

Fulton County Gospel News

Good News About Christ And His Church For All Of The World

“... Christ is the head of the church: and He is the Savior of the body.” - Ephesians 5:23

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LIE, CHEAT, AND STEAL

by Chris Perry

Lying, cheating, and stealing, three close cousins in the family of dishonesty, are included in nearly every society's, religion's, and philosopher's list of unethical and immoral activities. Concerning cheating, one author (who does not hold to Christian values) wrote, "If I were to make a list of the top ten moral rules, 'do not cheat' would have to be somewhere on the list."¹ Indeed, one would be hard-pressed to find a value system, ethical code, or system of law that does not condemn dishonesty. However, in this country especially, dishonesty has worked its way into almost every corner of society, from the heights of government to religion. Even some members of the Lord's body have lowered their standards when it comes to dishonest behavior. "Surely it's not wrong to tell a *little* lie..." someone might argue. Another might admit, "Sure I failed to report a *little* of my income from last year, but does it *really* matter?" "Come on," yet another might say, "using my neighbor's cable television isn't stealing..." But has *God's standard* concerning dishonesty changed? If Jesus Christ is "*the same yesterday, today and forever*" (Hebrews 13:8), then so is His Word by which our actions are judged (John 12:48). So what *does* the Bible have to say about lying, cheating, and stealing?

Lying is categorically con-

demned by Scripture. Revelation 21:8 states, "*But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death*" (emphasis added). Of the six things that the Lord hates, the seven that are an abomination, second on the list is "*a lying tongue*" (Proverbs 6:16-17). If liars are hated by God, and this includes the "all liars" from Revelation, then some of us might need to reevaluate our views of lying. The fisherman who lies about catching 20 bass when nothing was biting is just as wrong as the woman who lies about smoking on her life insurance application so she can get a lower rate. A "little white lie" told out of convenience is just as sinful in the sight of God as the "big lies" about which there are no questions. Christians need to get back to the idea that **all** lying is wrong.

Americans seem to cheat on everything. Some of us cheat on our taxes so we don't have to pay so much; others falsify mailing addresses to get cheaper car registration in a different county; still others cheat on tests, on spouses, on forms, and on and on. And it seems that every segment of society is vulnerable. George O'Leary, former Notre Dame head

football coach, resigned after it was uncovered that he lied on his resume. Sprint overbilled the US government by \$2 million, eventually settling for \$5.5 million.² A recent study found that eight of ten high school students cheat on tests, a statistic that has some wondering if students have a "diminished sense of academic integrity."³

But why is cheating wrong? Is it, as some scientists speculate, because "human beings have **evolved** into a species with a rational dislike of individuals in our midst who take more than their fair share"?⁴ (emphasis added). Or is it because we have not **evolved** at all, but were created by God to follow His commands? Any student of the Bible should understand that the latter is true. Cheating is, when properly considered, just another form of lying. The cheater, motivated by selfishness, breaks rules and deceives for the sole purpose of getting ahead. Yet **still** people everywhere (including Christians) seek to rationalize their dishonest behavior. "So what if I cheat on my taxes—the government has enough money as it is." "If I didn't cheat on this test, I wouldn't get a scholarship!" Oh, that Christians would feel as strongly against **all** forms of sin as Paul did when he penned, "*What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? **God forbid**. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?*" (Romans 6:1-2, emphasis added).

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Those who steal have always held a lower place in society. Horse thieves were subject to hanging in the Old West; in some foreign countries, stealing results in the loss of a hand. In spite of our feelings toward blatant thievery, many who claim to be Christians are practicing it in subtle—and not-so-subtle—ways. Some who claim to be Christians use someone else's cable television illegally, rather than pay for it as they ought. Others download music, movies, and other things off the Internet for free in direct violation of copyright laws. Still others gamble at casinos or lottery stations, in essence “stealing by consent” the hard-earned money of others. Paul wrote, “*Let him that stole steal no more, but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good*” (Ephesians 4:28).

