Necessary Sins - Part 3

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# Falsehood

# (Ephesians 4:20-25)

Welcome to part three of our message series called “Necessary Sins.” We’ve talked about grumbling and complaining, we’ve talked about biting and criticizing one another, and we’ve reflected on those sins that we find to be more acceptable, easier to rationalize, and maybe even necessary. This morning, in keeping with the spirit of this series, we’re joining in the prayer of David in Psalm chapter 139, where he said in verse 23…

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalms 139:23-24).

Today in part three of our series “Necessary Sins” we’re going to talk about the subject of saying that which is false. Now I wonder how many of you would agree that lying is a big problem in our culture today? How many of you would say that you’ve ever told a lie?

The truth is that lying is one of the first things that we learn to do. You don’t have to teach a child to lie. They can be standing on a chair with their hand in the cookie jar, even a cookie in their mouth, crumbs all over the counter and floor, and yet deny that they ever took a cookie. You just don’t have to teach anyone how to lie, because it’s just part of our sinful nature. The problem is, as the Bible tells us in Proverbs chapter 12,

“The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful” (Proverbs 12:22).

And so, God detests lying lips, meaning that our lies are disgusting, it makes him nauseous; it creates in him a loathing, a hatred, or outrage; because of the pain, the injustice, the consequences, or the fruit of that lie. Now of course, there are countless reasons for telling a lie, just as there are opportunities for every form of falsehood, but the bottom line is that it’s a deceitful heart that makes a statement a lie even more so than the words we speak. And the Bible tells us in Hebrews chapter 4 that it’s the truth, it’s the Word of God that…

“…judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

And so, you and I, we may not think much of our lies, we may even think of them as being necessary, but God knowing the thoughts and attitudes of our hearts, detests those lies, because he knows that there will be a trail of deceit, the building of lie upon lie, so much so that the perpetrator becomes a slave to that falsehood, and therefore it makes God nauseous.

Very possibly the main reason God detests lying is because it’s a foundational characteristic of his spiritual enemy, Satan. John chapter 8 tells us of a time when Jesus was challenged by some self-righteous religious folks, called Pharisees, who told him, “We don’t know who you are or where you’ve come from, but God is our Father.” Jesus replied in verse 44 saying,

“You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44).

And so, it just may be that the main reason God hates lying so much is because his spiritual enemy, the devil, is a liar and the father of lies, and he uses lies to take us away from God’s truth. You see, the devil’s number one weapon is to lie, to deceive, or to coerce us away from the freedom that is ours in Christ. And the apostle Paul warns us, telling us in Ephesians chapter four,

“You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires…” (Ephesians 4:20-22).

Here in Ephesians chapter 4, the apostle is going to give us three action steps to putting off the old self with those necessary sins and changing to become more like Jesus. Now, I think that most people if they were honest would like to change some aspect of their character. But especially as followers of Christ we should be constantly examining, changing, and improving ourselves, because if we’re content with the way that we are we’ve probably set our standards way too low. You see, Jesus raised the bar and said, “Your righteousness must surpass that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law” (Matthew 5:20). He said therefore, “Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:48). And so, the minute we stop growing, we start spiritually dying, and so the Christian life really should be a constant process of change.

The problem is that change isn’t easy or maybe I should say lasting change doesn’t come easily. It’s easy to make changes, you can do that on a whim, you know it’s like quitting smoking. You may have heard the guy who said, “It’s easy to quit smoking; I’ve quit a thousand times.” But the challenge is to make it last, to make it work long-term, to change your life and keep the change. And so, we’re going to look at three action steps to making lasting change in our lives, becoming better people, and walking with Jesus like we’ve never walked before. And so, the first point we want to consider, the first action step in putting off the old self, is to change the way we think.

## 1. Change the Way We Think

You see, lasting change begins in our mind, it begins with the thoughts that you and I think. It’s been said,

“You are today where your thoughts have brought you; and you’ll be tomorrow where your thoughts take you.”

And therefore, the Bible tells us in Ephesians chapter 4,

“To put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; and be made new in the attitude of our minds” (Ephesians 4:22-23).

