

Is It Ever Okay for a Christian to Lie?

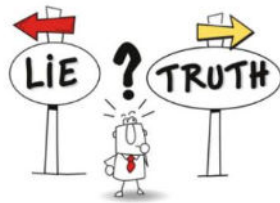
Proverbs 12:18-19: *18 There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. 19 Truthful lips will be established forever, but a lying tongue is only for a moment.*



“Tell the truth!” For many of us, we can recall that strongly-stated advice as coming from our parents when we were caught doing or saying something that we shouldn’t have. The immediate dilemma was obvious. If I tell the truth, then I’m going to get in trouble. If I lie or just tell a part of the truth, I may get away with it. But what if they found out that I lied? Then I might be in even more trouble! While we, as adults, may look back upon such dilemmas and smile, the reality is, we as Christians must always be on our guard to practice being

truthful and have integrity every day and in every way. What does this mean? How are we supposed to handle the countless compromising circumstances of life where half-truths and exaggeration come into play? And what about little white lies?

Let’s break down our Christian principles of truth-telling into four basic questions:



1. What is God’s perspective and example regarding truth and untruth?
2. Is telling a partial truth the same as lying?
3. Does being confronted by the forces of darkness give us permission to lie?
4. What about exaggeration? Is it the same as lying?



1. What is God’s perspective and example regarding truth and untruth?

The ninth commandment carries great influence in maintaining a just and respectful society:

Exodus 20:16: *You shall not bear false <8267> witness <5707> against your neighbor.*

Don’t speak or testify to an untruth of any kind when you’re testifying against your neighbor. There is a legalistic perspective here.

False: Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance #8267 *sheqer*; an untruth; by implication, a sham (often adverbial)

Witness: Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance #5707 *’ed*; concretely, a witness; abstractly, testimony; specifically, a recorder, i.e. prince

The Commandments helped organize and administer the legal and moral aspects of Hebrew society. Foundational truth-telling in this ninth commandment includes a legal component but also has a wider moral implication.

Several aspects are shown in this next verse which states the legal part first:

Leviticus 19:15: *You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly.*

In other words, we need to be honest in our judgments and not show partiality. Treat everyone fairly. We are not to *be partial to the poor* and because of that, bend the rules for them. Nor are we to *defer to the great*, and because they are wealthy or so well-known, bend the rules for them. We should be straightforward with everybody. This is a very clear, legalistic basis for this society.



Next is the very serious reminder to always represent truth when it comes to others—this goes beyond that legalistic approach in verse 15:

Leviticus 19:16: *You shall not go about as a **slanderer** <7400> among your people, and you are not to act against the life of your neighbor; I am the LORD.*

Slanderer: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #7400 *rakiyl*;
a scandal-monger (as traveling about)



Whenever we see, *I am the LORD* in a Scripture, we need to pay attention! It is God's command: *NEVER spread dishonest stories about anyone as you go about your business.*



What if we know a truth about someone; don't others have the right to know?



Do others have the right to know all the foolish things we have done in the past? NO! It is our job to not only be repeaters of truthful things, but to put the truth in a context of godliness. Telling falsehoods is not good. Slander is also not good. Slander may be true or untrue, but it is inappropriate because its intention is to diminish another person.

Finally, the matter of core values. We can have disagreements with our neighbor, but we are not to take matters into our own hands either internally or externally:

Leviticus 19:17-18: *17 You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart (meaning internally); you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him. 18 You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people (meaning externally), but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.*

I am the LORD. These are My commands!



Here is God's command: *Treat others truthfully and respectfully, especially when there is an opportunity for a disagreement to lead to personal reactions and responses.*

Be aboveboard. We should not be making ourselves angry internally by thinking vengeful thoughts, making ourselves even more angry. Nor should we be spreading stories externally, truthful or not, that will harm our neighbor with our words. This is incurring *sin because of him*.

Truth-telling was a fundamental basis for Israel's society in the Old Testament. Therefore, the morality of truth-telling has to carry over to us.

7
DEADLY SINS

God clearly and bluntly proclaims His stand on this issue of respect and honesty:

Proverbs 6:16-19: 16 *There are six things which the LORD hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: 17 Haughty eyes, a **lying** <8267> tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, 18 a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, 19 a false witness who utters **lies** <3577>, and one who spreads strife among brothers.*

Lying: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #8267 *sheqer*; an untruth; by implication, a sham (often adverbial)

Lies: The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon 1) a lie, untruth, falsehood, deceptive thing

Amongst the seven things God hates is:

- a *lying tongue*
- a *false witness who utters lies*

A *lying tongue* is the moral aspect of not telling the truth; a *false witness* is the legal aspect. Truth-telling in all areas is very important. God expects us to be truthful.

Lying is directly involved in two of the seven abominations and is easily implicated in the other five. We aren't going into this further, but we can see how each abomination has an aspect of lying connected to it.

