



Opening Question:

Why is honesty important?

Let's play a thought exercise. Let's assume everyone lies all the time. We would live in a world without trust. Where social cohesion would break down. Where institutions like the family, places of worship, even the government could not survive. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church states:

Men could not live with one another if there was not mutual confidence that they were being truthful to one another.

Catechism of the Catholic Church 2469

Of course, this insight begs the question why do people lie? Many reasons exist for dishonesty but most can be reduced to two motives: greed and jealousy. I deceive so I can have what others have. I lie because I covet. The Eighth Commandment prohibits lying. The Tenth Commandment forbids and the desire for what others have. Let's consider each in turn.

The Eighth Commandment

Truth lies at the root of our relationships with God and others. We know God tells us the truth because he's faithful. We assume others tell us the truth because we are social beings and gravitate towards others we can trust. We even call people who willingly give up their lives as witnesses to truth heroes and "martyrs." The Eighth Commandment states

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."

Exodus 20:16

The Eighth Commandment forbids dishonesty in its many forms. Obviously, it prohibits lying in informal settings as well as in a legal arena. But it covers much more. It condemns half-truths and the telling of secrets that can ruin reputations. It cautions us



against making rash judgments especially those that are based on gossip and hearsay. Without all the facts, rash judgments can lead to actions that destroy reputations and even put lives at risk. The commandment takes a dim view on boasting and flattery since both puff up egos many times at the cost of another without a basis in fact. Finally, it pushes back on indifference and inaction. If someone lies and we do nothing, we implicitly agree with the liar and are complicit in the lie.

The call to honesty is not absolute. Many times, silence serves others better than raw honesty. Sometimes it is better not to share a fact in order for another to save face. Sometimes general safety, respect for privacy, and the common good require silence or, at least, the use of measured language. Pastors and professional counselors have an obligation to hold the secrets of others in the strictest confidence.

The call to honesty also has limitations in social media. Modern means of communication have been a blessing and a curse. Media not only has the power to inform it can promote cultural views and norms. It can even shape popular thinking. So, we must use it wisely. We must avoid outlets that make profits by spreading misinformation and triggering rage in their consumers. We must insist social media serve the greater good not only by providing timely information and fair analysis,

but by building up trust among people. It must respect the reputation and privacy of its consumers. Finally, the call to honesty can transcend mere facts. Truth can touch our souls and raise us into ecstatic heights through the arts. What we see, hear, and touch can communicate the universal truth of God and his love for us. We are made in his image and can see that image in the product of the artist. This is especially true in sacred art that conveys the truths of our faith.

The Tenth Commandment

Let's return to the problem of dishonesty. Why do people lie? In many cases, people tell half-truths, even bold faced lies, to hide their true intent. They want what others have. This directly violates the Tenth Commandment:

You shall not covet...anything that is your neighbor's.

Exodus 20:17ac

The Tenth Commandment stands against greed and an unhealthy desire for money. It shuns jealousy and envy that drives people to want what others possess. It encourages us to desire the good for others, and to share what we have.

Jesus saw some rich people tossing their gift into the offering box one coin at a time. He also saw a poor widow putting in a few cents. He pointed her out to his followers.

"I tell you that this poor woman has put in more than all the others. Everyone else gave what they didn't need. But she is very poor and gave everything she had."

Luke 21:41-44

What's truly good for ourselves? When we see our place in the bigger picture. When we see ourselves as part of a community dedicated to the good of all. A commitment to that vision requires honesty and a concern for others. When we turn away from those values we violate the Eighth and Tenth Commandments. These directives not only act as social guardrails, they promote healthy attitudes that bind all of us closer together.

Closing Question:

Why are the reputation and goods of others important to you?

Reference to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, Paragraphs CCC 2464-2513 and 2534-2557.

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