

# On Being Truthful

by  
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Back when Dick Cavitt had a talk show on public television, I watched him interview a British lady who must have been about eighty years old. She looked as if she had just come from tea at Buckingham Palace. The woman gave all the air of being a person for whom nothing would be too hard. She mastered that interview! As a last ditch attempt to get some control of that interview with this great lady, Dick Cavitt asked her, "What has been the hardest thing in the world for you?" And she shot back, "Being honest."

I thought, "My kind of woman!" Being honest is very hard. I felt that here was a person who was beautiful and gallant and grand admitting what I knew in my heart was true about me. I think that the hardest thing in the world for me is being honest.

I told this story once at the First Presbyterian Church in Burbank, and a lady came up to me and said, "How can you, a so called evangelical leader, admit that it is hard for you to be honest?" I said, "My dear woman, it is hardest of all for us!" I mentioned to Alan Johnson that my definition of an evangelical leader was a person who couldn't write an honest autobiography. It's very hard. There are too many private citadels that you have to protect against the people who have set you up as a paragon of virtue and Christianity. It is hard to be truthful.

That woman has kind of stood out in my mind, because I think it's hard to be honest for all kinds of reasons. One, because it is so much easier to float through uncomfortable situations on the white cloud of a white lie. But it is also hard because truth is so complex, and it is so hard to know, for sure, whether you are telling the truth. It is hard to know whether you are thinking the truth.

I heard a story just yesterday that I don't know is appropriate here, but it suggests that there are some truths that some people cannot tell. You have to find out the answer somewhere else and, when you find it out, you don't always understand what you have found out. This little guy, about 10 years old, asked his mother, "How old are you?" And she said, "Honey, you should never ask a woman how old she is because she will never tell you the truth." "How much do you weigh, Mother?" "Honey, you should never ask a woman how much she weighs because she will never tell you the truth." Well, he left, and asked his father about that, and he said, "Son, when you want to find out things like that from a woman, you must not ask her. You must look at her driver's license." Which he did. His mother was out of the room, and her purse was lying there, so he opened it up and found her billfold and looked at her driver's license, and came back to her, and said, "Mother, I know how old you are. You are 36, and I know how much you weigh, 142, but one thing I don't understand, how come you got a 'F' in sex?" (Think about that!)

So it's hard to know whether you have the truth, and it's hard to know when to tell the truth and when not to tell the truth. But what I want to talk about is "Being Truthful." That's not the same thing as having the truth. Having the truth is fairly easy. All you have to do is have the right parents, or the right teachers, or the right preachers, hang around libraries a lot, listen to the right talk shows. Having the truth isn't that hard—important—but not all that hard.

What is really hard is "being truthful." Truthfulness is a thing that you've got to work at. Have you ever noticed that in the Bible integrity is never listed as a gift? There are all kinds of spiritual gifts, but with integrity, you and God have to work it out on your own. If you get to heaven and God says, "How come you were such a liar?" and you say, "I didn't have the gift of integrity," I don't think God will understand that. But it is so hard. If I have the gift of all gifts to give to you, I think it would be the gift of integrity. It would be the gift of having the hutzpah that the Psalmist had in Psalm 26, "Vindicate me, O Lord." He's looking at the Almighty, eyeball to eyeball, and says, "Vindicate me, O Lord, I've walked in my integrity." I like that phrase, "I have walked in my integrity," because it suggests that it is a journey, and none of us have arrived yet. If anybody ever comes to you and says, "I am a person of integrity," I recommend a second opinion. Integrity is something we're still working towards, not something any of us has achieved. So let's talk about it.

I think that being a truthful person has three faces. One is existing truthfully, another is thinking truthfully, and a third is speaking truthfully. I'd like you to think about all three of those with me for just a little while, but especially about speaking truthfully.

