

Critical Issues Commentary

A Biblically based commentary on current issues that impact you
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God's Truth in an Age of Lies part Three Spiritual Warfare: The Truth vs The Lie Written by Bob DeWaay

"Jesus therefore was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.'" (John 8:31,32)

"You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie [lit. the lie], he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies. (John 8:44)

"The one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false [lit. the lie], in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness." (2Thessalonians 2:9-12)

The New Testament shows that the battle for the minds and souls of human beings concerns "the truth," the message of Jesus Christ and "the lie," the message of the evil one. We either become disciples of Jesus and know the truth or remain in spiritual bondage. These two messages are vying for the hearts and minds of all humans: the truth and the lie. The lie has already captivated the minds of the unregenerate and the truth has come to set them free. At issue is one's eternal destiny.

In this issue I will show how truth is an essential aspect of the person and message of Jesus Christ and what it means to be His disciple. The contrast between freedom and bondage as it relates to the truth and the lie will be discussed. The way in which the lie in particular and lies in general are parasitical (having a form of existence only because of the prior existence of truth) will serve as an illustration of the nature of evil. This will help us under-

stand the nature of spiritual warfare.

The Truth & The Lie

The truth of which Jesus spoke in **John 8:32** is the revelation of God in Jesus Christ. In part one of this series I quoted Dana and Mantey who said, "Thus *alētheia*, truth, means anything in general which presents a character of reality and genuineness, but *ē alētheia* [the truth] as used in the New Testament means that which may be relied upon as really in accord with God's revelation in Christ."¹ The definite article with the abstract noun "truth" gives it a special meaning, here signifying the message and the person of Jesus Christ.

In contrast to this, several times the New Testament applies the definite article to the word "lie" to signify the message of the evil one. New Testament verses that contain "the lie" in the Greek (*to pseudos*) are **John 8:44**, **Romans 1:25**, **2Thessalonians 2:11**, and **Ephesians 4:25**. If truth is part of the very nature of God who cannot lie, then what is "the lie"? Jesus linked it to the nature of Satan, "Whenever he speaks a [the] lie, he speaks from his own nature." A. T. Robertson translates this and comments, "Whenever he speaks the lie,' as he is sure to do because it is his nature. Hence 'he speaks out of his own' (*ek tōn idiōn lalie*) like a fountain bubbling up."² Thus lying is Satan's practice and nature and "the lie" is his message.

Romans 1:25 helps identify this message, since it reveals the practice of those who rejected the knowledge of God (**Romans 1:21**) and embrace the lie: "For they exchanged the truth of God for a [the] lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen." There was an exchange not only of beliefs, but of objects of worship. Those who believed the lie consequently worshipped the creature. The lie involves futilely attributing deity to beings or things that are finite and created. It is essentially self-exaltation in that God's rightful place as Creator, Lord, and Sovereign Ruler of the universe is rejected and the created being autonomously goes its own way, seeking godhood.

The lie is none other than the very message of the Serpent in the Garden

of Eden: "And the serpent said to the woman, 'You surely shall not die! For God knows that in the day you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil '" (**Genesis 3:4,5**). His practice was to lie ("you surely shall not die") and his message was the lie ("you will be like God"). No need to submit to the Creator, according to the Serpent, you can ignore His word, disobey His command, escape His punishment, and ultimately sit in His place as sovereign ruler over your own life -- knowing all things without depending on God for truth.

When Jesus came to those in John 8 who ultimately rejected the truth for the lie, He said to them, "... unless you believe that I am He [Greek *egō eimi* - see **John 8:58**], you shall die in your sins" (**John 8:24b**). This is a striking claim of deity. The same Greek phrase is used in the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament that was widely used in the first century and sometimes quoted in the New Testament) in **Isaiah 43:10 & 25** where the Lord says that He is the one God and He takes away sins. **Isaiah 43:25** is remarkable since it begins "*egō eimi egō eimi*" - "I am I am" the one who "wipes out your transgressions." Jesus claimed to be "I am" who must be believed and trusted to take away sins. The truth is that Jesus is God who must be received if salvation is to be obtained and eternal judgment averted. The lie is a rejection of the absolute right of God to be believed, loved, served and honored for who He is and an embracing of creature worship.

Spiritual warfare is a battle between the truth and the lie. Who is to be believed and served and the eternal destiny of the souls of men and women are at issue. We will be disciples of Jesus Christ and be set free or "children" (dupes strikes me as an appropriate term) of the devil and live in bondage. The difference is not only in belief, but in practice, relationship, and eternal destiny. Nothing could be more profound and consequential than the outcome of this battle.