Even before we get to the New Testament and the basis of Christian society, we have the godly foundation of truth-telling. Abiding by and living in truth is profoundly important in the Law and the writings of the Old Testament.

God hates any falsehood and deception. It starts in the mind and its venom spews out of the mouth, just like it did with the serpent in the Garden of Eden. The venom of untruth! That is one of those things we avoid at all costs because it is the venom of the tongue that lies. How do we avoid it? How do we put ourselves in the right frame of mind to stay away from this evil?

Let's look at lying and truth in the New Testament:

1 John 1:5-7: 5 *...God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we **lie** <5574> and do not practice the truth; 7 but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another...*

Lie: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #5574 *pseudomai*; to utter an untruth or attempt to deceive by falsehood



Can silence be equated to lying? For example: a Christian steals something and keeps it quiet.



Why would a Christian steal and then keep it quiet? Because they would not want anyone to know—it reflects badly on those who profess to be Christian if they steal! The motivation determines if silence is a lie. In this case, the person is not speaking up nor repenting for a wrong action. He or she thought to hide the misdeed through their silence. This type of action does not enhance the glory of God. For Christians, there is an absolute dividing line between light and darkness.



A fundamental part of lying is personal ego. The greater the ego, the greater the propensity to lie. The example of Satan spewing venom in the Garden of Eden is a good place to start.

This sounds like the way a narcissist would look at life. A narcissist puts others down in order to build up self. We know Satan is the author of narcissism. His is the biggest ego that is recorded in Scripture. It was all about him.

1 John 1:8-10: *8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar <5583> and His word is not in us.*

Liar: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #5583 *pseustes*; a falsifier

Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon: 1) a liar 2) one who breaks faith
3) a false and faithless man

When we publicly profess to be Christians walking in the light of God while hiding our actions in darkness, it makes God appear to be a liar. If we are acting piously but shoplifting as we go, it is like taking God's high principles and polluting them with darkness and the venom of the tongue of Satan. This is making God look like a liar and others observing this can think badly about God and His professed followers.



We can have no higher example than God and His example in relation to lying and untruth. God plainly stands above all lies and deceit!

Take a moment and step back to look at the world around us. It obviously operates far beneath God's lofty standards of honesty!

**Now that we have God's unwavering perspective before us,
how do we figure out how much truth we should be sharing?**

This is one of those questions that can easily get us stuck in the details. We all know we need to speak with godly wisdom, and that means speaking with self-restraint. So, how much self-restraint should be in place in what circumstance? Are there times when our restraint can end up being a bad thing?



2. Is telling a partial truth the same as lying? What about withholding the truth?

Here's an example of God counseling on an act of speaking partial truth.

After God had rejected Saul as king over Israel, God instructed Samuel to forget Saul and move forward. God's counsel begins with a simple instruction:

1 Samuel 16:1-2a: *1 Now the LORD said to Samuel, How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and go; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have selected a king for Myself among his sons. 2 But Samuel said, How can I go? When Saul hears of it, he will kill me.*

God gives this command: *go ahead, fill your horn with oil, go anoint another king.* Samuel had a legitimate human concern. Saul did not have a stable mind and was capable of great anger and evil. Samuel knows this. He is worried and has every right to be concerned.

God's answer to Samuel provides a principled approach to the legitimate fear that Samuel had. Here is where the partial truth comes into play:

1 Samuel 16:2: *...And the LORD said, Take a heifer with you and say, I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.*

Wait a minute! Did God make up an excuse to mislead King Saul? Was that a lie?

No! This is a classic issue when some look at the Bible. When studying a verse, we have to understand the context of that verse. If we stop reading here, it can sound like God is telling Samuel to make something up, but He's not!

God sent Samuel as His representative. Sacrificing was an appropriate foundation for his visit.

God instructs Samuel to go to Bethlehem as he might normally do:

1 Samuel 16:3-5: *3 You shall invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for Me the one whom I designate to you. 4 So Samuel did what the LORD said, and came to Bethlehem. And the elders of the city came trembling to meet him and said, Do you come in peace? 5 He said, In peace; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice. He also consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.*

The Bethlehemites were concerned that Samuel was coming to bring God's judgment on them. When a prophet of God comes to your town, an instinctive reaction would be fear. They were thinking, *This is trouble. What did we do wrong? Do you come in peace? Are you bringing God's judgment upon us?* Samuel's presentation of the sacrifice removes their fear and puts them at ease. He tells them to consecrate themselves (washing and putting on clean clothes) to put them in a holy frame of mind, which helped Samuel to pursue God's higher mission.

(Source: Bible Difficulties by Gleason Archer) There is a clear distinction between resorting to actual deceit and to withholding information that would result in great harm and even failure to obey carrying out the will of God.

