

My World and I  
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Some day you may hear a conversation that might sound something like this:

“I’d never steal from a person, but snitching things at the Five & Ten is different.”

*“How is it different?”*

“Well, I’m not hurting anyone, am I? It’s not as if the stuff belonged to the salesgirls. The people who own the store make money on us. What does it matter if they make a little less?”

Honesty, truthfulness and “good citizenship” are often discussed at school, in clubs, in books and magazines. Truthfulness and honesty are very important for the existence of any kind of society or enterprise. Unless people can trust each other, it is impossible to live in peace and safety. For example, children must trust their parents, parents must trust their children. Schools, hospitals, fire departments and the police depend on trust and truthfulness of people. What would happen if no one could be trusted?

The importance of truthfulness and honesty was recognized in the great Ten Commandments given by God in the Old Testament. The Eighth Commandment says: “You Shall Not Steal.” And the Ninth says: “You Shall Not Bear False Witness Against Your Neighbor.”

What did Jesus Christ say about the importance of the Law given in the Old Testament? Jesus Christ said that He came not to abolish the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them. Jesus used even stronger words than the Law and the Prophets, condemning the hypocrisy and falsehood of the Pharisees. He told them that their father is the devil and their will is to do their father’s desire. Then speaking of the devil, He described him as: “The devil has nothing to do with truth, because there is not truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” (John 8:44)

In the great sermon that is called “The Sermon on the Mount,” Jesus said: Let what you say be simply “Yes” or “No” anything more than this comes from evil. (Matthew 5:37) When Jesus was choosing His disciples, He said of one of them as He saw him approaching: “Behold an Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile!” (John 1:47) These words show what kind of character Jesus admired.

### **What Did Jesus Teach?**

From all this we can see quite clearly that Jesus Christ considered truthfulness, honesty and integrity, as well as other moral rules, very important for a good life. And yet there was a very important difference in the way Jesus Christ taught these rules.

First of all, Jesus Christ taught that what matters is not so much the word of the rule, but the spirit. What does this mean? The Fourth Commandment says: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God; in it you shall not do any work.”

This rule was observed very strictly by the Jews and it was just as important to them as the other commandments which forbade them to kill, to seal, to bear false witness, etc. Throughout the Four Gospels, again and again we see Jesus coming into conflict with the formal observation of the Sabbath to a sacrifice brought in the Temple. He said that mercy, or love, is more important than a sacrifice. When we read about the miracles performed by Jesus Christ to help people, we see that He often came in conflict with the Pharisees who considered that he was breaking the Sabbath Law.

What is then the spirit of the law that forbids us to tell untruths and steal? Jesus said to the Pharisees that they were outwardly beautiful but within were full of dead men’s bones and all uncleanness. (Matthew 23:27-28). Evil thoughts, theft, deceit, slander and other evil things come from within, out of the heart of man. (Mark 7:20-23)

The evil of telling lies is not in the words we say, but that we are deceiving someone. Every fairy story is telling something fanciful. The evil lies in the motive which makes us tell a falsehood. Keeping your fingers crossed when you say an untruth, telling it in such words that it might be interpreted differently, does not change anything in “the evil thing that is in your heart.” If you tell a friend of yours that you cannot go to see him because you have homework to do, while the real reason is that he bores you, the thing that really matters is your attitude to your friend. Are you being selfish or unkind in not wanting to give him your time? Are your reasons for not wanting to see him good or not?

What kinds of feelings lead us to be untruthful? Most often we lie and cheat because we want to possess something that does not belong to us, or do not want to give up that which is our own. Or we lie because we are frightened, or because we want to show off or boast or because we want to avoid doing something that is difficult. Can you think of any examples when people tell lies for any of these reasons? Can you think of other reasons people may have to be untruthful?

If we give these “reasons of the heart” the names which are used in the Gospels, we shall have a list that runs somewhat like this: Greed, fear, boastfulness, and avoiding the hard way. Jesus Christ spoke a number of times about each one of these. “Reasons of the heart.” (Matthew 6:6, 19-21; 7:13-14; 10:28-31. Luke 12:15-21; 18:10-13. John 14:27).

A person of integrity, a person whose word one can trust, who is honest and sincere, is the kind of person we all want for a friend. Jesus Christ has taught us that the real value of honesty and truthfulness goes much deeper than mere accuracy. It is the quality of an un-greedy, fearless, humble and resolute heart.