Knowing the Truth & Being Disciples

A careful study of **John 8:31,32** (quoted at the beginning of this article) will help us understand what is necessary for victory in this spiritual battle. The first requirement for those who believe Jesus' Messianic claims is that they "abide" (meaning -- "remain committed to, continue in, hold fast to") in His "word" (in this context

meaning “teaching” - NIV). A. T. Robertson paraphrases, “Your future loyalty to my teaching will prove the reality of your present profession.”³ As the rest of this chapter shows, many of these hearers would soon reject His teaching and accuse Him of having a demon (**John 8:48**).

That these hearers were Jewish does not suggest a racial issue, only that Jesus went first to the His own people. Gentiles are confronted with the same issues and respond the same way (as in Athens -- Acts 17). Paul warns us not to “be arrogant toward” the natural branches of God's olive tree (**Romans 11:17,18**). It would be foolish to think that the issue between the truth and the lie that is shown in **John 8** only concerns the Jews. Gentiles have equally rejected Christ.

To come to the knowledge of the truth involves a life long, committed relationship to Messiah and His teaching. Abiding in Christ's teaching means a love for the truth and an intolerance of lies, error, and adulterated teaching. The possibility for deception is always present as long as we live in this fallen world. Paul warned the Corinthians that the type of deception that first introduced the lie to human beings was a danger even to those in the church: “*But I am afraid, lest as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds should be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ. For if one comes and preaches another Jesus whom we have not preached, or you receive a different spirit which you have not received, or a different gospel which you have not accepted, you bear this beautifully*” (**2Corinthians 11:3,4**). The problem with the Corinthians, as Paul shows with his irony, was that they were **too** tolerant. They tolerated false teaching very nicely, it was the truth they seemed unwilling to embrace.

The devil has always used lies to ensnare and enslave humans and he relentlessly sticks to his evil job. Christians who think it too much bother to be disciples in the sense that Jesus taught (as people who are life long students of His word) are deluded if they think that a past experience with Jesus precludes the possibility of later deception. Paul's term that is translated “simplicity” does not mean “theological naivety” but “sincerity of heart” (as the NASB translates the same word in **Ephesians 6:5**). Thayer defines it as “singleness, sincerity, mental honesty.”⁴ Charles Hodge translates the phrase, “from singleness of mind towards Christ.”⁵ The danger was possibly to be led away from the type of devotion to Christ to which He calls all who would believe in Him --

that they abide in His word and become disciples.

It amazes me how often I meet people who think that theological study will cause spiritual death and that ignorance of theological matters is beneficial for devotion to Christ. Their slogan is, “I don't know any theology but I love Jesus.” Occasionally I have responded to this statement by asking, “which Jesus.” Some are offended that I would even ask. Nevertheless, it is a pertinent question, especially since millions of Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons say they love Jesus but their Jesus's are created beings. There were many “Joshua's” (the English form of “Yeshua” which was Jesus' Jewish name) in the first century, and the Apostles in the Book of Acts always made it clear which one they were preaching about.

If the one claiming to know no theology (the ignorance of which many evangelicals wear as a badge of honor) answers my question by saying, “the Jesus who always existed from all eternity with the Father, was born of the virgin Mary, lived a sinless life, was crucified and bodily raised from the dead on the third day and ascended bodily into heaven,” then they **do** know theology after all.

But sadly, I rarely have gotten such a response. We need to continue in Jesus' teaching (i.e. “doctrine”) if we are to be His disciples. If we cannot even articulate the doctrine of the person of Christ, how can we say we love Him?

Those who avoid doctrine and theology evidently imagine that continuing in Jesus' teaching and being disciples entails being perpetually entertained by shallow, ear tickling “sermonettes” or enjoying an electrifying spiritual “charge” that bypasses the mind. These are the very ones who are in the danger of which Paul warned in **2Corinthians 11:4**. The method of the evil one has always been to lie and deceive. The lack of understanding the truth provides fertile ground for “*power and signs and false wonders*” (**2Thessalonians 2:9**) unleashed by Satan to trap people in “the lie.” Those deluded by power and wonders, “*perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth.*” Theology is the study of God, His Word, and His self-revelation to man. Knowing little about these matters while being gullibly naive does not equip one for spiritual battle.

