

# *Believing a Lie*

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From *McGarvey's Sermons Delivered in Louisville, Kentucky*  
(June-September, 1893)

In 2 Thessalonians, second chapter, tenth to twelfth verses, the apostle speaks of "*Them that are perishing, because they receive not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God sendeth them a working of error, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be judged who believe not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*"

It is quite a popular idea that it makes very little if any difference in religious matters, what a man believes, so he is sincere in regard to it, and faithfully lives according to his belief; but while men thus think in regard to religion, no man has the same thought in regard to any other human interest. For instance, a man believes in the soundness and good management of a bank, when it is about to break: does any one think that the sincerity of his belief, backed up by large deposits and the purchase of large blocks of the stock, will make safe his investment? Does not everybody know that the more sincerely a man believes in such a bank, the worse it is for him? The hand of a young lady is sought by a designing man in whom she has the most unlimited confidence: will the sincerity of her faith in him prevent the life-long misery which he is sure to inflict if she marries him? The more sincerely she believes in him, the worse it is for her. The same is true of false beliefs in every department of human life and interest. The same is true in matters of State, of science, and of war. False theories of government work evil continually; false theories in science are clogs in the way of knowledge; and the belief of a lie has caused the defeat of many a brave army and the sinking of many a gallant ship. Strange, then, if it is not so in matters pertaining to the soul. Strange if the belief of an error in religion is just as well as belief of the truth.

Paul was very far from entertaining this opinion. In the passage before us, he represents certain persons as perishing because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. He says, that "for his cause," that is, because they receive not the love of the truth, "God sendeth them a working of error, that they should believe a lie." He can not mean that God causes them to believe a lie by any direct exertion of His power; for He never interferes in that way for the injury of any human being; but that in the workings of His providence He allows those who do not love the truth to be worked upon by error, so that they shall believe a lie. And the result of this he declares to be, "that they all might be judged who believe not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness." He uses the word judged here, as in many other places, in the sense of being judged adversely, or being condemned. The result, then, of believing a lie, in the case under consideration, is not salvation, but condemnation; and that condemnation will be eternal, unless in the tender mercy of God it be forgiven before death intervenes. Notice, too, that he connects this belief of a lie with a failure to love the truth, and with taking pleasure in unrighteousness. It is but a natural consequence that the belief of a lie is injurious in some way; and especially that it leads away from the love of the truth, and from the paths of right doing. Belief of the truth alone leads to love of the truth, and to the practice of righteousness which truth always demands.

Our Lord taught in person the same doctrine on this subject that is here taught by Paul. He said of the Pharisees, "They are blind guides. And if the blind guide the blind, they shall both fall into the ditch." According to this, the blind guide will not escape falling into the ditch because he is blind; on the contrary, his blindness is the very cause of his falling in. So with the blind man who is guided by him. We know that this is literally true of the physically blind, and the Lord's purpose here is to teach that as it is with the physically blind, so it is with the mentally and spiritually blind. By the ditch into which they fall is meant the evil consequences into which misguidance naturally leads men in spiritual matters.

### **ILLUSTRATION OF BELIEVING A LIE – 1 KINGS 13**

There is an incident in Old Testament history which I think must have been brought about, so far as God directed it, for the very purpose of illustrating this great lesson to us, as well as for teaching it to the generation in which it occurred. It is the incident of the young prophet from Judah, who was sent to rebuke the image-worship set up at Bethel by Jeroboam. Having established himself as king of the ten tribes after their revolt against Rehoboam, son of Solomon, he soon concluded that if his subjects should continue going to Jerusalem to worship, as the law required, and especially if they continued to attend the annual festivals, where all the twelve tribes were accustomed to meet in religious fellowship, they would eventually grow discontented with their divided state, and would kill him and return to their old allegiance under the house of David. To avoid this disaster, he made two calves of gold, set one up at Bethel, and the other at Dan, and said to the people, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." He was the first king of whom we read who set up a religion of his own to support the throne; but he has had a multitude of followers; for this is the real purpose of every State religion down to the present day. He also appointed a feast on the fifteenth day of the eighth month, in imitation of the Feast of Tabernacles, which was held in Jerusalem on the same day of the seventh month; and on the first day of that feast he went up to his new altar to burn incense for the first time.