## EXISTING TRUTHFULLY

**God's Truthfulness: His Consistency.** When I think about God and God's truthfulness, what I think about first of all is his consistency, the consistency between what he says he is and what he does. What he says he is he revealed to Moses at the burning bush when he captivated the interest of this poor chap by the strangeness of a burning hunk of chaparral. He told Moses that he wanted to begin his romance with his family again, and Moses was to be his point man. And Moses said, "But you've been on a leave of absence for four hundred years. Nobody knows who you are. Who are you? What's your name?" And you remember that God uses a name, the remnants of which are four Hebrew consonants. Remember the Hebrews did not have vowels. There were those four Hebrew consonants, and the people who translated them into English were kind of philosophically orientated, so they said that that name was "I AM WHO I AM." Remember that?

I used to hear a Sunday School teacher talk about that with great unction, and we were supposed to be in awe of that "I Am the Great I Am, I Am Who I Am." When I took Philosophy 301, I learned that meant that God had his existence and his essence in

one indivisible moment. I thought that was terrific. But Moses hadn't taken Philosophy 301. He wasn't asking that type of question. Anyway, when I heard people talking about "I Am Who I Am" with awe and wonder, I thought about Popeye. Isn't that terrible. You remember that song, "Popeye, I am who I am," and that is how those things struck me then.

The question that Moses was interested in, and the question that those hod carriers in Egypt were interested in, was not being and existence. It was this, presence and absence. "You have been gone so long we don't know who you are any more, and now you plop back into our lives, how do we know you'll be here again tomorrow?" That was the question. When God said his name, I do not believe that he said simply, "I Am Who I Am." I believe, with John Courtney Murray and others, that what he said was, "I am the one who will be there with you." The question of the Bible about God always was, "Is he here? Will he be here tomorrow?" Christ Immanuel, he is here. In the eschatological vision of the world to come, the essence of it is, "We will be his people, and God will be with us." The question of God's truthfulness is the question of whether he will be who he says he was. And I think that is the question of integrity with us.

**Consistency and Being Truthful.** Consistency is a complicated matter. But I think that there are different dimensions of consistency. If I just check them off, it might tell you what I mean. There is kind of a **lateral** consistency, that is to say, if you can be depended upon to be basically the same person tomorrow that you are today. That's consistency, and there's integrity to that. There is also an **inner** consistency, a consistency such that what you are outside is what you intend to be, that there is no pretending to be what you do not intend to be. Here you have the essence of hypocrisy, Ananias and Sapphira, apostates disguising themselves as apostles, Satan disguising himself as an angel of light, Milli Vanilli, and anybody else who pretends to be what he does not, or she does not, intend to be.

There is a difference, though, between pretending to be what you do not intend to be, and pretending to be what you are not yet but what you do intend to be. C.S. Lewis has made, I think, a very perspective remark about how it takes a moral sleuthhound to see the difference between pretending to be what you are not, but pretending to be what you intend to become. And then there is that wonderful movement from pretending to becoming what you are. It is a kind of creative hypocrisy, that leads you from pretending to be what you do intend to be but are not yet. But by pretending you create the catalyst for becoming.

There is also a **relational** consistency. To be the kind of person who dares to make and cares enough to keep a commitment so that someone who hears you speak those mere words, "I'll be there," knows that you will be there because you are consistent with your commitments.

Then there's a **moral** consistency. Living a life in which there is a steady line between your moral sense of what you ought to do and ought to be and what you try to be and try to do. Consistency. You see, it's a matter of intention always, isn't it? That is to say, to be a truthful person doesn't mean that you have to achieve perfect consistency, but you have to intend it at least.

## THINKING TRUTHFULLY

**Self Deception.** Let's think now about thinking truthfully. Here again, we're talking intention. To think truthfully is to intend to let reality shape your thinking so that your consciousness is not corrupted by self-deceit.

