

# You Shall Not Bear False Witness

By  
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*“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”  
-Exodus 20:16*

We now reached the ninth commandment, and the last one that we will be talking about in this series. To be clear, we aren't skipping the tenth commandment which forbids covetousness, but instead I have been weaving that commandment into the other commandments to show that God not only cares about what we do with our bodies, but also the disposition in our souls.

Like the previous commandments we have spoken about, this commandment, which forbids lying, could be phrased in a positive way, which is to honor the truth. The other interesting thing about this commandment is that it is phrased in legal terms, to not bear false witness, and it also directly implicates our neighbor by telling us not to do this specifically against our neighbor. This does not mean that lying in a way that doesn't harm another person is somehow acceptable in the eyes of the law, but instead I believe it highlights the damage done against our neighbor when we fail to tell the truth. I think we see this connection highlighted in the following verse:

*“If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. “If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying under its burden, and you would refrain from helping it, you shall surely help him with it. “You shall not pervert the judgment of your poor in his dispute. “Keep yourself far from a false matter; do not kill the innocent and righteous. For I will not justify the wicked. “And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the discerning and perverts the words of the righteous. “Also you shall not oppress a stranger, for you know the heart of a stranger, because you were strangers in the land of Egypt.”  
-Exodus 23:4-9*

Notice how these commandments blend between mistreating our neighbor and lying about them. I believe that the reason why this emphasis is placed on this commandment is to show the unique way that lying breaks apart societal cohesion and can even lead to some of the worst sins that we are capable of, in many ways, deception lies at the root of most of the sins that we commit. If we think about it, God creates the universe in harmony and cohesion through His word. Meaning that the word

of truth spoken by God constitutes all reality and union throughout the spiritual and physical planes.

This is why God begins His creation with the creation of light. Light, symbolically, is the source of knowledge and truth, whereas darkness seems to be the realm of mystery and even deception. This is why God associates Himself so strongly with the truth:

*“Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.”*

*-John 14:6*

*“Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.”*

*-Revelation 19:11-13*

Christ is the Word of God who is truth in His very nature. Therefore, every word of truth is a word of union and integration. It unifies the speaker to the nature of reality itself, and in speaking truth we participate with the Word of God and bring greater unity and stability to the creation. However, the foundation of the fallen creation, the creation subject to pain, sin, disunity, and death was founded on a lie:

*“Then the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. “For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”*

*-Genesis 3:4-5*

From this one lie, and man’s belief in this lie, all of the tragic history of the fallen creation came into being. This is why Satan is specifically associated with lies:

*“You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.”*

*-John 8:44*

The reason why Satan is said to be the ruler of this world is because he is its founder, at least the founder of the present darkness that we live in. This means that when we lie,

we participate in the original lie of Satan. We participate in fragmentation, disunity, and darkness. To speak a lie is to, necessarily, separate ourselves from God's reality. To speak against it and thus to cause division between the truth and ourselves. This separation and division then spills out to Adam and God, Adam and Eve, and finally, mankind and nature itself.

Knowing this should help us to wrestle with the importance of this command. Because even though it seems like a fairly obvious commandment, it is one that we are asked to uphold more than any other commandment, and one that has the potential to corrupt us more than any other.

## Why We Lie

*"And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. Then the LORD God called to Adam and said to him, "Where are you?" So he said, "I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself." And He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?" Then the man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate."*

*-Genesis 3:8-12*

While there are numerous specific reasons why we lie, the most basic, overarching reason is seen in this passage. Adam and Eve hide themselves after they sin as a way of "covering" over their failure. To put this point more simply, a lie is a form of covering that shields us from aspects of reality that we don't like.

So whether we lie to get out of consequences, to attain some goal that is out of our reach, or to manipulate another person, our deception is the result of us not being courageous enough to face reality as it is. As Jesus puts it:

*"And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. "For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. "But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."*

*-John 3:19-21*

Jesus places this singular problem as the cause of His ultimate persecution and rejection by all men. For even His followers abandoned Him on the night of His

crucifixion, some even lying that they knew Him. Ever since the fall mankind has wrestled with God's reality. We have so many ways that we wish it could be different, and instead of facing God's reality with courage, we instead hide behind our deceptions in order to cope with the situations that we face. We will talk more about this later, but this is why courage is the number one virtue needed when it comes to living a life dedicated to the truth. As C.S. Lewis puts this point:

*"Courage is not simply one of the virtues but the form of every virtue at the testing point, which means at the point of highest reality. "*

*-C.S. Lewis - "The Screwtape Letters"*

Really quickly before we move on, this is not to say that honesty is such a supreme virtue that any word spoken honestly is necessarily *right*. The philosopher Aristotle had an articulation of virtue that the Bible seems to agree with. He believed that every virtue was flanked by two opposing vices, one coming from an excess of the virtue and the other coming from a deficiency of the virtue. So, in the case of the virtue of honesty, if someone has too little honesty then they are held captive by the vice of deception, but if someone has too much honesty, then they are held captive by the vice of brutishness.

