

Honesty

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Honesty Is a Principle of Salvation

- What would society be like if everyone were perfectly honest?

The 13th article of faith says, “We believe in being honest.” The Book of Mormon tells us about a group of people who were “distinguished for their zeal towards God, and also towards men; for they were perfectly honest and upright in all things; and they were firm in the faith of Christ, even unto the end” (Alma 27:27). Because of their honesty, these people were noted by their fellowmen and by God. It is important to learn what honesty is, how we are tempted to be dishonest, and how we can overcome this temptation.

Complete honesty is necessary for our salvation. President Brigham Young said, “If we accept salvation on the terms it is offered to us, we have got to be honest in every thought, in our reflections, in our meditations, in our private circles, in our deals, in our declarations, and in every act of our lives” (Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young [1997], 293).

God is honest and just in all things (see Alma 7:20). We too must be honest in all things to become like Him. The brother of Jared testified, “Yea, Lord, I know that thou . . . art a God of truth, and canst not lie” (Ether 3:12). In contrast, the devil is a liar. In fact, he is the father of lies (see 2 Nephi 9:9). “Those who choose to cheat and lie and deceive and misrepresent become his slaves” (Mark E. Petersen, in Conference Report, Oct. 1971, 65; or Ensign, Dec. 1971, 73).

Honest people love truth and justice. They are honest in their words and actions. They do not lie, steal, or cheat.

To Lie Is Dishonest

For teachers: This chapter contains three sections that describe forms of dishonesty: lying, stealing, and cheating. You might consider dividing class members or family members into three groups. Assign each group one of these three sections. Ask the individuals in each group to silently read their assigned section and consider the forms of dishonesty described in that section. Then discuss the sections as a class or as a family. Ask how we can be honest in each of the situations described.

Lying is intentionally deceiving others. Bearing false witness is one form of lying. The Lord gave this commandment to the children of Israel: “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour” (Exodus 20:16). Jesus also taught this when He was on earth (see Matthew 19:18). There are many other forms of lying. When we speak untruths, we are guilty of lying. We can also intentionally deceive others by a gesture or a look, by silence, or by telling only part of the truth. Whenever we lead people in any way to believe something that is not true, we are not being honest.

The main questions for consideration in this lesson have to do with what honesty means to our soul. How does honesty affect us and our behavior? How does honesty affect our relationships with others? How does honesty affect our faith in God? Does honesty affect God’s ability to be a God? If it affects his ability to be divine, what does that mean for us who want to become like our Father in Heaven? There must be reasons for the prophets to point out the honesty of these people and for emphasizing to us that they were so honest in all things.

Why do you think our salvation depends on our honesty? What is it that makes being completely honest a necessary part of salvation? Can we be pure in heart if we are not honest? Can we truly love our neighbor if we are dishonest with them? Can we really love God and still lie or cheat others?

One of the most treasured attributes of God is his dependability. If we couldn’t trust that he was telling us the truth or that he would keep his end of a deal, could we ever exercise faith in him sufficient to become like him? It is his very honesty that makes him the rock of reliability we depend on when all others fail us. It is the fact that when he gives His word we can stake our lives on the truthfulness of his declarations that makes him what He is.

Just as our Father in Heaven is always honest with us and is completely truthful in all things, so too is Satan dishonest with us. He will cheat us in any way he can. He will deceive and short us in any way that he can connive to do so.

There are almost infinite ways to be dishonest, but very few ways to be completely honest. Either we are honest or we are not. Either we are misrepresenting the truth or we are not. Life is much easier for those who choose honesty.

Our modern society has found many ways to mask lying. We call it misinformation, mis-speaking, speaking untruths, etc. Any way you slice it it is deception, which is lying.

When we make claims falsely, whether we know them to be false or even suspect they may be false, we are bearing false witness. Misdirection and deception can happen with a movement of a finger, a nod, a glancing of the eye, or any one of a thousand other ways to make someone assume something you know is not true. All of these things are dishonest and hurtful to one’s character.

The Lord is not pleased with such dishonesty, and we will have to account for our lies. Satan would have us believe it is all right to lie. He says, “Yea, lie a little; . . . there is no harm in this” (2 Nephi 28:8). Satan encourages us to justify our lies to ourselves. Honest people will recognize Satan’s temptations and will speak the whole truth, even if it seems to be to their disadvantage.

To Steal Is Dishonest

Jesus taught, “Thou shalt not steal” (Matthew 19:18). Stealing is taking something that does not belong to us. When we take what belongs to someone else or to a store or to the community without permission, we are stealing. Taking merchandise or supplies from an employer is stealing. Copying music, movies, pictures, or written text without the permission of the copyright owners is dishonest and is a form of theft. Accepting more change or goods than one should is dishonest. Taking more than our share of anything is stealing.

To Cheat Is Dishonest

We cheat when we give less than we owe, or when we get something we do not deserve. Some employees cheat their employers by not working their full time; yet they accept full pay. Some employers are not fair to their employees; they pay them less than they should. Satan says, “Take the advantage of one because of his words, dig a pit for thy neighbor” (2 Nephi 28:8). Taking unfair advantage is a form of dishonesty. Providing inferior service or merchandise is cheating.

