

Is It Ever Right to Lie?

I realize many people claim that it is sometimes acceptable, or even good, to lie. They may give examples of situations in which they consider lying "appropriate" or even "necessary." Often these examples represent very "extreme" cases, circumstances that few people will ever experience.

In practice, however, it is easy for the person who justifies lying in such "extreme" cases to end up "justifying" it for any reason at all. It may not be his intention to do this, but this tends to be the end result. People will always have some "reason" (excuse) that makes their lie "justified." The problem is that when we let circumstances and opinions rule our conduct, we lose any objective, unchanging, standards for making moral decisions.

In contrast, if we make the Bible our starting point for all we think and do, we find ourselves with a totally different view. We have the objective, unchanging Word of God - the God who alone defines morality (based on his very own nature). Anything contrary to what God has defined as "morally right" is not only an attack on morality, but is against the very nature of God.

Each moral attribute is a reflection of the nature of God. In fact, God's nature defines morality! For example, how do we know what love is?

1 John 4:16

God is love.

So we need to look in the Bible to find out what God is like - how he displays love.

1 John 4:10 This shows us what love is: It is not our love for God, but his love for us, in that he sent his Son to be the sacrificial payment for our sins.

Matthew 5:44-45 Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you. In this way, you will prove that you are children of your Father in heaven. He makes his sun rise on both evil and good people, and he sends rain on both righteous and unrighteous people.

The Bible says much more about love, of course, but a discourse on love is not my main purpose, here.

Also, it is NOT my purpose to say that you must hunt for verses that begin with the words, "God is... ." All the moral commands in Scripture reflect the nature of God. For example, 1 Corinthians 13 says much about love. But it doesn't say, "God is love." It doesn't need to.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8a Love is patient and kind. Love does not become jealous. It does not brag about itself, nor is it filled with pride. Love is not rude, nor does it try to get its own way. It is not quick to get upset with others, nor does it keep a record of the wrongs they have committed. Love is not happy when evil occurs; rather it is delighted with the truth. Love covers all things, it remains confident and hopeful in all things, it patiently endures all things. Love never gives up.

The same goes for truthfulness and lying. (The idea of being faithful or trustworthy is also related.) So we need to ask the question, "Is lying compatible with the nature of God?"

Numbers 23:19

God is not a human, that he should lie.

Titus 1:2b

God, who does not lie.

Hebrews 6:18

It is impossible for God to lie.

Are faithfulness and truth compatible with the nature of God? Yes, it is his nature!

Deuteronomy 7:9 Understand that the LORD your God is God. He is the faithful God, who keeps his promise and shows his love for a thousand generations, to those who love him and obey his commands.

John 3:33

God is truthful.

1 Corinthians 10:13 No temptation has taken hold of you except for what is common to everyone. But you can trust God, that he will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you can endure. Along with the temptation, he will provide a way through it, so that you will be able to endure it.

2 Corinthians 1:18

God is faithful.

Revelation 3:14

[Jesus] - the "Amen," the faithful and true witness.

Revelation 19:11 And I saw heaven opened; and a white horse was standing before me. Its rider is called Faithful and True. With integrity he judges and makes war.

Of course, we don't have to look only at verses that describe God. We can look at any verse that describes godly conduct!

Now as far as specific verses concerning lying (as far as our own conduct is concerned), here are a few:

Exodus 20:16

You must never tell lies about your neighbor.

Leviticus 19:11b

You must never lie or deceive another person.

Deuteronomy 5:20

You must never tell lies about your neighbor.

Matthew 19:18

And Jesus replied, "... You must never tell lies about anyone."

Mark 10:19 You know the commands, "You must never commit murder. You must never commit adultery. You must never steal. You must never tell lies about anyone. You must never cheat anyone. Honor your father and your mother."

Luke 18:20 You know the commands, "You must never commit adultery. You must never commit murder. You must never steal. You must never tell lies about anyone. Honor your father and your mother."

Colossians 3:9 Do not lie to each other, since you have gotten rid of your old sinful life and the things you once did.

Other verses tell us that when we say something, it should be true. We should not say one thing and mean another. (To do so is to live in a "worldly" manner - that is, to live just like people who don't know God!)

Matthew 5:37 Let your "yes" mean "yes," and your "no" mean "no." Anything that goes beyond this is from the evil one.

2 Corinthians 1:17-18 When I made these plans, do you think I did so without serious intent? Do you think I make plans the way the world does - saying both "Yes, yes," and "No, no"? Just as God is faithful, what we say to you is faithful - not "Yes" and "No."

