

Charles & Pam White
February 2007

Dear Friends and Loved Ones,

For 30 years, the December letter has always been one of reflection instead of reporting. This past December, after all this time, I ... forgot and did a regular informative letter. I don't know why it took me a month to discover that (maybe it's age!), but it just occurred to me the other day, and since I am somewhat of a man of tradition, I am going to make up for it here. In this February letter, then, I'll just do some thinking out loud, so to speak. If any of it touches a cord (or a nerve), do let me hear about it. I'm always glad to have your reactions. Here goes

The other day, a sister asked me for some thoughts about lying. She had been in a class where the question was brought up about not telling "all" the truth, and she was wondering if that was considered lying. In the class it had been pointed out that Abraham didn't tell all the truth about Sara (he told folks that she was his sister — true (sort of, since she was his half-sister) — but not that she was also his wife), and that he had not been punished. David had lied, also, etc. It seems to me that any telling of falsehood, or any telling of half-truths is lying, if the goal is to deceive. Obviously, we cannot reveal what has been told to us in confidence. But this is another subject altogether.

In my life, I have known two persons who could be called "compulsive" liars. That is, they lie in an automatic way, in a psychic-self-defense-system way, as if they cannot emotionally stand the idea that someone might think badly of them. So, they lie "like a rug" so to speak, in order to put themselves in a good light, "in the good role", as the French say. I don't know if this can be called sin; it seems more like a mental illness to me, in that it is neurotic (or at least paranoid) rather than deliberate.

But, for "normal" people, lying is "out", of course. Why? Simply because the God we serve is a God of truth (Psa. 31.5).

I don't know why Abraham wasn't punished; perhaps he was and the text doesn't mention it. (Notice that Sara lied as well.) But I do know that his example is not to be followed in this, because a half-truth is still a lie. Whether we put one gram or 100 grams of hydrochloric acid in a glass of pure water, the water is contaminated in both cases.

Blaise Pascal said in his *Pensées*: "The pious spirit is always given to speaking with truth and sincerity. (...) Whoever uses lies is acting by the spirit of the devil."

But we knew this: Jesus said that the devil is the father of the lie (John 8.44); he also said that liars will suffer the "second death" (Rev. 21.8). Paul exhorted Christians to put lying behind them as belonging to the "old man" (Col. 3.9).

But liars (it's an ugly word, isn't it?) aren't always easy to identify. Certain ambiguities and mysteries in others are sometimes simply due to their cultivation of a lie. I hope you won't think me too pretentious if I quote here from something that I have written

elsewhere. It happens that I've been thinking about this subject for quite some time.

(Quote)

When [the Christian who loves sincerely] speaks, his meaning will be obvious, for his words will translate correctly his thoughts. Richard Foster quotes Kierkegaard as saying: "If thou art absolutely obedient to God, then there is no ambiguity in thee and ... thou art mere simplicity before God". When this Christian is obliged to render a judgment, he will be first of all aware of his own weaknesses, as we have seen, and never criticize lightly or joyfully. He will not deal in subtleties, and when he gives reasons for his actions, people will know that he has spoken the truth. They will not have to wonder if he is not hiding something or if he is not saying this in order not to admit that, etc.

All of us know Christians who specialize in the delicate skill of inventing bogus (and sometimes quite ingenious) explanations for their indefensible behavior. They can thus do pretty much as they please and still feel good about themselves, in spite of the contradiction they are living. It is called lying, and I've no need here to underline the Bible's plain teaching about this sin that should not be found in a body of Christians (Col. 3.9; Rev. 21.8).

(End quote)

Of course, those who deal in this sort of trickery will be found out (Num. 32.23), for in the end it "cannot be hid" (1 Tim. 5.25).

The good news about lying is that when we do it unintentionally (or even intentionally) and we repent, the Lord is good to forgive us and cleanse us as we confess (1 John 1.8-9). We must never find excuses for our lying or seek ways to get around telling the truth. Jesus said that, in the day of judgment, everyone will "give account" for "every idle word" (Matt. 12.36). That's pretty sobering.

Well, all of this is submitted to you for what it is worth. I'll get back to the "normal" newsletter procedure next time.

Pam and I are doing OK, though we've had some pesky health problems in the past month. Our children are doing fine. And we are still reeling (pleasantly) from the surprise visit we had at the beginning of the month from two of our children. God is good.

The Church is planning some really interesting activities that I'll tell you about next month. We love you all in the Lord!

Sincerely,

Charles and Pam