This is not deceit. Samuel is telling them enough to put everyone at ease so the will of God can continue. There is no deception—there is an unfolding of truth as it becomes necessary and appropriate. God needed Samuel to accomplish the anointing of the new king, David. If those there knew this and Saul got wind of it, God's plan might have been thwarted.

God advocates righteousness through truth. This is what He is demonstrating by giving a partial truth to get things going.

That was in the Old Testament, but what about us as Christians? For Christians, speaking truth appropriately is paramount. Determining whether we are in a position to only share parts of the truth we know comes down to plainly confronting our own motivation. Often, the decision comes down to why would I say more—or NOT say more:



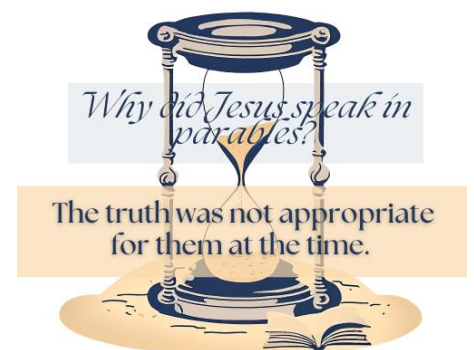
What is inside of me? What is my motivation?

Let's look at the motivation perspective through the eyes of what Jesus did and would do.

Jesus' motivation was ALWAYS in line with God's will, and he always respected those who were listening:

John 16:12: *I have many more things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.*

It wasn't appropriate to overwhelm his disciples with things they could not understand at that time. Jesus frequently spoke in parables whose meanings were obscure except to his close followers, and sometimes was not understood even by them. This method protected his listeners from being responsible for truths they could not yet understand. The revealment of truth is often best done at an appropriate time.



How do WE determine that? We should determine the appropriateness of telling truth the way Jesus did—according to the will of God and the righteous principles God has given us, nothing less. When it gets down to our own motivation, too often it is easier to avoid telling the truth because we just don't feel like dealing with the consequences. But that is not a reflection of God's principles. We have to aim higher.



TIME TO GET PRACTICAL



How about a circumstance when someone with Alzheimer's asks you where their spouse is when they died years ago? Do we lie so we don't cause them to grieve every time they hear about their loss? Is that a time when it's okay to lie?

This is a difficult question. Many healthcare professionals tell us to lie to patients with Alzheimer's disease so they do not get upset over something they don't remember. Instead of lying, we can redirect them by saying their spouse is not with us at this time. We want to be careful to hold ourselves to the highest principles as best we can. Ultimately, the motivation is to do what is best for the person suffering from dementia.

**Rick's
Experience**

My dad had Alzheimer's and I remember dealing with things that would get him very upset. What I would do, because it just bothered me to out-and-out lie, is deflect. If he would ask about his mom and dad (who had died 25 or 30 years ago), I'd say, *They aren't here. But dad, did we read those scriptures we were talking about earlier?* And he would ask, *What scriptures?* Well, *the ones in John*. Then we would turn to the Bible and he would forget about his question, getting absorbed in something else. I felt in my own heart and mind that was a better way for me to handle the situation. But, again, that may be hard to do if the person becomes persistent over a question like that.

As sinful humans, we can choose to speak parts of the truth for our own gain or for another's loss:

Proverbs 11:13: (NLT) *A gossip goes around telling secrets, but those who are trustworthy can keep a confidence.*

A gossip goes around saying things they ought not to say. There are a lot of things that happen in the lives of all of us that are not for public knowledge.



Am I trustworthy? Am I able to keep a confidence?

If we have "gossip" on one side of the scale and "worthy of trust" on the other, we should have a great weight difference on the side of being trustworthy.

When we are trustworthy, our life takes on a much higher quality.

Being trusted is such a powerful trait. God Almighty is trusted by those who understand Him because He doesn't deny Himself; He cannot go contrary to His word. He doesn't change. *There is no shadow of turning with Him.* This is the example we want to rise up to.

Am I focusing on speaking only parts of truth to feed my own convenience? I need to be about representing Christ every day. It is NOT about just being me:

Ephesians 4:14: *...we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming.*

We are no longer to be children. Grow up! Maybe that is the way we were, but that is not where we should stay. No more craftiness; no more scheming. It is far too easy to fall prey to the subtle suggestions that may arise to alter our approach to speaking truth, especially if those suggestions are in line with the thinking of our sinful nature. If it is in line with what we are naturally wired toward, it is easy, but not necessarily wise, to hold onto our old way of thinking.



But this rumor I heard is really juicy. How can I hold it back if it's YouTube-worthy? We have to be respectful of other people and realize their lives may be tarnished by spreading a rumor.

Ephesians 4:15-16: *15 But speaking the truth in love (this is selfless, benevolent love), we are to grow up in all aspects into him who is the head, even Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.*

Speak truth but only in love. There is the answer to every question. *Am I speaking the truth in that selfless, benevolent love?* In so doing, we can grow up from silly children to mature Christians. And what a difference when we grow to that level!