*"Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one."*

*-Colossians 4:6*

It is not enough to merely say the right thing, in order to be truly virtuous in our honesty, we must also practice how we say it. This is the Biblical virtue of *meekness* and it must always accompany the virtues of courage and honesty:

*"But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."*

*-James 3:17-18*

## Good Lies

But before we discuss the actual sin of deception I think we first need to address the question of whether or not it is *ever* justified, or good to lie. Meaning, we have to see if the virtue of honesty is so absolute that the Christian is bound to it no matter what.

## Dreams

*“So he said to them, “Please hear this dream which I have dreamed: “There we were, binding sheaves in the field. Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf.” And his brothers said to him, “Shall you indeed reign over us? Or shall you indeed have dominion over us?” So they hated him even more for his dreams and for his words.”*

*-Genesis 37:6-8*

One way that we can speak in a way that doesn't reflect reality is through our dreams. When Joseph dreams of being in a position of authority over his brothers, and then even his father and mother, this dream had not come true yet, and so, technically, it was false. However, this isn't actually a form of deception, and I think we all recognize that.

For Joseph to share his dream is not an attempt to deceive his family, but instead to share a vision that he had, and in this case, this vision came from God. But this is similar to a person sharing a dream about their future, or even a person embodying something that is above their station. For instance, a couple dressing up to go out to a fancy restaurant to celebrate an anniversary, even if they can't normally afford this lifestyle.

Even though they aren't living in accord with reality, technically, they are acting aspirationally, and in good fun. This would only be bad if they did this constantly until they spent all their money. But within reason, this isn't necessarily a bad thing. We do this all the time. When we go to work, or to church, we tend to dress ourselves up and behave in a way that is more formal and kind than we normally are. This isn't necessarily a form of deception if we are actually trying to live up to the way that we are acting.

I think a lot of people in our culture consider this behavior inauthentic and actually prefer those who let all their darkness and iniquity hang out for all the world to see, without any filter. I believe this is the reason why so many people love Donald Trump. Regardless of what you personally feel about him, people seem to like him because he seems authentic. This is, largely, symptomatic of a sick culture. While it is possible for people to “dress up” in a hypocritical sense. Meaning that they act nice in public but are really wicked and evil behind closed doors, but this can also be aspirational. They act a certain way in public, first of all, so that they don't scandalize or embarrass their fellow man, but also because they are genuinely working on those areas of their private life.

There are virtues of discretion, tact, and self-control. These are not impediments to authentic life, but a way to grow in our virtue.

## Games

Another “good” lie comes in the form of games. Take poker for instance. In this game, people are asked to “deceive” their fellow players. However, this deception is all in good fun. Since we know that this is what we are doing, and it is part of the game, no one is hurt or offended by this practice. This is the source of all art and storytelling.

Art, mostly, consists of things that aren’t strictly “true”. When we watch a movie, even one that is based on a true story, we know that the story isn’t literally true in every sense. In fact, we know that the majority of the story is fabricated, or at the very least, exaggerated. This exaggeration is not done with any malicious or manipulative intent. As a matter of fact, what the story is attempting to do is to use fiction to express a deeper reality.

It’s a little more difficult to explain this in regards to storytelling, so let’s take painting as an example. During the high renaissance period, the ideal of art became about realism, a perfect reflection of nature. One of the most famous paintings of this time would be the Mona Lisa by Michaelangelo:



This painting lacks any flourish or exaggeration. It depicts a woman whose beauty is fairly common and even her attire and adornment are relatively modest. One reason why this painting is considered a masterpiece to this day, was the sheer level of talent that Michaelangelo poured into this artwork to give it its hyper realistic visage. The mistake that most people made in the wake of works of art like this was to believe that the purpose of art was to *merely* reflect the beauty of nature. In doing this they missed the whole point of art.