I know a story about Huck Finn. Down at the riverside, there is a barge collision, a bad accident. He's telling a woman about it, a white woman, who asks him, "Did anybody get hurt down there?" He said, "No ma'am, nobody got hurt down there, just a couple of niggers got killed." "Oh," she said, "that's good, a person could get hurt in an accident like that." What's going on? What's going on is the corruption of her consciousness. She does not intend to know what she really knows. She refuses to see what she really sees.

There was a guy who taught theology at what was, at that time, America's premier theological institution, who was living a bizarre, illicit, crazy, wild sex life, including seducing students and all sorts of other stuff. Very shortly after he died, his widow wrote his biography telling all about this stuff. A few years later, I talked to the president of that institution, who had just become the former president of that institution, I said, "Didn't you guys know?" You know what he said? He said, "We knew, but we refused to know." When we refuse to see the truth in front of our eyes, to hear the truth that's being shouted at us, refuse to know what we really know, we have corrupted our consciousness.

Now there's something very sneaky and subtle about this process. What is sneaky about it is that, on the face of it, nobody intends to deceive herself. I don't think anybody gets up in the morning and says, "I think I'll lie to my wife." No, I'm sorry, I think a lot of people could get up in the morning and say, "I think I will lie to my prof today," or, "I think I'll lie to the Dean today," or, "I think I will lie to my roommate today." But does anybody get up in the morning and say, "I think I will lie to myself today?" And yet, at some instant point, there is, I believe, an intention to deceive ourselves, a refusal to know what we know.

This is what St. Paul says about unbelievers in Romans 1, "They know God, but they refuse to know him." He doesn't say, "Too bad they don't know God, too bad they are so stupid, it's too bad they can't see, too bad they are blind." What he says is, "God is in front of their faces, they know him, and they refuse to know him." This happens all the time.

In the 1930s, if anything was clear at all, it was the intention of Adolf Hitler. The reasonable **London Times** said, "Hitler is a reasonable man," and the parliament of Great Britain and the two prime ministers of Great Britain preceding Winston Churchill said, "Hitler is a man of peace."

If you want to think about self-deception, read Albert Speer's memoirs. Albert Speer was Hitler's favorite. After the war, he asked himself, "How could I have lived this kind of life?" His only answer was, "Once I committed myself to this leader, I refused to ask questions, I refused to investigate. Now that I look back on it, I see that that whole Nazi clique lived in an insulated globe of self-deception."

I wonder if we Americans are doing this today? We are so wild, so ecstatic at having won a war that nobody really was fighting except us. We know that we killed an awful lot of innocent people, an awful lot of Iraqi children and women and soldiers who never wanted to be soldiers. We may say, "But it was necessary to do that less evil thing." But who wants to think about it? Who talks about it? I think that the terror we brought on that country is something that we know, but we don't want to know. We do it all the time. Religious people do it.

**Discernment.** I find an interesting relation between the corrupt consciousness and lack of discernment. I've been more and more impressed lately with the importance of the faculty of discernment to St. Paul. Philippians 1:9, "I pray that love may be added to your understanding and discernment." Why? So that you can recognize, that is to say appropriate, a more excellent way to live.

Discernment is simply the power to see what's going on around you. It is to have a nose for reality, to see the details that a coarser person might miss. Discernment is to see the differences between things, to recognize the difference between something that's really new and something that's just bizarre, between something that is important and something that can be put off until tomorrow. It is to see the differences between things, and the links between things. It is to see two things that appear to be different, but you, a discerning person, can see that there are similarities between them such that at the core the same issue is joined between them.

A discerning person sees beneath the surface of things, sees the hurt beneath the shrill yell, sees the wound behind the smile, sees the maneuvering agenda behind the external agenda of people. Now it takes something to see those things, to be a discerning person.

Is it true that if you don't have discernment, if you are a clod that doesn't notice the little things that make the big difference, who doesn't see that tempests really do blow in teacups sometimes, that mountains really form in mole hills, if you don't see what is going on around you, is it true that that's just an accident?

