

A Lie Is a Sinful Falsehood

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Falsehoods Are Deceptions, Evasions, or Factual Errors

A lie is a sinful falsehood. Hence a falsehood that is not sinful is not a lie and can even be good and necessary. Therefore sinful falsehoods are lies, and non-sinful falsehoods are not lies. Falsehoods are told either to deceive or evade or because of an error regarding facts.

- An error regarding facts is a non-sinful falsehood and thus not a lie, although one can be guilty of the sin of affected ignorance for not sufficiently searching for the truth, but that would be a sin of affected ignorance and not a sin of lying.
- If the cause is just and no sin is committed in telling a falsehood, then these falsehoods told to deceive or evade are not lies and thus are non-sinful falsehoods.
- If the cause is unjust or a sin is committed in telling a falsehood, then these falsehoods told to deceive or evade are lies and thus are sinful falsehoods.

Non-sinful deceptions and evasions can be used against enemies or friends. A non-sinful deception or evasion can be used against a friend to protect him from information he should not know. For example,

- St. Raphael the Archangel, to protect Tobias from knowing something he was not supposed to know at that time, deceived him by telling him that he was an Israelite named Azarias, the son of Ananias. (Tob. 5)
- Jesus, to keep his apostles from knowing His plans until the middle of the feast, deceived the apostles by telling them that He was not going up to the feast in Jerusalem but went up to Jerusalem in disguise. (Jn. 7)
- A doctor, to prevent a patient from going into shock and dying, should deceive the patient who just had his leg blown off in war by telling him that his leg was not blown off. He should only be told the truth that his leg was blown off when the news will not endanger his life or health.
- A spy, to protect his friend, can deceive him by telling him that he is not a spy.

All these deceptions are for just causes and no sin is committed in telling them, and thus they are not lies but non-sinful falsehoods. However, “He that deceiveth the just in a wicked way shall fall in his own destruction.” (Prv. 28:10) Hence one can deceive a just man in a non-wicked way and for a just reason.

Non-sinful Falsehoods

Sarah said she did not laugh, but she did

Sarah told God that she did not laugh, but she did. And God did not condemn her but instead blessed her:

“And when they had eaten, they said to him: Where is Sara thy wife? He answered: Lo, she is in the tent. And he said to him: I will return and come to thee at this time, life accompanying, and Sara thy wife shall have a son. Which when Sara heard, she laughed behind the door of the tent... And the Lord said to Abraham: Why did Sara laugh, saying: Shall I who am an old woman bear a child indeed? Is there anything hard to God? According to appointment I will return to thee at this same time, life accompanying, and Sara shall have a son. Sara denied, saying: I did not laugh, for she was afraid. But the Lord said: Nay, but thou didst laugh.” (Gen. 18:9-10, 13-15)

Joseph deceived his brothers

Joseph deceived his brothers in order to punish the ones who sold him into slavery:

“And Joseph commanded the steward of his house, saying: Fill their sacks with corn, as much as they can hold, and put the money of everyone in the top of his sack. And in the mouth of the younger’s sack, put my silver cup and the price which he gave for the wheat. And it was so done. And when the morning arose, they were sent away with their asses. And when they were now departed out of the city and had gone forward a little way, Joseph sending for the steward of his house, said: Arise and pursue after the men, and when thou hast overtaken them say to them: Why have you returned evil for good? The cup which you have stolen is that in which my lord drinketh and in which he is wont to divine; you have done a very evil thing.” (Gen. 44:1-5)

Hebrew midwives deceived Pharaoh to save Hebrew male infants

Hebrew midwives deceived Pharaoh in order to save Hebrew male infants. And God blessed them for it:

“And the king of Egypt spoke to the midwives of the Hebrews, of whom one was called Sephora, the other Phua, commanding them: When you shall do the office of midwives to the Hebrew women and the time of delivery is come, if it be a man child kill it; if a woman, keep it alive. But the midwives feared God and did not do as the king of Egypt had commanded, but saved the men children. And the king called for them and said: What is that you meant to do, that you would save the men children? They answered: The Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women, for they themselves are skilful in the office of a midwife and they are delivered before we come to them. Therefore God dealt well with the midwives, and the people multiplied and grew exceedingly strong. And because the midwives feared God, he built them houses.” (Ex. 1:15-21)

