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"Honestly Speaking"
First Thess 2:5
(52-11)

When Paul looked back on his work among the Thessalonians? A life on a daily basis that was:

1. **FEARLESS** [2:1]
2. **GENUINE** [2:3]
3. **HONEST** [2:5]
4. **HUMBLE** [2:6]
5. **LOVING** [2:7]
6. **PASSIONATE** [2:8]
7. **DEDICATED** [2:9-11]

*Have you ever thought how powerful words can be? In his chapter called *The Discipline of Tongue*¹ Pastor Kent Hughes tells this story to remind us! In 1899 FOUR reporters from Denver, Colorado, met by chance on a Saturday night in a Denver railroad station. Al Stevens, Jack Tournay, John Lewis, and Hal Wilshire worked for the four Denver papers: the Post, the Times, the Republican and the Rocky Mountain News.*

Each had the unenviable task of finding a scoop for the Sunday edition. They hoped to spot a visiting celebrity arriving that evening by train.

However, none showed up, so the reporters wondered what on earth they would do. As they discussed options in a nearby saloon, Al suggested they make up a story. The other three laughed - at first. But before long they were all agreed - they would come up with such a whopper that no one would question it and their respective editors would congratulate them on their find.

A phony local story would be too obvious, so they decided to write about someplace far away. They agreed on China. "What if we say that some American engineers, on their way to China, told us they are bidding on a major job: the Chinese government is planning to demolish the Great Wall?"

Harold was not sure the story would be believable. Why would the Chinese ever tear down the Great Wall of China? "As a sign of international goodwill, to invite foreign trade."

By 11 P.M. the four reporters had worked out the details, and the next day all four Denver newspapers carried the story - on the front page. The Times headline that Sunday read: "Great Chinese Wall Doomed! Peking Seeks World Trade!"

¹ Hughes, Disciplines of a Godly Man, p. 129-31.

Of course, the story was a ridiculous tall tale made up by four opportunistic newsmen in a hotel bar. But amazingly their story was taken seriously and soon ran in newspapers in the Eastern U.S. and even abroad.

When the citizens of China heard that the Americans were sending a demolition crew to dismantle the Great Wall, most were indignant, even enraged. Particularly angry were members of a secret society made up of Chinese patriots already against any kind of foreign intervention. Moved to action by the news story, they attacked the foreign embassies in Peking and murdered hundreds of missionaries from abroad.

In the next two months twelve thousand troops from six countries, working together, invaded China to protect their countrymen. The bloodshed of that time, born out of a journalistic hoax fabricated in a saloon in Denver was the time of violence known ever since as the Boxer Rebellion.²

What power the written or spoken word has! Nations have risen and nations have fallen to the tongue. Lives have been elevated and lives have been cast down by human speech. Goodness has flowed like a sweet river from our mouths, and so has the cesspool. The tiny tongue is a mighty force indeed.

Read By My Spirit [Holy Spirit-25] pp. 47-48.

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- I. **FEARLESS** [2:1] And that is what he taught every group he ministered to!
- II. **GENUINE** [2:3] They had experienced the DOCTRINE OF SALVATION³ Some years ago a man in a penitentiary studied a Moody correspondence course. He found Christ. In answer to one of the questions which gave him an opportunity to express where he stood in relation to his newfound faith, he wrote down: "I am a new man in an old body." It was a most perceptive remark. For that is what salvation is. But it will go even further than that saved prisoner realized. One day he will be a new man in a new body.
- III. Honest [2:5]
 - A. LYING: THE PROHIBITION Colossians 3:9 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, (NKJV)

² Paul Aurant, ed. More of Paul Harvey's the rest of the story (NY: Bantaam Books, 1981), pp. 136-138.

³ Phillips, 100 New Testament Outlines, #100.

B. LYING: THE PURPOSE⁴

1. PROTECT OUR FEARS. John 7:12-13 And there was much complaining among the people concerning Him. Some said, "He is good"; others said, "No, on the contrary, He deceives the people." However, no one spoke openly of Him for fear of the Jews. (NKJV) Perhaps even more lies are told out of fear. This may be the root of most children's lies - fear of consequences. And the result is usually quite harmless. But in adults deception can have monstrous effects - Watergates, Irangates, Pearly Gates.
2. PROTECT OUR EMBARRASSMENT. Proverbs 26:24-25 He who hates, disguises it with his lips, And lays up deceit within himself; When he speaks kindly, do not believe him, For there are seven abominations in his heart; (NKJV) Many lie to avoid embarrassment or to keep from hurting others' feelings. When we are unwilling to face the truth we begin the long term slide of deception. This is a hardening of our spiritual lives!
3. PROTECT OUR MONEY. Proverbs 28:8 One who increases his possessions by usury and extortion Gathers it for him who will pity the poor. (NKJV) Some otherwise honest people find their Achilles' heel to be money. The rationalization is so reasonable: "Business is tough. The margin between success and failure is fractional. All my competitors 'fudge' on their accounting procedures. If I don't do what everyone else- is doing I'll fail! And then what will my investors say? They all know that I'm a Christian. I can't let them down. God will understand." Of course, God *does* understand - all too well!
4. PROTECT OUR CULTURE. John 19:38 After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took the body of Jesus. (NKJV) A dear friend of mine works for an extremely large Japanese corporation. He is a technical quality engineer. Second in command at a manufacturing facility. His job is to be sure the level of quality sold to the customer is present in the product (in his case that product is magnetic film). On many occasions he has nearly lost his job for reporting a batch of film that failed the test. He was rebuked and his Japanese supervisor cleared the product for delivery. He soon found out that that was the way business was done in that company! Their culture said that to admit inferior product was a loss of face and would not be tolerated.