We Must Not Excuse Our Dishonesty

- What happens to us spiritually when we excuse our dishonesty?

People use many excuses for being dishonest. People lie to protect themselves and to have others think well of them. Some excuse themselves for stealing, thinking they deserve what they took, intend to return it, or need it more than the owner. Some cheat to get better grades in school or because “everyone else does it” or to get even.

Sometimes it seems like such a small inconvenience to deceive someone else because it would be so much more difficult to have to deal with the honest truth. Such times are a test of our character. Would God be dishonest with us for his own convenience? Would Jesus lie to us to make his own life easier?

One of the greatest signs of a noble character is when someone is willing to be completely honest even when it will hurt them personally. This shows that truth matters to them. It shows that they care about being respectful of others and that they are not willing to deceive those around them, especially for personal comfort or gain.

If stealing is taking that which does not belong to us then there are a thousand ways to steal. We steal when we take more than our share of something. We steal when we don’t deliver what is owed to someone, be it in time, effort, work, etc. We steal when we take credit for someone else’s work or thoughts. We steal when we assume we have the right to something that is not ours to dispose of. This could include taking office supplies from work that we say we are only “borrowing.” It could include opening a bag of fruit in a grocery store and handpicking the best fruit to make a custom bag for yourself, leaving the worst for others to have to take home. Dishonesty even includes “little” things like eating a grape from the fruit bin without paying for it. If we have to make excuses for our behavior then our behavior is probably dishonest. There are many ways to be dishonest.

Can you imagine your Father in Heaven cheating you on blessings you are owed? I can’t. When He gives his word on something that word is as good as an iron clad contract. It cannot be broken by him. Why? Because He is honest. When we don’t receive the promised blessings of covenants we have made with God it is because we have broken the covenant, not because He has. Shorting someone happens anytime we feel we deserve more than we are actually owed. When we convince ourselves that we deserve or are owed something that we haven’t earned or been rightfully given we wind up cheating someone else.

Unfortunately, sometimes to get what we want we have to cause someone else to hurt themselves so we gain the advantage. This is what happens when Satan says to “dig a pit for thy neighbor.” We set them up to hurt themselves so we get what we want dishonestly. If we were supporting and loving our neighbor we would never consider taking advantage of them in such a way. We would do without rather than hurt another to get something we wanted.

Excusing our dishonesty numbs us to our own weaknesses. Excusing our own dishonesty blinds us over time to what we are doing. We actually begin to believe our own lies. Self deception is the worst form of lying. It is more difficult to see the ways we deceive ourselves than it is to see how we are deceiving others. Satan uses our own blindness and spiritually numbed thinking to his advantage. As long as we are not listening to the Spirit, which

always tells us to do the right thing, then Satan can whisper in the Spirit's place and he becomes our guide. This is why learning to be completely honest is so important. The only protection we have against the lies of Satan is the Spirit of God, and that requires honesty, the more the better.

These excuses and many more are given as reasons for dishonesty. To the Lord, there are no acceptable reasons. When we excuse ourselves, we cheat ourselves and the Spirit of God ceases to be with us. We become more and more unrighteous.

We Can Be Completely Honest

- What does it mean to be completely honest?

To become completely honest, we must look carefully at our lives. If there are ways in which we are being even the least bit dishonest, we should repent of them immediately.

Someone told me once that it was hard to have to think about everything they said so as not to offend anyone. And they were correct. It is hard. It is difficult, at least it is difficult until it becomes a way of life. Once being honest is just the way we are then we don't have to think about it, we just do the right thing. But at first we have to make the commitment to monitor everything we do and say to make sure we are being as honest as we know how to be.

Like anything else in life, we begin with the little things and over time we learn how to incorporate the harder ones. We need to start somewhere, and today is as good a time as any.

When we are completely honest, we cannot be corrupted. We are true to every trust, duty, agreement, or covenant, even if it costs us money, friends, or our lives. Then we can face the Lord, ourselves, and others without shame. President Joseph F. Smith counseled, "Let every man's life be so that his character will bear the closest inspection, and that it may be seen as an open book, so that he will have nothing to shrink from or be ashamed of" (Gospel Doctrine, 5th ed. [1939], 252).

This is a wonderful concept that those who are completely honest cannot be corrupted. It is also very true. How can someone blackmail you if you haven't done anything wrong? How can someone play on your weaknesses if you don't have any?

I am talking about those who work in the business world. If you don't have a drinking problem, you don't sleep around, do drugs, cheat on your spouse, you do pay your taxes and all your debts in a timely manner, etc. Then what is there to hold over your head and control you with? The wicked use the wickedness of others to control them. A person who is above reproach because of their complete honesty in all things cannot be controlled or corrupted.

- In what ways does our honesty or dishonesty affect how we feel about ourselves?

Additional Scriptures

- D&C 50:17 (speak only by the spirit of truth)
- D&C 76:103–6 (destination of liars)
- D&C 42:27 (commandment not to speak evil of neighbors)
- Exodus 20:15–16 (commandments not to steal and not to bear false witness)
- D&C 42:20, 84–85; 59:6 (forbidden to steal)
- D&C 3:2 (God is honest)
- D&C 10:25–28 (Satan deceives)