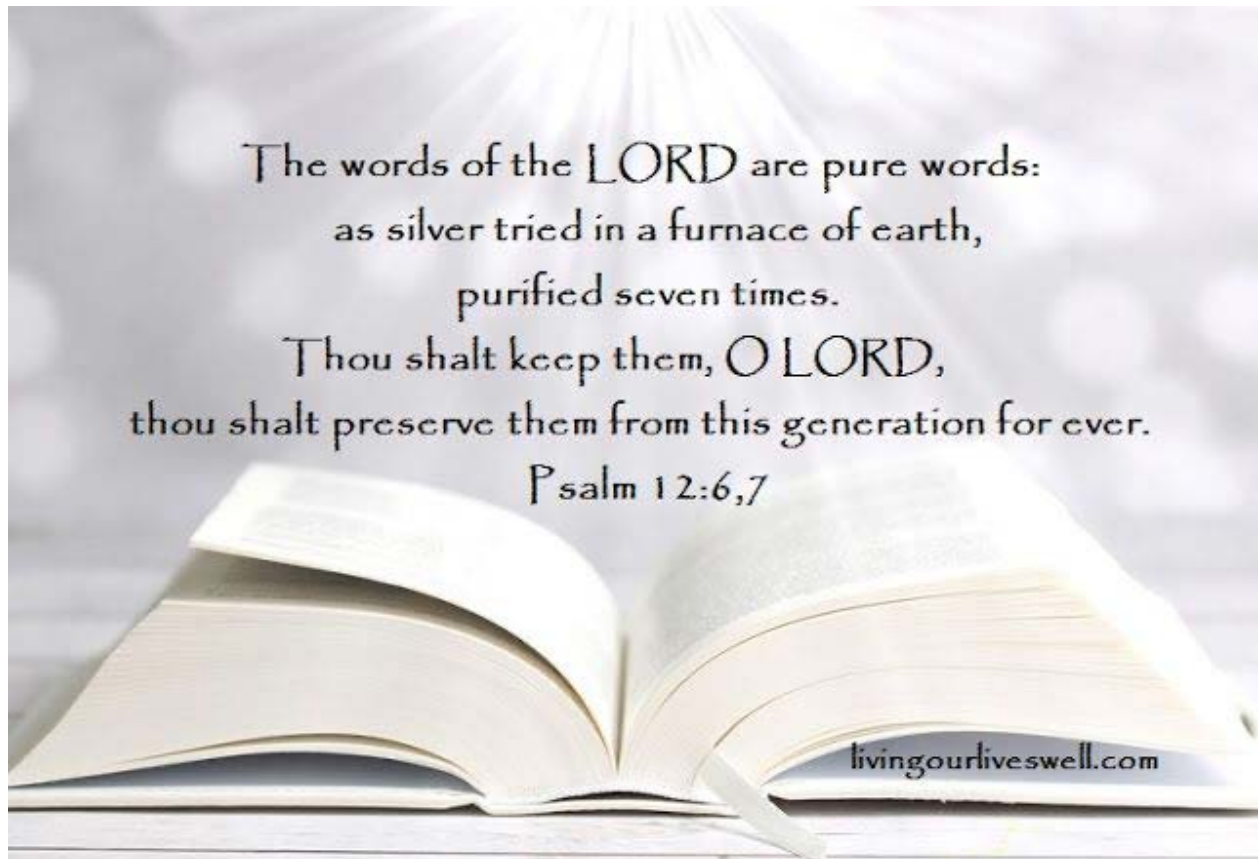


# TRUTH EXCHANGE

LET GOD BE TRUE (2)



Standing for truth in an age of wrong belief.

T. M. MOORE

*A ReVision Study from*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

Truth Exchange  
Let God Be True (2)  
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## Welcome to *Truth Exchange*

Ours is commonly thought of as an age of unbelief. But this is not the case. Having exchanged the truth of God for the lie of Satan, those who do not believe the Gospel believe something else. They cannot *not* believe. And what they believe is the lie.

They're not unbelievers but wrong believers. We need to understand how the lie has come to capture the devotion of so many and what we can do to protect ourselves against lies.

“Truth Exchange” helps us better understand the times we live in, so that we, who know the truth that is in Jesus, can be bolder, more confident, and more effective in proclaiming truth to the world.

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Thank you.

T. M. Moore  
Principal

## 1 The Truth and the Lie

*Therefore God also gave them up to uncleanness, in the lusts of their hearts, to dishonor their bodies among themselves, who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen.* Romans 1.24, 25

### *Living in the light*

The Scriptures are very clear about the fact that everyone lives his or her life on one or the other side of a metaphysical and epistemological divide.

On one side of that divide is the truth of God, which is in Christ Jesus. Likewise, the Word of God is truth, so that, through its lens we can see things as they really are, the way Christ sees them (1 Cor. 2.16), and know things the way God knows them, at least, to an extent appropriate to our ability as creatures (Jn. 17.17; Eccl. 3.11). Jesus Christ is the centerpiece of truth; all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are to be discovered in Him (Jn. 14.6; Col. 2.2, 3).