The Apostle Paul taught us the value of intentionally unfolding truth with patience and respect. Here he is talking to a group of absolute pagans, full of idolatry:

Acts 17:22-23: *22 So Paul stood in the midst of the Areopagus and said, Men of Athens, I observe that you are very religious in all respects. 23 For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you.*

Paul's goal was to draw them to God, not to put them down for worshipping figures of stone. He only said what was necessary to build their trust and draw them to pay attention. He didn't say, *You fools! You are worshipping stones. What is wrong with you?*

Instead, he said, *Let me show you about this unknown God, because He is so magnificent!* He spoke partial truth to draw them up, to draw them out, and to show them something so much better. What incredible wisdom! He did that for their own good.



When engaged in mature conversations, our delivery of truth should be in accordance with godly principles of righteousness and on a level that respects those who are hearing us. Any partial truths we speak should always be done in a righteous manner and be for the benefit of those who hear.

Q. Is telling a partial truth the same as lying? Yes or no?



Maybe, maybe not. It depends on our motivation and whether we are staying with true, clear, godly and righteous principles. If we are, then telling a partial truth as we see in Scripture is acceptable. But if we are doing this for other reasons—especially ones that benefit us—it is not acceptable.

It can be so easy to fall into the trap of manipulating others with our words. Let's stop and think before we speak!

**We need to watch what we say and monitor why we are saying it.
Do the same principles hold true when confronted with evil?**

This is a difficult question because of its many nuances that can cause us to potentially rationalize our responses. To approach these challenges, we will need to draw specific lines of distinction. Our first distinction is to determine whether or not the evil we face is on a personal level or more in the category of a social, warlike crisis.



3. Does being confronted by the forces of darkness give us permission to lie?

In the Old Testament, God did instruct Israel to use deception when battling their enemies. In Joshua's time, there was the city of Ai that they were supposed to conquer. God allowed Israel to be routed (defeated) in battle because Achan, one of their soldiers, disobeyed God's command and took spoils from their previous battle. Once Achan was found out and executed for his treason, God then instructed them how to win their battle against the city of Ai.

God's plan was all about deception—military deception:

Joshua 8:2: *You shall do to Ai and its king just as you did to Jericho and its king; you shall take only its spoil and its cattle as plunder for yourselves. Set an ambush for the city behind it.*

Ambush: *Dictionary.com*

1. an act of lying concealed so as to attack by surprise
2. an act or instance of attacking unexpectedly from a concealed position

Joshua followed God's instructions:

Joshua 8:12: 12, 15-16: *15 And he took about 5,000 men and set them in ambush between Bethel and Ai, on the west side of the city.*

Joshua took 5,000 men as bait, bringing them out in front where the king and people of Ai could see them.

When the king of Ai saw Joshua and his men out in front of the city, he brought his army out to again battle with Joshua, not knowing of the ambush set up behind the city.

15 Joshua and all Israel pretended to be beaten before them, and fled by the way of the wilderness. 16 And all the people who were in the city were called together to pursue them, and they pursued Joshua and were drawn away from the city.

The city was left unprotected. The ambush worked, and Israel won the battle by using the strategy of deception for victory in war. This was a deceptive war practice—essentially a trick or lie—and Israel won the battle.



TIME TO GET PRACTICAL



What if our boss asks us to lie when someone calls the office for him and he says, “Tell them I’m not here.” Are we to follow through with the deception even if we could be fired?

God instructed Joshua to use a type of deception. Are we to follow that deception? NO.

**Rick's
Experience**

This happened to me several times. In one of my careers, I was a cabinet and countertop maker. I worked in a shop where orders were on schedule and then things got off schedule and we would be in trouble.

I was the general manager and worked in the office. I would answer the phone calls. One day someone called and wanted their countertop. I asked my boss the status of the customer’s countertop, and he said he hadn’t started it yet!

We hadn’t even started on the production and it was supposed to be delivered later that day. I have my hand over the receiver, and he tells me to tell the customer that his countertop fell off the truck.

I got on the phone and said, “Listen, here is what happened.” (The boss is standing right in front of me, hands on his hips, watching.) I said, “I’m sorry, we are way behind schedule. We are not nearly in a position to get this to you right now. I will go out to the shop myself and see what I can do to move it along, but it is going to be late.” I apologized and got off the phone.

The boss ripped into me saying, “Why didn’t you just say what I told you to say?” My answer was, “Because you asked me to lie. I can’t do that.”

It was hard. And that wasn't the only time. He would stand there so many times with hands on his hips, glaring and then stomping off in a rage. After a while, we ended up with a mutual respect, and he knew better than to expect me to lie. Customers actually began to know to just ask for me so they would get the truth!