But perhaps the most common way in which some Christians steal directly involves our Father in heaven. Malachi wrote, “*Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings*” (Malachi 3:8, emphasis added). Malachi was fighting the practice by some of offering the blind, lame and sick as sacrifices to God (1:6-8) and keeping the best for themselves. Today, many who claim to be faithful to God steal from Him in the same manner. We build large houses, drive new cars, wear the best clothes, but when it comes time to give to God, we offer the pitiful remnants of our income. However, Paul commanded every Christian on the Lord's Day to “*lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him*” (1 Corinthians 16:2). Our giving must be proportionate to the blessings we have received.

In the moral climate of today's modern world, Christians cannot afford to lower their standards concerning right and wrong. May we ever stand behind God's definitions of lying, cheating, and stealing. “*For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away: but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you*” (1 Peter 1:24-25, emphasis added).

¹ Anita L. Allen, The New Ethic: A Guided Tour of the 21st Century Moral Landscape, p.28.

² Ibid (both illustrations), p.30, 34.

³ Ibid, p.32.

⁴ Ibid, p.37.

LESSONS LEARNED IN THE GARDEN

by Wayne Jones

Although it is not possible, suppose that you could visit any place in history. Where would you go? Perhaps you would choose to visit an important date in the history of our great country. Maybe you would want to see the signing of the Declaration of Independence or witness a significant battle in the War Between the States.

Perhaps, if you could go anywhere in history, you would choose a Biblical event to witness. The three most notable would probably be the birth, death and resurrection of Jesus. Maybe you would want to witness Daniel being thrown into the den of lions or David courageously defeating Goliath. Maybe you would be tempted to visit Noah while the ark was being built or Moses bring the ten commandments down the mountain to the people.

While all of these are more than worthy of attention, I would like to invite you back to the garden of Eden. We could never literally go back to that wonderful place, but we can visit there through the inspired text. Through the description of that garden and the events that transpired there, we can mentally walk through the garden of old. In doing so, many lessons ought to stand out.

MAN IS SPECIAL TO GOD

God created the world and He saw that it was good (Genesis 1:10,12,18,25,31). However, in that good, perfect creation, God made a special place for man to dwell. The

Scripture reveals that *“the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed”* (Genesis 2:8). Notice the special care that God give to Adam and Eve by placing them in a separately prepared garden.

Again, man is shown to be special because of his special creation. Genesis one gives us a brief overview of the creation. However, chapter two takes us back to the sixth day and, specifically on that day, the creation of man. Why would God record the creation of man in detail? Because man was the only being created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). That fact alone shows that man is special to God. *“Thou madest him a little lower than the angels; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands”* (Hebrews 2:7).

Further, man is seen as special because in that garden, he had a personal relationship with the Creator. Genesis 2:16-17 records the command of God to the human inhabitants of the garden. The very idea that God would relay a command to them, shows that Adam and Eve were special in His sight.

Certainly, if no other lesson is learned from the garden, we can learn that man is special.

MAN HAS FREEDOM OF CHOICE

Sadly, in our world many teach and believe that God has predetermined who will be saved and who will be lost. Because of this fact (in the estimation of many), man has no choice or part in the matter. Due to a belief in this anti-biblical doctrine, many souls will be lost on the day of judgment.

If people would simply look back at the beginning of time and recall the events of the garden, they could refute and forget this soul-damning doctrine. The garden plainly reveals that man is free to choose what he will do in life. Further, the garden reveals that those choices that he makes will determine the spiritual condition of his soul. Many things about the garden declare these truths.

First, the command to not eat of a certain tree (the tree of knowledge of good and evil) shows that man has the freedom of choice. Otherwise, it would have been pointless for God to give the command. If man were going to eat of the tree regardless and God has appointed him to do so, then God should have never given commandment concerning the tree. But, He did; thus proving that man was free to choose.

Second, the temptation of Satan is proof of man’s free moral will. Think with me for a moment. If man could not help but fall or if God had programmed him not to fall, Satan was wasting his time with the temptation. However, Satan knew that Eve had a choice. For that reason, He tempted her.

Third, man’s banishment from the garden is proof that man had the ability to choose right or wrong in this matter. Moses writes, *“Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden”* (Genesis 3:23). If man had no choice in the matter, then God was not being fair. Was God punishing Adam and Eve for something that He made them or created them to do? The answer is NO. The truth is, Adam and Eve both had a choice to turn down the temptation, but they did not. For that they were punished.