God, to be concise, is true.

On the truth side of the divide, the Kingdom of God is advancing (Dan. 2.44, 45), and everything throughout the vast cosmos is moving toward being reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, Who is Himself truth (2 Cor. 5.18, 19). He enables those who trust in Him to know the truth in ways that liberate them from the sin and lies (Jn. 8.32) and empower them for good works of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.

To live in the truth is to walk in the light, as Jesus Christ is in the light, to be children of God, His peculiar possession, and heirs of eternal life and glory. All who have ever known the truth have found in it the way to fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore in the Presence of God – Who never fails nor forsakes those He calls unto Himself and to His Kingdom and glory (Ps. 16.11; Heb. 13.5; 1 Thess 2.12).

They who live in the green meadows and beside the still waters of the truth that is in Jesus, feed on His truth with joy and rejoicing (Ps. 23.2; Jer. 15.16), growing daily in grace and being ever more fully equipped for lives of good works (2 Pet. 3.18; 2 Tim. 3.15-17).

The great privilege of every Christian is to know the truth that makes us free, the truth that is from, through, unto, and all about Jesus Christ (Rom. 11.36; Jn. 5.39).

### *Living in the lie*

On the other side of that divide is the lie, as Paul explains in Romans 1.24, 25. Those who turn their backs on God – Who is their Creator and calls them to know His truth – embrace the lie. But not just *a* lie, *the* lie, a gross perversion and tragic misrepresentation of every aspect of life, a *Bizarro* world, where all that is solid melts into thin air and people do whatever seems right in their own eyes. This is not so much a world of *un*belief as of *wrong* belief, as we shall see.

Ensnared in the death grip of the lie, having turned away from the One Who made them, people are lost in the world and dead in their trespasses and sin. But, since they are made in God's image and likeness, they have stamped into their very souls the need to connect with transcendence, to know and serve something greater than themselves – that is, to know and serve God.

At the same time, because they have rejected God, they can only look to various kinds of created things, worshiping and serving these, whatever they may be, as though these were the very fount and meaning of life itself.

## *Truth Exchange*

They make themselves their own gods, the final arbiters of all things beautiful, good, and true, and the obsessions and pleasures of this world are the sacred gifts they eagerly pursue as offerings to themselves. The folly and tragedy of living on this side of the divide, trapped in a death spiral of wrong belief, should be evident to all.

### *Folly, empty, deadly hopes*

Over the centuries, people have taken to themselves all manner of created things as the objects of their worship – animals, trees, mountains, lakes, wealth, sex, and power among them. Those who devote their lives to the pursuit, pleasure, and promise of created things are living the lie. They have wrongly believed that ultimate goodness and joy can be found in impermanent things. They have exchanged the truth of God, which He plainly has shown them, for the lie of idolatry. They deny God His rightful place and erect instead an idol of their own devising, although they may still know a measure of truth, and even acknowledge that God has some place in the great scheme of things.

And this truth exchange can have disappointing, frightening, and even deadly, consequences (Rom. 1.18-32).

But in their heart of hearts, those who make this truth exchange want what *they* want, not what *God* wants, and they pursue all manner of material things and agreeable conditions, hoping in this, that, or the other, and clinging with all their might to what they imagine to be their greatest good and the promise of happiness it portends.

All such hopes, however, are hollow, empty, and deadly. We must be very clear and firm about this. Those who live in the lie, desperately trying to reach the high ground of happiness, are on the slippery slope that leads to disappointment, despair, and death. The lie insists that God either does not exist or is not relevant to human happiness, or at best, relevant on *my* terms rather than His. Those who live on the divide of the lie are persuaded that God is merely a construct, a fabrication of weak and fearful souls, a cosmic killjoy whose greatest pleasure is denying them theirs, or a butler deity available to their beck and call. Every human being, they loudly insist, must decide for themselves where true happiness will be found. With the speaker in William Ernest Henley's poem, *Invictus*, they boast "I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul!" (cf. Ps. 12.1-4)

But this is vain hope whistling through the graveyard of dead uncertainty. This is the way that seems right to so many of our contemporaries, but, in the end, it is the way of death (Prov. 14.12). This is the truth exchange which holds our world in thrall.

And this is the lie.

### *For reflection*

1. Do you agree with the idea that everyone is living on one side or another of a great divide? Cite evidence for your answer.
2. What is the Kingdom of God? How do we engage it? What are its prospects in a day such as ours?
3. Paul emphatically writes *the* lie in our text, not just *a* lie. What's the difference? Why is it important to us that we make this distinction?

*Next steps – Conversation: What will you do today to make sure that your conversations – however brief or lengthy – are free from any exchanging of truth for lies?*

## 2 The Essence of the Lie

*The fool has said in his heart,*  
“There is *no God*.” Psalm 53.1

### *The truth*

The simplest way to define truth is the way Jesus does: He Himself is the truth of God (Jn. 14.6), and the Word of God, which points throughout to Jesus, is also God’s truth (Jn. 17.17; 5.39). All other truths and true propositions derive from Jesus, Who is the Word and truth of God. All other truths are secondary and derivative and find their ultimate meaning in Him. The whole universe holds together in this Word of God (Heb. 1.3), and He causes all created things and all the events of time to serve His purposes (Ps. 119.89-91; Eph. 1.11).

