

TO TELL THE TRUTH

By Paul Penno

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A store manager heard his clerk tell a customer, “No, ma’am, we haven’t had any for a while, and it doesn’t look as if we’ll be getting any soon.” Horrified, the manager came running over to the customer and said, “Of course we’ll have some soon. We placed an order last week.” Then the manager drew the clerk aside. “Never,” he snarled, “Never, never, never say we’re out of anything- say we’ve got it on order and it’s coming. Now, what was it she wanted anyway?” The clerk said, “Rain!”

Louis was a gentle child, and beautiful—at least she was at the moment, but her father was a violent and unpredictable man. More than once she had paid the price for his outbursts. The telltale marks were on her arms and face. A pretty dress covered the ones on her back.

Three houses down lived the Martins, a retired pastor and his wife. Devout and gentle Christians, the Martins had struck u a friendship with Louise. When the violence in her own home became unbearable, she would slip over to theirs.

Now Louise’s dad stood at the Martin’s door, fists clenched, eyes blazing. “Is my daughter here?” he shouted. She was. How should Pastor Martin respond?

As John Wilcox drove home, he pondered the bad news from the mechanic. John’s sleek little car, just 3,000 miles out of warranty, looked like it was headed for a major engine overhaul. A casual observer wouldn’t notice—not yet. But the mechanic was a man of integrity and experience. John knew the cure would cost big bucks.

Another option would be to sell. Hardly a week went by without someone asking John if he would part with his car. It was a popular model, in spotless condition, pampered and polished both inside and out. Furthermore, John could flash a meticulous service record. He had followed the manufacturer’s recommendations to a fault. What should John tell a prospective buyer?

Carmen had just returned to the dorm from a shopping trip in town. She had stumbled across a couple of real bargains and could scarcely wait to share her elation with friends on her hall.

“Friends” might not be quite the right word, for Carmen didn’t fit in all that well. In polite language, one would say she lacked social graces.

She was something of a master at breaking into conversations at the wrong moment and showing up when she was neither invited nor wanted.

As she rushed into the hall with her purchases in hand, she met Debbie, a vivacious and popular girl on campus, but one who was also caring and sensitive. "Look at my new dress," bubbled Carmen. "Don't you like it?" Debbie's heart sank. The fabric was good quality, but the style was dated, and the design would hardly complement Carmen's figure.

Debbie struggled with her feelings about Carmen. She wanted to be helpful; she wanted to be nice. What should she say?

"Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor?" Ex. 20:16. How does this ninth commandment help us respond to these three incidents?

Prayer. The basic premise of "To Tell the Truth" consisted of a panel of four well-known people correctly identifying a "central character" from a choice of three possibilities. One of them normally held an unusual occupation or had done something noteworthy, and it is this person whom the panel had to attempt to identify. Two of the people will tell lies, while the real person has sworn "to tell the truth." Now how do you go through life? Are you bluffing your way through by telling lies or do you "tell the truth"?

Let us now come to the very heart of the matter. If there is truth in the inward parts, there will be no outward manifestation of falsehood. Christ is the Truth; therefore when Christ dwells in the heart by faith, none of the errors and lies will be seen in the life; for He came to bear witness to the truth. John 18:37. He is called "the faithful and true Witness." Rev. 3:14. To us is given the high honor of being classed with Him. God made man, just as He made everything else, to be a revelation of Himself. "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." 1 Peter 2:9.

The inanimate creation is true to its calling, witnessing for God. See Acts 14:17. The everlasting power and Divinity of God have from the creation of the world until now been clearly revealed in the things that He has made. Only man has proved false to his trust, defacing the image of God, and repressing the truth in unrighteousness. Yet even in fallen humanity God's faithfulness and truth are to be seen; for every sinner is an unconscious witness to the longsuffering of God. The man who blasphemes the name of God, and even denies His

existence, is a monument of His tender mercy. It is a fact that “all men are liars;” for while they were made in the image of God, to reveal His character, they exhibit the opposite.