If you come to judgment day, and God says this time, "How come you were such a clod? You never noticed the cry of pain in your friend who was just mumbling. You never noticed what was really going on. How come you were such a clod?" And if you said, "Lord, I didn't have the gift of discernment." I think the Lord will say to you and to me, "Yes, you did. I gave you the faculty. You just didn't exercise it. You were only half awake most of the time. You didn't listen to people. You didn't trust your own intuition sometimes. You didn't care enough to know. That's why you didn't see.

That's why you didn't know. You were too lazy, too self-interested. You didn't love reality enough to know it." So your failure to see is a moral question just as your corrupted consciousness is a moral failure.

Discernment is so important to the subject that this conference is dealing with. Being a truthful person isn't just being a person who is willing to tell the truth. A truthful person, who is a discerning person, is a person who knows which truth to tell, when to tell it, how to tell it, and to whom to tell it. St. Paul said, "Speak the truth in love," and, I think centuries before that, Aristotle gave kind of a commentary on that when he said, "Not only speak the truth, but speak the right truth, at the right time, in the right way, to the right person." And to know the right truth, the right time, the right way, you need to know what's really going on. You need to develop discernment.

So you can corrupt your consciousness by refusing to know what is in front of your eyes. You can also fail to be a discerning person because you don't will strongly enough, lovingly enough, to know what's really going on. A person who corrupts her consciousness and is too lazy to be a discerning person is a person who fails to be truthful because she or he does not think truthfully. Now let us talk about telling the truth.

## TELLING THE TRUTH

Telling the truth, like thinking the truth and being the truth, is primarily a matter of intention. Being a truthful teller is to be a person who has the intention not to deceive. The minimal duty of truth telling, I think, comes down to this, when you communicate, have the intention that your listener will know what is on your mind and in your heart. Speaking the truth is far more subtle than just speaking the truth, because you can tell the truth with an intention to deceive.

You have all read, I'm sure, *The Yearling*, Mark Rawling's great novel. At least we read it in the ninth grade. I thought it was staple diet in schools. Maybe it is, and maybe it isn't. In any case, where Penny Baxter lived, the men got together on Saturday morning in a store. They sat around a pot-bellied stove and traded stories about hunting bear, and they bragged about their dogs. They bragged about their dogs, everybody knew they were bragging about their dogs and everybody knew that they were lying about their dogs, so it didn't count. They didn't really intend to deceive with their lying, right? It's like everyone understood that that was the name of the game.

Now Penny Baxter had a dog that he wanted to get rid of, a no-good bear dog. So he showed up on a Saturday morning, and he says, "That bear dog of mine ain't worth a good plug of tobaccy, sorriest bear dog I ever foller'd. I sure would like to get shucked of that bear dog of mine." And his friend Lem Billings said, "Hey, what's going on here? Never hear'd of no one run his dog down that a'way, some thing fishy is going on here, I want that dog!" So he showed up at Penny Baxter's the next morning with a rifle, and says, "I want to trade you this rifle for that dog." And Penny Baxter says, "You don't want that dog, I told you that was a no-good dog, ain't worth a good plug of tobaccy, I told ya that." Lem Billings said, "You take this rifle for that dog, or by gum, I'm gonna come and steal your dog." Trade made.

Next day, Penny Baxter's conscience began to bother him. His son said to him, "Shucks, Pa, you told him the truth." Penny said, "Yes, son, I told him the truth. My words were straight, but my intention was as crooked as the Oklahawa River." So the intention not to deceive the listener is our minimal duty in truth telling.

**The Importance of Telling the Truth.** Now I want to ask this question. What's the big deal? Why is telling the truth so important? I may be wrong about this, but in my view, the primary reason why telling the truth is important is not the importance of truth. I believe that the importance of telling the truth has to do with people, not with truth. I don't believe that the bedrock reason why we are obligated to tell the truth has to do with the sacredness of truth. Some philosophers and theologians have held this. Immanuel Kant believed that to lie is to violate the law of rationality, consistency. That is why he thought it would be better to tell the truth, even if it threatened the life of a friend, than not to tell the truth. The death of rationality is worse than the death of a friend.