God was of course beholding these proceedings, and He sent a prophet out of Judah, who arrived in Bethel just in time to witness this first burning of incense. He made his way through the great crowd, close up to the king, who stood before the altar, and cried out, "O altar, altar, thus saith Jehovah: Behold, a child shall be born in Judah, Josiah by name; and upon thee shall he sacrifice the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall they burn upon thee." And he gave a sign that these words should be fulfilled, saying, "Behold, the altar shall be rent, and the ashes that are upon it shall be poured out." The altar was immediately rent asunder, and the ashes, including the incense, I suppose, was spilt upon the ground. The king in great wrath put forth his hand, and exclaimed to those about him, "Lay hold of him." But the moment he uttered the words he felt a stiffening of his arm, and realized that he could not draw it back to his body. The bystanders saw this, and not one of them dared to lay hands on the prophet. The king's tune changes. He says to the man of God, "Entreat now the favor of the Lord thy God, and pray for me, that my hand may be restored". The prophet did so, and the hand was restored as suddenly as it has been stiffened. The prophet is now a wonderful man in the eyes of the king. Wrath is turned into admiration, and he says, "Come home with me, and refresh thyself, and I will give thee a reward." What a surprise to the poor prophet! Invited to dine, and to receive a reward, yes a royal dinner and a royal reward, where he had reason to expect only hatred and threats! How glad he would have been to go! What a feast he would have enjoyed, what a reward he would have received, and what honor he would have had in the eyes of the people! But he answered, "If thou wilt give me half thy house, I will not go in with thee, neither will I eat bread or drink water in this

place: for so was it charged me by the word of God." He turned on his heel, and started home by a different road.

Now here is a man to be admired. He was so courageous that in obedience to the command of God he defied the power of the king; he was so free from ambition as to resist the flattering invitation of the king; and he was so unselfish as not to be influenced by the king's money. He was proof against fear of danger, against flattery, against avarice. And the way in which he resisted the temptations of flattery and avarice, is the more remarkable from the consideration that he certainly could not have seen a reason why he should not eat and drink there if he was hungry. Moreover, if he had been disposed to resort to pleas of expediency, he might have thought that the unexpected invitation of the king should be accepted as a step in the direction of gaining his good will and thereby winning him back to God. But with the plain command of God before him, he made no parley with expediency. Implicit and unquestioning obedience was evidently his rule of life. A man with such a rule may be a hero. A man without it never leaves the world better than he finds it.

In this same city of Bethel, almost under the shadow of Jeroboam's golden calf, we are told that there dwelt another prophet, an old one. He, of course, was opposed to this false worship; but he had consulted expediency, and had kept his mouth shut. One of his own sons had been in the crowd which assembled to witness the inauguration of the new altar; for the children will go to see the sights, especially if their fathers do not sternly restrain them. The son ran home when the young prophet had disappeared, and told his father all that had been said and done. Though too cowardly to act such a part himself, the old man was instantly fired with admiration for his daring fellow-prophet, and he felt that he must have him in his house to break bread with him: so he ordered his son to saddle the ass, and he hurried off to bring the prophet back. He found him dismounted, and sitting under the shade of an oak. Hurrying up to him, he said, "Come home with me and eat bread." The young man answered him as he had answered the king about eating and drinking in the place. But the old man was so eager to have him come that he made up a lie, and said to him, "I also am a prophet as thou art; and an angel spake to me by the word of the Lord, saying, Bring him back with thee into thy house, that he may eat bread and drink water." This lie prevailed. The man who was proof against danger, against flattery, against avarice, was overcome by the plausibility of a lie. Notice, now, that it is not a bad man, but a brave and good man, who is thus overcome. Even such a man is not free from danger at this point. Many a man just as brave and true in many particulars, has been led to his own undoing by the belief of a lie.

No doubt the old man's table was spread with the best the house afforded, and the two were enjoying themselves to the utmost when the Spirit of God came upon the old prophet and forced from his lips this solemn sentence: "Thus saith Jehovah: Forasmuch as thou hast been disobedient to the mouth of Jehovah, and hast not kept the command which Jehovah thy God commanded thee, but had come back, and eaten and drunk in this place, thy carcass shall not come to the sepulchre of thy fathers." The joyful feast ended in gloom. The young man departed with a sense of guilt weighing him down; and he wondered, no doubt, what mysterious fate was involved in the words which had come from the Lord. He was not long in finding out; for he had gone but a short distance toward home when he saw a lion rushing upon him. He sees the glare of the lion's eyes, he feels the powerful claws as they drag him to the ground; the horrid mouth of the beast is opened upon him, he feels the crushing in of his ribs, and then he feels and sees no more. What do you suppose was uppermost in his mind as his life was being crushed out of him? Was it the thought of the lion, or was it the thought of his sin? O brethren, what can be the thought of danger or pain when we are dying, compared with the thought that we are dying in sin? God grant that no one of us shall have such an experience. The same day there came into the city

from that road some men who said that they saw the strange sight of a lion standing by the side of a dead man, whom he had slain but had not eaten, and the man's ass standing by unharmed. The old prophet knew what it meant. He ordered out his ass once more, hastened down the road, found it as the men had said, brought the carcass home with him, and buried it in his own sepulchre. When the sad work was done, he said to his sons, "When I am dead, bury me in the sepulchre where the man of God is buried; lay my bones by the side of his bones." This was a poor atonement for the ruin which his lie had wrought, but it was the best that he could do.