Yet “we can do nothing against the truth but for the truth,” no matter how much we try to, for God makes even the wrath of man to praise Him, and so the truth of God more abounds through our lie unto His glory. Rom. 3:7. God will see to it that His will is done, even in spite of man; and He will make them the agents of it; but they will have none of the benefit of it, because it is done against their will.

The commandments are all linked together; no one can break one of them without violating the whole. We have read that whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and in like manner we find that he is a liar as well. The Apostle James says, “If ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.” James 3:14. Christ is the truth, and He is meek and lowly in heart; now it is a fact that He is come in the flesh, so that every one who cherishes or exhibits bitterness or wrath denies the presence of Christ in the flesh. He holds down the truth in unrighteousness.

In 1 John 2:22, we have the whole case summed up in a single question “Who is a liar, but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ?” The one who denies that Jesus is the Christ, is a liar, and according to this question, nobody else is a liar. Now we have traced falsehood to its lair, and can identify it in its very beginning. If one has not denied that Jesus is the Christ, he is not a liar; but if he has denied this truth, he is a liar though he never speaks. If you wish to stop lying, you must go to the root of the matter. You may tear off a limb here, and pluck out an evil habit there; but until Jesus is fully recognized and acknowledged as the Christ of God, the lying disposition exists.

According to the Jesus Seminar and Dan Brown’s *The Da Vinci Code*, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John can no longer be trusted as the historical records of Jesus, instead “The Gospel of Thomas” present authentic Christianity! Over the past forty years much of Christianity has been subject to a diet of mushrooms. If you want mushrooms to grow, you keep them in the dark and feed them garbage. What some Christians believe today is the result of having been fed religious garbage in the name of Jesus!

Peter at one time denied the Lord, but he did nothing more than every one has done. “Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh, is of God; and

every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God.” 1 John 4:2, 3. Moreover, “whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ, is born of God;” “and whosoever is born of God sinneth not.” 1 John 5:1, 18. By putting these statements together, and thinking carefully over them, we may see that every sin that we commit is a denial that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh,—a denial that He is the Son of God,—and therefore that it marks us as liars.

We are told, “The Word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart.” Rom. 10:8. Christ is the Word, and it is by His presence that even sinners live. So we read further: “If thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.”

We can confess only that which already is so, it is a truth, therefore, that Christ is come in the flesh of every one, and that whoever will confess His presence has salvation. But to confess Christ,—to confess that He is come in the flesh,—is to say from the heart what the Apostle Paul wrote in Gal 2:20: “I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.”

To confess Jesus, therefore, is to be just as He was—to allow Him to dwell in us, and to speak and act through us. If this be the case, we cannot help telling the truth, since He is the truth; and if this be not the case, our whole life will be a lie. The one who has not Christ abiding in him cannot help being a liar.

So the only way any one can keep the ninth commandment is to give himself wholly to the Lord, to be used by Him according to His good pleasure. “It is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.” 1 John 5:6. Christ said: “Ye shall receive power, when the Holy Ghost is come upon you; and ye shall be My witnesses.” Acts 1:8. Only as one has the Spirit of truth, can one be capable of telling the truth.

I am thankful that Jesus is saving me from a lying tongue. I stole some items that didn’t belong to me. My conscience bothered me and I returned them. As I was replacing them, a worker approached me accusing that I had taken what wasn’t mine. All red-faced I lied and denied having removed the items. I was so ashamed of myself having that sin exposed. But as I look upon it now I am thankful for the experience. The Holy Spirit is revealing what is in my heart and how only Jesus can save me from my sin.