God has made human beings to know the world and His truth – not completely, but truly (Eccl 3.11). However, we may only know truth when we are operating out of the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2.16; Jn. 8.32; Eph. 4.17-24), and not according to our own best ideas, or even the best ideas of our day. Only the truth as it is in Jesus Christ and the Word of God makes us free from the corruptions, distortions, and deceptions of the lie.

Jesus Christ and His Word are the truth. All who refuse to acknowledge and embrace Him as such consign themselves to lives of folly. In Paul’s language, they exchange the truth of God for a lie of their own making, and thus consign themselves to lives in rebellion against God and their own true reason for being. By turning away from God and refusing to give Him thanks, they do not become *un*believers but *wrong* believers. They are like the person who, ignoring the flashing lights of the warning sign, wrongly believes that the bridge is not really out ahead, and so continues on his way toward catastrophe, confident that he knows better than the highway authorities.

In other words, all who prefer the lie to the truth that is in Jesus are what the Bible describes as *fools*. And in an age such as ours, an age in flight from God and wholly immersed in folly, we who believe in Jesus and inhabit the fertile plains on the truth side of the human divide, must conduct ourselves with vigilance, walking circumspectly lest we fall into the ways of a foolish world and lose our hold on the truth that is in Jesus (Eph. 5.15-17).

### *The lie*

But if Jesus is the truth, then what is the lie?

The lie is the exact opposite of the truth. The lie insists that God and truth are mere constructs; men define *God* and *truth* in terms agreeable and useful to them and their purposes, including, if they choose, to define such ideas as nonexistent.

Thus the lie claims to be the truth, but, at the same time, it insists that truth is personal, relative, pragmatic, and utilitarian. Truth, from this perspective, is not absolute, but dynamic, changeable rather than fixed. It is conditioned by circumstances of time and place. At the end of the day, people are the final arbiters of truth, and truth is whatever they find to be useful for their purposes. Ultimate truth is that which people impose on others by one or another kind of force, whether intellectual, political, or physical.

The lie thus takes the form of many different worldviews and philosophical perspectives. Show its inadequacy or insufficiency in one form, and it simply morphs into another. Carried out to the extreme, the lie points to a grim future for mankind and the cosmos: Existence is an accident, and has no purpose; hence, it can have no true or lasting meaning. The universe is a coffin, and life is a struggle to survive. Chance, not man, is the master of our fate; culture is relative and temporal; and each person must find his or her own way in life, all

the while knowing that death is the best one can hope for in the end.

I do not intend to say that all who participate in the lie are liars, that is, that they intentionally and habitually deceive and mislead. Rather, we insist that they are consumers and purveyors of – believers in – a view of life that rejects God, His Word, the authority of His Law, the certainty of truth, and the promise of blessing and glory He extends. And they do this on no other basis than their own opinion, wishful thinking, the influence of friends, or the biased reports of pundits, educators, politicians, scientists, and other sophisticated self-seekers.

*In God's image*

At the same time, because all people are made in the image of God, fools pursue lives of meaning, purpose, and happiness, believing that these are their undeniable right and destiny. The inconsistency and absurdity of living in such a way, since one has denied all truth but that which he prefers, seems never to occur to them. And even when it does – as in the works of Albert Camus – the determination to press on against the absurdity of life becomes a duty or obligation or burden that must be borne, even though it can only end in disappointment. The bridge is out? The bridge be damned! Full speed ahead!

Having rejected God, those who dwell on the lie side of the human divide seek happiness and prosperity in a world where nothing is certain, and everything is tenuous and finally degenerates into nothingness. They inhabit a cold, impersonal universe, where looking out for their own best interests is the highest form of morality. Made in the image of God, they strive for a transcendent ideal and hope. But caught up in the lie, the only transcendence they can imagine is some temporal set or condition that lies just beyond the next horizon. Their vision is blurred; their desires are corrupted; and they consign themselves to frustration, disappointment, and a form of happiness which is fleeting and flat. They are believers in what Steve Smith referred to as an “immanent religiosity”, even though they do not acknowledge as much (*Pagans and Christians in the City*).

With Tennessee Ernie Ford, they load their 16 tons daily, while with Peggy Lee they sing plaintively, “Is that all there is?” And with Jack Nicholson they wonder aloud in quiet desperation whether this is as good as it gets.

And within the framework of the lie, for those who wrongly believe the promise of mere immanence, the answer is, Yes. This *is* as good as it gets.

*For reflection*

1. What does the Christian worldview mean by “the truth”? How does this apply to our daily lives in a fallen world?
2. How would you explain the essence of the lie? “The lie claims to be the truth.” Do you agree with that assessment? Why or why not? What’s the problem with that claim?
3. Is idolatry a problem in our society? Explain.

