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## CHAPTER ONE

# We Live in a Dishonest World

**A**N EPIDEMIC OF LYING HAS SWEEPED OVER OUR LAND. Our culture is shaped around the assumption that Americans are a dishonest and lying people. People must always be cautious to avoid being cheated. Businesses make huge efforts to screen out the liars and cheaters. Older people frequently talk of those “good old” days when a person’s “yes” meant “yes” and “no” meant “no.” A neighbor’s word and handshake could be trusted. The customer could ask the merchant to charge it “till the end of the month.” The businessman could “write it up” on an invoice and did not need to worry whether he would be paid. The farmer could hurry to the hardware store for a bolt, put it on his account, and get back to plowing. At one time, honesty and trust prevailed in our culture.

However, that has changed. Ours has become a culture of liars.

Lying has become a serious problem, aggravated by the prevailing attitude that everybody does it; therefore, it is not so bad. Some even claim one must lie these days to make it. Some business people say they must lie to stay in business. Pub-

lic officials argue that those in government have a right to lie.

People have largely lost their awareness of the sinfulness of lying. We have lost sight of its consequences and the harvest that comes with it. For some, lying has become almost as natural as walking. The shame of being a liar has evaporated. As William Bennett once said, "Shame is synonymous with conscience. If you have no sense of shame, it means you have no sense of wrongdoing."<sup>1</sup>

Lying and dishonesty have become a way of life. The businessman lies to make an extra dollar. The employee lies on his time card. The manager lies to her employees. The husband lies to his wife about his unfaithfulness, and the wife lies to her husband. Parents lie to children, children to parents and others in leadership and authority.

People pose as salesmen offering a bargain, but underneath lies a carefully planned rip-off. The flyer in the mail poses as an advertisement of a legitimate company with a fantastic product; but it only represents a mailing address to receive your money. The salesperson is a fake planning a robbery. The list could go on and on.

People around the globe remember the image of an American President facing his country, angrily wagging his finger, and saying, "I did not." The truth is he did. In 1998, the chief law enforcement officer of the United States looked the people in the eye and lied. Instead of an "honest Abe" for President, Americans had a "lying Bill."

For many people, lying is simply a way of life. The only bad part of it is getting caught. We have become a society of liars and a culture of dishonesty.

Years ago, my uncle from North Carolina came to Northern Virginia with the mission of seeing his congressman. Because he was older than 80 years, I thought I should go with him to Capitol Hill. He believed airplane jet streams were evidence that someone was seeding the clouds to make it rain. He wanted to ask his congressman to check into the matter and put a stop to it. We arrived at the congressman's office, and Uncle inquired about seeing his representative. The secretary gave her "I'm sorry, he is not here right now" speech. Uncle did not accept that very gracefully. He let her know he had come all the way from North Carolina and wanted to see the man. Within minutes we were ushered to his office, into the presence of the congressman who was there after all. "He is not here right now" is a common lie used nonchalantly.

I remember a conversation from my days of working at a hospital in Washington, D.C. We had to spend a lot of time cleaning and sharpening needles. This allowed for conversation. One of the discussions was about being in a street car accident. Someone said that if you are involved in an accident, you should claim a back injury. Even if you do not have an injury, no one can prove your back does not hurt and you can collect insurance money.

Our company, Choice Books, uses vans to deliver our books to retail stores. When we replace an old van, we often put it in our parking lot with a "for sale" sign on it.

Once, a brown van was on our lot to sell, and a potential buyer stopped to see it, inquiring about the price. There were several people in the interested party. They claimed that they needed the van to transport handicapped children. Their

appeal to us was that they would use it to help others, so God would bless us if we sold it to them at their price. Eventually, we decided to let them have the van at the reduced price they offered.

Several days later, one of our associates drove past a shopping center and noticed this van in the parking lot for sale. He wrote down the phone number that was posted on the van and called for information. The person who answered the call claimed to have owned the van for years, declaring it to be in better condition than it really was, and said it had a rebuilt engine. When my associate identified himself, the buyer claimed we had sold them a bad van. This man freely lied to buy the van and lied just as easily to try and sell it.

For many, lying has become a way of life. A Washington merchant hung this sign in his shop window: “You can fool some people some of the time, and generally speaking, that’s enough to allow for profit.”<sup>2</sup>

Words from the Bible describe our lying condition.

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron (1 Timothy 4:1, 2).

This Scripture warns that people will fall away from the faith and pay attention to deceiving spirits and doctrines taught by demons. These deceivers teach false doctrine through their hypocritical lying. They can do this because their conscience is seared, and they can no longer distinguish right from wrong. Their conscience is silent about lying.

Look around you! We live in a lying world. Dishonesty has become so pervasive that even people in the church lie. People who claim to be God's children and sing hymns on Sunday morning also are caught in the lying web.

I recall watching a minister's wife arrange a dozen eggs in order to slip in some smaller ones and make it still look like a dozen large eggs. She arranged a lie.

I read once of a preacher who took a \$450 deduction on his tax return for a "clerical collar." Despite the increase in the cost of living, this seemed a little out of line to IRS officials. The minister was called to give an account. He claimed an honest mistake. The \$450 should have been \$4.50. The understanding IRS men let the preacher pay the extra tax plus 5% interest. "But one shrewd auditor had a second guess. Sure enough, a scrutiny of past income tax returns showed that the minister consistently had trouble with decimals. For three years in a row, things such as \$4.50 came out \$450 in the deductions column. For this, the red-faced cleric paid added taxes, 6% interest, and a 50% penalty for fraud."<sup>3</sup> I cannot imagine that the IRS agents would have picked this preacher to instruct them in the ways of godliness.

Once, a letter addressed to Resident came in the mail. "TO A FRIEND" was written in the mailing address. Above the address it read, "PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL." Big letters across the envelope claimed, "God's Holy Spirit said, 'Someone connected with this address needs help.'" Inside it declared, "GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT IS IN AND ON THIS HOLY LETTER." The letter, with yellow highlights, continued: "Please read this urgent word in the spirit that came to us concerning you or