Jesus said, "To this end was I born, and for this purpose came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth." John 18:37. Again, "As My Father hath sent Me, even so send I you." A great mistake that many people make is to suppose that they cannot witness for the truth unless they do a great deal of talking. Just as it is possible for a person to act a lie, so may one act the truth. Often our testimony is a great deal stronger if we keep our mouth shut. It is not necessary for us to be always in an attitude of "defense." We are not obliged, as witnesses to the truth, to answer every objection that skeptics bring up. The Lord says, "Who is blind, but My servant? or deaf, as My messenger that I sent? who is blind as He that is perfect, and blind as the Lord's Servant? Seeing many things, but Thou observest not; opening the ears, but He heareth not." Isa. 42:19, 20. Jesus is the Truth and the Life. His life was sufficient witness to the truth; then when He spoke, His words were faithful testimony, because He spoke just what He was.

It is a common thing to hear that such an one has received the truth. What is it to accept the truth—It is to accept the Lord Jesus Christ as one's own personal Saviour. No matter how correct anybody's belief is as to form, he has not the truth unless he has Christ within. Unless a man knows the Lord, he does not even know what the truth is; how then can he tell the truth? To accept the truth, therefore, is no light thing. It is not merely to want to it, but to be transformed by it.

The train arrived early in the morning. A stranger stepped out and looked around. Why was he here? What should he do? This man was Captain Joseph Bates, one of the three founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. He was travelling through Michigan. In those days that was part of America's wild west. The Holy Spirit had directed him to get on a train and travel to Battle Creek. The train pulled in before breakfast, Captain Bates had no idea who to see in the town.

Then the Holy Spirit impressed him to go to the postmaster and ask a startling question. "Where can I find the most honest man in town?"

The postmaster said, "The most honest man in town is David Hewitt, a Presbyterian. He lives on Van Buren Street."

Mr. Hewitt heard the knock on the door just before breakfast. He had no idea it would change his life forever.

He opened the door and Captain Bates said, "I have been directed to you as the most honest man in town. If this is so, I have some important truth to present to you."

A verse from the Bible flashed through the honest man's mind. "Remember to entertain strangers." (Hebrews 13:2).

"Come in," he said. "Join us for breakfast. Then we will listen to you." After breakfast, Captain Bates pulled out a chart which explained prophecies about the end of time. He talked about them until it was time to stop for lunch. They ate lunch. Then Captain Bates changed the subject. Until 5pm he now talked about the Sabbath and the Third Angel's Message (Revelation 14:6-12). How long did it take for the most honest man in town to decide to keep the Sabbath? It wasn't a year. It wasn't three months, or even one month. It wasn't even a week. He decided straight away—and he kept the very next Sabbath.

Mr. Hewitt became a very strong Seventh-day Adventist. The church even met in his home each Sabbath—until a little wooden Adventist church was built in that village two years later.

Believing for another and disbelieving God for ourselves is an impossibility. We often here someone say, "I can believe for others, but I cannot believe for myself. I can believe that God forgives and saves my brother, but I cannot believe that He saves me." This is the worst sort of deception. It is real nonsense. One cannot play fast and loose with the truth in that way. Whoever really believes the Lord, believes Him all the time. The Lord does not change, and He does not display partiality. Therefore if He can be believed at all, He must be believed all the time. "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself; he that believeth not God hath made Him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life." 1 John 5:10, 11. Whoever disbelieves God to the slightest extent, makes Him out to be a liar. But God is not a liar. He "cannot lie." Therefore whoever charges God with lying is himself a liar. And whoever does not believe does this; therefore every person who does not believe that God has given eternal life, everlasting salvation, to him personally, is a liar of the worst sort.

Let no one persuade himself that he thinks well of God, unless he believes with absolute certainty that God saves him. Don't talk about believing that He will save somebody else, but not you. If God is true, you can believe Him all the time, when He speaks to you as well as when He speaks to somebody else. What would you think if a man should say to you, "I can believe everything you say, when I hear you talking to somebody else; but as soon as you begin to talk to me I

lose all confidence in you, and think that you are lying.” Would you think that he had a very high opinion of you? Yet that is the way many people regard the Lord, and they are not ashamed to talk such feelings out right before His face.

