

The Tentmaker and Truthfulness – is it ever right to lie?

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It would have surprised everyone to find that the actor and comedian W. C. Fields was interested in religion! When a surprised friend caught him reading the Bible, he said, "Well, I am looking for loopholes--and there do not seem to be any."

A few mission leaders today are searching the Scriptures for loopholes as they deal with the vexing problems Christian workers, especially tentmakers, face in spiritually hostile countries. I have before me a mission training paper with the title, "When is it acceptable to lie?" And an article from a missions publication on the same subject. Both are from respected groups that do fine ministry.

No Christian leader defends gratuitous, blatant lies. But when is it permissible, in a hostile country, to tell a half-truth or withhold information to give a less than truthful impression?"

If you seek a job in a Muslim country, how much must you reveal about yourself on a job application or in a job interview? What do you tell border guards and customs officers? How do you answer the nosy questions of Muslim or Hindu or Buddhist neighbors and colleagues at work? Is it acceptable to use a minimal job mainly as a front or a cover for regular missionary work? Is it permissible to hide behind a phantom business? Dare you evangelize if the government forbids it? What about exchanging money on the black market? Smuggling Bibles? Holding two passports? Paying bribes?

What if your telling the truth could get a co-worker or a local convert into trouble? What if your telling the truth could get you arrested or imprisoned? Or kicked out of the country on 24 hour notice--with your family and possessions? What if your truthfulness could also get your employer in trouble?

Is lying always wrong, or is it excusable when it is for the gospel? Does the end ever justify the means?

The mission papers I have before me list Bible passages that seem to justify lies in severe situations. Since I already had this paper in progress before I found these papers, I have incorporated all their arguments into it. I have also examined all the suggested passages, and added others that were surprisingly omitted.

What is my conclusion? I find no loopholes. Not one. Let us not open this Pandora's box! We may never be able to close it again.

But the difference of opinion in mission circles is not among people with greater and lesser commitment to the Lord, but among leaders all of whom love the Lord and care about truth. It is said that we must be understanding of Christians and mission groups who can live with more ambiguity on this question than most other Christians.

So the arguments on both sides must be considered. If we conclude that lying is never permissible, how do we deal with the ethical dilemmas tentmakers often face?

I will consider the subject in seven sections:

- 1) The loophole proof texts and Bible case histories that have been suggested in the training papers.
- 2) More passages on lying and truth.
- 3) Passages on governmental authority.
- 4) Underlying problems in the 1990s that exacerbate the temptation to lie.
- 5) Scripture versus experience.
- 6) Critical situations tentmakers face and a few suggestions for dealing with them.
- 7) What bearing has "situation ethics"?

1. Proof texts used as loop-holes for untruthfulness

The following passages were listed on the mission papers to support selective lying, half-truths and evasive silence. Proof-texting is always dangerous because a verse seems to say one thing in isolation but something quite different in context. We must see how these proof texts hold up under scrutiny. We must ask about each passage: 1) What does it actually say? 2) What did it mean to the writer and the earliest readers? 3) How does it apply to us today?

Prov. 2:11-13. Prov. 2:11-13. "Discretion will watch over you; understanding will guard you; delivering you from the way of evil, from men of perverted speech. . ." True. But the mission papers suggest that discreet means secretive and less than totally truthful. But the word usually means cautious. Prov. 2:1ff. shows a father counseling his son. The discretion is not to protect himself in persecution, but to guard him from the bad influence of wicked men and loose women! (vv.12-19). It is to protect from sin, not give license for it.

Prov. 11:13 says, "He who belittles his neighbor lacks sense, but a man of understanding remains silent." The mission papers use this to show there are occasions when silence is acceptable. But v.12 shows the context is about tale-bearing! We have here no justification for evasion of truth, but a command not to gossip.

Prov. 12:23. Prov. 12:23. "A prudent man conceals his knowledge, but fools proclaim their folly." The point is to conceal folly, not truth, as confirmed by the previous verse, which is omitted from the mission papers: "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who act faithfully are his delight." This passage is an admonition to braggarts.

Prov. 15:28. Prov. 15:28. "The mind of the righteous ponders how to answer, but the mouth of the wicked pours out evil things." The context clarifies the situation: You are about to lose your temper, to shout, maybe to harm someone. But as a righteous person, you show restraint. You think how best to deal with the problem. It suggests you ask the Lord how to respond, because the next verse says God hears the prayers of the righteous. It is good advice for tentmakers, but not permission to lie.

Prov. 13:3. "He who guards his mouth preserves his life; he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin." This could be true of a tentmaker. But here a father counsels his son not to offend or insult people or make enemies by careless speech. Don't pick a fight. It is no loophole for lying. The mission papers oddly omit verse 5, which says, "A righteous man hates falsehood"!

Prov. 25:2. "It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out." What is the implication--that God withholds truth so we may also? Rather, the verse says God's knowledge is too vast and high for human beings. But King Solomon loved researching God's physical world and human nature. God says: "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts higher than your thoughts." (Isa.55: 8,9) He says to Job, "Where were you when I created everything?" Paul asks, "Who knows the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?" (1 Cor.2:16) "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable are his ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord or who has been his counselor?" (Rom. 11:33, 34) How can Prov. 25:2 justify people's half-truths?

Ecclesiastes 3:7b. Ecclesiastes 3:7b. "For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven. . ." Then it lists human activities--to eat and not eat, to sleep and to waken, even a time to sow and a time to reap! A time to gather stones and a time to throw them. In the middle of the list it says, "A time to keep silence and a time to speak. . ." When is silence golden? While someone else speaks, while others study or sleep--or mourn. If speaking up could hurt someone. If a matter is not our business. The passage justifies times of silence, but does not suggest evasive silence. We are never obligated to say everything we think. The question is whether we intend to deceive and if our interrogator would think so.

Exodus 1:15-21. It is said that the Hebrew midwives lied to Pharaoh when he ordered them to kill the male babies. Did they? The text says they "feared God"--that is, they trusted him. They told Pharaoh the Hebrew women delivered their babies before they could be summoned. Was that a lie? The midwives may have dragged their feet. But the Hebrew women were strong, used to slave labor. They would not call the midwives, knowing about Pharaoh's edict. Surely other mothers helped with the deliveries, and God helped the women to give birth safely. No deceit is implied.

Exodus 3:18, 8:25-29. Exodus 3:18, 8:25-29. It is said that Moses lied to Pharaoh. Did he? It is said he asked to take the people on a retreat when he had no intention of returning. Is that true? The Hebrews had been slaves in Egypt for four centuries! They lived in a rural ghetto because the Egyptians considered them ceremonially unclean. Now they had multiplied so much that they constituted a threat to Egypt. Yet they were needed because Egypt was heavily dependent on their slave labor. But life for the Hebrews had become intolerable. So Moses hoped to lead them to freedom. But when he asked for permission for a religious retreat, that is all that he intended. The people needed to renew their covenant with God by animal sacrifices, which they had not offered for 400 years! Most of the Hebrews were idolaters! Sacrifices would be offensive to the Egyptians, so Moses asked to go three days journey away.