*Next steps – Preparation: On the truth side of the human divide, all of life is devoted to serving Jesus, Who is the truth. Are there any aspects of your life which are not consciously and continuously devoted to serving Jesus?*



### 3 The Motive of the Lie

*“But when the vinedressers saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, ‘This is the heir. Come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours.’”* Luke 20.14

#### *To be God*

Why would people choose to live by the lie when the truth Who makes us free from ignorance, sin, and death invites them freely into His family?

The answer is quite simple: People do not want to *serve* God, they want to *be* God.

Those who reject God, and choose to live on the lie side of the human divide, want to exercise God’s right to define the terms of their existence. As if they, and not God, were their creator. They want to exercise God’s authority to prescribe how they should act, what their values and priorities should be, and how they should relate to other people. They want to possess whatever of God’s creation they desire, and to do with it what they will. And they insist that all others must recognize their authority to be a law unto themselves in all matters.

This desire for autonomy – to be a law unto themselves – demonstrates that the ultimate objective of wrong believers, of all who have exchanged the truth of God for the lie, is to be a god unto themselves. The final authority on all matters. The only one to be served, pleased, and enjoyed. The end for which they exist.

Augustine described this desire for autonomy as a “deadly corrosive.” Once people embark upon the lie as their chosen course in life, life becomes a matter of making sovereign choices to satisfy one’s every desire, with no regard for anything other than what works to enable me to get what I want.

In the kingdom of the lie, life becomes a kind of artful dodging of undesirable consequences in a smash-and-grab of good times and good things. Certainly those who live this way do many good things and accomplish many admirable works. But this is so only because the grace of God Who refuses to give them up to deeper and harsher depths of the lie, strives with them to realize His goodness and repent (Matt. 5.44, 45; Rom. 1.18-32; Gen. 6.3; Rom. 2.4).

Yet always, *always*, looming over the heads of those who live the lie is the fear of death (Heb. 2.15).

#### *The law of sin, the fear of death*

Those who have embraced the lie do not want God to dictate the terms of their morality. The law of sin, which operates in all people (Rom. 7.21-23), powerfully inclines them to reject God’s authority and standards and to prefer their own. People derive a kind of sinister pleasure in saying to themselves, as William Ernest Henley says, “I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul”, even though, deep inside, all people know this isn’t true.

Who of them can control the erratic driving habits of those cars coming at them from the other side of a painted line? Who of them can master the storms and cancers and violent whims of others? Who of them can know even the simplest detail of what their lives will be like in the next hour? Who of them can deliver them from death and the grave?

The Bible teaches plainly that those who reject the truth of God and turn to the lie *know* that they’re turning away from a reality they will never be able to deny, and Whom they will one day have to face (Rom. 1.18-20). They *know* God, even though they *deny* Him, usurp His prerogatives, and scorn His ways. And within that framework of convictions, if only at the level of the subconscious, death becomes an even more fearful prospect than it already is (Heb. 2.15) because of what all people know – or at least, *fear* – lies beyond it: a

terrifying encounter with the living God, Whom they have scorned, repudiated, and rejected.

But while all people fear death, most of them try hard not to think about it. Instead, they euphemize and seek to postpone death, while they press on in their course of being deceived, thinking that the next choice, the next decision, the next acquisition or experience will give them the happiness they desire, and vindicate their pretended autonomy. Let someone suggest to them that they are living a lie, and they will shrug it off, respond with laughter or scorn, or become angry and even violent.

*To own it all*

For all its elusiveness and its many shape-shifting forms, the lie powerfully holds the affections and thinking of those who believe that, by exchanging the truth of God for the lie, they will discover the full and abundant life they are persuaded they deserve. All their reasoning bends to the justification of their own presumed autonomy; all their choices are made with a view to vindicating their autonomy and obtaining the good life, however they have defined it.

Yet, deep in their souls, they know they are denying the only hope Who can save them from their folly, and make their lives make sense. They are made in the image of God. Made to know Him, love Him, and serve Him for His glory and their greatest joy. Yet once they have chosen the life of the lie, their wrong belief pervades, corrupts, and distorts their every decision, choice, and action.

The lie says of God and His truth, “Yea, hath God said...?” and urges people on to “be like God” themselves, to own all of God’s prerogatives and power and make of themselves whatever they will: *my* will, not *Thine*, be done.

*For reflection*

1. In what ways is “the desire for autonomy a deadly corrosive”? Can you give some examples?
2. How is the desire for autonomy related to the problem of idolatry in our day?
3. Meditate on Proverbs 14.12 and Hebrews 2.15. What role does the certainty of death play in the lives of those who are living the lie? How can we use this as a way of focusing on the Good News?

*Next steps – Conversation: Talk with a Christian friend today about the truth that is in Jesus. What is your friend learning about Jesus? How can you encourage one another to let God be true in every aspect and facet of your lives?*

## 4 The Strong Grip of the Lie

*But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, saying, "What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it." Acts 4.15, 16*

*Blind reason?*

Indeed, a "notable miracle" had been done by Peter and John, done in the name of truth – the healing of a lame man – by merely pronouncing the Name of Jesus upon him. Many had witnessed that work just as it was recorded by Luke. Not even the religious leaders of the day could deny that this remarkable work had happened, a *good* work, and one which reasonable people would wish to see multiplied. It was true. They had seen it, and so had a good many other people.