Rahab hid Israelite spies and told a non-sinful falsehood to protect them

A Gentile harlot named Rahab, of the town of Jericho, hid Israelite spies and told a non-sinful falsehood to protect them. And she was rewarded with her life and the lives of

her family members. She converted to Judaism and became very holy and is praised in all generations by God's chosen people. And she is in the bloodline of Jesus Christ because she is the mother of Booz:

“And Josue the son of Nun sent from Setim two men to spy secretly, and said to them: Go, and view the land and the city of Jericho. They went and entered into the house of a woman that was a harlot named Rahab and lodged with her. And it was told the king of Jericho, and was said: Behold, there are men come in hither by night, of the children of Israel, to spy the land. And the king of Jericho sent to Rahab, saying: Bring forth the men that came to thee and are entered into thy house, for they are spies and are come to view all the land. And the woman, taking the men, hid them, and said: I confess they came to me, but I knew not whence they were. And at the time of shutting the gate in the dark, they also went out together. I know not whither they are gone; pursue after them quickly and you will overtake them. But she made the men go up to the top of her house and covered them with the stalks of flax which was there.” (Jos. 2:1-6)

“And let this city be an anathema, and all things that are in it, to the Lord. Let only Rahab the harlot live, with all that are with her in the house, for she hid the messengers whom we sent.” (Jos. 6:17)

“By faith Rahab the harlot perished not with the unbelievers, receiving the spies with peace.” (Heb. 11:31)

“And in like manner also Rahab the harlot, was not she justified by works, receiving the messengers and sending them out another way?” (Ja. 2:25)

“And Salmon begot Booz of Rahab. And Booz begot Obed of Ruth. And Obed begot Jesse.” (Mt. 1:5)

Jahel deceived and killed Sisara

“But Sisara fleeing came to the tent of Jahel the wife of Haber the Cinite, for there was peace between Jabin the king of Asor and the house of Haber the Cinite. And Jahel went forth to meet Sisara, and said to him: Come in to me, my lord, come in, fear not. He went into her tent, and being covered by her with a cloak, said to her: Give me, I beseech thee, a little water, for I am very thirsty. She opened a bottle of milk, and gave him to drink, and covered him. And Sisara said to her: Stand before the door of the tent, and when any shall come and inquire of thee, saying: Is there any man here? thou shalt say: There is none. So Jahel, Haber's wife, took a nail of the tent, and taking also a hammer and going in softly, and with silence, she put the nail upon the temples of his head, and striking it with the hammer drove it through his brain fast into the ground; and so passing from deep sleep to death, he fainted away and died.” (Jdg. 4:17-21)

St. Raphael the Archangel deceived Tobias

St. Raphael the Archangel deceived Tobias the elder and Tobias the younger by telling them that he was an Israelite named Azarias, the son of Ananias:

“But go now, and seek thee out some faithful man to go with thee for his hire, that thou mayest receive it while I yet live. Then Tobias going forth found a beautiful young man, standing girded, and as it were ready to walk. And not knowing that he was an angel of God, he saluted him and said: From whence art thou, good young man? But he answered: Of the children of Israel. And Tobias said to him: Knowest thou the way that leadeth to the country of the Medes? ...And Tobias said to him:

Canst thou conduct my son to Gabelus at Rages, a city of the Medes? and when thou shalt return I will pay thee thy hire. And the angel said to him: I will conduct him thither and bring him back to thee. And Tobias said to him: I pray thee, tell me, of what family or what tribe art thou? And Raphael the angel answered: Dost thou seek the family of him thou hirest or the hired servant himself to go with thy son? But lest I should make thee uneasy, I am Azarias the son of the great Ananias. And Tobias answered: Thou art of a great family. But I pray thee be not angry that I desired to know thy family.” (Tob. 5:4-7, 14-19)

At the end of Tobias’ journey, St. Raphael revealed himself to him and his father:

“I discover then the truth unto you, and I will not hide the secret from you. When thou didst pray with tears, and didst bury the dead, and didst leave thy dinner and hide the dead by day in thy house and bury them by night, I offered thy prayer to the Lord. And because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee. And now the Lord hath sent me to heal thee and to deliver Sara thy son’s wife from the devil. For I am the angel Raphael, one of the seven who stand before the Lord.” (Tob. 12:11-15)