Theologians have felt the same way. God is truth, God is sacred, therefore truth is sacred, therefore you have to tell the truth. I believe that deception is bad because it hurts people, not because it violates truth. I do think deception is bad because it violates truth, but I don't think that that's the principal reason. When St. Paul says, "Speak the truth to one another." Is it because truth is sacred? No. "Speak the truth to one another." Why? Because "you are members one of another." You need to speak the truth. We need to speak the truth to each other, because there is no life but life in community, as Elliot said. There is no community without trust, and there is no trust without the implicit understanding that we intend to speak truthfully to each other.

What was wrong with Ananias and Sapphira? Was it that they violated the sacredness of truth? No, they violated the community. Why does the eighth commandment say, "Don't lie"? It's because in those ancient courtrooms all that they had to go on was the understanding that people spoke the truth. They had no computers, they had no fingerprints, they had no scientific detection, they had no way of investigating the truth in any scientific way. Everything depended upon the judge's ability to assume that we spoke truthfully to each other.

Community is held together by truth. Imagine a community—just imagine! —a community in which everybody expects leaders to lie wherever a lie serves them, when teachers are expected to pretend to know what they don't know, when religious leaders are expected to be hypocritical, when the media is expected to distort the truth, when salespersons are expected to misrepresent their products, when spouses are expected to cheat. In such an environment, no community is possible. You can have a legal framework, a structure held together by laws and law enforcement, but you would have no community because you would have no trust. "Speak the truth one to another because you are members one of another."

Another reason that truth is important for people is that other people have a right to truthfulness when they must make responsible decisions about the thing that you're

communicating about. When people need to make responsible decisions about what you are talking about, they have a right to truth. If they have a right to truth, you have an obligation to give it to them.

Hence the deepest rationale for why truthfulness is so important lies in the human need for community and in the human right to make responsible decisions.

**Secrecy and Disclosure of Truth.** But I'm talking at this point about the right not to be deceived. I'm not talking about the right to know. I don't think anybody has an absolute right to know everything that he or she wants to know, and therefore, I don't think anybody has an obligation to tell anybody whatever it is they want to know. There's a lot of stuff about you that I have no right to know and you have no obligation to tell me. How do we know when a person has a right to our truth?

I have to pause here to make sure you understand where I am. I'm not now talking about the right not to be deceived. We could talk about that, we could talk about when it might be okay to deceive somebody. But, for now, I just want to know when I am obligated to tell you what you want to know and when I have a right to keep my mouth shut. I don't know how we can gauge the moment when somebody standing before us has the right to our truth and we have an obligation to tell, unless we develop the gift, the power, the faculty of discernment. How can I know when you have the right to my truth unless I know what's really going on in the situation that we are sharing and what's going on with you. Discernment is everything.

I do want to pursue, for a moment, some abstract guidelines for recognizing which truth to tell and which truth to keep concealed. I'm going to tack to the left and tack to the right, cover my tracks, allow exceptions to every rule, and then to insist on exceptions to the exceptions. In the end, it will come down to this. Keep your eyes open, keep your ears open, and keep your heart tuned to reality, and God will give you the ability to recognize the moment when to speak and when to be quiet. Or as Kenny Rogers used to sing, "You gotta know when to hold 'em, you gotta know when to fold 'em, you gotta know when to walk away." How do you know when to walk away?

**First**, we should tell the truth that people have a right to know. What kind of truths do people have a right to know? Well I'll mention one; people have a right to know what they need to know in order to make a responsible decision about the specific matter that I am talking about. If I need to make a responsible decision about whether to buy your used Toyota, I have a right to know the truth that you know about that Toyota. If I need to make a decision about the political life of my community, and you are a political leader who is going to determine the future of my community, I have the right to know the truth from you. Justice calls for a person's rights being honored, and I think this is one case where you have a right to know.