It's reasonable to respond to truth, especially when it takes the form of a good work done for a helpless person, with interest, enthusiasm, and appreciation.

But the Name of Jesus was such a threat to the pretended autonomy of those religious leaders that they *would* not accept what they *could* not deny. Though they *knew* the truth, they refused to *embrace* it, preferring instead to redouble their efforts to preserve their autonomy. They exchanged the truth they had seen and knew, for the lie which deceived and misled them.

The power of the lie can be very great, causing otherwise reasonable and responsible people to deny what is true but perhaps uncomfortably obvious, and to cling to what can never satisfy their deepest wants and needs.

No amount of evidence or argument will persuade people to embrace the truth so long as they continue to hide behind the lie, in whatever form, as their benchmark explanation for life. As the discipline of argumentative theory demonstrates, people do not typically employ reason as a tool for discovering truth, but for defending and vindicating their chosen perspective on life. That is, people *begin* the reasoning process with what they already believe and cherish – even though those beliefs may be wrong – then bend their arguments and reason to defend that perspective. And when that perspective is the lie, and wrong belief defines the parameters of thought, all justifications, reasons, and proofs will simply reinforce the starting point of the argument.

And this is precisely what we see happening with the religious leaders in Acts 4.

*The record of Christianity*

This truth is obvious in our own day. As Rodney Stark, Tom Holland, and others have shown, Christianity has been a source of enormous good throughout the course of human history. Even institutions and conventions cherished and enjoyed by our unbelieving contemporaries have their origins in the Christian movement – the arts and sciences, universal and higher education, campaigns for literacy and good health, capitalism and democratic forms of government, hospitals and charitable organizations of all kinds.

Christians created the first free hospitals, cared for victims of plague and war, and took in orphans and outcasts. They created laws to elevate the status of women and the poor, denounced and worked to eliminate lewd and barbaric entertainments, taught literacy, freed slaves, produced an enormous amount of literature in vernacular languages, started schools and universities, improved conditions for workers and prisoners, created standards of high quality in craftsmanship and the arts, built cities, turned swamps into fertile fields, and laid the foundations of the modern scientific enterprise.

This glorious record of achievement, grounded in the truth that is in Jesus, is clear and undeniable. Except, of course, for those who choose not to be moved by it.

Christians are not perfect, and the Christian movement has much to decry in its record. In the main, however, and contrary to the claims of such detractors as Bertrand Russell, Christianity has been a source, not of more evil, but of more good in the world than any other religion, philosophy, political party, or social movement. Nevertheless, so strong is the power of the lie that, even though people may acknowledge the truth of Christian achievement, past and present, they will not turn to God and believe the Gospel, but entrench themselves even more solidly in the foolish ways of the lie.

*Something more powerful*

Something more powerful than reason, logic, and evidence is required to break people free of the strong grip of the lie and bring them into the light of truth. We cannot reason people out of their folly. At best, reason can set the stage for the greater power of God's Word and Spirit, by creating doubts, challenging inconsistencies, and reminding those who live on the lie side of the human divide that much of what they take for granted as good and useful is the fruit of the grace of God and the truth that is found in Jesus. Indeed, sowing doubt into the confident blindness of wrong believers is an important step in pointing them to the truth, as Michael Polanyi explained: "Yet where the metaphysical believer cannot hope to convince, he may still strive to convert. Though powerless to argue with the nihilist, he may yet succeed in conveying to him the intimation of a mental satisfaction which is lacking; and this intimation may start in him a process of conversion" (*Science, Faith and Society*).

The only power that can liberate people from the lie is the truth that is in Jesus, applied by His Spirit. And God's determined way of bringing that truth to prisoners of the lie is for those who know the truth that is in Jesus to so live and proclaim the Good News of His Kingdom, praying that the Spirit of God will be pleased to work in His power – *spiritual* power – to subdue the hearts, transform the minds, convert the souls, and save the lives of those who cannot break free of the strong grip of the lie by their own strength or wits.

The lie is blinding and powerful, but the truth of God, lived and proclaimed, can prevail where reason fails, and help those who are dead in their trespasses and sin find new life in Jesus on the truth side of the human divide (Eph. 2.1-10).

*For reflection or discussion*

1. In what ways have you experienced the blinding power of the lie (or of sin)?
2. Can you see the blinding power of the lie at work in our society? Can you give some examples?
3. Why is reason alone powerless to free people from the blinding power of the lie? What more than reason is needed to bring people into the light of truth?

*Next steps – Preparation: What is the Gospel? That is, in a concise statement, what is the truth that is in Jesus Christ? Write a brief outline of the Gospel of the Kingdom as you might share it.*

## 5 The Promulgator of 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

### *Not of this world*

Contrary to what many Christians seem to think, the provenance of the lie is not from this world, nor the best thinkers of this or any other age. We make a mistake if we focus our energies in overcoming the lie merely at the human and temporal level. Those who are trapped in the lie are only partly to blame for their dilemma.