How is this different from the situation with Joshua? Joshua's situation was military strategy given to him by God. They were attempting to attain and maintain control of the Promised Land God had given them.



Does this give us permission to lie when we are faced with those who would persecute us?

What about those who would come after us like the king of Ai came after Joshua?
Do we have permission to lie?



The answer is no!

No! Jesus himself chose a different path when faced with severe persecution:

Matthew 26:62-64: *62 The high priest stood up and said to him, Do you not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against you? 63 But Jesus kept silent...*

Jesus did not answer the accusations because they were false. He chose to say absolutely nothing, even with the threat of death before him so that the scriptures could be fulfilled.

And the high priest said to him, I adjure you by the living God, that you tell us whether you are the Christ, the son of God.

When the high priest says, *I adjure you by the living God*, he is implementing an aspect of the Law that says in essence, *I am imploring you as the high priest to speak based on the Law*. Jesus respected the Law. They were misusing it. They were having a trial they shouldn't have been having, so he spoke out of respect for the Law he had upheld.

64 Jesus said to him, You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN. (Quoting from Daniel 7:13)

Everyone in that room knew that prophecy from Daniel. They were incensed. When Jesus applied that prophecy to himself, he gave them a way to find him guilty of heresy. The key is, he did not lie about a thing. He did not run from persecution. He walked up in front of the prosecution and faced them because he knew that is what he needed to do. There was pure, godly honesty and integrity in everything he did. It is a wonderful example.

Jesus faced his persecutors. Here is how the Apostle Peter described the responses from Jesus:

1 Peter 2:21-23: *21 For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in his steps, 22 WHO COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT <1388> FOUND IN HIS MOUTH; 23 and while being reviled, he did not revile in return; while suffering, he uttered no threats, but kept entrusting himself to Him who judges righteously.*

Deceit: Strong's Exhaustive Concordance #1388 *dolos*; from an obsolete primary verb, *dello* (probably meant to decoy)

Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon: craft, deceit, guile

Jesus was found with *no deceit in his mouth*—no craftiness or guile. He is our example. The Matthew scriptures showed us how to approach an attack on us. Peter looks back on that and reminds us always to remember that as our standard.

Our highest and most reliable example is Jesus who had no deceit in his words, which means there was no deceit in his heart. He was solely about God's truth, God's plan, God's love, God's way, God's providence and God's wisdom. He saw himself as the tool through which God's will would be done.



Do I see myself that way when faced with the difficulty of defending myself? Am I going to rise above the sense of wanting to wiggle my way out of it by telling an untruth? Or am I going to stand as Jesus stood?

When it comes to self-protection, the flesh is very weak.

We must follow our leader and always firmly uphold the highest scriptural principles in our speech. Jesus warned about these times:

Luke 12:11-12: *11 When they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not worry about how or what you are to speak in your defense, or what you are to say; 12 for the holy spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.*



I often think about if I was in this situation, what would I do to defend the truth to properly represent God and Jesus? What would I say and how I would say it? Even though God's influence and power would help me with the words at that time, I still practice in my head how I would honor the LORD. Stephen was a great example.

Stephen basically told those persecuting him the whole plan of God. He knew it would get him into trouble, but he told them anyway because they needed to hear it, understand it and absorb what he was standing for. It cost him his life. Stephen saw before him that if he was faithful, eternity was open for him to spend it with his Lord Jesus.

This is the point Jesus' example helps us understand. We must see things in the right perspective when it comes to truth and untruth.

Always seek out and hold fast to righteousness. We must strive to simply be Christians of integrity:

1 Thessalonians 5:15, 21-22: *15 See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people. 21 But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; 22 abstain from every form of evil.*

Abstain from every form of evil—not evil in general—but every form of evil. Hold fast to that which is good. That is godly good, not earthly good.

Our speech is to reflect our clear focus on the most important things. No deceit, just integrity. These verses show a lot of deceit, and a lack of integrity:

2 Timothy 4:3-5: *3 For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, 4 and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. 5 But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*

Have a sober mind. Be clear. Be serious about all things. Endure the hardship that comes; don't run from it. We can't try to lie our way through it. Do the work of an evangelist. Fulfill that which our ministry requires of us to fulfill. These are big responsibilities we are given towards godly truth and principles.



According to Scripture, Christians do not have any permission to be deceptive with anyone, even those who would persecute us. We understand God instructing Joshua to use deceptive military tactics as applying to Israel and their fight to attain and maintain their promised land.

This is vastly different than our personal experiences against evil as Christians.

Q As followers of Christ, do we have permission to lie when confronted with the forces of darkness?



It is not like the Old Testament, where God showed them how to militarily be deceptive. We do not live in the age and environment of the Old Testament.