It isn't to directly reflect the beauty of nature, but it is to use nature to express a spiritual reality. Take the impressionists that came after the masters of realism like Michaelangelo:



This is Monet's "Starry Night". As you can tell this is startlingly less realistic than any of his predecessors. But why is this? Is it because Monet and the other Impressionists lacked the artistic talent to create art as realistic as their predecessors? No, they were a correction to a false way of thinking. Though Michaelangelo and his contemporaries mastered realistic techniques, realism wasn't the *point* of their artwork. Yes the Mona Lisa is realistic in its depiction, but it hasn't stood the test of time simply *because* the Mona Lisa is realistic, it has stood the test of time because Michaelangelo is speaking through his painting something about the *interior* life of humanity through his model.

This is why this one painting has inspired countless poems and songs, many of which focusing on her smile.

Monet did something similar. He is *using* the landscape in front of him to express the inexpressible. To contrast darkness and light, his view of the heavens and God's immense sovereignty contrasted by the dark and foreboding tree that looms over the city. So in one sense, his art is "less true" than Michaelangelo's, but in another sense it is "more true".

This is why games and art are not considered "deceptive". They are expressions of true realities, not manipulations that pull us away from reality. But we must be careful, because within this normal "state of play" there is also a way to use that to manipulate another person. An artist can use beauty and realism as an excuse to portray a message or ideology that is false. A beautiful movie can portray acts of cowardice, adultery, and even murder as being "beautiful" or aspirational due to the surrounding beauty.

Someone can use a game to trick a child into practicing bad morals over time. And we can even use sarcasm and "joking" as a shield to protect us when we hide deception within them. As the Proverbs warn us:

*"Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death, Is the man who deceives his neighbor, And says, 'I was only joking!'"*

*-Proverbs 26:18-19*

## To Save a Life

*"Now Joshua the son of Nun sent out two men from Acacia Grove to spy secretly, saying, 'Go, view the land, especially Jericho.'" So they went, and came to the house of a harlot named Rahab, and lodged there. And it was told the king of Jericho, saying, 'Behold, men have come here tonight from the children of Israel to search out the country.'" So the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying, 'Bring out the men who have come to you, who have entered your house, for they have come to search out all the country.'" Then the woman took the two men and hid them. So she said, 'Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. 'And it happened as the gate was being shut, when it was dark, that the men went out. Where the men went I do not know; pursue them quickly, for you may overtake them.'"*

*-Joshua 2:4-5*

The most commonly known reason to "excuse" deception is in extreme circumstances that enable someone to save a life. This is what we see in the above passage when

Rahab, a prostitute, hides the Israeli spies and is honored for doing this. We have to be very careful in talking about this deception because it can very easily set up a permission structure in our consciences that allows for deception if the ends justify the means. We have to understand that the above story is an example of an extreme form of inversion.

In any normal story, Rahab would be considered the villain. She is a prostitute, which would normally make her a woman of ill-repute, who gains money by committing adultery and fornication with different men. Beyond that, her betrayal of her nation participates in the destruction of her own people. This would make her a type of Benedict Arnold, or Brutus and Cassius, or even Judas. Someone who betrays her own people to protect her own life. The reason why we don't see her this way is because she is a part of a world that is so upside down, that a hero in that society would be a villain and a traitor in that society is a hero.

Take a more recent, well known, example. During the rise of Hitler and the spread of Nazi Germany, many Christians stood up to his regime by defying it in numerous ways, including outright violence and hiding targets of the Nazis, most notably the Jews. A famous account of this is from the Ten Boom family that is recorded in the book "The Hiding Place". But even Corrie Ten Boom, the only survivor of her family through the horrors of the Holocaust, struggled with the ethics of her decision:

*"We knew, of course, that there was an underground in Holland—or suspected it. Most cases of sabotage were not reported in our controlled press, but rumors abounded. A factory had been blown up. A train carrying political prisoners had been stopped and seven, or seventeen, or seventy, had made it away. The rumors tended to get more spectacular with each repetition. But always they featured things we believed were wrong in the sight of God. Stealing, lying, murder. Was this what God wanted in times like these? How should a Christian act when evil was in power?"*

*-Corrie Ten Boom - "The Hiding Place"*

She later, tentatively, solved her own conundrum later on in the novel when she was having dinner with a Jewish family, the Heemstra's:

*"That was all. Nothing had changed. Mrs. Heemstra continued with her recipe for stretching the tea ration with rose leaves. And yet everything was changed. For in that instant, reality broke through the numbness that had grown in me since the invasion. At any minute there might be a rap on this door. These children, this mother and father, might be ordered to the back of a truck. Dr. Heemstra came back to the living room and the conversation rambled on. But under the words, a prayer was forming in my heart. Lord Jesus, I offer myself for Your people. In any way. Any place. Any time."*