Moses and Aaron also needed to unite the people behind their leadership. But Moses intended for them all to return. How do we know? Because the sacrificial animals they would take to the retreat were not nearly enough to sustain all the Hebrews on their long journey to Canaan. God had said they would take all their cattle and belongings with them on departure, plus gifts from neighbors. Such a massive operation could never be carried out in stealth. They could not emigrate without Pharaoh's permission.

Moses knew Pharaoh would never grant so many people such a long vacation from work, nor trust them to travel so far. But the king's refusals gave him an excuse to escalate his request. Now he asks to emigrate en mass, to secede from Egypt! Why would Pharaoh refuse? If he lost his slave labor force, the Egyptian economy would be destroyed! (It was!) During each plague Pharaoh gives permission for their departure, and when the plague ends, he retracts it. Until the angel of death takes all the oldest male children, including the heir to the throne! Moses defies Pharaoh, but does not lie.

It is said the Hebrews lied when they borrowed things from their neighbors and then absconded with the loot! But only the old KJV says borrowed--a poor translation. God told the poor Hebrews to ask the wealthy Egyptians for things.

The Egyptians knew it was well-earned back pay. Besides, they now had a healthy respect for the Hebrew God and wanted his people gone! They gave willingly.

It is God who parts the Red Sea to let his people cross and allows the waters to drown the Egyptians.

Joshua 2:1-14. Joshua 2:1-14. It is claimed that Rahab lied about the Hebrew spies. Did she? Yes, several times. This is the most often cited loophole passage to justify lying. She lodged the Hebrew spies in her house which was part of the wide Jericho city wall. Its location was convenient, and it probably would not arouse suspicion for two men to enter the house of a prostitute. But someone reported the Hebrew spies so the king sent officers to arrest them. By now, everyone knew what the Hebrews had done to Egypt! And how God had provided for them in the desert and protected them from all enemies.

Rahab hid the men on the rooftop under bundles of flax. She lied and sent the officers out into the night on a wild goose chase. The heavy city gate closed for the night, so she used a rope to let the Hebrew spies out through a window, telling them to travel by night and hide by day.

Rahab spared the spies because she had come to believe in the Hebrew God who had parted the Red Sea and protected the Israelites in the wilderness. He must be the true God! Her reward? A promise that when the invading Hebrews came, they would see the red cord in Rahab's window and rescue her and her family.

It is said this passage provides a loophole for lying, if the lie is intended for God's cause. Besides, Rahab is commended three times in the N.T.! But Heb. 11:31 commends her faith, not her lies. And James 2:25 says she proved her faith by risking her life. But nowhere is she commended for lying! In any case, it is preposterous to think God would ever intend for Christians in the A.D.1990s to derive their ethics from a Canaanite prostitute in the 1300s B.C.! And on the occasion of her conversion! Her inclusion in the genealogy of Jesus suggests she changed her conduct.

1 Samuel 16:1-5. 1 Samuel 16:1-5. It is claimed that Samuel lied about his visit to Bethlehem. Did he? He said he was going to Bethlehem to sacrifice. He went to Bethlehem and sacrificed. He also sprang a surprise on everyone by anointing David king! He acted secret-ly, but not deceitfully. God ordered it because King Saul had crossed the line and was now rejected. Samuel was high priest and prophet of God, ful-filling his God-ordained role in his own land. He had more than one reason for the trip. This suggests we need not always reveal every reason for an action.

2 Kings 6:15-20. It is claimed that Elisha lied to the Syrian army. Did he? The king of Assyria sent his army to arrest the prophet because his prophetic insight enabled the King of Israel to attack them. Elisha woke up to see his city of Dothan surrounded by Syrian armies with all their horses and chariots! His servant is petrified. But Elisha says, "Fear not, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them!" (v.16) He asks God to open the servant's eyes. Then he too sees this hilltop city with an inner circle of horses and chariots of fire around the two of them! An angel army! Between them and the Syrians! Then at Elisha's request, God strikes the Syrians blind. Then Elisha volunteers to lead them to the man they seek, who is, of course, Elisha himself, their guide!

Elisha does exactly as he promised, after turning himself into a moving target! He leads them to the most dangerous possible place--inside Samaria, the walled capital of Israel, straight to the King, their mortal enemy! Imagine the horror of the trapped Syrians when God restores their sight! And the king of Israel immediately orders their death! There is no escape. But Elisha says to the king "Stop! Do not kill them--feed them! I have brought them for dinner!" After the royal banquet Elisha sends the well-fed armies safely to their home! His kindness has defused the Syrian animosity. There is enormous humor here--and a lesson about winning enemies through kindness. But surely there is here no justification to lie.

Luke 16:1-9. Jesus commends the lying steward. This business administrator of a wealthy estate has been caught embezzling the householder's goods. He knows he will be dismissed and no one else will hire him. His options are heavy manual labor or begging, neither one tolerable. He revises his bookkeeping, quickly reducing all the accounts receivable. This second swindle ingratiates him with all the debtors and obligates them to take him in!

Jesus commends this administrator for his prudence in preparing for his future, but not for his lying or cheat-in! The mission papers oddly do not include the next verse, which dispels all doubt about that. Jesus says, "He who is dishonest even in very little will be dishonest also in much." To God, big lies and little ones look the same.

John 2:24, 25. It is claimed that Jesus was sometimes less than forth-right. It was Passover early in his ministry. "Many believed when they saw the signs he did; but Jesus did not trust himself to them. . . for he himself knew what was in man." He did not always know what everyone was thinking, because in the incarnation he laid aside his divine prerogatives and limited himself to our human capabilities. But he had unusual prophetic power and insight, especially because he was without sin. In the context John gives several examples of Jesus reading people's thoughts. 1) Nathaniel in John 1, Nicodemus in John 3, the Samaritan woman in John 4 and the paralytic in John 5. Several other passages show that Jesus was not carried away by the praise of fickle crowds. Their motivation was wrong and they could turn on him.

So tentmakers should not be gullible. The passage justifies selective trust. Converts from Islam often do not trust each other, and with reason, since 8 out of 10 go back to Islam sooner or later! But we must not be so suspicious that our lack of trust damages genuine converts, driving them back to Islam.

This passage suggests caution and wisdom, but no hint of dishonesty. It can be right to escape persecution, as Jesus made strategic withdrawals from regions where people had heard and where religious leaders had turned against him. God probably allows some tentmakers to lose their employment because they have too high a profile. So he sends them to a new location and brings in a fresh witness. It is some of the best, most faithful witnesses that are likely to be expelled, so expulsion must not be equated with failure.

Matthew 7:8. Jesus said: "Do not give dogs what is holy or cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you." It is suggested Jesus here allows lying to enemies. But the passage relates rather to Jesus' preaching and teaching, and is highly significant for tentmakers in hostile situations. Jesus did fishing evangelism, saying things in public that would fish out the seekers from the indifferent or hostile crowds, but reserving his deeper teaching for those who were hungry to know. The parables had hidden meanings. They allowed insincere listeners to leave with the same prejudices with which they came. But they were also teasers to get people to ask the important questions. Jesus gave the precious truths only to those who stayed to ask. This passage may apply to street meetings, Christian radio and TV, but does not suggest lying for our protection. It models the ideal evangelistic approach for tentmakers. (See GO's Workplace Evangelism: Fishing out Seekers.)