You say, “Well, then, I am lost, for I have lied all my life.” No; you are not lost, for Christ has given Himself to you, and since He is the truth He saves you from all untruth. All His commandments are promises; so when He says that we shall not bear false witness against our neighbor, He means that He will see to it that we witness to the truth, if we but receive Him. Christ died for the ungodly, for all the ungodly; therefore the sum of all lying, in fact, the only lie we can really tell, is to neglect this great salvation. It is the same as saying either that Christ has not died, or else that His death is not sufficient ransom. But, on the other hand, as soon as we accept salvation, our whole life of lying ceases.

It is not enough to be on our guard against falsehood; we must submit to the truth. We must by yielding bear witness to the fact that God is abundantly able to do all that He has undertaken. His word is true from the beginning, and is settled for ever in heaven; therefore we may depend upon it. It will not fail us. God Himself has such confidence in it that He says to every one who takes Him at His word, “Thou shalt not bear false witness.” “If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” John 8:31.

Satan, who is a liar and the father of it, is also called “the accuser of the brethren.” Rev. 12:10. He accuses them before God day and night. Now Satan would know better than to try to make the Lord believe that a person has committed a sin of which he is not guilty. He well knows that no act escapes the eye of the Lord, and that it is useless to try to make Him believe that He has overlooked some fault. Therefore it follows that in accusing the brethren before God, Satan confines himself to the things that they have actually done. Where then is the wrong? Just here: “It is God that justifieth,” and whoever lays anything to the charge of God’s elect brings false witness against God as well as against the brethren. When God has forgiven a man, it is a grievous sin to accuse the man of sin. Whoever brings up that fault and talks about it to the man’s detriment, is doing the devil’s work. There is no meaner way of serving the devil than to charge against a person the sin that he has confessed. As soon as a

person confesses his sin, God calls him righteous; to call him guilty then is to bear false witness against both man and God.

A transient came to town. Not only was his reputation as a gypsy well-known, but he had changed gender. He was befriended by an Adventist in town to whom he was forever grateful. He expressed his thanks by doing mechanical work for his Adventist friend and giving him tools. God changed this man by His miracle-working power and he was born-again and baptized, joining the church. However, he was never fully accepted into certain classes of the church society because of his former reputation.

How many there are who cruelly suspect a person, and always treat him as untrustworthy, because of some sin or sins in the past. It matters not that he has confessed his fault, he is still held under suspicion. Some will say, "We know that he has fallen once, and he may again." Yes; and so may the critic. Just as though no man in this world is guilty, except the one whose sin has become public property! The fact that a man has fallen into any kind of sin is no evidence whatever in itself that he will do the same thing again. On the contrary if he has voluntarily, under the influence of the Spirit of God, confessed his sin (and no one ever voluntarily confesses a fault unless he is prompted by the Spirit), that is the best possible evidence that he will be on his guard. If a man has lied to me, and of his own free will comes to me and confesses it, I can have more confidence in him than ever before. When a sin has been confessed, we must beware of bearing false witness by our condemnation. It is a terrible thing to condemn where God justifies.

This applies when the sinner is ourselves, just as much as when it is somebody else. When we have confessed our sin to the Lord, He has forgiven it, and we have no right to go on condemning ourselves. We are not our own; we belong to the Lord: and, leaving ourselves out of the question, we must not dare think that He has not forgiven, when He says that He has. How many there are who would place the most implicit trust in the word of a neighbor, but who do not regard it as a sin to contradict the Word of God, thus charging Him falsely.

If we ever repeat any story about anybody, we are never safe from the possibility of having lied. In the first place there is always the possibility of being mistaken: our informant may not have known all the facts, and it may be that the person talked about has done nothing amiss. And in the second place, even if he were guilty, he may have confessed it to God, and been forgiven, before the story

reached the ears of any other person. We may say that we certainly would not repeat anything against a person, if we knew that that person had repented; but as long as we do not know that he has not we are assuming all the risk of lying, both against God and man, when we take up a reproach against our neighbor.