*-Corrie Ten Boom - "The Hiding Place"*

Her deception was an attempt to thwart the evil being done to these people, not an attempt to openly deceive and manipulate. But this also happened during a time of extreme inversion and is not acceptable in most normal circumstances. Let's use a previous study to understand this a little better. While the Bible does forbid murder, there are other passages that allow for "accidental" killing in the name of self defense:

*"If the thief is found breaking in, and he is struck so that he dies, there shall be no guilt for his bloodshed. "If the sun has risen on him, there shall be guilt for his bloodshed. He should make full restitution; if he has nothing, then he shall be sold for his theft."*

*-Exodus 22:2-3*

Although murder is always an act of evil, in extreme circumstances, it is allowable in the law. It isn't allowable to kill someone, but in order to defend yourself and your family, the accidental side effect of your self-defense might be that the intruder loses their life. This is why there is a caveat in the law for if "the sun has risen on him..." This doesn't mean that self-defense is illegal in broad daylight, but in broad daylight it is easier to assess the situation and see the danger posed by the intruder, it is also easier to call for help. In other words, if killing the intruder can be avoided, it should be. In the same way, if deception can be avoided, it always should be, this is the standard.

## How We Lie

The forms of deception are almost infinite and could be explained ad infinitum. So for the sake of brevity I will list some of the most common forms of deception, but I will only offer a few sentences to explain these forms. But as we go through these, I encourage you, as well as myself, to pray and see which forms of deception we most struggle with, and seek to repent of these things that we might better walk in truth. As I said previously, lying might be the most ubiquitous sin that we commit, and therefore, to commit ourselves to fight deception in our own lives will bring about a large amount of sanctification and personal growth.

*"But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin."*

*-1 John 1:7*

## Lies of Manipulation

*“Then the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. “For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”*

*-Genesis 3:4-5*

The most common form of deception that we can think of is malicious manipulation. Like Satan who targets Eve and deceives her in order to harm her, this form of deception is the most destructive, the most cruel, and therefore garners the most amount of scorn and derision. However, it is also the most rare. The majority of deception that we regularly participate in are much more subtle and easier to justify.

## Lies of Participation

*“You shall not circulate a false report. Do not put your hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. “You shall not follow a crowd to do evil; nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after many to pervert justice. “You shall not show partiality to a poor man in his dispute.”*

*-Exodus 23:1-3*

This is a massive one in our current culture. Instead of manufacturing a lie, we merely pass along a lie in the form of sharing an article, a post, or repeating a talking point that we heard online. In Shakespeare’s play Hamlet, a character offers good wisdom to his son that is very much the same as the above passage:

*“Give every man thy ear, but few thy voice, Take each man’s censure, but reserve thy judgment.”*

*-William Shakespeare - “Hamlet”*

We are to be thoughtful and compassionate, which means we should hear people out, but we don’t have to give our voices to other people unless we have found their information true. To fail at this is to participate in the lie and to be equally responsible for the outcome. This is a form of gossip and slander that causes maximum damage through numerous channels of people passing along information that they don’t know to be true or not.

I think a massive public example of this would be the massive online campaign to smear Erika Kirk. I don’t know much about Erika Kirk, but I have listened to most of the criticisms of her and found them wanting for any solid facts. And here’s the thing, to attack a grieving widow on the basis of a “feeling” is an incredibly evil thing to do. But most don’t see this as problematic because she is a public figure and they are merely passing along various doubts and worries that people have about her. This is an

example of lending our voice to something that we don't know to be true, and therefore to participate in the gossip is also to participate in the guilt accumulated by such actions.

*“And it is not every day and not on every shoulder that violence brings down its heavy hand: It demands of us only a submission to lies, a daily participation in deceit—and this suffices as our fealty. And therein we find, neglected by us, the simplest, the most accessible key to our liberation: a personal nonparticipation in lies! Even if all is covered by lies, even if all is under their rule, let us resist in the smallest way: Let their rule hold not through me!”*

*-Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn - “Live Not By Lies”*

## Self-Deception

*“But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.”*

*-2 Timothy 3:13*

Arguably the most common form of deception. To deceive ourselves is to build up a convenient narrative that protects us from any psychic harm through guilt or any other such thing. This is the source of self-justification and willful blindness to sin and corruption in our own lives, as well as in the lives of people that we love. It is this sin that Shakespeare is warning about in, probably his most, misquoted line from Hamlet:

*“This above all: to thine own self be true, And it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man.”*

*-William Shakespeare - “Hamlet”*

To be “true” to ourselves, doesn't mean, as many take it, to only believe our “own truth”, but instead it is to heed the voice of our own conscience. To not shut out what we know to be wrong with a convenient justification designed to protect our fragile sense of self.