Mt.27:11-14, Mk. 15:1ff, Luke 2:1-15, John 18:19-40, 19:1-16. Mt.27:11-14, Mk. 15:1ff, Luke 2:1-15, John 18:19-40, 19:1-16. It is suggested that Jesus was less than forthright at his trials. All gospel accounts are condensed narratives, with each writer recording facts truth-fully, but emphasizing what impressed him. So we must consider all of the accounts to get all the details, and yet allow each writer only those inclusions and omissions that reflect his own recollections and his own purpose in writing.

In all four accounts Jesus answers Pilate's questions, showing respect for this Roman authority--and even spiritual concern. The Jews (who refused to enter the Praetorium, fearing ceremonial contamination during this Passover week) wanted Pilate to condemn Jesus without evidence. Their real charge against him was blasphemy, but Rome did not care about religion, so the Jews brought a trumped up charge of treason--of political subversion! Jesus did not refer to

himself as "the Messiah, the king of the Jews," since these titles were politically loaded. (He preferred the less political "Son of man.") Pilate knew all about messianic prophecies and had arrested a few false messiahs, political liberators who led armed insurrections against Rome. The Jews claimed Jesus was "perverting the nation, forbidding the people to give tribute to Caesar, claiming to be Messiah, a king."

The triumphal entry could have given credence to that charge, except that Jesus rode on a donkey, not a horse. He came in peace, and Jewish leaders would have recognized his deliberate fulfillment of the prophecy in Zech. 9:9,10. Jesus repeatedly disassociated himself from Zealots and all political groups. But this accusation from the Jewish politico-religious establishment was exceedingly dangerous. When Pilate asks if he is the Messiah (the Christ), the king of the Jews, Jesus' answer sounds evasive, but is not. He cannot say an unqualified "yes" because the Jews' term is intended to mean a political revolutionary, and Jesus was not that. Yet he was the true Messiah, come to set up a spiritual kingdom. He just tells the truth. The old KJV translates: "Thou sayest so." RSV: "You have said so." NEB: "The words are yours."

Jesus says Yes--but that he would not use Pilate's politically loaded terms. He says, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight so I would not be delivered to the Jews. My kingship is not of this world." (Jn.18: 36) Jesus is not saying that in other circumstances he might engage in bloody combat. (Although he would not.) He is asking, "If I were the political messiah they accuse me to be, would I not have soldiers around me, and weapons? Do you see any? Do I look or act like a revolutionary?" So Pilate publicly declares Jesus innocent and offers to free him at Passover, but the priests demand Barrabas, the very kind of rebel false messiah they accuse Jesus of being! It was easy to use blackmail to coerce Pilate to crucify Jesus. Procurators were not in the military hierarchy, but were Caesar's own personal appointees--often from his own household. A treason charge would reach him swiftly. So Pilate gives in.

Jesus also said to Pilate (Jn.18:37): "For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice." Pilate shuts Jesus up with a rhetorical question to which he wants no answer: "What is truth?"

It is preposterous to suggest that Jesus evaded truth in order to save his life, and therefore we may do so, too!

But Jesus responds differently before the Jewish religious leaders. He answers them not a word. They are insincere. They know their real charge is blasphemy and that treason is a false accusation. He has already been pronounced innocent by Pilate and Herod. Months earlier the Jewish leaders had admitted Jesus' supernatural power, but attributed it to the devil. Jesus asked why Satan would hurt his own cause by expelling his own servant demons? How could anyone expel them without first binding Satan? No one had ever done that except Jesus!

There is no suggestion that Jesus told half-truths or withheld information to protect himself. His silence before the Jews is not to avoid self-incrimination but to shame them for their hypocrisy.

Conclusion: Conclusion: One mission training paper asks, "Based on these passages, do you believe we are obligated to tell the truth to everyone?" The implied answer is "No." But my answer is: Yes, absolutely! We are never obligated to say everything we think. Often we should not volunteer information that is not requested. But we should live in such a way that we have nothing to hide.

Not a single one of these proposed loophole passages provides a loophole! They reveal abysmally poor Bible study skills! More surprising--Why were so many adjacent verses against lying omitted? Is it honest to select only passages that seem to support one's thesis and to ignore all that oppose it?

2. More on lying and truth

None of the following passages were included in the training papers, though they bear directly on the subject.

Genesis 12-22. Abraham and Sarah. Abraham, a self-employed tentmaker, moved his cattle business to a wicked, dangerous foreign country in order to represent God there. They finally found the right location in that land. But whenever Abraham built an altar he was staking a claim for God. All the tests that he and Sarah faced revolved around three questions: 1) Could God protect them? 2) Could God provide for their large entourage? 3) Could God fulfill his promises? That is, his salvation promises--his plan to form a people for himself. Time and again they resorted to lies, because they failed to trust God. Twice they jeopardized God's promise and the whole plan of salvation! Abraham allows Sarah to be taken captive. It seems neither he nor Sarah knew that she also was necessary for the fulfillment of the promises. Abraham could, and did, take a concubine and two other wives. But the promise was to Sarah, and God comes to her rescue. What effort it took for God to turn this couple into a man and a woman of faith! Meanwhile, they damaged their testimony and jeopardized the very people they were supposed to bless.

Genesis 27-37. Isaac and Rebecca, Esau and Jacob. Then Isaac, who knew his parents' failures, had to learn the same lessons the same hard way. Peace-loving Isaac also failed in his roles as husband and father. He played favorites with his children. Isaac's unconcern, complacency and self-indulgence almost forced Rebecca to take things into her own hands. It is easy to understand why she and Jacob colluded in the deceit of Isaac and Esau, but they paid dearly for it. The mother and the young son never saw each other again. The boy Jacob had learned lying well. His whole life was characterized by deceiving and being deceived. The lying resulted from a failure to trust and obey God. Can the children of tentmakers understand the fine line some of their parents draw between truth and falsehood?

Joshua 7. After 40 years of wander-in, the Hebrews crossed the Jordan, and attacked Jericho, a large, wealthy, walled city. The whole land was filled with fear of the Hebrew God. The next target, Ai, would be easy, so Joshua sends fewer men. But they flee! It was a shameful retreat that damaged God's reputation. Even little Ai could rout the Hebrew armies! But God tells Joshua he has allowed the defeat because there is sin in the camp. Achan has taken the forbidden booty--a luxurious garment, 200 shekels of silver and a 50 shekel bar of gold, and buried them under his tent. Nor does he confess. He waits all day silently as Joshua calls one tribe at a time, and each family in order, to find the culprit. Not until Achan is apprehended does he admit his guilt. The penalty was death for the whole family, who were involved in his coverup. They were stoned. They had caused Israel's defeat, the death of many men and had hurt God's reputation in the region. God would not bless any of the Hebrews until the dishonesty was dealt with.