The first step to lasting change is to change what goes on in your mind, to change your attitude, changing the way that you think. To be transformed by “the renewing of your mind” as the apostle Paul says in Romans chapter 12 verse two. And so, lasting change begins in our heads, between our ears, before settling into our hearts as Christ renews our thoughts and attitudes.

However, one of my greatest fears is that some of you not only have been deceived into believing a lie but you’re living a lie. It could be that most people know you as a Christian, but statistics tell us that some of you have an uncontrolled addiction to pornography that rages like a wildfire when you’re alone. Others of you are living that perfect life on Facebook and among friends, but inside you’re struggling with depression and feelings of meaninglessness. It’s for this reason that Jesus warns us in John chapter 10, that the deceiver,

“…comes only to steal, kill, and destroy” (John 10:10).

Jesus wants you to know that the devil’s a thief, he’s a deceiver who not only lies to us, but he wants us to lie and speak his language, even believing our lies, so that ultimately, we’re living a lie. He comes to steal, kill, and destroy; he wants to detour and distract you, and I’m afraid that there may be some of you that are deceived, not recognizing just how desperately you need Christ to save you from this deception. This is so important, listen to what the apostle John said in his first letter to the church. In chapter 2, verse 4, John wrote,

“The man who says, "I know him," but doesn’t do what he commands is a liar and the truth is not in him” (1 John 2:4).

So, number one, we need to change the way that we think, because if there’s no obedience, if there’s no life change, and there’s no fruit, you’re spiritually dead. But when we’re transformed by the renewing of our mind, when we know God intimately, suddenly we’re different; we’re changed. And so, if we say, “I know God” but we’re not like Jesus, and we’re not doing what he commands; John tells us, that person “is a liar and the truth is not in him.”

Now, I’ll tell you, this is deeply personal for me, because this was me growing up. I grew up in the church, but I wasn’t a follower of Jesus. I called myself a Christian, because that’s how I grew up. I was baptized and my parents dragged me to church every time the doors were open, but I wasn’t obedient, there wasn’t any spiritual fruit, I was deceived and I was lying to myself.

The Bible says, “You, however, did not come to know Christ that way. Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; and to be made new in the attitude of your minds” (Ephesians 4:20-23).

And so, number one we need to change the way we think, and then number two we need to put off any falsehood.

## 2. Put Off Any Falsehood

However, that’s often easier said than done, because time and time again we find ourselves deceived; believing that our lie will work better than the truth. You know, if I tell a lie then I won’t get in trouble. If I tell a lie you might like me better. If I tell a lie I’ll be able to avoid the conflict. And so, at the very root of the problem, we’ve been deceived into believing a lie that God isn’t trustworthy, and therefore we don’t trust God.

Interestingly enough, as you read the Bible, in spite of the difference in time and culture, from the very beginning there’s story after story of individuals who were deceived. And their experiences are no different than our experiences, whether it was a falsehood covering up sin, some sort of trickery or deception, or avoiding certain conflict. And so, no matter whether it’s among friends, family, or neighbors there’s always been the temptation to deceive, to lie, to promote a falsehood, just to smooth things over, hoping to avoid any deeper conflict, or to manipulate a situation.

For example, in Genesis chapter 4, when Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him the Lord said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” Cain replied, “I don’t know” (Genesis 4:9).

In Genesis chapter 18, when the Lord met with Abraham and told him that Sarah would have a son, she overheard this conversation and laughed. But the Lord, knowing all things, knowing her heart, said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh; is anything too hard for the Lord?” And verse 15 says, “Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh." But the Lord said, "Yes, you did laugh” (Genesis 18:15).

Isaac was deceived by his son Jacob and his wife Rebekah as they conspired to take his firstborn son Esau’s birthright in Genesis chapter 27. Jacob consumed with guilt and afraid of the wrath of his brother Esau, fled to live with his uncle Laban’s family, but the deceiver was deceived as his uncle Laban gave him his daughter Leah in marriage in place of his beloved Rachel to whom he had been engaged.