The provenance of the lie is from beyond the material world to which deceived men and women cling so fervently. People who are so blinded by the lie that they refuse to admit the evidence for God abounding on every hand, and who are so determined to have their own way in life that they will hold fast to every worthless idea or thing rather than fall at the feet of the Savior – such people are *deceived* in the depths of their souls by a fallen fiend who delights in keeping them prisoners to wrong belief, delusion, and sin.

Satan, the accuser of the brethren and the deceiver of the world, is the father of the lie and of all lies. We have it on the authority of Jesus Himself.

We do not expect our unbelieving neighbors to agree with Jesus’ assessment about their condition; at the same time, their denials of what we (and they) know to be true do not change the reality of which Jesus speaks. Let Jesus be true and every Satan-denier a victim of his lies. The devil is a real and active agent in the affairs of people and nations, and he roams and stalks about the earth sowing lies, deceit, and disinformation into the souls of those who turn away from God and depend only on themselves for the happiness they seek (1 Pet. 5.8; Rev. 12.9).

We must at all times bear in mind that the ultimate enemy of the truth is the father of lies; reason, force, and culture change are not lasting solutions to his influence. Only *spiritual* weapons can prevail in resisting and dispatching him.

### *The devil’s wiles*

How does the devil ply his trade of deception and lies?

Scripture is clear enough. He undermines the authority of God’s Word and promise (Gen. 3.1-4), making the Word of God sound unreasonable, illogical, harsh, naïve, and opposed to human wellbeing. He leads people to regard God as a tyrant – if, that is, He exists at all (Gen. 3.5; Ps. 10.1-4). He urges people to follow their own desires, take full charge of their lives and give in to their gut instincts (Gen. 3.3-5; Matt. 4.1-11). In short, to be their own god and lawmaker. He paints grand scenarios of personal autonomy, complete satisfaction, and liberation from all constraints, insisting that people ought to be free to make all their own choices.

That is, he leads people to believe that they can be like God and perhaps even a god themselves if only they will stop listening to the truth of God and look to their own best thoughts about what’s best for them.

At the end of the day, however, what the devil seeks has nothing to do with anybody’s wellbeing. His goal is to dethrone God and establish himself as ultimate, final, and alone the object of worship – even by God Himself (Matt. 4.9).

The devil plays on human pride (Gen. 3.1-4), the lusts of the eyes and the flesh (1 Jn. 2.16), the pressure to conform (Rom. 12.1, 2), the allure of the times, and the false belief that God cannot know or will not hold us

accountable for our sinful, selfish actions (Pss. 10.11-13; 73.11). Those who have rejected the truth are all too ready to believe such folly.

The devil is able even to make the most outwardly noble aspirations and intentions stand opposed to the good and perfect will of God, as we see in Peter's insistence that Jesus must not be crucified (Matt. 16.21-23).

*"One little Word..."*

Only the truth of God can thwart the devil's schemes and overthrow the fortress of lies he erects in a person's soul. Jesus thwarted the devil's lies time and again by appealing to the truth of God as revealed in His Word. And Jesus, the very Word of God, assured us that, while in this world of deception and lies we can expect to know trouble and trial, still, we may be of good cheer, for He has overcome the world and the ruler of it (Jn. 16.33; 12.31).

They who are dead in their trespasses and sins, and trapped on the lie side of the human divide – enemies of God as we once were (Rom. 5.10) – can find their way over that divide and into the green meadows and still waters of Jesus Christ, but only as they are helped on their way by powers and practices this secular, wrong-believing world roundly scorns. Prayer, sharing the Word of God or our personal testimony, explaining the Gospel, living the truth – these are the only means whereby dying sinners may be extricated from their plight and born again into the Kingdom of light. If we neglect these resources, preferring instead to woo or argue with or humiliate those ensnared by the lie, we shall make no headway for their restoration.

*The Prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him  
His rage we can endure, for, lo, his doom is sure:  
One little Word shall fell him.*

Thus Luther taught us to sing, and we must never forget that our only protection against, and best weapon in combating the lie, and the father of all lies, is the truth of God.

*For reflection*

1. People in our day don't believe in the devil. While the devil may not feature in our sharing of the Good News, why is it nevertheless important that we understand how he works?
2. Meditate on Genesis 3.1-6. Can you see this same ploy at work in our own day? Explain.
3. Meditate on Matthew 4.1-11. Discuss the use of God's Word in resisting and thwarting the devil and the lie.

*Next steps – Preparation: What is your approach to resisting the devil? That is, when temptation presents before you, what do you do so that you will grow through it into greater Christlikeness rather than fall through it into sin?*

## 6 The Lie in the Church

*But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?” Acts 5.3*

### *A high price to pay*

The sin of Ananias and Sapphira was not that they only gave part of what they had gained from the sale of their land to the work of the Church. As Peter pointed out, it was their property, and they were free to do with the proceeds as they chose. The sin was that they lied. They represented their gift as the whole of the proceeds, so that they would look good to the apostles and everyone else. In so doing, they brought the lie into the congregation of the truth and robbed God of His glory.