Daniel. Daniel. When Daniel, probably only 15, was taken hostage to Babylon, he saw the hand of God in this circumstance. He was so far from home he could have indulged in the sinful pleasures of Babylon and his family would not have known the difference. But he resolved in his heart never to do anything to compromise the reputation of his God and he led his friends in the same resolve. In Ch. 3 the friends of Daniel stand before the great new golden statue. Nebuchadnezzar orders all his satraps (governors) to show their loyalty to him by worshiping his statue. The three Hebrew young men could have faked compliance and avoided the furnace. But they would have denied God. He wanted them in the furnace so he could show himself strong on their behalf--for their sakes, and for the eventual salvation of Nebuchadnezzar and many others.

When the Medo-Persians conquered Babylon, they quickly learned that Daniel was honest in his words and his deeds even in the face of death--a superb example of a tentmaker with personal integrity. His jealous enemies could find no fault in him except for his faith. He always prayed by his open window, facing Jerusalem. (If he had looked up the Babylonians and Persians would think he had adopted their moon worship.) Now when the Persian king demands exclusive worship of himself for a month, Daniel had an easy escape. He needed only to step back a few feet from the window. He could still pray. Would it not have been wise to take this evasive action instead of risking the lion's den?

Why does Daniel insist on praying at his window? Does he need to provoke opposition? Yes. If they could not see Daniel at the window, everyone would think he was complying with the idolatrous order. His testimony would be ruined and God's glory compromised. God could have saved Daniel from the lion's den, but he wanted him in it! Why? Because it let him demonstrate his power and his love for him, so the king, the accusers and all the people would know about it!

We should be discreet, in the sense that we should not flaunt our faith in people's faces. But we do not have the option of evasive speech or action if it means denying the Lord. How can God reveal his power and glory to the unreached peoples if we constantly short-circuit what he is doing?

Acts 5. Ananias and Sapphira. Acts 5. Ananias and Sapphira. Many of the earliest believers were selling their possessions and bringing the proceeds to help care for the many who had been expelled from their homes by their families or had lost their jobs. Although the giving was voluntary, this couple pretended to give all they had, which was not true. One could argue that what they did was not harmful to anyone. But what did the Holy Spirit think? It cost them their lives. Truth matters.

Luke 9-12. Jesus says the disciples in persecution are not to worry about food and clothing. He says in all four Gospels that they would suffer for their faith. Luke 9-12. Jesus says the disciples in persecution are not to worry about food and clothing. He says in all four Gospels that they would suffer for their faith. In Lk. 9:23 he says they should take up their cross daily. Jesus had not yet been crucified, so he does not mean this command in any spiritualized sense. He means that his followers must begin every day knowing that it might end with crucifixion. He says he came not to bring peace but a sword and that families would be divided between members who believed and those who persecuted them. He tells them not to fear the ones who can kill the body, but rather, fear him who can destroy the soul. Jesus was concerned about the spiritual damage we might incur during persecution. The Father sees even a sparrow fall and a hair of our heads drop. Nothing can hurt us without his permission. He tells his disciples they will be arrested, and not to worry about what to say when they are brought before kings and magistrates. The Holy Spirit will tell them what to say. He is the Spirit of truth and would not coach them to tell lies! We only feel the need to lie when we are trusting in ourselves instead of in God.

Peter lied at Jesus' trial. Peter lied at Jesus' trial. All four Gospels record this incident, the kind of situation a tentmaker might find himself in. He watches the trial of Jesus from outside--probably in a patio, and is terrified for Jesus and for himself. When the servants charge that they saw him with Jesus, he denies it three times--he does not even know this Man! The cock crows as Jesus said it would, and Peter weeps bitterly. Surely, we cannot see in Peter any excuse for lying. He learned. See his 1 Peter letter for how to live in an atmosphere of persecution and how to face accusations and imprisonments. Their behavior was to be above reproach. No lies or deceit, no matter what the cost.

Psalm 51:6. Psalm 51:6. "Thou desirest truth in the inward parts. Therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart." Yes.

Psalm 66:18. If we cherish iniquity in our hearts God will not hear our prayers.

Prov. 6:16-19. Prov. 6:16-19. Seven things the Lord hates--abominations to him. Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run to do evil, a false witness that breathes out lies, and a man who sows discord among brothers. Lying is mentioned twice!

Prov. 8:7-9. Prov. 8:7-9. Wisdom is personified, another name for the preincarnate Jesus. "For my mouth will utter truth; wickedness is an abomination to my lips. All the words of my mouth are righteous; there is no thing twisted or crooked in them."

Prov. 12:17-22. Prov. 12:17-22. "He who speaks the truth gives honest evidence, but a false witness utters deceit."

Prov. 14:5, 25. Prov. 14:5, 25. "A faithful witness does not lie, but a false one breathes out lies." "A truthful witness saves lives, but one who utters lies is a betrayer."

John 8:44ff. Jesus says to the Jewish leaders, "You are of your father, the devil, and your will is to do your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning and has nothing to do with truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I tell you the truth you do not believe me. Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell you the truth, why do you not believe me? Because you are not of God." How can we justify lies?

Ephesians 4:25. Ephesians 4:25. This verse must be taken with vv. 20 to 24. Paul comments on the sinfulness of the pagan non-believers. Then he says, "You did not so learn Christ! Assuming you have heard of him and were taught in him, as the truth is in Jesus." Then he tells them to put off the old nature, like dirty clothes, and "Put on the new nature in the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness." V. 25--"Therefore, putting away falsehood, let everyone speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another." He says, no stealing, no evil talk, no grieving the Holy Spirit. "Be imitators of God." (5:1)

Colossians 3:8-10 lists sins that characterized these people before their conversion, and says, "But now put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander and foul talk from your mouth." "Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old nature with its practices and have put on the new nature which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its Creator."

Titus 1:2. Titus 1:2. Paul refers to "the God who never lies" and says "be imitators of him."

1 John 2:21, 22. 1 John 2:21, 22. "You know the truth, and know that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist."

Proverbs 19:9. Proverbs 19:9. "A false witness will not go unpunished and he who utters lies will perish."

Rev. 21:27. Jesus says about the crystal city, God's glorious redeemed people, "But nothing unclean shall enter it, nor any one who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life."

Rev. 22:15. "But outside (of the crystal city) are the dogs and sorcerers and fornicators and murderers and idolaters and every one who loves and practices falsehood."

Ephesians 6:10-18. Truth is a major part of our spiritual armor and our only weapon! "Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. (Not to be overcome by him.) For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world ruler of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. Stand therefore having your loins girt with truth and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace; above all taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Pray at all times. . ."

We hear a good bit today about power encounter in missions. Rick Love, the U.S. director for Frontiers, who knows the value of power encounter from his tentmaking experience in Indonesia, rightly says in an EMQ article, that we have an even greater need today for truth encounter and moral encounter! To speak out the truth and to live out its implications--even when it is costly to do so!

