

129 "Let's be honest"!

Mr Sepp Blatter and many of his FIFA colleagues are in trouble. It appears that for decades these men have been running FIFA, the body in charge of world football, very much to suit their own interests. For years there has been talk of lying, corruption, bribery, fraud and money laundering within the organisation, and now, at long last, serious steps are being taken to bring the wrongdoers to justice. Already some of those under threat of arrest and trial are beginning to "squeal" - promising to tell all in return for lenient treatment for themselves at the hands of the judges; but whether or not their words will be true also remains to be seen.

This whole FIFA mess brings to prominence the tendency we all have as fallen human beings to be dishonest, in both our words and our deeds. How easy, how natural, how instinctive, how immediate, we find it is to tell a lie! This is always for the same reason - our own self-interest in one form or another. So we blurt out - "It wasn't my fault", "I did let you know last week", "I don't know what you're talking about", "Sorry I can't help with that because" - when we could help but simply don't want to!

Not surprisingly, lying starts with Satan. In John 8.44 the Lord Jesus tells us plainly that Satan has no truth in him, and is a liar and the father of lies. Now these days Satan is rarely mentioned in preaching, (which suits him just fine), but "Christ's faithful sheep" need to have their eyes wide open to the widespread, concealed mischief of Satan and his cronies, which usually involves lying in some shape or form. This means, to be frank, that the words of many normal, ordinary people these days may well be not true, because lying has become such an accepted part of modern culture. How we need to be "wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (Matthew 10.16).

But of course it is not just "them out there", be they top FIFA officials or the dodgy estate agents round the corner, who are prone to telling lies; it is also very much a case of "you and me, right 'ere"! Not surprisingly the Lord in His Word has a great deal to say about our own speech, simply because it is so central to human behaviour, and so easily misused.

In the ninth of the Ten Commandments we are instructed - "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour" (Exodus 20.16). It is as simple as that: truthfulness and not falsehood, honesty and not lying, when speaking of others. We all nod in agreement, but it is perilously easy to get this one wrong.

In James Chapter 3 is the well-known passage where the tongue is compared to a horse's bit, a ship's rudder, and a fire, "a world of iniquity" - in short, a tiny object capable of causing immense damage. Nor are we to go round uttering great oaths to emphasise our words: "Let your Yes be Yes, and your No be No", for no more should be necessary (James 5.12 / Matthew 5.33-37).

Elsewhere the Lord tells us: "Let your speech be always seasoned with grace speaking the truth in love (and use) sound speech" (Colossians 4.6 / Ephesians 4.15 / Titus 2.8).

We see from these and other scriptures that our speech is to be calm, considered, measured - and true. When listening to others, we do well to ask ourselves, "Is this true?". And when we ourselves are about to speak, we ask, "Are these my words true, wholesome, and edifying? Is the Lord content with my speaking these things in this way?". And if and when the answer is "No, He isn't", then we'd better change tack, and quickly!

"There is a time to keep silence, and a time to speak" (Ecclesiastes 3.7). And when it is a time to speak, "let's be honest" - and speak the truth.

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