Judith deceived and killed Holofernes

By the will of God, Judith deceived Holofernes by telling him the falsehood that God delivered the Israelites into his hands to be killed and that she would help him. When she got his trust, she killed him by cutting off his head and gave Israel a great victory. And this deception, this non-sinful falsehood, goes down as one of the greatest and holiest acts of all time and Judith as one of the holiest of all the Israelites (See Judith 16):

“And it came to pass, when she had ceased to cry to the Lord, that she rose from the place wherein she lay prostrate before the Lord. And she called her maid, and going down into her house she took off her haircloth and put away the garments of her widowhood... And the Lord also gave her more beauty, because all this dressing up did not proceed from sensuality but from virtue; and therefore the Lord increased this her beauty [in order to better deceive Holofernes] so that she appeared to all men’s eyes incomparably lovely.” (Judi. 10:1-4)

“She anointed her face with ointment and bound up her locks with a crown, she took a new robe to deceive him.” (Judi. 16:10)

“And it came to pass, when she went down the hill about break of day, that the watchmen of the Assyrians met her and stopped her, saying: Whence comest thou? Or whither goest thou? And she answered: I am a daughter of the Hebrews, and I am fled from them because I knew they would be made a prey to you because they despised you and would not of their own accord yield themselves that they might find mercy in your sight. For this reason I thought with myself, saying: I will go to the presence of the prince Holofernes that I may tell him their secrets and shew him by what way he may take them without the loss of one man of his army.” (Judi. 10:11-13)

“Then Holofernes said to her: Be of good comfort and fear not in thy heart, for I have never hurt a man that was willing to serve Nabuchodonosor the king. And if thy people had not despised me, I would never have lifted up my spear against them. But now tell me, for what cause hast thou left them, and why it hath pleased thee to come to us? And Judith said to him: Receive the words of thy handmaid, for if thou wilt follow the words of thy handmaid, the Lord will do with thee a perfect thing... For it is certain that our God is so offended with sins, that he hath sent word by his prophets to the people, that he will deliver them up for their sins... Therefore because they do these things, it is certain they will be given up to destruction. And I

thy handmaid knowing this am fled from them, and the Lord hath sent me to tell thee these very things. And he will tell me when he will repay them for their sins, and I will come and tell thee so that I may bring thee through the midst of Jerusalem, and thou shalt have all the people of Israel, as sheep that have no shepherd, and there shall not so much as one dog bark against thee because these things are told me by the providence of God.” (Judi. 11:1-4, 8, 12-16)

“And Judith was alone in the chamber. But Holofernes lay on his bed, fast asleep, being exceedingly drunk. And Judith spoke to her maid to stand without before the chamber and to watch: And Judith stood before the bed, praying with tears and the motion of her lips in silence, saying: Strengthen me, O Lord God of Israel, and in this hour look on the works of my hands, that as thou hast promised, thou mayest raise up Jerusalem thy city and that I may bring to pass that which I have purposed, having a belief that it might be done by thee. And when she had said this, she went to the pillar that was at his bed’s head and loosed his sword that hung tied upon it. And when she had drawn it out, she took him by the hair of his head, and said: Strengthen me, O Lord God, at this hour. And she struck twice upon his neck and cut off his head, and took off his canopy from the pillars, and rolled away his headless body.” (Judi. 13:3-10)

“And Judith said to all the people: Hear me, my brethren, hang ye up this head upon our walls. And as soon as the sun shall rise, let every man take his arms and rush ye out, not as going down beneath, but as making an assault. Then the watchmen must needs run to awake their prince for the battle. And when the captains of them shall run to the tent of Holofernes and shall find him without his head, wallowing in his blood, fear shall fall upon them. And when you shall know that they are fleeing, go after them securely, for the Lord will destroy them under your feet.” (Judi. 14:1-5)

What follows is the praise and honor given to Judith by Israelites for her great faith, courage, and victory:

“And they all adored the Lord and said to her: The Lord hath blessed thee by his power, because by thee he hath brought our enemies to nought. And Ozias the prince of the people of Israel said to her: Blessed art thou, O daughter, by the Lord the most high God, above all women upon the earth. Blessed be the Lord who made heaven and earth, who hath directed thee to the cutting off the head of the prince of our enemies, because he hath so magnified thy name this day that thy praise shall not depart out of the mouth of men who shall be mindful of the power of the Lord for ever, for that thou hast not spared thy life, by reason of the distress and tribulation of thy people, but hast prevented our ruin in the presence of our God. And all the people said: So be it, so be it.” (Judi. 13:22-26)