Jesus did not allow those who had “believed” to be content with their yet

superficial knowledge of Him and His word. He challenged them to become disciples and be set free. Their immediate response was to reject the idea that they had ever been in bondage (**John 8:33**). They did not think that “the lie” had any influence on them and trusted that a one time experience with Jesus sufficed. Like them, we need continual instruction from our Savior and Master because the sin nature within and the fallen world without are constantly promoting the lie. The temptation to autonomy and disbelief is always there. We need daily instruction and an abiding relationship with our Lord to both renew our minds with the truth and expose the follies of the lie.

Disciples eagerly listen to their teacher because they are convinced that He has the truth. Disciples also **practice** the teachings of their Master. Not content to receive His teachings only intellectually, they depend on Him for grace to live changed lives. Abiding in Christ and becoming disciples always involve a submitted, dependent relationship with God. The result is **freedom** - “*you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free*” (**John 8:32**).

“Humans who were created in God's image to worship, love, and depend upon Him and enjoy their relationship with Him embarked on a quest for godhood.”

The Truth and Freedom

The immediate hearers of Jesus did not perceive their bondage. They thought in terms of political freedom or the freedom of a son as opposed to a bond slave (see **John 8:33-35**). Jesus was speaking of freedom from sin (**verse 34**). The lie that was first believed by Eve and Adam and ultimately embraced by nature and by choice in all of their descendants has resulted in bondage of the worst sort. Humans who were created in God's image to worship, love, and depend upon Him and enjoy their relationship with Him embarked on a quest for godhood. This means believing that autonomy and self-determination are necessary for happiness. We crave things that can never satisfy and believe the lie, “you can sin and not die -- you can be like God and know all things.” The dissatisfaction with creaturehood that prompted Satan's revolt and foiled “ascent” to godhood (see **Isaiah 14:12-16**) has spread to the

human race that cannot be content with its creaturely estate.

The book of Hebrews describes the life long bondage, “*Since then the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil; and might deliver those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives*” (**Hebrews 2:14,15**). Satan told Eve that she would not die -- he lied! Now all humans have been subject to bondage, a fear of death that belies the positive facade that covers their innate insecurity. Adam and Eve were found hiding from God in fear. Their newly experienced “freedom” turned out to be cursed bondage. Jesus promised freedom to those who would abide in Him and His word and become disciples. The truth sets us free from the lie that had enslaved us throughout our lives.

Truth is that which is in keeping with reality, the way things truly are. Knowing the truth means that there is a match between our perception and understanding of reality and reality itself. This is a powerful freedom. To know God who “is” means freedom from the delusion that human life is nothing more than a cosmic accident. To know the truth is to find meaning and purpose in a world that is ridiculously absurd if understood only from the perspective of “the lie.” It is absurd that feeble and fallen humans can become “gods” or are “gods” -- little “creators” of their own reality. It is absurd that if deity is a human quality, that we need seminars to find it out. The truth is that Jesus, the second Person of the Trinity, is God and has come to save us and deliver us from the horrible burden of trying to be what we never were and never can be -- self-actualizing gods.

The truth is that we are the created and not the Creator. Knowing this is liberating because it shows us that we can truly depend on One who does not just **claim** to be a “god,” but **is** the eternal “I AM.” Truly being God, He can deliver us from judgment, sin, hopelessness and meaninglessness. The life He gives is “abundant” because it means living according to the purpose that the Creator intended from the beginning. Believing this works so much better because reality becomes our friend rather than our enemy.

Embracing the Light

The liar deludes himself because he thinks he is better off if people believe his lies than if the truth comes out. Thus, something far bigger than he that

is unchangeable and keeps relentless pressing in upon him -- **reality**, has become an enemy. The liar has made himself an enemy of the truth, and the truth ultimately prevails. The more lies that are told and the longer they are told, the more difficult it is to keep from being exposed. One lie will often require dozens more to keep it afloat.

The truth is liberating because once one embraces it and loves it, reality becomes his friend. That which we keep bumping our heads against in our deluded belief in the lie becomes something we can run to embrace. Saul of Tarsus had made himself an enemy of something he could never change or stop, the work of the Holy Spirit in regenerating people and adding them to the church; but he found freedom and salvation when he met the resurrected Christ whose followers he previously wanted stoned (see **Acts 9** for the account of Paul's conversion).