Many people seem to think that any amount of gossip is justified, provided one does not tell willful lies. But the Bible says that the one who shall abide in the holy hill of the Lord is he who “backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbor, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbor.” Ps. 15:3. That is as much as to say that he who has taken up a reproach against his neighbor, will not dwell in the tabernacle of God. Aside from any other reason, it is a fact that it is next to impossible, if not quite, to talk about another’s doings or sayings, and speak the exact truth. If we go so far as to tell his sentiments, or to judge his motives, then it is absolutely certain that we shall be guilty of falsehood; for nobody can state another person’s belief, or tell what somebody else thinks. We shall at least tell that which we do not certainly know; and whoever does that is to all intents and purposes a liar. If we tell the truth on any such occasion, it is only by accident. The love of making an accusation is so strong that we are often willing to run the risk of telling an untruth, rather than miss the chance of being the first to tell the news.

A man had been lied about by another man and had been severely harmed and damaged. As the man was dying the man who had lied about him was called to his bedside. At the bedside the liar said, “I realize I did damage to you, and I’m so sorry I have lied to you. I want you to forgive me.”

The dying man replied, “Yes, I’ll forgive you for lying on me, but I want you to take my pillow and rip it open, go to the window, and empty the pillow of all of the feathers.”

So the man who had lied, somewhat quizzically, did as he was asked. He ripped open the pillow and let all the feathers out the window. He came back to the dying man and reported, “I have done what you asked me to do.”

Then the dying man said, “Sir, go now and recover all of the feathers that you have thrown out the window.”

The other man protested, “That would be impossible. There’s no way you can recover all of those feathers.”

The dying man said, “Likewise, though I forgive you, there is no way you can recover all of the damage that your lying words have done.”

The Book of Revelation describes a people who in the last days have permitted the Holy Spirit to mold them, to teach them, to train them, to be like Christ in character:

“I looked,” says John, “and, behold, a Lamb standing on Mount Zion [a symbol of the church], and with Him one hundred and forty-four thousand. . . . These are the ones who follow the Lamb wherever He goes. . . . In their mouth was found no deceit, for they are without fault before the throne of God” (Revelation 14:1-5). We can’t wash any portion of God’s word down the drain. It’s written here for us to believe.

This is people who as a group are different from any others in all world history, for “they sing as it were a new song before the throne.” A “new song” means a new experience; and a new experience means they have heard and received a new message, a fresh proclamation of “the everlasting gospel” which has accomplished this wonderful achievement. Yes, “the gospel of Christ . . . is the power of God to salvation” (Romans 1:16). But this is a clearer proclamation of that gospel! Luther, Calvin, and the 16th century Reformers saw much light and were a blessing to the world. But in these last days we live in the time of the great three angels’ messages of Revelation 14 and of that message of the fourth angel in chapter 18—“the everlasting gospel” is now more fully being revealed. Its purpose is not merely to prepare a people to die, but to prepare the corporate body of God’s people for translation without seeing death. Granted, some will refuse this last days ministry of Christ as our great High Priest; but there will be many who will honor Him by permitting the Holy Spirit to work upon their hearts.

“But these people are sinners by nature, just like you and me.” Yes indeed, but they have permitted Jesus to save them from continued sinning. They have no advantage, no more education or “perks” than anybody else; they have simply seen something, comprehended something, that others in past ages could not see. Paul prayed for us when he said, “For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, . . . that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love [*agape*], may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:14-19). That means, to be ready for the glorious second coming of Jesus!

Today there are those three angels going everywhere in the world, proclaiming this most precious message. Soon a fourth angel will join them, and a voice will sound from heaven in some way to every person in the world, "Come out of [Babylon], My people, lest you share in her sins, and lest you receive of her plagues" (Revelation 18:4). That voice is speaking to you!

It is telling you the good news that Christ has saved you from breaking that ninth commandment! You can be a new person; you don't have to stay in old, dark spiritual "Egypt" for He has set you free! The prison doors are open; walk out into the sunshine!