We don't have that kind of permission. We need to stand for truth. Does telling the truth mean we have to tell everybody everything? No, we need to stand for truth in the context of godliness, while upholding righteousness. If we are withholding a truth, we need to make sure we are doing it for the purpose of honoring our heavenly Father.

Being truthful in all aspects of our Christian lives requires a lot of thinking and a lot of understanding. We need to pay attention!

**Be careful when speaking partial truths and avoid deceit altogether.
What about embellishing our story or opinion?**

Here again we want to proceed with caution as our own imperfections can subtly turn what would be statements of clear truth into an agenda-driven commentary. How can this happen? Often it comes down to the simplicity of word choices. When we pay close attention to the words we choose, we open the door to understanding how we may come across to others.

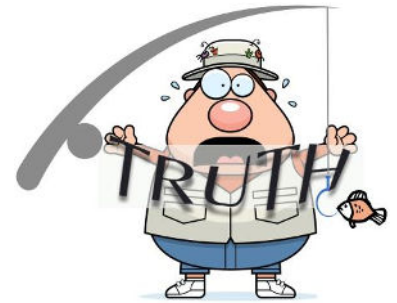


4. What about exaggeration? Is it the same as lying?

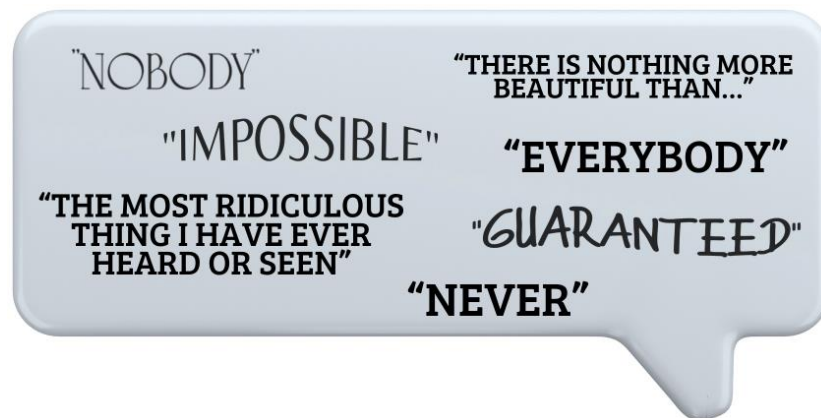
Exaggeration: *Wikipedia*

Exaggeration is the representation of something as more extreme or dramatic than it really is. Exaggeration may occur intentionally or unintentionally.

Stretching or bending the truth is another way to describe exaggeration. Did we take the truth and stretch it into something it is not? What about bending the truth? Isn't the truth supposed to be straight as an arrow? It sure can look like a boomerang sometimes after bending! Exaggeration happens. A lot of us do it without even realizing it, but we need to be careful here.



Here are a few examples of exaggeration. Sometimes we use these words and phrases without thinking:



1. Do I use these words or phrases as leverage to press my point?
2. By using these words or phrases, am I speaking pure truth?

Why would someone exaggerate on purpose? It might be used as a point to make someone stop an action or convince them to do something. For instance, if somebody is going down a harmful path and we know they are going to hurt themselves, we may exaggerate because we are running out of things to say to stop them. Maybe if we exaggerate we can make them stop. This is trying to use exaggeration for something good.

Christian principles for sound speech that fosters mutual trust and respect:

Principle 1: Self-assess. Honestly and prayerfully determine what we need to change in our speech.

Ephesians 4:25: *Therefore, laying aside falsehood, SPEAK TRUTH EACH ONE of you WITH HIS NEIGHBOR, for we are members of one another.*

Falsehood should not enter into the equation! Clear speech and accurate representation of our thoughts is paramount, especially when we might be angry.

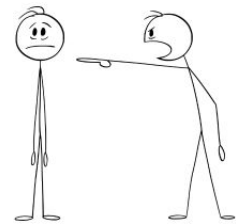
This is hard, because when we are angry we can become confrontational and blow things out of proportion. While in this emotional state we are more likely to compromise and bend the truth while trying to make a point.

Principle 2: Acknowledge our weaknesses and reactions and work to control them daily.

Ephesians 4:26: *BE ANGRY, AND yet DO NOT SIN; do not let the sun go down on your anger.*

This is interesting, *Be angry*—it's okay. We can't tell someone, *Don't be mad*. That just makes them more mad! We can be angry, but we cannot sin because of it. Feel the anger, understand it and express it in an appropriate way. Don't work out your anger by sinning with your angry words.

"You always" and "you never" are exaggerations, not truthful expressions. We attack by using these expressions, putting the other person on the defensive which causes them to close their minds to a discussion. "ALWAYS" and "NEVER" are very exaggerated (and rarely true) ways of describing the problem at hand.



Principle 3: Recognize the ease with which Satan can and will exploit our earthly mind. Be alert!