James 5:12 Brothers and sisters, this is of highest importance: Do not take an oath to confirm what you say, whether it is in the name of heaven, of the earth, or

of anything else. Let your "Yes" mean "yes" and your "No" mean "no."
Otherwise, you will be condemned.

I should make a few comments about the Matthew and James passages. Some people interpret these verses in such a way as to contradict other passages in the Bible. In legal, government matters (such as when a person is standing before a judge), oaths were required - even mandatory - according to the Old Testament regulations. But some people fail to make a distinction between these legal, judicial matters, and normal "day-to-day" life. As a result, they interpret these passages in Matthew and James in a way that opposes such oath-taking ("swearing"). The intent, however, was NOT to contradict (or nullify or abolish) other passages in the Bible, but to speak concerning normal, "day-to-day" life. Every day, all the time, any time you interact with people, your speech should be of such a nature that there is never any reason to doubt your truthfulness. There should be no need to swear (make an oath) or to promise that you are speaking truthfully - you should ALWAYS do so.

Remember, an oath is almost the same as a solemn promise, though it sometimes has the added implication of judgment against the person (by God or by the government) if he breaks it. You should not break your promises (or oaths). Neither should your words (those spoken WITHOUT an oath) prove false. [A few of the many verses concerning legal oath-taking are: Exodus 22:11; Numbers 5:19; and Deuteronomy 6:13. Even God took legal oaths! See Genesis 22:16; Exodus 33:1; and Deuteronomy 1:34-35, for three examples. The New Testament refers to God taking an oath in Hebrews 6:16-17; 7:20-21, 28.]

Now it seems to me that the clear commands of Scripture would be enough to convince anyone that God is opposed to lying. But there are "smooth talkers" [see Romans 16:18] and people who have been deceived by them, who ignore these plain commands and try to use examples of people who lied, to try to convince others that lying can be good.

For example, they use the illustration of Rahab, the prostitute. When she hid the two men who were spying on Jericho, she lied to the king of the city, and kept the two men alive.

Joshua 2:1-7 And Joshua the son of Nun secretly sent two men out from Shittim as spies. He said, "Go, look over the land, especially Jericho." So they went and stayed at the house of a prostitute named Rahab.

Now the king of Jericho was told, "Look! Some Israelites have come here tonight to spy out the land." So the king of Jericho sent this message to Rahab: "Bring out the men who have come to you and are staying at your house. They have come to spy out the entire land." But the woman had taken the two men, and hid them. She replied, "Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they came from. As it was getting dark, and the gate was about to be closed, the men left. I do not know where they went. But go after them quickly, and you may catch up with them." (She had actually taken them up to the roof and hidden them under some stalks of flax, which she had laid out on the roof.)

So the men left to search for the spies along the road to the Jordan river crossing. And as soon as they left the city, the gate was closed.

Then these people show you that Rahab is praised in the book of James:

James 2:25 In the same way, wasn't Rahab the prostitute shown to have God's approval by what she did, when she welcomed the spies and sent them home a different direction?

Of course, James praises her for her faith (a faith that resulted in godly actions), not for lying. The book of Hebrews also mentions this.

Hebrews 11:31 Because of her faith in God, Rahab the prostitute welcomed the spies in peace. She was not killed with those who refused to obey God.

The Bible says that she lied, but it never says that her lie was good. But the "smooth talkers" will use all sorts of reasonings to try to convince you that the praise of her *faith* also included a praise of her *lying*.

Another example they will give is the instructions that God gave to Samuel, when he went to anoint David.

1 Samuel 16:1-3 And the LORD said to Samuel, "How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king of Israel? Fill a container with olive oil and go. I am sending you to Jesse in Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king."

But Samuel replied, "How can I go? If Saul finds out, he will kill me."

The LORD said, "Take a young calf with you. Say, 'I have come to offer a sacrifice to the LORD.' Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what to do. You must anoint the one I point out to you."

If we read the passage and its context, we will see that Samuel had two things to do at Bethlehem: 1) Sacrifice to the LORD, and 2) anoint the future king (David). If questioned (by those who would try to harm him), the Lord instructed Samuel to tell them the first purpose for his visit, but not the second. He did NOT instruct Samuel to lie. Everything that he was told to say (regarding the first purpose) was truthful. It was not distorted in a way to deceive the questioner. Samuel was simply told to avoid mentioning the second purpose.