Yes, the garden of Eden serves

as proof that God created man with the freedom to choose good and the freedom to choose evil.

THE SOURCE OF TEMPTATION

James boldly proclaimed that God is not tempted with evil and that He does not tempt man with evil (James 1:13). James would continue to write that temptation is a result of being enticed by lust. John revealed that there were three types of lusts through which man can be tempted or enticed: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the pride of life (1 John 2:16). The garden ties these two New Testament passages together with the source of that enticement. That source is Satan.

“And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat” (Genesis 3:6). In this one verse we can see all three avenues of temptation about which John wrote. Eve looked on the food, desired the food and saw the “benefits” of partaking. The source of that enticement to look, desire and partake was the deceit of Satan as recorded in verses 1-3.

Friends, Satan’s entire mission is to lure us away from our personal relationship with God. He will entice us and deceive us. Peter describes him as a roaring lion who walks around looking for someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). If we are not careful, he will destroy us with his fiery darts. Satan is the source of temptation to sin.

THE HOPE IN CHRIST

Once man has sinned and God is about to punish him, our look into

the garden becomes very bleak and dim. Man, through his freedom of choice has fallen to Satan's temptation and is about to be separated from the garden which was prepared especially for him.

The old cliché "it is darkest just before dawn" is fitting for this account. In the dimness of sin and the darkness of cursing, God reveals the greatest Light of all. He gives the first promise of Christ's coming: "*And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel*" (Genesis 3:15). Entailed in this promise was the virgin birth of Christ, His death on the cross and His resurrection from the tomb. Entailed in this promise was hope in the face of sin and death.

Where is your hope this day? Is it Christ? It ought to be. That hope will provide you with supreme confidence about the life to come (Titus 1:2). It will be enough to sustain you in the life that you now live (1 John 3:3). Always look "*for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ*" (Titus 2:13).

Yes, what a wonderful thing it would be to walk through the garden of Eden. It would be great to learn first hand about man's special place in the heart of God, to be reminded of man's freedom to choose, to discover the source of temptation and to realize the true hope that is found only in Christ. Friend, we will never walk through Eden's garden, but we can learn these same lessons through a study of the events which took place therein.

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HAVE YOU THOUGHT ABOUT YOUR SOUL?

Have you ever stopped to wonder
What this life is all about—
Why you're here and where you're
going
When your lease on time runs out?

Maybe you've been far too busy,
Trying hard to reach your goal,
Would you let me ask you kindly,
Have you thought about your soul?

You may reach the highest portals,
And your dreams may all
come true:
Wealth and fame may be your
portion,
And success may shine on you.

All your friends may sing
your praises,
Not a care on you may roll.
What about the great tomorrow?
Have you thought about your soul?

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CHURCHES

Lowell Church of Christ (Springdale, AR)50.00
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M/M Charles Tostige (Falmouth, MI)	50.00
Kirk Rankin (Fort Worth, TX)	100.00

GOD'S PLAN OF SALVATION

1. Hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17; Acts 16:32).
2. Believing what is taught (Mark 16:16; Hebrews 11:6).
3. Repentance (Acts 2:38; Luke 13:3; Acts 17:30).
4. Confession (Romans 10:9, 10; Acts 8:37).
5. Baptism (Acts 2:38; Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21; Romans 6:3, 4).
6. After the above five steps, faithful Christian Living (I Peter 2:11, 12; Revelation 2:10).

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST

1. The Bible is its only guide (Romans 1:16; I Thess. 2:13).
2. Wears a Biblical Name (Romans 16:16).
3. Established at the right place (Isaiah 2:2, 3; Acts 2).
4. Established at the right time (Joel 2:28-32; Acts 2).
5. Established on the right person (Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:36).
6. Saved are in it (Ephesians 5:23; Acts 2:47).
7. Its members are enrolled in heaven (Hebrews 12:23).
8. Membership in it is obtained by obedience to God's commands including baptism (Acts 2:41-47; I Corinthians 12:13).

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