Ephesians 4:27-28: *27 And do not give the devil an opportunity. 28 He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.*

This has nothing to do with our words, but the principle does. It says, *do not give the devil an opportunity*. Don't be like you used to be. Be higher.

When we exaggerate, we are wading into the water of speaking untruths. Should we be wading into those waters or should we be standing and not giving the devil an opportunity?

Exaggerating to make our point can be stealing goodness from our neighbor. Rather than taking from them (as it says in **Ephesians 4**) let us instead be engaged in productive behavior that promotes love and good works. Let's feed them something valuable instead of taking from them. We have to put the old ways aside.

Principle 4: Replace our words of untruth and exaggeration with words that build up in truth!

Ephesians 4:29: *Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.*

This scripture is a perfect remedy for protecting us from exaggerating. Don't let any unwholesome word proceed from your mouth. If it is about to come out—stop it. Remember the attack words: “You always” and “You never!” Try rephrasing these angry words to accurately express how we feel.

ATTACK WORDS:

YOU ALWAYS...!
YOU NEVER..!

REPHRASED WORDS:

It seems like you always...
It feels like you never...
From where I sit it looks like...
MY PERSPECTIVE IS...

Exaggeration sounds like an accusation. When we take away the “ALWAYS” and “NEVER” and all those exaggerated statements, we stop sounding accusatory. We stop accusing and start observing. Observing may be internal—“it seems to me...”—and that changes the tenor of what is happening. Rephrasing opens the door of communication. When someone is pushed by an accusation, they stand firm and push back.

Principle 5: Awareness. Our standing with God depends on how we treat and speak to others:

Ephesians 4:30: (KJV) *And grieve not the holy spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.*

What does grieve the holy spirit of God mean? If we are walking in Christ's footsteps, God's spirit is dwelling within us; we are a new creature in Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:17: *Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things (our previous moral and spiritual condition) passed away; behold, new things have come.*

If we are grieving God's spirit, we are not listening to His power and His influence within us. We are not following its guiding, its leading, its provocation toward loving good works. It means we are doing something else. When we walk down these roads, we can be walking away from godliness. That would grieve God's spirit. Following our *old things*, our flesh, is not a good idea. We must be aware.

Principle 6: Evict. Permanently remove slanderous and exaggerated habits of thinking and speaking.

Ephesians 4:31: *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.*

Did it say put away some of the bitterness, some of the wrath and some of the anger? No, put away ALL! What about clamor, slander and malice? All are to be put away. All are to be removed. All are to be evicted. This is what we are called upon to rise up to. This is how we take our speech and make it pure. We don't bend and we don't stretch, but we stay pure.

This requires conscious and disciplined effort. Intentionally put these things away! This is a daily struggle—we put out the eviction notice and take away the house keys, but we may have left the window open a crack. We want to evict, but if we push something out, we have to bring in something to take its place (or we get squatters!).



Principle 7: Embrace. Be filled with the simplicity of kindness, the compassion of tenderheartedness and the mercy of forgiveness.

Ephesians 4:32: *Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*

How do we do this? Look at how God treats us. That is how we are to treat our neighbors.

Simply be a genuine disciple of Jesus! Put untruth aside and be a simple, clear and genuine disciple of Jesus.



The ability to regularly speak the truth in love can be elusive. To do it we need to recognize its God-honoring place in our lives. We then must desire its presence, weed out what stands in its way and practice its delivery.

Then and only then can speaking unexaggerated truth begin to become a life-changing habit!

Q. Is all exaggeration a sin or a lie?



No. Maybe. Could be. But, we have to watch what we say and why we say it.

If we are joking around with someone or playing a game, exaggeration fits. But when we are being serious, exaggeration is NOT a positive or godly tool.

We have to ask if our heart is in tune with scriptural principles that lay out the necessity of righteousness in thought, word and deed. Do we fully accept that we must be a truthful, righteous representative of Jesus Christ as the son of God? Do we honor God in all we say and do? Do we take truth seriously or are we flipping it and ending up with little white lies? Let's be careful!

**So, is it ever okay for a Christian to lie?
For Rick, Jonathan, Julie and Christian Questions...
...Think about it!**

All scriptures cited are from the NASB1995 translation unless otherwise noted.