## Lies to Maintain Peace

*“Faithful are the wounds of a friend, But the kisses of an enemy are deceitful.”*

*-Proverbs 27:6*

This is one of the easiest forms of deception to justify, to tell a lie to a friend to protect their feelings. This could be as small as failing to tell a friend that they have something in their teeth, to refusing to call out a moral failing in a friend to avoid offending them. While this may seem gracious, it is ultimately self-serving and harmful to the person that we should love enough to “wound” in order to protect them from their own sin.

## Violating Our Conscience

*“Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, “Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me.” But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.”*

*-Jonah 1:1-3*

This goes along with self-deception. But, like Jonah, any time that we hear the voice of conscience telling us that something is wrong, or even to do something right, and we ignore it, is a form of self-deception. Violating our own conscience is a sin against ourselves and therefore it is incredibly destabilizing and can even have an effect of “searing” our conscience to the point where we can no longer hear it and by doing so we can lose sight of ourselves and slowly corrupt our own character:

*“...speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron...”*

*-1 Timothy 4:2*

## Repression

*“Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.”*

*-James 5:16*

The Bible is very clear, there is something cathartic, and even therapeutic about confessing our sins. Which means that there is something poisonous and harmful about hiding our sin, which is exactly what Adam and Eve do in the garden when they cover their own nakedness. Repression like this can be to hide a sin, from ourselves or others, but it can also be to hide a shame that exists in our past, like some form of trauma or abuse. Regardless of what we are hiding, the result is the same, that which is hidden in the shadows gains a foothold in our souls and begins to poison our souls. This problem is so ubiquitous and obvious that most of modern psychology is based on this one simple premise. As the psycho-analyst Carl Jung put it:

*“As soon as man was capable of conceiving the idea of sin, he had recourse to psychic concealment—or, to put it in analytical language, repressions arose. Anything that is concealed is a secret. The maintenance of secrets acts like a psychic poison which alienates their possessor from the community. In small doses, this poison may actually be a priceless remedy, even an essential preliminary to the differentiation of the individual.”*

Carl Jung - "Modern Man in Search of a Soul"

Unfortunately we have taken this principle too far in our modern cult of authenticity in which we almost brag about our sins and trauma's and seek no actual power to move forward, to repent, or to change. To confess is also to call out for the power to change or move forward.

## Lies and Lust

*"So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate."*

-Genesis 3:6

This corresponds to what we talked about earlier with beauty. The problem with attraction is that it can blind us to potential consequences and deceive us into thinking that there is only an upside to our sin and no downside. I like how the prophet Isaiah put this point when describing a man bowing down to an idol:

*"He feeds on ashes; A deceived heart has turned him aside; And he cannot deliver his soul, Nor say, "Is there not a lie in my right hand?"*

-Isaiah 44:20

The "beauty" and "glamor" of the idol deceive the person's soul. Because the idol is so attractive, it enamours the imagination and can therefore blind the individual from the truth. This is the danger of getting lost in our own imagination, disconnected from reality and wasting away in front of a self-made illusion. This can happen with obvious things like pornography, but even with things like watching house or lifestyle videos which attract our attention and pull us into a life of fantasy, disconnected from reality. Most of the online discourse is in the same fever pitch. Completely consumed with digital reality, and losing more and more of our grip on actual reality.

In the fantasy book "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone", Harry finds a magical artifact called the Mirror of Erised, which is obviously the word "desire" spelled backwards. Using this artifact, JK Rowling has the wise professor Dumbledore teach young Harry a valuable lesson:

*"However, this mirror will give us neither knowledge or truth. Men have wasted away before it, entranced by what they have seen, or been driven mad, not knowing if what it shows is real or even possible... It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live."*

-J.K. Rowling - "Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone"

## Lies of Arrogance

*“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction.”*

*-Proverbs 1:7*

A more destructive form of self deception comes from our own arrogance. This is when we start to think that we actually understand reality, that we become so puffed up in our own understanding that we believe everything in a dogmatic way. This used to be called the “Lucifarian Intellect” after Satan himself. Satan fell in love with his own ideology so much, that when it contradicted the ultimate ground of reality itself, God, he chose to rebel against God rather than to bow to God’s rule. The poet John Milto depicts Satan voicing this ideology after being cast into Hell:

*“The mind is its own place, and in it self Can make a Heav’n of Hell, a Hell of Heav’n... Here at least We shall be free... Here we may reign secure, and in my choyce To reign is worth ambition though in Hell: Better to reign in Hell, then serve in Heav’n.”*

*-John Milton - “Paradise Lost”*

Even when his ideas have literally placed him in hell, Satan refuses to admit that he was wrong. This is the danger of pride, it is the sin that can’t be corrected, and therefore it is the sin that can’t be repented of or redeemed.