**Secondly**, people have a right to know truth that affects them in a covenanted relationship, which is defined by honesty. If you are my therapist and I am your patient, I have the right to know the truth from you about matters that deal with me in this relationship with you. My wife has a right to know truth from me, which affects this covenanted relationship. This does not mean she has the right to every truth.

I heard something yesterday about somebody, which I covenanted not to tell anybody, and my wife has no right to that truth, and I'm not going to tell her. But I remember one time, some years ago, when our kids were young, something bad happened to one of our kids, and I knew about it, she didn't, and I didn't tell her. And she asked me, "Why didn't you tell me?" I said, "Honey, I knew it would just hurt you." And she became very angry, she said, "You let me decide how much hurt I can stand." This was a truth that affected our covenanted relationship, and she had a right to know it even if it was painful.

The same is generally true of a government to its people. I have a covenanted relationship with my government; therefore my government has an obligation to tell me the truth I need to know to make responsible decisions pertinent to my life as a citizen in this community.

**Thirdly**, people have a right to know the truth on which their basic well-being depends. This is not quite as hard and crystal clear as the other reasons are, but I think of St. Paul saying, "Woe is me if I don't preach the gospel." Why? Because there was at least a truth concerning the salvation of human beings that people have a right to know because it was God's will for them to be saved. A child has a right to know she is loved by her parents, and a parent therefore has an obligation to let the child know in a kaleidoscopic variety of ways that she is loved because she has a right to know that.

Now obviously, these are less than absolute rights. These are what philosophers or lawyers call *prima facie* rights, that is, they are normally your right to know, but circumstances may present sufficient reason for the speaker to decide that it is something she should conceal.

**When It is Right to Not Tell the Truth.** So I ask now, flipping the page, how do you know when you have reached the moment when you should not tell the truth? Again, if you do not see what is going on, and hear what is going on, and feel what is going on, and intuit what is going on around you, these abstractions are not going to do you much good, but try them.

**First**, I think I have a right to conceal my truth from you when to reveal it to you would run the risk of violence to others. Hence it is right for the military to keep some secrets if to reveal them would jeopardize men and women on the battlefield, or it would be right for me to conceal an unsavory remark that if people knew about it, you would be discriminated against.

I have, in the **second** place, a right to conceal my truth from you even when you want it, when to reveal the truth would violate a confidence. It is interesting that the very relationships that within them demand openness, demand that outside of them there is concealment and confidentiality. I have an obligation to tell my patient the truth. But precisely because we have that kind of covenanted relationship together, I must tell it to nobody else! I must conceal it even when somebody else asks.

**Thirdly**, I have a right to conceal the truth from you that I have promised another person not to tell. This can get you into difficulties sometime. I once knew a secret, I still know it, about a friend of mine. I promised him I would never tell, and I assumed that I would go to my death without that secret being known.

I have another friend, who is a friend of both of us, who has a blunt way of asking questions. Who said to me one time, out of the blue, “Is it true that ‘X’ is?” I thought, “How am I going to get out of this? If I say I don’t know, I’ll be lying.” Right? “If I say it is none of your business, he will know the answer.” I told the truth. I wish to God I never did. Because in telling the truth to the person who asked it, I was assuming that a person has the right to the truth simply because he asks. I forgot that it was a demand of truth to the person to whom I promised that I not reveal that. If the only way for me to keep my promise to the first person was to lie, I think God would have blessed my lie. I don’t know whether it was the only way. I didn’t have the wit at the time to find a way out of it. I didn’t have the wit to find a way, a devious, sneaky way to get out of that, so that at the end I could say, “I kept my promise and I didn’t lie.” But, to this day, I haven’t been able to think of a way I could have done that. I would have been involved in deception somehow. So I told the truth, and I wish I hadn’t.