C. LYING: THE WAYS⁵ The human mind seemingly knows no end to its creativity when it comes to rationalizing conduct. This capacity is only exceeded by the creation of deceptions and lies.

1. SLANDER is lying about another's character or conduct. Thomas Watson the Puritan divine wrote- "The scorpion carries his poison in his tail, the slanderer carries his in his tongue. Jesus was assailed on many occasions by His enemies. But today Christians are guilty of

⁴ R. Kent Hughes, Disciplines of Grace, p. 159.

⁵ R. Kent Hughes, Disciplines of Grace, p. 159.

much the same when they willingly share evil reports about fellow believers that are true! God says to not speak evil unless we are in the admonishment and edification mode to the person himself! James 4:11 Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. (NKJV)

2. GOSSIP: Gossip is the voluntary sharing of information, true or untrue, that is damaging to the reputation of the one referred to. Often even truth gets so mixed up in the mind of the hearer that it is false when it finally slips out of the mouth of the hearer. Here God's Word must be taken to heart.

"Do not go about spreading slander among your people.... I am the Lord" (Leviticus 19:16).

". . . a gossip separates close friends" (Proverbs 16:28).

"He who covers over an offense promotes love, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends" (Proverbs 17:9).

"The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man's inmost parts" (Proverbs 18:8).

"Without wood a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down" (Proverbs 26:20).

This dangerous habit of gossip is often prefaced with: "don't tell anyone but . . .", or "did you hear . . .", or "I'm not sure but . . .", or "did any of you hear that . . ." and the most insidious "please pray with me about . . .".

3. FLATTERY Among the subtlest forms of deceit is flattery, which someone has cleverly defined as "saying things to a person's face that you would never say behind his back!" 1 Thessalonians 2:5 For neither at any time did we use flattering words, as you know, nor a cloak for covetousness -- God is witness. (NKJV) Flattery does not come from love for that person, but rather from a love for self that wants to be noticed or perhaps ingratiated to the one being flattered. Elihu ominously spoke against this when he said, "I will show partiality to no one, nor will I flatter any man; for if I were skilled in flattery, my Maker would soon take me away" (Job 32:21, 22). God's people must avoid flattery just as the Apostle Paul and the writer of Proverbs averred: "You know we never used flattery" (1 Thessalonians 2:5); "do not associate with one who flatters with his lips" (Proverbs 20:19, NKJV).

4. EXAGGERATION Playful exaggeration in story-telling - embellishing a story to entertain others - is not forbidden. But exaggerating one's work, as is so common in Christian ministry - making God's work more glorious or more "successful" than it is - is sin. Pretending that something is more wonderful than it is falls under the same condemnation.

5. CARELESSNESS Many people become "chronically inaccurate" in what they say. They do not lie deliberately but carelessly. For this

reason Dr. Samuel Johnson, advised: " Accustom your children ... constantly to this; if a thing happened at one window and they, when relating it, say that it happened at another, do not let it pass, but instantly check them; you do not know where deviation of the truth will end. The lazy lie is a sign of moral stagnation!

6. TRUE WORDS Even true statements can be employed to deceive others. In the oft retold example - as a ship's first mate so well understood. It seems that the first mate had been derelict in his duties and had been disciplined by the ship's captain. But a few days later he got his revenge when the captain became ill, and the first mate assumed running the ship - and the keeping of the ship's log. His opening entry that day began, "Captain sober today . . ." Perfectly true - and a perfect deception in what it implied!
 7. INSINUATION Satan's slander of job is instructive. His method involved an insinuating question: "Does job fear God for nothing?" (job 1:9). The enemy did not plainly slander job as a believer who followed God for what he could get. He slyly raised the question - a grievous slander. This is so easy to do. "Is John really that smart?" "Why would Joe do that?" Insinuating questions are slippery libels on others. Those attacked are defenseless and the attackers unassailable - in this world!
- IV. What can we do? Colossians 3:9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices (NIV). How do we change?

A. **STOP THE OLD HABITS.**

Discipline yourself to tell the truth. Truth must become a habit. Honesty becomes something we do without thinking. Habitual integrity is the goal of our lives. Avoid at all costs the so-called "small things":

- ⇒ the tiny phone theft,
- ⇒ stealing work time from our employer Colossians 3:22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. (NIV)
- ⇒ taking the office supplies for personal use
- ⇒ indulging our desires in the liberality of an expense account
- ⇒ estimating mileage to our favor
- ⇒ twisting the truth ever so slightly.