In this cosmic struggle for control of the world we cannot afford to have any chinks in our armor. Even when we can get away with a lie, we are defeated because the devil knows we did it. It gives him a foothold in us. All he has to do to turn us into inveterate liars is to keep us in tight situations! We play right into his hands! Would he risk getting us arrested if he knew our truthfulness might convert an authority?

James 1. James 1. Sin never stays small. It always grows until it is beyond our control. Almost every lie demands others until we are caught in a web we could not have imagined. There is also the influence upon our children--are they able to understand the subtleties in speech which we justify? Even more important, what do we teach our new converts? Will they lie to avoid persecution? Will they justify lies in other situations?

Paul's letters and the Acts show us how much he suffered, but there is not the slightest hint of lying. Why doesn't he tell converts that a little lie in a crunch won't hurt? Instead, he says much about truth and he demonstrates it, as he models Christian living for his converts, in an idolatrous, immoral, corrupt marketplace.

3. Government authorities

It is understandable why tentmakers should fear encounters with government authorities. It was a problem also for New Testament believers, so the Bible gives us counsel.

Acts 4:18-20 and Acts 5:27-29. Acts 4:18-20 and Acts 5:27-29. The whole story must be taken, not just a verse or two. Peter and John are arrested for preaching and once for healing a well-known crippled man at the temple gate. They are jailed, but when they are to be brought out for trial the following morning, they have escaped and are finally found on the temple steps, boldly preaching! They say, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard." In Ch.5, "We must obey God rather than men." And they preach a sermon to the Jewish Council! (The Council was more like the governing board of a non-evangelical denomination than a government, so what they did might not be appropriate in another country.)

They did not break Roman laws, but they did disobey their religious authorities. It could be argued that the Jewish leaders had just lost all true authority by crucifying Jesus. (The Herods were Idumeans--half Arabs from Edom, who ingratiated themselves with Rome. The high priestly family bought their positions.) Jesus told the scribes (lawyer-theologians) that they had failed to use the keys of the kingdom to enter the kingdom of God, and had kept others from entering, too. (Lk.11:52) So the keys were now to be given to those who were more worthy--Peter and the other apostles! (Mt. 16, 18) One could argue that these religious rulers were not legitimate. But Paul later apologizes for talking back to a high priest. But the synagogue rulers persecuted Paul, and Jesus himself in Revelation called the Jewish gatherings "the synagogues of Satan."

Romans 13:1-7. Paul said every person is to be subject to government, because it is an institution ordained by God, because he wants peace and order in society. (No one regime is necessarily approved. But regardless of the regime, it is to be obeyed just because it is the government of the moment.) Christians were to observe good conduct because governments are not a terror to good conduct, but to evil doers. They were to obey rulers for two main reasons: For the sake of conscience and to avoid God's displeasure. They were to pay taxes and revenues, respect and honor! If rulers or others persecuted them, they were to bless them! (12:13). The Christians' goal must be to win the authorities to the Lord. Their good behavior and their Christ-like attitudes would cause the rulers to ask questions, enabling the Christians to answer them! (Recall Paul before Felix, Festus, Agrippa and Bernice.)

Almost all of 1 Peter tells Christians to obey governmental authorities and how to live and witness under severe persecution. In 1 Pet. 3:14-16 he tells them not to fear, but to maintain good conduct, to keep focused on Jesus Christ

living within them and to be ready to answer the questions that this would elicit! What would seekers ask about? The Christians' hope! They would marvel how the Christians could have peace and joy in the midst of economic discrimination and physical persecution.

It is easy to think Paul and Peter might make an exception in the case of today's Saudi Arabia or Iran--the two worst persecutors. But the government of which these two apostles speak was Nero's Rome in the sixties! In the end, both apostles were put to death by Nero.

That is, he thought he had killed them, but they were still alive! Only Jesus holds the keys of life and death. The worst that Satan can do only gets the Christian promoted to God's up-stairs department! It can only happen when God permits it for his own reasons.

John gives the same counsel. The persecution was even worse in the 90s under Domitian. Nero's persecution was mainly in Rome. But under Domitian, emperor worship became obligatory and it was empire wide.

Revelation. Revelation. The whole book deals with this subject! It was during the terrible Domitian persecution that the seven churches of Asia (with their many congregations) felt the temptation to compromise their faith. They suffered not only physical persecution, but also economic discrimination. The Nicolaitans (who could tolerate considerable ethical ambiguity!) told fellow Christians to be faithful to God in their hearts, but to pretend worship to Caesar. They could avoid suffering.

Jesus condemned this thoroughly in the book of Revelation. He taught through the visions in Revelation that the gospel would be taken throughout the world. In Ch.6 we see the post-resurrection Jesus, crowned and seated on a white horse, riding out into the world to conquer! (He is the same Messiah figure of Psa. 45: 2-7, Hab. 3:8,9, etc.) In Ch. 19 we see him again accompanied by many riders, all of them in white and riding on white horses. They are identified as those who followed him and were faithful to him--those who took the gospel to the whole world. But Ch. 6 shows that always the red horse of physical persecution would follow close behind. (This rider carried, not a sword for war, but a meat cleaver, used for animal sacrifices. The sixth seal shows the martyred Christians as such animal sacrifices, with their blood under the altar.) The black horse would follow. He represented, not famine, as often thought, because there was plenty of oil and wine. He stands for property loss and economic discrimination. We are told later that the Christians could neither buy nor sell without the mark of the beast. Then the pale horse would follow--death due to war, epidemics, famine and wild animals (a menace in those days). The pale horse went after believers and non-believers alike. God could have spared the Christians, but it would have been cheap insurance that would have attracted everyone in the empire--for the wrong reasons. The believers' faith had to be tested to see whether it could endure. In the suffering, believers gave their most powerful testimony and their most convincing demonstration of the wonderful help of their strong Lord.

God gives the human and non-human forces great freedom to do evil and to persecute believers. Why? He could have protected the believers. But if the evil in people's hearts was not allowed to express itself, how could God condemn them? He would seem like an unjust judge. He has to let them do their worst. Until they destroy all life on this planet (Rev. 16) and then destroy all the culture they have built during millennia of civilization (Rev. 17,18). God seems to say to wicked people, "If you will not repent, do your worst. You are playing right into my hand. You are bringing down eternal damnation on yourselves."

At the same time, the believers need testing for their purification. Or their neighbors could charge, as Satan did, that God was unjust to save such imperfect people, who just trusted him for what they could get out of him. (The health and wealth gospel!) But their faithfulness unto death justified God in saving them.

But the worst that Satan can ever do to believers is to get them transferred to God's upstairs department! They keep right on living! Some may not lose consciousness here before they are already aware of their new environment. Revelation pictures them singing, worshiping and praying. Who can say how important their contribution is in this cosmic struggle for control of God's world. God uses the Christians' suffering to purify them, to win seekers, to damn the unrepentant, and to accomplish his goals for human history.

There is already more persecution of Christians in our day than in any previous period of history. If we believe we will soon have the world evangelized then we should be preparing our-selves and Christians in every land for more severe persecution, as the world become more polarized. Jesus said Christians would always be in the minority (Mt. 13).