**Fourthly**, I have a right to conceal my truth when telling my truth violates my privacy. I have been thinking a lot—well not a lot, but a little bit anyway lately—about the mystery of our need for privacy. There is a core of ourselves that we set up boundaries around, such that we reveal it only in a trusted relationship. And if you simply invade that mansion of my privacy, I am undone in a deep and grievous and painful way. This is why the government does not have a right to all the truth about me. And I find it very interesting, historically, that the governments that are best at concealing their truth from people are the governments that won’t allow their people to have any secrets. The first way a government can break down a people is to take away their secrets, take away their privacy.

So I have a right not to tell you my truth if my truth is likely to hurt innocent people, if my truth is a truth I learned in a confidential relationship, if my truth is a truth I promised not to tell, or if my truth is something that violates my privacy. These are four very strong reasons for having the right not to tell the truth.

**When We Must Tell Truth We Normally Have the Right to Conceal.** I have another question. I have asked, “What’s the right truth to tell?” And I’ve asked, “What’s the right truth to conceal?” And now I want to ask, “When are we obligated to reveal truth that we normally have a right to conceal?” (Are you following me, are you with me?) When am I obligated to reveal the truth that normally I would say, “I don’t have to tell you! Because I have a right to conceal it”?

**First**, I think we have an obligation to reveal truths that we are normally permitted to conceal when my confidentiality causes serious risk to innocent people. Supposing I am a therapist or a doctor and you are my client, and I learn from you that you have AIDS and that you intend to marry a woman without telling her that you have AIDS. I think I may be obligated to reveal even that confidential truth. I may be wrong, but it strikes me as being a time.

**Secondly**, when to conceal the truth in order to protect people is actually a deception in order to protect me. People with corrupt consciousness in high places deceive themselves very easily into believing that they are protecting the confidentiality of their high office when in fact they are only covering up their covert corruption. We are obligated to tell the truth which we normally are permitted to conceal when we are actually trying to cover up our own selves.

**Thirdly**, let’s take the thing I said a little while ago, you don’t have to tell what you promised not to tell. I think you do have to tell, even what you promised not to tell, when not to tell it could lead to great injury. Here is a real story, someone’s experience that was told to me recently. This guy is a counselor. A young man calls from somewhere, and the young man threatens to do himself great harm. From the experience of counseling, the counselor takes that very seriously, that he is likely to do himself great harm. Now the young man says, “I will tell where I am if you will promise not to tell anybody.” And he promises, and he tells. A very shaky situation, but I think he did right.

## CONCLUSION

We have asked what truth is right, the right truth to tell, and when is it right to tell it? We've asked when is it right not to tell it, and we have asked when might we be obligated to tell it even if we have the right to conceal it? If I haven't made at least this point by now I'm surprised. The point is that the road to truthfulness is a twisting path between the hard place of obligation to tell the truth and the rock of obligation to keep our mouth shut. There are many pitfalls and pratfalls on the way, and the only way to keep a fairly decent batting average is to keep your eyes open and your heart pure.

In some relationships, I think, like the government to the governed, the overwhelming rule is tell all that people need to know except when lives might be lost. In other relationships, like the covenanted relationship between husband and wife, patient and doctor, teacher and student, and some others, the general rule is conceal the truth that is spoken to you in that covenanted relationship lest you break the covenant. And in the Bible, there is nothing worse than breaking the covenant. In most relationships, it all depends on what is going on.

Now you may understand why I was so intrigued by that lady on the Dick Cavitt show who said the hardest thing in her life was to be truthful. Truthfulness, I think, is the place that we are going towards, and we do very well just to keep moving in that direction, keeping check on our intentions always. Because we need to see whether, everyday, we are on the way to integrity, or whether at some shadowed place, we left the path and went off to nowhere, knowing that without integrity, anywhere is nowhere.

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