Many years later, Jacob was lied to again by his own sons in a conspiracy against his beloved son Joseph whom they claimed was killed by wild animals when actually they sold him to slave traders going to Egypt.

Time and time again we see lies and deception, even in our lives today, but it doesn’t have to be that way. In Ephesians chapter 4 Paul talks a great deal about our Christian walk, living in unity, dealing with conflict, and learning to get along with one another. And so, he tells the Church, and he tells us in verse 24 and 25,

“Put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body” (Ephesians 4: 24-25).

You wouldn’t think that we would need to be told “to put off falsehood and speak truthfully” but we’re often deceived, mistakenly believing that by lying we can avoid conflict, we can better ourselves, and we can improve our image. It’s almost as if we think that telling the truth opens the door to all sorts of negative consequences or is an invitation to conflict, but the truth is that love is and must be the qualifier in all things. The apostle Paul speaks of that in first Corinthians chapter 13. In verse one he says,

“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging symbol” (1 Corinthians 13:1).

And so, no matter what we say or what we do if we don’t have love we gain nothing, because the Bible says in verse 6,

“Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails” (1 Corinthians 13:6-8).

And so, as Paul was writing to the Ephesians he expected that there would be life change and he gave three admonitions. He said, “Put off your old self, put on the new self, and put off falsehood.” Therefore, just as we’re taught in Romans chapter 6 that the old self has been crucified and buried with Christ in our baptism, we put off the old self and we put on the new self, because God sent his Son to deliver us from sin, he’s done his part, and now it’s up to us to change, to put on the new self. And so, the first action step was to change the way we think, the second was to put off any falsehood, and then the third action step is to change the words we speak.

## 3. Change the Words We Speak

Speaking of change, I’m reminded of the instructions that Jesus gave concerning his friend Lazarus who had become sick and died. In John chapter 11, the Bible tells us that Lazarus had been dead for several days, when Jesus approaching his tomb called out in a loud voice saying,

“Lazarus, come out!" The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go" (John 11:43-44).

In the same way, we need to change, taking off the grave clothes of our old life, putting off any falsehood, and putting on the new self; knowing that if we belong to the truth how can we indulge in lies any longer? It’s just as Paul asks in verse 21,

“Surely you heard of him and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus” (Ephesians 4:21).

You see, we believe that truth is a person. Surely you’ve heard that he is the way, the truth, and the life, and his name is Jesus. When you know him, when you know Jesus, John chapter 8 says,

“Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32).

Therefore, we want to change the words we speak, we want to speak truthfully to our neighbor, because lies bring bondage. Our spiritual enemy Satan wants us to tell lies, believe lies, and ultimately to live a lie, because he’s trying to steal us away from the freedom that Christ gives. Jesus wants us to walk in the truth, experiencing the truth that will set us free, and therefore, Paul tells us in verse 25,

“Each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor…” (Ephesians 4:25).

In other words, Paul is encouraging us to remember that our words carry a great weight of responsibility. Words can be destructive, and so, we need to change our words, speaking truthfully to one another, because as followers of Christ, speaking lovingly and truthfully is an essential part of displaying our new nature in Christ. It’s for that reason that James said,

“Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (James 1:19).

There’s a good reason God gave us two ears but only one mouth; so that we would be quick to listen and slow to speak. And when we do say something inappropriate, or carelessly, or spitefully God still has a plan to redeem our words. It’s simple, it’s powerful, and it’s freeing. The Bible tells us in first John chapter 1,

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

And so, when we confess our sins to God, he cleanses us, forgives us, and separates our sins from us as far as the east is from the west. In other words, he doesn’t bring them up again, he doesn’t hold them against us anymore, but he washes us of our sins. You are free. There is now, therefore, no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Our good God forgives you and remembers your sin no more.

There are some of you this morning, you may have believed a lie and recognize that you have been living a lie. The shame, the guilt, and fear can be overwhelming, but this morning we can commit to changing the way we think, putting off any falsehood, and changing the words that we speak. You see, the truth is so freeing. To be able to wake up with no secrets, completely free, completely forgiven; that’s the freedom that Jesus wants you to experience in him. When you know the truth, the truth will set you free.

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