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Bonus Material and Study Questions

Recommended additional study:

Ep.1076: Does the Bible Contradict Itself? Contradictions (Part II)
Child sacrifice, killing and lying – apparent contradictions resolved
<https://christianquestions.com/doctrine/1076-bible-contradict-2/>

Ep.1178: Is There a Difference Between Exaggerating and Lying?
Calling out the damage of misrepresentation and exaggeration
<https://christianquestions.com/character/1178-exaggeration/>

Ep.1087: If I Slander and Gossip, What Does That Say About Me?
Calling out the vile actions and results of evil speaking
<https://christianquestions.com/character/1087-gossip/>



Parents and Bible class teachers, continue your studies on this topic with these short, animated videos for kids at ChristianQuestions.com/YouTube:

- **What is evil speaking?**
<https://christianquestions.com/cq-videos/videos-cq-kids/what-is-evil-speaking/>
- **Is it ever ok to lie?**
<https://christianquestions.com/cq-videos/videos-cq-kids/lie/>
- **What are some wisdom lessons for children about our words?**
<https://christianquestions.com/cq-videos/videos-cq-kids/wisdom-lessons-about-our-words/>

A reminder of God's perspective:

Psalms 5:4-6: *4 For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; No evil dwells with You. 5 The boastful shall not stand before Your eyes; You hate all who do iniquity. 6 You destroy those who speak falsehood; The LORD abhors the man of bloodshed and deceit.*

The powerful penalty in the Jewish Law for bearing false witness: First, the Law was emphatic regarding the necessity for more than one witness.

This would minimize the temptation to make trouble for those we don't like by spreading false or exaggerated statements:

Deuteronomy 19:15: *A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed.*

In the case where there was a malicious witness:

Deuteronomy 19:16-19: *16 If a malicious witness rises up against a man to accuse him of wrongdoing, 17 then both the men who have the dispute shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who will be in office in those days. 18 The judges shall investigate thoroughly, and if the witness is a false witness and he has accused his brother falsely, 19 then you shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you.*

A harsh and yet just penalty for purposefully dishonest representation of your neighbor:

Deuteronomy 19:20-21: *20 The rest will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such an evil thing among you. 21 Thus you shall not show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.*

God took honesty between His people seriously. His Law and its penalties were there to make people think before they acted!

Simple speech portrays a clear message and a righteous conscience:

Matthew 5:33-37: *33 Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD. 34 But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING. 36 Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 But let your statement be, Yes, yes or No, no; anything beyond these is of evil.*

Study QUESTIONS

Ep.1353: Is It Ever Okay for a Christian to Lie?

<https://christianquestions.com/character/1353-lie/>

See:  CQ Rewind
SHOW NOTES

1. **God's perspective on truth and untruth:**
 - a. What was the purpose of the commandments in Hebrew society? (Example: Exodus 20:16)
 - b. What legal and moral truths do Leviticus 19:15-16 set up for Hebrew society?
 - c. How should we approach a disagreement with a neighbor? (Leviticus 19:17-18)
 - d. What is God's stand on respect and honesty? (Proverbs 6:16-19)
 - e. How do our actions reflect on God? (1 John 1:5-10)
2. **Telling a partial truth and withholding the truth:**
 - a. How did God allow Samuel to use a partial truth to accomplish what needed to be done? (1 Samuel 16:1-5)
 - b. How did Jesus use partial truths to protect those not yet ready for his great sayings? (John 16:12)
 - c. How should we be when speaking to others? (Ephesians 4:14-16)
 - d. Which side of Proverbs 11:13 do you fall under?
3. **Is it appropriate to lie to evil people?**
 - a. How did God use military deception to help Joshua conquer Ai? (Joshua 8:2,12-15)
 - b. How did Jesus answer the high priest during his trial? (Matthew 26:62-64)
 - c. Do you defend yourself when accused by telling partial or untruths? Did Jesus? (1 Peter 2:21-23, Luke 12:11-12)
4. **Exaggeration verses lying: Principles based on Ephesians 4**
 - 1) Do you use exaggerations as leverage to press your point?
 - 2) When you use exaggerated words or phrases, are you speaking pure truth?
 - a. **Principle 1:** Self-assess: What would be a better approach to this discussion? (verse 25)
What is necessary when we get into a heated discussion with a neighbor or brother?
 - b. **Principle 2:** Acknowledge weaknesses and reactions – work on control. (verse 26)
Why are “You ALWAYS” and “You NEVER” not good ways to get our point across?
 - c. **Principle 3:** Be ALERT and on guard against Satan exploiting every opportunity. (verses 27-28)
How can exaggeration steal goodness from our neighbor? What can we do instead?
 - d. **Principle 4:** Words of untruth and exaggeration versus words that build up truth. (verse 29)
How can we change the tenor of our statements during a disagreement?
 - e. **Principle 5:** Be aware of how we treat and speak to others. (verse 30, 2 Corinthians 5:17)
How can we “grieve” God's spirit?
 - f. **Principle 6:** Evict: Remove bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander and malice. (verse 31)
What can we put in the place of these once we succeed in rooting them out?
 - g. **Principle 7:** Embrace: Be kind, tenderhearted and merciful. (verse 32)
Are you kind, tenderhearted and merciful to others even when frustrated and angry?
5. **Examine yourself:** Are your words helpful or harmful? Do you feel you are a truthful, righteous representative of Jesus Christ? Do you honor God in what you say and do? Do you take truth-telling seriously? How?