Those who promote lying want us to believe that if we don't tell COMPLETELY EVERYTHING, we are lying! They want us to believe that God was teaching Samuel to lie by not telling everything!

In reality, what do we learn from this? To lie?? Of course not! All this tells us is that sometimes there are things that people (in this case, enemies of truth) should not know. But in such a case, what we do say is to be truthful and accurate.

There are other verses that such people will try to use, in order to promote lying. But I think these two passages will serve to illustrate the way they must twist and distort the Scriptures, in order to serve their purposes.

At many times throughout history, Christians have been forced to choose between lying (denying who Christ is) and facing torture or death. There were even times in which all they needed to do was to merely *pretend* to worship a false god, and they would be set free! Instead, they chose to suffer and die, rather than to lie about their God and Savior!

In contrast, many of these modern-day lie-promoters would say that it would have been better to "pretend" to deny Christ (to lie about him) and stay alive. They would claim that once the person was set free, he could change back into a follower of Jesus! He could say that his denial was not genuine!

But Jesus says:

Matthew 10:28, 32-33, 38-39 Don't be afraid of those who can kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. Instead fear the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Everyone who admits to others that he knows me, I will admit to my Father in heaven that I know him. But everyone denies to others that he knows me, I will deny to my Father in heaven that I know him.

Anyone who does not take up his cross and follow me, does not deserve to be called my disciple. Whoever finds his life will lose it; whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

When evil people (those who hate truth or who want to use truth to accomplish evil) try to get you to answer their questions, there is also another option you can choose. Not only can you choose to NOT tell them everything, but you can choose to tell them nothing at all! In some cases, they may hurt you and try to force you to give them the information they want, but you do not have to tell them. Look at what Jesus did, when he was on trial before the Jewish and Roman leaders (just before they put him to death). In a few specific instances, he did answer them. But for most of the questions and accusations, what did he do?

Matthew 26:62-63a The high priest stood up and said to Jesus, "Do you have nothing to say? What about all the things these witnesses have said against you?" But Jesus kept silent.

Matthew 27:13-14 Then Pilate said to him, "Don't you hear how many things they have testified against you?" But Jesus did not give him an answer, not even to a single accusation. So the governor was very surprised.

Luke 23:9

Herod asked Jesus many questions, but Jesus would not answer him.

When necessary, we can follow the example of our Lord and Savior - our master and teacher.

1 Peter 2:23 When they insulted him [Jesus], he did not insult them back . When they made him suffer, he did not pour out threats against them. Instead, he entrusted himself to the One who is the Righteous Judge.

There will come a day of judgment for all of us. Those who try to deceive us will answer to God. We do not have to give-in to their teachings.

1 Peter 1:13-19, 22-23; 2:1-3 So prepare your minds for action and be clear-minded. Base your hope entirely on the kindness you will be receiving when Jesus Christ is revealed. Having become obedient children of God, don't give yourself to satisfying the evil desires you used to have, back when you didn't know any better. But just as God, who called you, is holy, you also must be holy in all you do.

In God's Word it is written, "You must be holy, because I am holy." He does not show favoritism, but judges each person according to what he has done. So if you look to God as your Father, spend the rest of your temporary stay here on earth in reverent fear. Remember that you were rescued from the useless way of life that was passed down to you from your ancestors. God paid the ransom, not with something that can perish, such as silver or gold, but with something far more precious - the blood of Christ, who was like a sacrificial lamb, without any blemishes or defects.

Since you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth, you can now have a genuine love for your Christian brothers and sisters. So love each other deeply and with all your heart. For you have had a new birth. And the source of your new life is not something mortal, but something that cannot die. It is the living message of God, which will live on forever.

So rid yourselves of every kind of evil, every kind of deception, hypocrisy, jealousy, and every kind of evil speech. As newborn babies have a longing for milk, develop an intense desire for pure "spiritual milk" - God's word, which

enables you to grow up in your salvation. Even now, you have begun to experience the Lord's kindness!

I hope that the above comments have provided some help in answering your question about lying. As always, I recommend that you check the Scriptures, in order to make sure that what I am saying is correct. I hope you have the same godly attitude that we see in the people of Berea, who were praised by the apostles:

Acts 17:11 Now the people of Berea were more willing to listen than those of Thessalonica. They eagerly accepted the message, and examined the Scriptures daily, to find out if what Paul said was true.

Finally, I hope that in all ways you will grow in the grace (kindness) and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 3:18)