We must also remember that today, when we missionaries and tentmakers go to live and work in other countries, we go as guests. This adds to our responsibility to obey their laws. Jesus said we are to give to Caesar what is his and to God what is his. That means that if Caesar interferes with what is God's, that we may disobey--but we must then be willing to take the consequences. If authorities forbid us to meet for worship, we must meet anyway, but in small house fellowships. If they forbid evangelism, we must nevertheless share the good news. But we must not flaunt our Christian activity as a challenge to government, but witness quietly, and in a context of otherwise irreproachable behavior.

Nowhere do the gospels suggest confrontational evangelism. In persecution you focus on personal integrity, quality work, caring relationships, tactful verbal witness appropriately inserted into non-religious conversation, and readiness to answer questions. You fish out the seekers from among the indifferent or hostile people around them and tell them the good news where it will not arouse antagonism. (Col. 4:5,6)

It is the way that Jesus evangelized in a milieu almost identical to a Muslim country today. The Jews and Muslims act from a fanatical monotheism that rejects the Trinity.

The more positive our individual and collective contribution to a country the more tolerant they are of our religious activity. A number of mission hospitals and schools in Muslim countries that were started under European colonialism, have been allowed to continue. An American Christian has been permitted to do church planting in a fanatically Jewish part of Israel--because he has established three firms that provide jobs for Israelis and bring hard currency into the country-- \$6 million a year.

The persecution of godless governments give us no excuse for lying. It is precisely in this kind of situation that we are admonished to speak the truth! Anything less is insulting to our all-powerful God! He said we can never be brought before authorities without his permission. When it happens we know God is zeroing in on those authorities. We have one responsibility--to tell them what the Holy Spirit is telling us to say! The Spirit of Truth will not tell us to lie!

4. Underlying problems

Several underlying factors in the 1990's tentmaking syndrome contribute to the problems in tentmaking today and make evasion of truth seem necessary.

1) Unclear tentmaker model

Mission leaders have reluctantly taken the word "tentmaking" from the apostle Paul, because 80% of world population is now off limits to regular missionaries unless they can go in with jobs and work permits. Oddly, that is the only interest most seem to have in Paul's approach to ministry. But Paul gives us is a remarkable, total strategy for church planting in hostile regions. It is an extremely effective strategy in which tentmaking plays a dominant role. His plan requires few foreign missionaries and virtually no foreign funds!

But most Christian expatriates are not tentmakers! They had little or no ministry at home, and so they have no cross-cultural ministry in their new host country. A genuine tentmaker, who fully supports himself, has a full-time spiritual ministry because he integrates work and witness. Paul gives detailed instructions for how to regard the job, and what kind of evangelism to do in the workplace. It is quite different from what most contemporary Christians are doing. Paul was a fully trained, fully qualified missionary who could have served as clergy. But he deliberately chose to serve as a lay person, an artisan, a worker-evangelist. We must heed his example and his instructions.

True tentmakers must be who they say they are. No pretense. Much of what is called tentmaking today has little resemblance to what Paul did. When Christians raise full donor support and then get minimal jobs abroad as a cover or a front for regular missionary work, they are already in an uncomfortable situation. It creates a clandestine mentality which leads them to do and say things that make them suspect. Non-believers ask embarrassing questions, not about God, but about the puzzling inconsistencies they see. The Christians run out of ways to evade the questions and lose track of what they have said on prior occasions, so that their half-true answers become increasingly puzzling. In no time at all the Christians have lost credibility--exactly that quality which Paul's tent-making gained for him. He genuinely earned his living. He did not pretend to do so while receiving fat paychecks from Antioch. (See GO Papers: Why Did Paul Make Tents? A Biblical Basis for Tentmaking.)

If we put full self-support at one end and full donor support at the other, all combinations in between are legitimate, as long as they are completely honest before everyone concerned. But here is the hitch. It is these hybrid options which bring constant temptations to untruthfulness, because they tend to be not fully honest.

2) Unclear evangelism concept

It constantly amazes me that in our truly evangelical circles, even in mission circles, there is no strong agreement that all Christians must witness. Ralph Winter estimates that even in the mission community about 90% rarely evangelize; they are engaged in other kinds of ministry. Because most Christians do not know how to evangelize, some mission leaders describe two kinds of tentmakers--those who focus on lifestyle on the job and those who take minimum jobs and focus on evangelism and church planting. For shame!

Anyone who cannot explain who Jesus is and help a seeker to receive him, is no tentmaker at all! That person is just a Christian expatriate--a typical church member who had little or no ministry at home, and therefore has little or no ministry abroad.

Matt. 10:32, 33. Matt. 10:32, 33. Jesus says that he will acknowledge before his Father in heaven only those who acknowledge him in public--especially in an atmosphere of persecution. The others he will not acknowledge. When should we witness? Whenever the opportunity arises. Especially when people ask.

I am even more amazed at the crudeness of much Christian evangelism. It is extremely important in implementing Paul's worker-evangelist approach to also follow his instructions for how to evangelize, as described above. He reduced evangelism in hostile societies to godly living and thirst-producing verbal witness. Instead of evangelizing indiscriminately, they were to fish out the seekers. The Christians were to put out bait and wait for seekers to ask questions about God, and then be ready to answer them. You will rarely get into trouble when you answer the questions of a genuine seeker. You are not imposing the gospel, but allowing the seekers to pace the conversations and even to show by their questions which answers they need! It is a very liberating approach to evangelism which makes it a joyful activity. Few Christians feel comfortable invading the privacy of indifferent or hostile individuals. Paul and Peter both taught their converts to fish, not hunt. (Col. 4:4,5, 1 Pet. 3:14-17).

Hunting more often puts one into a position where lying may seem necessary. Fishing is more appropriate for hostile environments. (See GO's paper on Workplace and Campus Evangelism: Fishing out Seekers--30 pages.)

3) Unbiblical view of work

Why does Paul say so much about work in his brief letters? He had to instill a biblical work ethic in his converts or his whole strategy would have failed. For Paul, the job was no necessary evil that took time away from evangelism. He integrated work and witness. He did not relegate ministry to free time. A true tentmaker is a full-time minister of God even with a full-time job! The job is the God-given context in which most of the evangelism takes place. It is where the gospel must be lived out as well as spoken, to elicit the crucial questions. Essential parts of lifestyle are personal integrity (no lies!), caring relationships, and quality work. Mission leaders create tensions for tentmakers by reminding them often not to put so much effort into their jobs "because that is not what they are here for!"

Yet Paul says that Christians must serve their masters with the same efficiency and wholeheartedness as if the employer were Jesus Christ! (Eph. 6:5-10, Col. 3:22-24) This part of tentmaking dare not be ignored! Since 70 to 90 percent of the laborers were slaves, the boss was usually a slave-master! He was usually a wealthy householder--and a key person to be won to the Lord. Imagine the impact on him when one or more of his employees was transformed by Jesus Christ and approached his work and relationships with a whole new attitude! Paul told the Christian slaves there was to be no more pilfering, no more drunkenness, insubmission, disobedience, unfaithfulness, laziness, gossip, quarreling, rudeness, envy, etc. They were to be chaste, and a model of good deeds and sound speech. They were to serve the employer as though he were Jesus Christ himself! Eph. 6:3-5, Col. 3:23-25, Titus 2:9, 10. Paul taught them to turn even unpleasant labor into ministry and worship!