Light exposes things for what they are and thereby aids one in seeing the truth. Lying and believing the lie is a moral problem because it is a rejection of the light that God has given. Jesus said, “*And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God*” (**John 3:19-21**). Light is a blessed thing for the one who practices the truth because it helps him see it more clearly.

When one does evil and wishes to escape the consequences, darkness seems to be an ally. Studies have shown that intense street lights placed liberally and strategically around city streets cut down the crime rate. Property owners who wish to discourage crime use bright lights to deter potential vandals or robbers. This works because people who do evil do not want to be seen. They love darkness because it helps them live one life at night and during the day when people are watching pretend that they are law abiding citizens. Jesus used this fact to illustrate the love of spiritual darkness that causes people to reject the light of God's truth that came to them in the person of Jesus the Messiah. Those who do not wish to repent and receive forgiveness want the light to be turned off so that they can continue to live the lie without exposure.

The Nature of Lies

When Satan wished to seduce the

first human beings away from their unsullied relationship with God, he introduced the lie. Lies ruin relationships. Anyone who has ever been in a relationship with someone who practices lying knows that this is true. Habitual lying is common with people who are alcoholics or drug addicts. These substances distort one's relationship with reality anyway, and those who are addicted to them will lie to protect their access to their chemical doorway into an altered state of consciousness.

Lying destroys relationships because the person who loves or trusts the liar is operating under the assumption that what he or she is being told is true. This means that decisions and commitments are made based on what someone else wants them to believe is reality, but is not. This way the lying chemical abuser, for example, pulls friends and loved ones into his deluded world of unreality. In a sense the liar is seeking to be God in that he seeks to create reality with his words. He wants those with whom he associates to let him verbally dictate what is to be “real” in at least part of their world. God can speak and cause things to come into being (**Genesis 1 & Romans 4:17**). God cannot lie (**Titus 1:2**) and He has all power. His word created reality and it also describes it to us. Liars cannot create reality, they can only distort one's relationship to it.

The ability to use words to truly communicate is a gift from God. Lying is an abuse of that gift. Words, whether written or spoken, are symbols of concrete realities or meaningful concepts. Lying would be impossible if lying was all there were. Think about it, if all the words a liar used had no meaningful relationship to the real world, he would be speaking gibberish. Lying works when most of the words serve the purpose of being adequate symbols of reality for both parties, but some of those symbols are abused.

When the Serpent told Eve, “you shall not surely die,” the individual words meant the same thing for both of them. The problem was that the Serpent was misleading her because he knew she would die. His words did not fit with the real world that God had made and the truthful decrees of God. Had Eve lacked the ability to communicate using word symbols, the lie would have been impossible. When God confused the language of the builders of the tower of Babel (**Genesis 11**) they did not start lying to one another (that was no longer possible), they had to quit their associations all together. Only those who can validly communicate in some ways have the potential for lying.

The lie could not be told if truth did not previously exist. This is much like evil itself. God and His goodness (and all His other attributes) exist from all eternity. Evil had a beginning as a perversion or distortion of something God had created as good. It is parasitical since it lives off a previously existing good and depends upon it. God will ultimately triumph over all evil as the truth will prevail over the lie.

The Final Battle

The passage quoted at the beginning of this article from 2Thessalonians is about the end time delusion that comes upon the earth and God's victory over it. The watershed issue is the truth: whether it is loved and believed, or whether the pleasure of wickedness will cause the deluding influence of false signs and wonders to mislead. The truth is the gospel, the good news of salvation through Jesus the Messiah. The lie is the "good" news of Satan: that you can autonomously sin and not die. It is that the orgiastic pleasures of creature worship (see **Romans 1:24-32**) are worth the chance that God's decree that the penalty of sin is death is false.

The battle is for allegiance and worship. It is not about using verbal techniques and secret formulas to rearrange the spiritual powers of the cosmos; it is about submitting to the Lord Jesus Christ and believing His word. It is about becoming His disciples, knowing the truth and being set free. The issue remains the same from Genesis to Revelation: who is going to be God, the true Creator God or some created pretender.

In conclusion, consider what the apostle John wrote: "*I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it, and because no lie is of the truth. Who is the liar but the one who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, the one who denies the Father and the Son*" (**1John 2:21,22**). The issue in the spiritual battle of the end times is -- who is the Christ?

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2. A. T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol. V (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1932) 154.

3. *ibid.* 149.

4. Joseph Thayer, Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977) under *aplotēs* 57.

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End Notes

1. H.E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, A Manual Grammar of the Greek New