## Lies of Ignorance

*“He who answers a matter before he hears it, It is folly and shame to him.”*

*-Proverbs 18:13*

This goes along with lies of participation, but it is a little different. Ignorance is not a sin biblically, but to answer out of ignorance, or to willingly remain ignorant is a sin and the source of what the Bible calls “foolishness”. In the fear of the Lord, we know that *truth* is objective and real, but we also know that it is difficult to discern and requires time and attention to recognize. But in laziness we might remain ignorant and prefer to only listen to those that we trust.

*“The first one to plead his cause seems right, Until his neighbor comes and examines him.”*

*-Proverbs 18:17*

This is especially dangerous in our day of mass media. There is so much information out there that it can be daunting. Therefore, it is easier to simply pledge loyalty to a

single source of truth and believe those we like without trying to hear the other side. This is equally true, and equally destructive, on a personal level. We may hear a friend vent about another person, and immediately believe their side without hearing the other. In such cases we are speaking out of ignorance, but we may not see it that way.

*“The lazy man is wiser in his own eyes Than seven men who can answer sensibly.”  
-Proverbs 26:16*

## Failure to Follow Through

*“The lazy man buries his hand in the bowl; It wearies him to bring it back to his mouth.”  
-Proverbs 26:15*

It may not seem like it, but breaking a vow or a promise is also a form of deception, even if that promise was made only to ourselves. When we set a goal, or make a promise, that constitutes a commitment, and when we fail to live up to that commitment, we are engaged in a form of deception. And since it is impossible to build anything real on the foundation of a lie, to perpetually break promises is to become a fundamentally dishonest person who doesn't even count their own word as binding.

While this isn't always true, failure is usually a sign of self-deception. Meaning that a failure to actually follow through on our commitments, or to even count the cost of the commitment we are making before we make a rash vow, moves us towards deceptive behavior. In order to avoid that thought though, we tend to blame others for our failure instead of taking account of our own failure to either live up to our commitments, or to take full account of whether a promise is even possible before we make it.

## The Cost of Lies

Just as the forms of deception are almost endless, the cost of deception is equally endless. But we must take account of its cost so we can see the importance of fighting its power in our own lives.

## Trust

The first and most obvious cost of deception is trust. To lie in any form creates division and a loss of trust. This is of vital importance because trust is the basis of all relationships and the very foundation that love can be built on. Christ warns us about this reality:

*“And then many will be offended, will betray one another, and will hate one another. Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold.”*

*-Matthew 24:10-12*

Deception and betrayal breeds lawlessness, and lawlessness strips a society of the basis for trust or love. In our current culture where fraud and scandal seems rampant in almost every institution, where truth is under more assault than ever before due to technological advancements like AI where we can't even trust our own eyes anymore. A world that is becoming more superficial, more digital, and less personal, it makes sense that we are more fractious, more divisive, and less loving than we have ever been.

## Hope

This also affects our ability to hope. I don't fully understand the connection, but we are taught that there is a “trinity” of Godly ethics in the form of “faith, hope, and love...” (1 Corinthians 13:13). This means that as one of these starts to fail, they all start to fail. Just as a lack of faith, or a lack of trust, leads to a lack of love, so too does it lead to a lack of hope.

Think about games for a second. If someone offers to play a game with me that I know is rigged, I would be a fool to play the game, especially if there is some sort of bet on the line. When young people see the world as largely fraudulent, there is no hope, or incentive to join the world. If all businesses, politics, churches, and relationships are fundamentally corrupt, why participate in any of them? To do so would make us a sucker. This type of thinking is called being “Black pillled”.

This comes from the movie “The Matrix” where the protagonist Neo recognizes that there is something wrong with the world, that reality is not what it seems. He is offered a choice, to take a blue pill that leaves him in his current state of delusion, or the red pill which promises to wake him up to reality. But the reality that he is woken up to is far more dystopian and hopeless than he previously thought, this sends him into an existential crisis and even intense denial. This is being “black pillled”.

