

## Bearing False Witness

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Human societies are built on a foundation of truth. When people can no longer trust each other to tell the truth, civil discourse collapses and anarchy takes over.

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*“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Ex. 20:16).*

*“Therefore, putting away lying, ‘let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,’ for we are members of one another” (Eph. 4:25).*

*“We have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood we have hidden ourselves” (Isa. 28:15).*

*“Everyone will deceive his neighbor and will not speak the truth; they have taught their tongue to speak lies. . . . ‘Shall I not punish them for these things?’ says the Lord. ‘Shall I not avenge Myself on such a nation as this?’” (Jer. 9:5).*



The recent Senate hearings and related media circus relating to the appointment of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court have laid bare several fault lines threatening our culture. We have learned, for example, that the sins of our youth can come back to haunt us, especially escapades involving alcohol. The lurid details in the charges and countercharges about sexual improprieties illustrate how powerful and dangerous sexual attraction is, and what happens when the barriers that are designed to keep it in check are relaxed. Our nation is now dealing with the chaos created by decades of moral relativism and carelessness.

There is one more glaring fact that came out of these hearings that deserves our attention, namely, *somebody lied!* After swearing to God with their hands on a Bible, one or both parties in this affair have twisted the truth for personal advantage. Congress and the American people now are stuck with trying to sort out the mess.

From the dawn of time, human societies have recognized the importance of honesty in social transactions. The daily decisions we all make are based on the assumption that the information we receive from others is truthful. When we learn that others have fed us lies and distortions, we get burned and the very nature of the relationship is corrupted. When millions of people are routinely inflicting this kind of duplicity on one another, society degenerates into a dog-eat-dog jungle in which everyone suffers.

Bearing false witness is one of the cardinal sins prohibited in the Ten Commandments. It was a major target of the Old Testament prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah, who witnessed firsthand the destruction that widespread deceit had on the welfare of their nation. When people can no longer trust each other, the very foundation of free and open cooperation is destroyed. Every component of civil society—marriages, businesses, governments, educational institutions, civic associations, friendships—crumbles when people cannot trust each other to speak the truth.

The Kavanaugh episode is simply one more data point in a much larger pattern of behavior that increasingly defines our national character. We are committing civilizational suicide by our widespread lack of honesty.

How can we fix this problem? Partisan attacks on individuals or political factions may score points, but they don’t address the underlying disease. The solution is personal. Each one of us must rebuild a commitment to *truth* in our own lives. That means we must speak the truth to others, even when it disadvantages us. It means we admit our own mistakes and failures and “take our licks,” instead of covering them up. It means we conduct our business with integrity and honesty. Finally, we must, with courage and conviction, plead with our neighbors to do the same.

Whatever happens to the Supreme Court is largely irrelevant if we as private citizens do not deal truthfully with each other. We are God’s people; bearing *true* witness must begin with us.

— David King