Many converted householders became leaders of new house churches. They were the natural, most logical leaders, once they grew spiritually. Their villas became the meeting places of new Christian fellowships.

Today, it is a way to win a very influential person, like the boss, his nuclear family, his extended family, his employees and their families! In most cultures today, women and children have little freedom to follow the Lord, unless the husband and father can be won first. The best place to reach the head of a family is in the workplace.

There is much else in the Bible about God's view of work and the fulfillment of our cultural mandate. It is still binding on Christians and is most effective when integrated with our missionary mandate.

Most mission leaders and many tentmakers have little appreciation for the workplace and worker-evangelism because they have never held a significant secular job, or if they did, they had no ministry in that context. Secular work experience and witness on the job ought to be part of the formal training of every pastor and missionary! Paul made it a requirement for all his church leaders. (Acts 20:33-35, I Tim.3:4.) Without workplace experience how could they perform their main task--to mobilize the laity? Not to get everyone onto some church committee, but to equip every member to witness effectively in the neighborhood and the workplace (Eph. 4:10).

In the many articles I have collected on tentmaking over 20 years, almost all assume that a tentmaker's ministry has to be done in his very limited free time! This wrong concept distorts what tentmaking is, but it is what clergy in the church at large have been teaching church members for many decades.

4) Unwillingness to suffer

All careers have some vocational hazards. Tentmaking adds another one--the possibility of persecution.

Jesus made willingness to suffer a condition of discipleship. In Luke 9 he turned away volunteers who came on the wrong premises. In Luke 14:25-35 he gave three conditions: They had to love Jesus more than their loved ones, more than their own physical safety and more than their possessions.

Dr. Josip Tson of Romania, who suffered much during the Communist regime, says it was those Christians who had already lost everything that were the most effective witnesses, because they had little more to lose. One wonders if God will have to send Chinese and Eastern European Christians to evangelize the Muslim world, because most Westerners are unwilling for any suffering at all, and do not provide appropriate models for converts. And we ship persecuted converts off to America for safety, when God may have a quite different plan for them.

As to truth, we have to use common sense. No human being is under obligation to tell everything about himself to everyone he meets, and indeed, this would be impossible. We are to be open and transparent. We should answer questions briefly, but honestly. Answer what you think they are asking. If someone asks, "Why are you living in Turkey?" you might say, "My work is here," "I like Turkey and the Turkish people," and maybe, "I want my children to gain experience in a foreign culture." Say these things if they are true. There is nothing wrong with having secondary motivations, as long as our primary motivation is right. But if they ask, "Are you a missionary?" Then a tentmaker can say, honestly, "No, I am a chemistry teacher, but I am a Christian and my relationship with Jesus Christ is so wonderful that I wish everyone could experience it."

You never hide the fact that you are a Christian. When the question is asked, that is your clue that God wants you to answer it. An evangelistic conversation is to occur. Do fishing evangelism--by giving a brief answer and leaving the listener free. When they ask another question, you proceed with a few more thoughts. As soon as possible, get them into a one-on-one Bible study. This gives you freedom to take more initiative.

Bona fide tentmakers, who are fully self-supporting and have a substantial secular job, and good qualifications, usually have little difficulty. They have freedom to speak, because they are who they say they are. There is no pretense. The temptations to dishonesty arise more often when the Christian is in a "hybrid" situation, pretending to earn their living but actually living on donor support, trying to do regular missionary work instead of the tentmaker's unique ministry.

5. Bible versus experience

There is a basic problem with this loophole approach to the question of truthfulness in tentmaking.

1) It was bothersome to me to search the Scripture for justification to do what I otherwise consider wrong. In writing this paper, I have wanted to be fair, and to find texts for truth evasion in tight situations. I experienced tight situations myself during my 21 years abroad--in my tentmaking and in my work in restricted countries. But I have not been able to turn up loopholes in Scripture.

2) It is wrong seek out verses that might excuse lying, while ignoring the passages that rule it out, 2) It is wrong seek out verses that might excuse lying, while ignoring the passages that rule it out, especially when these are adjacent to the chosen texts. This selective use of the Scriptures in the training papers suggests a disregard for truth.

3) It is wrong to select narratives of Old Testament characters to justify questionable actions. If we are right in emulating their dishonesty, why not also their adultery and murder? We can rejoice in the degree of holiness many attained with

no written Scriptures and without the Holy Spirit in them in a post-Pentecost sense. God judges people within their particular milieu. He holds us to much higher standards. N.T. ethical teaching and examples, and its evaluation of O.T. saints is a more certain guide for conduct.

4) It is wrong to ignore narratives of people trusting God and resisting the temptation to lie, 4) It is wrong to ignore narratives of people trusting God and resisting the temptation to lie, even when this proved costly. Unfortunately, in almost every country the church has taken root only after a period of blood bath. We must provide models of faithfulness.

5) It is extremely bad Bible study to use proof texts, with no regard for their contexts! Even isolated sayings from the Proverbs have a context. You approach Proverbs topically. Put together all the verses on a single subject, in a logical order, and treat it as a chapter. God does not contradict himself in Scripture. As we have seen, not one of the suggested loophole verses gave us any leeway for evasion of truth. (That any Christian leader could misuse Scripture in this way makes one wonder about the rest of that person's ministry.)

6) It is always wrong to begin with experience and then seek biblical justification. We must begin with the Scriptures and bring experience in line with it. 6) It is always wrong to begin with experience and then seek biblical justification. We must begin with the Scriptures and bring experience in line with it. We rightly criticize cults for beginning with experience--it is how cults arise. We must begin with the clear teaching of Scripture, and then correct our conduct according to its light.

6. Times of ethical temptation

The temptation to be less than truthful comes to all tentmakers at certain crucial points. Here are a few of them.

1) Filling out application forms for a secular job. 1) Filling out application forms for a secular job. You must be honest in every point. If you make up the usual chronological resume, you must account for where you were working or studying each year. A way to avoid this is to make up functional resumes, where you describe only the studies and work experience relevant to the job you want. But almost certainly the employer will then ask for fuller information, maybe even a transcript of grades, etc.

To avoid all mention of religious interests at first and then have it appear strongly in subsequent forms, smells of deception. It is better to be honest and then pray that God will overrule and get you the right job. If the employer is an American, he may even be pleased that you are someone with high standards, who will not drink, etc. If he asks whether you will evangelize, assure him that you will be sensitive to the people and their culture, but that you will want to share your faith with people who ask. Unfortunately, a few unwise Christians have made some employers wary.

If the employer is Muslim, Hindu, etc., he may not be surprised even that you did seminary studies, since non-Christians often consider all Westerners Christians. If such an employer turns you down because of your faith, accept that as God's will.

2) Applying for a work permit or visa papers. 2) Applying for a work permit or visa papers. The same reasons apply as in the job application. Most often the employer gets your work visa for you. But if you must do it yourself, answer only what is asked, but do so honestly.