You can now see very plainly that this incident happened for a type, as Paul said of many other Old Testament incidents, and that it was written for our admonition. It was written to warn us against the belief of a lie. The fate of the young prophet cries out like the blast of a trumpet to startle us from our fancied security, and makes us look around to see if we, too, are in any such peril. Perhaps you are ready to say that the sin of the old prophet in this case was greater than that of the young one; and you think it strange that the less guilty was the one who perished. Well, there was an abundance of texts and incidents to show the sin of lying, and the evil consequences which must follow it; and nobody, either then or now, needed any particular instruction about the sin of the old prophet; but the world needed a lesson on the subject of believing a lie; so the young prophet was slain to teach this lesson, while the old man was left to God's ordinary method of dealing with liars. No doubt he got his deserts sooner or later. I think you will all agree with me that this very singular piece of inspired history confirms most strikingly, and illustrates most aptly the teaching of Paul and of Jesus on the subject of believing a lie—of being guided by blind guides.

Shall we think, then, that every man who believes a lie in regard to God's will shall perish? I think not. If a blind man is guided by another blind man along a smooth road, where there is no ditch, I don't think either of them will fall into a ditch. It is only when there is a ditch in the way that they will fall into it. So, if this young prophet had been told to do almost any thing else than what he was told to do, we have no reason to think it would have been fatal. If, for example, the old prophet had said, An angel sent me to tell you to get from under this tree and run for your life, and not to stop until you get home, the young man would have been scared, and would have run himself out of breath; but the lion would not have killed him. In like manner, I can imagine a man believing some lies in religion, which, though they may injure him some, and I suppose there are very few that would not, might yet fall far short of proving fatal to him. I think that the doctrine of election as taught in the old creeds is false in the extreme; but I think that many a man has believed it all his life, and then gone to heaven when he died. What, then, is the distinction? It is to be traced out by remembering that there is only one thing that can keep men out of heaven, or keep them estranged from God in this life. That one thing is sin. Nothing else does or can stand between God and any man. If the belief of a lie, then, leads a man to commit sin, it will prove fatal unless that sin shall be forgiven. It was thus with the young prophet. The lie which he believed led him to disobey God. His disobedience was the immediate cause, while the belief of a lie was only the remote cause of his death.

### **HOW SHALL WE BE SURE WE ARE NOT BELIEVING LIES?**

In view of the solemn lesson now before us, taught both in the Old Testament and in the New, it becomes a question of transcendent importance, How shall we be sure that we are not believing lies; that we are not being led by blind guides? This last-named figure of speech may help us to an answer. If I am a blind man myself, I should have more sense than to let another blind man guide me. He may guide

me a little way and not lead me into a ditch; but when I start to follow his guidance, I can not know but that the second step I take will be a sudden plunge into a ditch from which I can not get out. I must, then, take pains to let no one guide me but those who can see. But how can I determine who among all those proposing to guide me in religious matters are the men who can see—who are not blind men? I answer there is one set of men, and only one, whom we can trust implicitly. We know that they are not blind: I mean the Lord Jesus and his apostles. We have their written instructions on the way of life, and they are not so voluminous or so obscure as to be unintelligible in regard to what is sinful. We may be in doubt, as we study them, over many questions of history and of exegesis, but rarely can we be in the least suspense, if we have a willing heart, as to what is sinful. Having found this, we ought to be able, and we shall be, to prevent any man from leading us into such error as shall cause us to commit sin—sin of omission or sin of commission.

