

RESOURCES FOR BIBLICAL LIVING

# DECEPTION

LETTING GO OF LYING



LOU PRIOLO

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Lou Priolo, series editor

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P U B L I S H I N G

P.O. BOX 817 • PHILLIPSBURG • NEW JERSEY 08865-0817

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Italics within Scripture quotations indicate emphasis added.

Printed in the United States of America

### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Priolo, Lou.

Deception : letting go of lying / Lou Priolo.

p. cm. — (Resources for biblical living)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-59638-129-2 (pbk.)

1. Truthfulness and falsehood—Religious aspects—Christianity.

2. Truthfulness and falsehood—Biblical teaching. I. Title.

BV4627.F3P75 2008

177'.3—dc22

2008031796

IN 1988, a survey published in the *San Francisco Chronicle* indicated that the average adult lies (or is willing to admit that he lies) 13 times per week. More recent estimates place the frequency from between 20 and 200 lies *per day*. It has been suggested that the two biggest American lies are: “I’m from the government, and I’m here to help you,” and “The check is in the mail.”

Syndicated columnist Ann Landers once asked her readers to send her their ideas for the third biggest lie. Here is a sample of the responses she received.

- “It’s delicious, but I can’t eat another bite.”
- “So glad you dropped by. I wasn’t doing a thing.”
- “You don’t look a day over forty.”
- “The baby is just beautiful.”
- “It’s a good thing you came in today. We have only two more in stock.”
- “Put the map away. I know exactly how to get there.”

If you are like most people, you have struggled with telling the truth. As a Christian, this presents a particular problem for you because you not only *know* the truth, but you are *commanded to speak* the truth (in love). The ninth commandment—“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor”—is one of the most basic biblical directives for living the Christian life (see Ex. 20:16).

“Now wait just one minute! Are you calling me a liar?”

Of course, I don’t know how much you actually struggle with lying. But with your permission, I will presume that if you are reading this booklet, you (or someone you love) have a pattern of mishandling the truth.

Perhaps you've tried to change and failed repeatedly—especially in the crunch when the pressure was on. But I have good news for you. You are not alone. Many people of God have struggled with this sin. The Bible is filled with examples of people who have lied. Even well-respected people like Abraham, Jacob, Aaron, David, and the apostle Peter lied under pressure.

Even if you are not a practicing liar, deceit is in your heart. Indeed, “The heart is deceitful above all things . . . who can know it?” (Jer. 17:9 NKJV). David said, “The wicked are estranged from the womb; they go astray from birth, speaking lies” (Ps. 58:3 ESV).

Look at what Paul says in Romans 3:9–13.

What then? Are we better than they? Not at all; for we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin; as it is written,

“There is none righteous, not even one;  
There is none who understands,  
There is none who seeks for God;  
All have turned aside, together they have become  
useless;  
There is none who does good,  
There is not even one.”  
“Their throat is an open grave, *With their tongues  
they keep deceiving,*”  
“The poison of asps is under their lips.”

Who is Paul talking about here? He's talking about unregenerate man—you and me before we were saved.

Now, some people claim that they never lie. But think about what such people say when they make this assertion. They claim that they never break the ninth commandment. Consider the answer to question 112 of the historic Heidelberg catechism.

*Question 112.* What is required in the ninth commandment?

*Answer.* That I bear false witness against no man, wrest no one's words; that I be no backbiter [that is, to speak spitefully about someone], or slanderer; that I do not judge, or join in condemning any man rashly, or unheard [that is, without hearing his side of the story]; but that I avoid all sorts of lies and deceit, as the proper works of the devil, unless I would bring down upon myself the heavy wrath of God; likewise, that in judicial and all other dealings I love the truth, speak it uprightly and confess it; and that, as much as I am able, I *defend and promote the honor and reputation* of my neighbor.

Who can really maintain that he never breaks this commandment? To make such a claim is to instantly break it.

## A Biblical View of Deception

Have you ever really thought about your dishonesty from God's perspective? You will not change until you do. "Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, but those who deal faithfully are His delight" (Prov. 12:22).

"Our truth-telling, promise-keeping God who 'cannot lie' takes this business of deception seriously! He hates lying! Do you?"<sup>1</sup>

Lying is something that it is *good to hate*:

A righteous man *hates* falsehood. (Prov. 13:5)

I *hate* and *despise* falsehood, but I love Your law. (Ps. 119:163)

Have you ever stopped to identify your own specific *style* of lying? Do you know what tactics you use to keep others from knowing the truth about you? Allow me to help you.

Let's begin looking at the general categories of deception, and then we'll move on to some of the more specific *misleading maneuvers* identified in the Bible. Hopefully, by the time we're

1. J. I. Packer, *Growing in Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1996).