For most people, the event that did this to them was Covid. Seeing the “veil” removed on the inherent corruption in our institutions was like taking the “red pill”, seeing reality as it really was. But this spiraled many people into a form of insane pessimism. In an effort to avoid being taken advantage of, they approached all reality with a form of extreme skepticism. In a world where all things are suspect and all motives are corrupt, the only people we think we can trust are those whose conspiratorial version of reality mirrors our skepticism. And unfortunately, this way of thinking is not totally false:

*“Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, “All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. “Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours.”*

*-Luke 4:5-7*

Satan claims authority over the kingdoms of this world, and Christ, surprisingly, doesn't dispute this claim. Which means that we should expect that many of those who are powerful and wealthy in this present darkness have, in some way, “worshipped” Satan and the things of this world. But more than this, we know that humanity itself is enthralled with this kingdom and participates in Satan's rebellion to one extent or another:

*“...in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.”*

*-Ephesians 2:2-3*

We will get more to the hope present in this passage in a bit, but remember that this is the state of mankind, Satan is the prince of the power of the air, and everyone performs works of disobedience that mirror Satan's fall from glory. And when we start to see the utter corruption of this world, we lose hope, and when we lose hope we lose motivation. At a psychological level there is no difference between the absence of hope and the presence of depression.

## Corruption

*“Pilate therefore said to Him, “Are You a king then?” Jesus answered, “You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.” Pilate said to Him, “What is truth?” And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, “I find no fault in Him at all.*

*-John 18:37-38*

And by the power of lies, corruption spreads like a flood. What normally stops us from committing great evil is our own conscience, and while there are a select few people who can efficiently ignore their conscience, whom we call sociopaths, the vast majority

of us can't. It is for this reason why we need lies in order to grow more corrupt, at an individual level as well as at a societal one.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn was a Christian living in the Soviet Union during their fall into utter corruption and wickedness. And in his recounting of the horrors of the Soviet Union, in his incredibly dark book called "The Gulag Archipelago", he recounts in no uncertain terms how his nation had become utterly corrupted, at every level through the power of lies. No one could be honest with themselves, or with one another about what was true in the society anymore. Truth itself had become outlawed, and the only speech that was tolerated was whatever "truth" that the state ordained for the people. And on the foundation of these horrific lies, one of the most evil empires that ever existed was built, brick by brick. In the following quote, he explains how even good people allowed these atrocities to be committed, some even participating in them:

*"To do evil a human being must first of all believe that what he's doing is good, or else that it's a well-considered act in conformity with natural law. Fortunately, it is in the nature of the human being to seek a justification for his actions... Ideology—that is what gives evil doing its long-sought justification and gives the evildoer the necessary steadfastness and determination. That is the social theory which helps to make his acts seem good instead of bad in his own and others' eyes, so that he won't hear reproaches and curses but will receive praise and honors. That was how the agents of the Inquisition fortified their wills: by invoking Christianity; the conquerors of foreign lands, by extolling the grandeur of their Motherland; the colonizers, by civilization; the Nazis, by race; and the Jacobins (early and late), by equality, brotherhood, and the happiness of future generations."*

*-Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn - "The Gulag Archipelago"*

While most decent people can't silence their conscience, they can deceive themselves into thinking that they are following their conscience even when they are clearly and blatantly violating it. Lies are what give permission to corruption, and allow it to spread universally.

*"He who corrects a scoffer gets shame for himself, And he who rebukes a wicked man only harms himself. Do not correct a scoffer, lest he hate you; Rebuke a wise man, and he will love you. Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; Teach a just man, and he will increase in learning. "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."*

*-Proverbs 9:7-10*

Also, our capacity to change is linked to our ability to receive corrections. If we can't be corrected, then we can't repent, and if we can't repent our corruption can only spread. Think about an infection in your body. Infections only have the ability to spread, they don't shrink of their own accord. They have to be cut out, excised from the body so that their corruption doesn't spread and kill the person. But the only way to do this is to first identify the infection and locate it so that it can be cut out.

Sin works the same in an individual as well as in a society. Lies prevent repentance because they blind us to our need for repentance. They assure us that we are fine, all while providing cover for the unmitigated spread of corruption and evil.

*“And Jesus said, “For judgment I have come into this world, that those who do not see may see, and that those who see may be made blind.” Then some of the Pharisees who were with Him heard these words, and said to Him, “Are we blind also?” Jesus said to them, “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, ‘We see.’ Therefore your sin remains.”*

*-John 9:39-41*

## The Truth and Liberty

*“One word of truth shall outweigh the whole world.”*

*-Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn - Nobel Acceptance Speech*

*“Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. “And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.”*

*-John 8:31-32*

This then leads us to our solution. As simple as it may seem, to stop the spread of corruption, to find true liberty and union with God and our neighbor, we must devote ourselves to the truth. While lies provide a lot of soothing comfort to us, the comfort they offer to us is only temporary, and once the comfort is gone, they can only bring destruction. In many ways, lies act like a form of intoxication:

*“And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit...”*

*-Ephesians 5:18*

Wine can provide rest and comfort to those who drink it, but its comfort is not based in reality, but in dulling the harsh nature of reality. As such, once its effects fade, or dissipate, all that we were blinding ourselves toward comes rushing back in a moment,

and now we have to deal with our problems anew with the added side effects of coming down from our drinking.

