

# Rolheiser: God cannot tell a lie

Lying is the most pernicious of evils, the most dangerous of sins, the worst of blasphemes, and the one sin that can be unforgivable. Perhaps we need to be reminded of that today, given our present culture where we are in danger of losing the very idea of reality and truth. Nothing is more dangerous.

There's a line buried deep in scripture that is too seldom quoted. The *Letter to the Hebrews* states simply: *It is impossible for God to lie.* (Hebrews 6, 18) It could not be otherwise. God is Truth, so how could God lie?

For God to lie would be a denial of God's very nature. Consequently, for us to lie is to go directly against God. Lying is the definition of irreverence and blasphemy. It is an affront to the nature of God.

If we are aware of that, we haven't taken it seriously lately. Everywhere, from countless social media tweets, texts, and blogs to the highest offices of government, business, and even the church, we are seeing an ever-deteriorating relationship with reality and truth. Lying and creating one's own truth have become socially acceptable (to a frightening degree).

What's changed? Haven't we always lied? Who among us can say that he or she has never told a lie or falsified information in one way or another? What's different today?

What's different today is that, until our generation, you could be caught in a lie, shamed for telling it, forced to accept your own dishonesty. No longer. Today our relationship with truth is fracturing to a degree that we no longer distinguish, morally or practically, between a lie and the truth. A lie, now, is simply another modality of truth.

What's the net effect of this? We are living it. Its effects are everywhere. First, it has broken down a shared sense of reality where, as a community, we no longer have a common epistemology and a shared sense of right and wrong. People no longer relate to reality in the same way. One person's truth is the other person's lie. It is becoming impossible to define what constitutes a lie.

This doesn't just destroy trust among us; worse, it plays with our sanity and with some of the deeper moral and religious chromosomes inside us.

As I wrote in this column several months ago, we believe that there are four transcendental properties to God. We teach that God is *One, True, Good, and Beautiful*. Because God is *One*, whole and consistent, there can never be any internal contradictions within God. This might sound abstract and academic, *but this is what anchors our sanity*. We are sane and remain sane only because we can always trust that two plus two equals four, ever and always.

God's *Oneness* is what anchors that. If that should ever change, then the peg that moors our sanity would be removed. Once two plus two can equal something other than four, then nothing can be securely known or trusted ever again.

That's the ultimate danger in what's happening today. We are unmooring our psyche.

The next danger in lying is what it does to those of us who lie.

Fyodor Dostoevsky *sums it up succinctly*: "People who lie to themselves and listen to their own lie come to such a pass that they cannot distinguish the truth within them, or around them, and so lose all respect for themselves and for others. And having no respect, they cease to love."

Jordan Peterson would add this: If we lie long enough "after that comes the arrogance and sense of superiority that inevitably accompanies the production of successful lies (hypothetically successful lies – and that is one of the greatest dangers: apparently everyone is fooled, so everyone is stupid, except me. Everyone is stupid, and fooled, by me – so I can get away with whatever I want).

Finally, there is the proposition: '*Being itself is susceptible to my manipulation. Thus, it deserves no respect.*'"

Jesus' warning in John's Gospel is the strongest of all. He tells us that if we lie long enough we will eventually believe our own lies and confuse falsehood for the truth and truth for falsehood, and that becomes an unforgiveable sin (a "blaspheme against the Holy Spirit) because the person who's lying no longer wants to be forgiven.

Finally, lying breaks down trust among us.

Trust is predicated on the belief that we all accept that two plus two equals four, that we all accept there is such a thing as reality, that we all accept that reality can be falsified by a lie, and that we all accept that a lie is falsehood and not just another modality of truth. Lying destroys that trust.

Living in a world that plays fast and easy with reality and truth also plays on our loneliness.

George Eliot once asked: "*What loneliness is more lonely than distrust?*" So true.

*The loneliest loneliness of all is the loneliness of distrust.* Welcome to our not-so-brave new world.