Many of us have seen God work on our behalf in these situations. Recently, a couple applied for a residence visa for a Muslim country, knowing that the data they had to present would ordinarily bring immediate rejection. The person who attended them was so alarmed he called the head officer. Instead of rejection, this man quickly approved them,

impressed with their honesty. Much depends upon the particular individual who must pass on your case. He may not agree with his country's strict policies, or he may have had a good experience with U.S. citizens, or then, with Christians.

3) When neighbors or colleagues at work ask personal questions. They always do. In most cultures this is quite acceptable. On your first meeting they may already ask where you work, what you do, how much you earn, how much rent you pay, how much you paid for your car, etc. Why did you come to this country? Do you like it better than America? (They also ask single people why they are not married, and childless couples why they do not have children, and if they have one why they do not have two!) Everything is fair game.

We should live in such a way that we have nothing to hide. We can be transparent. We can answer questions, because that is right before God and part of our cultural adjustment. If we start out with little lies and evasions we will certainly be caught in inconsistencies and our reputation for truth will crash, along with our credibility as representatives of Jesus Christ.

4) Entering a country. 4) Entering a country. A few countries do not allow people to cross a border directly into a hostile neighbor country. So a few Christians carry two passports. This was illegal and probably still is.

5) Taking in Christian literature.

It can be risky to take many Christian books into some restricted countries. But tentmakers need these books for themselves and their ministry and to share with other expats. You need to select carefully and take a reasonable amount--even though there is some risk. (Most tentmakers in sensitive countries get paid annual vacations in the U.S., and other trips out to nearby countries, and can replenish their supply. Christians also exchange books with each other.)

Many international flights arrive during the night when customs guards may do less thorough searches. Some do not read English. Others do not agree with their country's strict policies and will be lenient, especially, if the foreigners are friendly and polite. He may expect a tip, but you need to distinguish between a tip for services and a bribe, which is illegal in many countries.

You can always say that you need the books for your personal religious practice. Children's books are easier to justify, and can be useful for evangelism of English learners. Avoid books with the words evangelism or missions on the cover. Avoid multiple copies of one title, that might appear to be for resale. It is ideal to take Arab New Testaments or individual gospels into Muslim countries, but this involves more risk. You might take a couple of bilingual testaments--English and Arabic--as language learning aids. If the religious books are mixed with secular ones, and children's books, they will attract less attention.

Bringing in Christian books is not breaking any law, but you want to avoid flaunting them before the guards.

5) Smuggling Bibles and Christian books into a country. Every government has a right to control what comes in and out of its borders. It could be drugs! It was counterproductive when Christians used to smuggle materials, and even people, into Communist countries in false-bottom cars, etc. Some of my Christian friends behind the Iron Curtain felt it greatly added to the government's persecution of them. During that same period, our IVCF-IFES tentmakers were regularly taking in a whole van full of Bibles and books, openly, with no trouble. Border guards sometimes took sample copies. (They may have been spiritually hungry!)

7. Situation ethics

We must guard against the ethical relativity that became so dominant a few years ago. Proponents say we must often choose between two sinful alternatives, in which case, we should opt for the more ethical of the two.

I am not sure that God ever allows Christians to be put into this situation, because Scripture says that in every test and temptation God always gives a way out. 1 Cor. 10:11-13) The Holy Spirit always shows us what to do.

A common example was the WWII refugees fleeing the Nazis at night. If the baby cried, the whole group might be found and put to death. So would it be justifiable to kill the baby? But usually there are less drastic options. Could the baby be sedated? Could just one person walk with the baby, apart from the group, reducing the danger for the rest?

What should we think about people like Corrie Ten Boom and her family, who hid Jewish people to protect them from certain death in Nazi concentration camps? We must admire their enormous compassion and courage, in what proved to be a very costly service, since all of these Christians except Corrie died in concentration camps. Corrie felt justified in lying to save their Jewish refugees, and she is responsible only to the Lord for what she believed was right. Her sister Betsy felt she must always tell the truth and trust. Once when they were ready to sit down for a meal, there was a knock at the door. The Jews quickly hid under the table. When the Gestapo asked where they had hidden the Jews, Betsy answered truthfully, "Here, under the table." The officers thought she was being sarcastic, and stomped out. If they had lifted the floor-length tablecloth, they would have discovered the Jews huddled together.

A Russian Christian gives helpful advice. If officers ask if you have anyone hidden inside, say neither yes or no, but, "Why don't you see for yourself?" Also, it may be right to withhold information, not as deceit, but as deliberate disobedience, and take the consequences.

Conclusion:

It is a mistake to wait until a crisis occurs to decide what we would do. We should anticipate some crises and think what would be the biblical way to respond.

Fascism uses the same tactics as Communism--and I experienced some of both in my brief work in Poland and seven years in Franco's Spain. All the university student meetings in my apartment in Barcelona were illegal. You could not have more than 15 people in your home at any time without police permission. It would have been denied to us because evangelicals could only meet in buildings registered for that purpose, and all student meetings were prohibited. Evangelicals had been free to study in the universities only since 1965. Even then a couple of them were kicked out of their universities and the nuns forbade the student nurses to live in the dorms or to eat in the dining rooms.

We decided that if the police came to our meetings in my apartment, we would answer questions honestly, but not volunteer unrequested information. They came several times. Once we moved our meetings to another location for several weeks. But on a couple of occasions we convinced the police that our Bible studies were politically harmless. They told us not to meet again, knowing we would meet. My Catholic landlord and landlady, who lived in the same building, could have caused us harm, but they had already found Jesus Christ in our conversations together.

Eventually, we applied for legal status, not expecting to get it because there was no law to cover our case, but to show the authorities we had no reason and no desire to be clandestine. Then persecution intensified and Christians were denied permission to publish several books. But the individual who had to pass on our case was more broad-minded, and we became the first evangelical non-church organization to become legalized in Spain!

When we resort to lies, our main problem is insufficient trust in our sovereign God. We must obey governments in our host country, but not in the question of evangelism. We must not flaunt our faith, but evangelize quietly. We should not take foolish risks, but also not be so timid and cautious that we fail to witness when we should. We must be sensitive to people and to the Holy Spirit. We should always speak when someone asks us about our faith.

We must believe that no one can touch us without God's permission. If God allows our arrest, it is because he intends something big, and we should not thwart that by dishonesty. A number of missionaries who have been taken hostage have been put to death, but others have won their captors to the Lord!

The very first Christians suffered terrible persecution at the hands of Saul of Tarsus. He entered house after house, dragging out men and women, and interrogating them about Jesus. What did they say? One probably said, "Once I was blind, but now I can see!" They all told what they heard Jesus say and what they saw him do and what they experienced at his hands. Saul became the most evangelized man in history! He heard more testimonies than we have in all four gospels! If the Christians had tried to evade the truth, "the chief persecutor of the church" might never have become "our beloved brother Paul." Let us not short-circuit what God is trying to do, regardless of the cost to us. Let us honor God and speak the truth and trust in his love and his power.

GLOBAL Opportunities