God doesn't offer His people comforting lies, but the truth in all its totality. And the truth that Christianity teaches is at one point far more harsh than any other philosophy of man, and yet it is simultaneously, even paradoxically, more hopeful and optimistic than any other philosophy or religion. For while Christianity does teach us that mankind, and all our institutions are corrupt down to their core, it also teaches us that they were *made* pure and that this same purity can be redeemed by the One who made them:

*"And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus..."*

*-Ephesians 2:1-6*

While shielding ourselves from the harsh nature of reality and pretending as though humanity is pure and our institutions unstained and altruistic can bring comfort, as we spoke about earlier, once that veil is removed, there is nothing protecting us from the despair that develops from seeing the darkness and corruption of our world. If we want the exposure to malevolence, evil, and death, to not destroy us, we must be equally aware of the life and love of God that redeems this world and fills us with hope. This reminds me of a quote by the Christian novelist Dorothy Sayers.

Prior to World War 2, the west had convinced themselves through their naive socialistic theories that they were on the verge of utopia, that war, famine, and disease would be cured through their new technologies, philosophies, and social programs. But in the wake of World War 2 they saw how the nation that was at the forefront of philosophy and science, Germany, could be responsible for the worst atrocities the world had ever seen. This brought about a level of despair in the west that was unknown until that moment, and in this despair, Dorothy Sayers wrote the following:

*"...The people who are most discouraged and made despondent by the barbarity and stupidity of human behavior are those who... cling to an optimistic belief in the civilizing influence of progress and enlightenment. To them, the appalling outbursts of bestial ferocity in the totalitarian states, and the obstinate selfishness and stupid greed of*

*capitalist society are not merely shocking and alarming. For them, these things are the utter negation of everything which they have believed. It is thought the bottom had dropped out of their universe... Now for the Christian, this is not so. He is as deeply shocked and grieved as anyone else, but he is not astonished. He has been accustomed to the idea that there is a deep interior dislocation in the very center of human personality... It is, at bottom, far more pessimistic than Christian pessimism because, if science and progress break down, there is nothing to fall back upon. Humanism is self-contained — it provides for man no resources outside himself. The Christian dogma of the double nature of man — which asserts that man is disintegrated and necessarily imperfect in himself and all his works, yet closely related by a real unity of substance with an eternal perfection within and beyond him — makes the present parlous state of human society seem less hopeless and less irrational.”*

*-Dorothy Sayers - “Total Depravity - A Great Source of Strength”*

The present darkness of the world, and our own nature, is far more severe than even the most despairing pessimists could ever imagine, but the hope that began the world and redeemed is far greater than the most naive optimist could possibly fathom. What is greater, death, or the life that falls to death? The shadow, or the light that casts the shadow? Corruption, or the purity that became corrupt?

This is why Satan’s greatest victory became his greatest defeat. Since this world is built by the lies of the evil one, the only man to ever live their life in total obedience to the truth, the only man who was unwilling to lie, was condemned to death by a court of deceit and lies. Seeing the Son of God wrapped in flesh, Satan, in his hubris, believed that he could destroy life itself by swallowing God in the grave. But far from succeeding in his goal, by bringing life into death, light into darkness, the grave was overcome, and the darkness was destroyed by the light.

*“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.”*

*-John 1:4-5*

*“Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and on those in the tombs bestowing life!”*

*-Paschal Troparion*

What Scripture teaches us is that corruption is not the natural state of things. It was the eternal life of the Spirit of God that gave birth to the universe, the Word that embodies the truth that gave shape to our universe, and the love of God that created the world in His image. It was the deception of Satan that corrupted the good work of God. So while

the corruption is deep and far more pervasive than we would like to know, it isn't the natural state of things, but a deprivation of God's intent.

As such, it is far more natural for God to restore the creation to perfection than it was for the creation to become corrupt. No matter how corrupt and wicked an individual can become, the righteousness that can redeem Him is his true nature, not the sin that stained him. The Christian who can accept this truth is the one who can maintain their sanity in this world gone mad, can see their sin without being brought to despair over it, and can make the decision to speak the truth no matter the consequences, and in knowledge of the truth, we find our freedom and our hope in God.

*"I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry."*

*-2 Timothy 4:1-5*