I suppose that in the actual experiences of life, we seldom encounter a severer trial than did the young prophet of whom we have said so much. The lie which deceived him was told by a prophet, and told as coming from God through an angel. It would seem at first glance, that he could scarcely have failed to believe it; that he could scarcely be blamed for believing it. His respect for the prophetic order to which he himself belonged, and his confidence in the veracity of the holy angels, seemed to require him to believe the story. Why, then, was he censured for believing it? The answer is at hand. He knew that a prophet told him to eat and drink in Bethel; he knew that if the prophet told the truth, an angel had commanded him to do so; but he also knew, beyond a doubt, that God Himself had told him not to eat and drink in that place. His obvious duty, then, was to answer the old prophet according to this knowledge. He should have said to him, I suppose that you are a prophet, as you claim to be; it is possible, as you say, that an angel has sent you with this message; all this may be, or it may not be; but one thing is absolutely certain, and that is, that God has commanded me not to eat or drink in your city, and I will obey Him, even if all the prophets on earth and all the angels in heaven, were to countermand His order. Such a determination to obey God at all hazards, would have saved him from sin, and from an untimely death. It is just such faith as this that is enjoined in the New Testament. Paul says, in one of his outbursts of eloquence, "Let God be true, and every man a liar." And again he says, to some to whom he had preached the gospel: "Though we, or an angel from heaven should preach unto you any gospel other than that which we preached unto you, let him be anathema." He says this, and lest any man might think he had gone too far, or was speaking at random, he immediately repeats it. He was speaking of men who were perverting the gospel, and were thus making it a different gospel. They of course claimed to be preaching the true gospel, and this was the lie that they were propagating. This warning is found in the first chapter of the epistle to the Galatians, and farther on in the same epistle we find that some of the Galatians had believed the lie, and that in consequence, they had become alienated from Paul; they had come to regard him as an enemy; and they were desiring to go back under the law, where Christ would profit them nothing. They knew very well what Paul had taught on the subject, but, deceived by blind guides who had come among them, they were knowingly departing from Paul's teaching. These blind guides did not die without leaving a progeny behind them. Ever since their day, and even in ours, there have been teachers who knew more than Paul did, who could criticize Paul and tell wherein he made mistakes in his teaching, or taught things not adapted to a more enlightened age. Some of the breed, both male and female, are still alive, and you will do well to steer clear of them if you would guide your own bark in safety. All sorts of doctrines are being taught by all sorts of men and women; and it becomes a man who wishes ever to please God, to keep his head level, and his eye fixed on the plain teachings of the Lord and the apostles, if he would not believe a lie and be condemned.

**LIE – "THERE IS TIME ENOUGH YET."**

In the next place, let me say that there is one lie which has been propagated wherever the gospel has been preached, and more industriously, perhaps, than any other. It has also proved more fatal, at least in Christian lands, than any other lie that I can think of. It is the lie constantly palmed off on sinners, "There is time enough yet." It comes from the father of lies; it bids a man to neglect his surrender to Christ, to continue in sin, and to flatter himself that in so doing he is neither doing himself injury at present, nor endangering his eternal welfare. Under this fatal delusion, men and women are dying by the thousands without God and without hope. Have any of you been victims of it? I doubt not that you have. I beg you now to cast aside this fateful falsehood, and take into your mind the unquestionable fact, that if you are to prepare your sinful soul for dwelling with God and angels, you have not a moment to lose. You know this very well, when you stop to think. It is only in your unthoughtful moments that you believe, or try to believe, the lie. It is in the neglect of duty, rather than in overt acts of sin, that the belief of this lie, and of some others, shows its most baneful effects. How many there are, among even those who have made a surrender to the Lord, who still neglect important duties from day to day, under the delusion that it is a small matter to do this for a while, and that there is time enough yet in which to become punctilious servants of the Lord!

### **LIE – "BAPTISM IS NOTHING MORE THAN AN EXTERNAL ORDINANCE"**

And then, there are certain views entertained and propagated among believers themselves, the inevitable effect of which, if not their intended effect, is to breed a neglect of our duties. There are theories, for instance, in regard to the first act of consecration required of a penitent sinner, the ordinance of baptism, which have this effect. We are told, again and again, that baptism is nothing but an external ordinance which can not be a matter of great importance in a spiritual religion; and that, therefore, it maybe neglected, or changed in form, without peril. If we insist upon its strict observance, we are called ritualists or something else that is supposed to be a reproach to us; and if we exhort men, w Peter did, to repent and be baptized for the remission of sins, we are charged with teaching salvation by water. Now the whole effect of this teaching, or rather this railing, is to discourage the observance of that solemn ordinance of which even under John's administration of it, our Lord himself said: "The Pharisees and the lawyers rejected for themselves the counsel of God, not being baptized by him." The belief of any lie leading men to neglect this ordinance, is the more likely to be fatal from this fact that the forgiveness of all our past sins is connected with it; and, if, in the neglect of it, we are saved at all, it will be because, for reasons which God has not revealed to us, he shall both forgive these sins in the absence of one of the conditions which he has prescribed, and also forgive the neglect of that condition. Who is willing to risk his soul on an uncertainty like that? I trust that none of you who hear me today will think of it for a moment. I beg of you to cast aside the fatal delusion that there is time enough for you to surrender to the authority of your Lord, and any delusion which may have been palmed off upon you in regard to the importance of prompt obedience in that ordinance which stands between you and the forgiveness of your many sins. Let not a day pass over your heads till, with a penitent soul, you are buried with Christ in baptism, and shall have risen to walk with him in a new life.

Published in "SERMONS DELIVERED IN LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY, JUNE-SEPTEMBER, 1893" BY J. W. MCGARVEY, PROFESSOR OF SACRED HISTORY, COLLEGE OF THE BIBLE, LEXINGTON, KY.