the truth and so love to have truth spoken and heard with gospel love. The truth, the real truth about you is all covered by the blood of Jesus if you are in Christ. Speaking this kind of truth about the gospel is the kind of people we are to be for it is what has been given to us.