They had fallen for the devil’s temptation, and conspired together to introduce the lie into the Body of Christ.

They paid a high price for their attempt. The story of Ananias and Sapphira puts us on notice that the Church is not immune from the presence or influence of the lie. Though Christ has bound Satan, and his power against true believers is therefore limited (Matt. 12.22-29), still, he remains a potent force and a persistent threat to corrupt the community of truth by various manifestations and machinations of the lie (1 Pet. 5.8, 9).

The devil and his brood of human and angelic agents are like the clean-up squads in the film, *Men in Black*. They usually show up after the truth has made itself known – a message preached, a word of witness, a good deed of love, a manifestation of hope and courage, a fresh insight from the Word of God – all witnesses to the realm and reality of the truth. While those who are deceived and prisoners to the lie are pondering what they’ve heard or seen, and perhaps even considering further examination into the claims of the truth (Acts 17.32-34), the devil comes along with some “flashy thing” or other, blinds them in an instant of confrontation, then proceeds to explain that what they heard or saw can be accounted for in a much more reasonable manner, one that does not require toeing God’s line, or of giving up one’s own preferred ways of thinking.

But we see from the story of Ananias and Sapphira where such trafficking with the devil can lead.

### *Another gospel*

So even in the Church, the devil stalks about deceiving people into believing the Gospel is something other than the Good News of the Kingdom of God. The Gospel, the devil will insist, is having all the health and wealth you could desire; knowing ecstatic experiences; being loving and tolerant to all people, no matter their preferred lifestyles or worldviews; living a “Gospel lifestyle” without having to worry about something so inconvenient and unattainable as holiness; forging new paths for love apart from the Law of God; and so forth.

The Gospel, the devil will suggest, is all of grace, so we don’t need to fuss with God’s Law any longer. The Gospel liberates us to live in the joy of Jesus; no need to submit to rigorous disciplines of prayer and Bible reading – legalistic stuff like that. The Gospel teaches us to love everyone, so we don’t judge people whose lifestyle choices differ from our own, and from those set forth in the Bible. We need to keep in step with the times. Be relevant. Embrace change. Jesus is all about us, and so life in the church should be all about us, too. The Spirit can lead us by love alone; we don’t need doctrines and Bible study, which only fill our minds with high-falutin’ theological nonsense.

Thus in the name of the truth, false teachers promote lies, half-truths, and outright deceptions within the holy confines of the Body of Christ, seeking to make a name for themselves, fill their pews and coffers, or gain a little adulation by telling people what their sinful souls want to hear, rather than what the truth of God requires.

Make no mistake about it, the lie occupies a place in the pews, pulpits, and theater seats of America's churches, just as it did in the days of the apostles; and its mission to dethrone God and install human autonomy in the name of the Lord is as active today as it has ever been.

*Near Christianity*

The Church today features a wide range of expressions of we might call "near Christianity" – explanations of the Gospel and Christian life which include *parts* of the truth, but which leave ample room for people in whom the lie has taken root to operate unchecked, and to carve out their own autonomous "Christian" lifestyle.

"My Jesus loves me even though I sin," they protest, against calls to repentance. "My Jesus doesn't want me to be a legalist," they object to those who insist they bring holiness to completion in the fear of God. "My Jesus is my Friend; why should I fear Him?" they confidently declare. "My Jesus will accept me no matter what," they opine as they pursue lifestyles clearly at odds with the plain teaching of God's Word.

Thus, blinded by the lie, they have made *another* gospel, rather than the truth that is in Jesus Christ, their preferred avenue to the good life. Ananias and Sapphira thought they could make it work. So do multitudes of ersatz believers today.

Make sure you aren't one of them.

For in bringing the lie into the community of truth, all such contemporary Ananiases conspire against the Lord of glory and make a pact with the father of lies.

*For reflection*

1. Do you agree that the lie can be found in the churches in our day? Why or why not?
2. Peter took it upon himself to confront the lie boldly and decisively. How does his example instruct us? Explain.
3. How can you keep the lie from gaining entry to your own soul (Psalm 139.23, 24; Proverbs 4.20-27)?

*Next steps – Preparation: What can you do to make sure you aren't helping the lie find its way into your church?*



## 7 Prowling Around

*Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith...* 1 Peter 5.8, 9

### *Anash in the lie*

What David wrote nearly two millennia ago seems especially true in our day (Ps. 12.1, 2):

Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases!  
For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men.  
They speak idly everyone with his neighbor;  
*With* flattering lips *and* a double heart they speak.

Sometimes men's lies seem harmless enough – white lies to cover up a misdeed, exaggerate a claim, or fake a personality shortcoming. They're still lies; and the more we resort to such lies, the inured to lies we become. At other times the lies people embrace are large and very consequential – Nazism, Marxism, Jim Crow, secularism.

As in David's day, we see the presence of the lie on every hand; we know, work with, and live alongside people who are prisoners of the lie. They seem happy enough, and they aren't bothering anyone else. But they live in the fear of death; true happiness eludes them; an air of uncertainty hovers about them; and there is a disquiet in their souls that leaves them with the haunting feeling they're missing something in life.

We know this, because the truth of God in Scripture tells us it is so, and we know it because we too struggle to stay clear of the slippery slopes of the lie. We will not be able to help other people until we first are able to recognize the various forms the lie takes in our lives and our day.

### *Forms of the lie*

The forms of the lie are many, and all linked in one grand conspiracy to resist and, if possible, overthrow the rule of King Jesus. Obvious manifestations of the lie include the various false religions of the world, including liberal Christianity in all its forms and certain expressions of evangelicalism. These can make legitimate claims of having insight to truth; but each of them as an overall system ignores the glory of God and denies or diminishes the work of Jesus Christ, Who alone is truth.

The lie may capture us in more subtle ways. It may take the form of materialism, the pursuit of things and experiences as the true measure of happiness. Or people who have capitulated to the lie may be committed to pragmatism, to a view of life that is relativistic and utilitarian. They may have begun to put more trust in politics and government than anything else, or to believe the lie in the form of evolution as an explanation for life and the cosmos. Perhaps they have resigned themselves to some absurdist view of life – that life has no meaning and purpose, but that we must soldier on anyway. Or they may be captive to some form of “near Christianity” which is keeping them from the righteousness, peace, and joy of the Kingdom of God.

In all these ways and more the promulgator of the lie is prowling about and spreading his message throughout our society, titillating the desire for sovereignty in our peers and luring them away from the truth that is in Jesus. He is especially intent on flooding the Church with lies, so that we cannot pursue or enjoy the truth that is in Jesus Christ (Rev. 12.13-15).

### *Unmasking the lie*

We must study to understand and unmask the various forms of the lie, and to help people find their way out of the prison house and death grip of the lie by embracing the truth that is in Jesus.

### *Truth Exchange*

It is not loving to go about our business indifferent to the plight of people who live foolish, deceived, and doomed lives. We must, like the sons of Issachar, understand the times in which we live and the various manifestations of the lie (1 Chron. 12.32), so that we may reach out with confidence and love to the prisoners of the devil with whom we consort every day.

And we must, as the apostle Paul commanded, become able students of God's Word (2 Tim. 2.15), so that we can wield the Sword of the Spirit against the sin-blinded perspectives, reasons, and justifications of those who can resist everything but the Spirit of God in their desperate attempts to preserve their presumed autonomy (Ps. 149; Jn. 6.63).

The love of Christ requires that we immerse ourselves more fully in the truth, live it out in every area of our lives – thus demonstrating the hope we have in Jesus – and then be ready to explain ourselves and the truth of Christ to everyone who will listen (1 Pet. 3.15).

In an age when lies abound on every hand, and everyone seeks only what is good in his or her own eye, Christians must shelter in the Word of God, rejoicing in the truth, and proclaiming the truth that is in Jesus at every opportunity, to all who will listen. God intends to stop the mouths of those who traffic in lies, so that the truth of Jesus may abound and bless. And we have a role in this, each of us in our own callings. We must adopt a stance toward the lie which says, as Solzhenitsyn did with respect to the Marxist encroachment on all of life, "Let that come, if it must come, only not by me!"

The first step is to recognize the lie and to fortify ourselves with the truth that we may resist the devil and send him scurrying. The next step is then to stand up to the lie at every opportunity, winsomely but firmly, by our lives and words and in the power of God's truth. Let God be true, and let us make sure we stand with Him for the truth that is in Jesus Christ for all of life.

#### *For reflection*

1. What is your responsibility in preparing to unmask the lie? How can you prepare yourself to be more consistent and effective in this?
2. Is your present approach to reading and studying Scripture sufficient to help you deal with the lie in its contemporary forms? Why or why not?
3. What are some ways Christians can work together to unmask the lie and advance the truth?

*Next steps – Transformation: Find a prayer partner who will pray with you about becoming a more consistent and effective witness to those who are trapped in the lie in your sphere of influence.*

*Truth Exchange*

*For reflection or discussion*

1. What do we mean by “the lie”? What do we mean by “the truth”?
2. What is the Christian’s responsibility with respect to the truth that is in Jesus?
3. Why are reason, friendship, and personal example *alone* insufficient to lead people out of the lie into the truth of Jesus? What else is needed?
4. What can you do to become more consistent and effective in opposing the lie and promoting the truth that is in Jesus?
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from this study? How are you planning to incorporate that lesson into your walk with and work for the Lord?

*For prayer:*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

The Fellowship of Ailbe is a spiritual fellowship in the Celtic Christian tradition. Our goal is to promote revival, renewal, and awakening, following the teaching of Scripture and the example and heritage of our forebears in the faith.

The Fellowship of Ailbe offers many opportunities for training, prayer, personal growth, and ministry. Visit our website at [www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org) to learn more.

We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship to help us extend our ministry and resources to others. You can contribute to our ministry by using the Contribute button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 360 Zephyr Road, Williston, VT 05495.

Thank you.