Michol used evasion and deception to protect David from Saul

“Saul therefore sent his guards to David’s house to watch him that he might be killed in the morning. And when Michol David’s wife had told him this, saying: Unless thou save thyself this night, tomorrow thou wilt die: She let him down through a window. And he went and fled away and escaped. And Michol took an image and laid it on the bed, and put a goat’s skin with the hair at the head of it, and covered it with clothes. And Saul sent officers to seize David, and it was answered that he was sick. And again Saul sent to see David, saying: Bring him to me in the bed, that he may be slain. And when the messengers were come in, they found an image upon the bed and a goat’s skin at his head. And Saul said to Michol: Why hast thou deceived me so and let my enemy go and flee away? And Michol answered Saul: Because he said to me: Let me go or else I will kill thee.” (1 Ki. 19:11-17)

Chusai spied to protect King David and told falsehoods to Absalom

“And when David was come to the top of the mountain where he was about to adore the Lord, behold Chusai the Arachite came to meet him with his garment rent and his head covered with earth. And David said to him: If thou come with me, thou wilt be a burden to me; but if thou return into the city and wilt say to Absalom: I am thy servant, O king; as I have been thy father’s servant, so I will be thy servant: thou shalt defeat the counsel of Achitophel.” (2 Ki. 15:32-34)

“And when Chusai the Arachite, David’s friend, was come to Absalom, he said to him: God save thee, O king; God save thee, O king. And Absalom said to him: Is this thy kindness to thy friend? Why wentest thou not with thy friend? And Chusai answered Absalom: Nay, for I will be his whom the Lord hath chosen, and all this people and all Israel, and with him will I abide. Besides this, whom shall I serve? Is it not the king’s son? As I have served thy father, so will I serve thee also.” (2 Ki. 16:16-19)

“And Absalom and all the men of Israel said: The counsel of Chusai the Arachite is better than the counsel of Achitophel. And by the will of the Lord the profitable counsel of Achitophel was defeated, that the Lord might bring evil upon Absalom.” (2 Ki. 17:14)

David pretended to be insane to evade the wrath of an enemy

“And the servants of Achis, when they saw David, said to him: Is not this David the king of the land? Did they not sing to him in their dances, saying: Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands? But David laid up these words in his heart and was exceedingly afraid at the face of Achis the king of Geth. And he changed his countenance before them and slipt down between their hands; and he stumbled against the doors of the gate, and his spittle ran down upon his beard. And Achis said to his servants: You saw the man was mad; why have you brought him to me? Have we need of mad men, that you have brought in this fellow to play the madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?” (1 Ki. 21:11-15)

“For David, when he changed his countenance before Achimelech, who dismissed him and he went his way.” (Ps. 33:1)

The woman of Thecua deceived King David

“And Joab the son of Sarvia, understanding that the king’s heart was turned to Absalom, sent to Thecua and fetched from thence a wise woman, and said to her: Feign thyself to be a mourner, and put on mourning apparel, and be not anointed with oil that thou mayest be as a woman that had a long time been mourning for one dead. And thou shalt go in to the king and shalt speak to him in this manner. And Joab put the words in her mouth.” (2 Ki. 14:1-3)

Jeremias told a falsehood to protect King Sedecias

“And king Sedecias sent and took Jeremias the prophet to him to the third gate that was in the house of the Lord, and the king said to Jeremias: I will ask thee a thing; hide nothing from me. Then Jeremias said to Sedecias: If I shall declare it to thee, wilt thou not put me to death? And if I give thee counsel, thou wilt not hearken to me. Then king Sedecias swore to Jeremias in private, saying: As the Lord liveth that made us this soul, I will not put thee to death, nor will I deliver thee into the hands of these men that seek thy life. And Jeremias said to Sedecias: Thus saith the Lord

of hosts the God of Israel: If thou wilt take a resolution and go out to the princes of the king of Babylon, thy soul shall live and this city shall not be burnt with fire, and thou shalt be safe and thy house. But if thou wilt not go out to the princes of the king of Babylon, this city shall be delivered into the hands of the Chaldeans and they shall burn it with fire, and thou shalt not escape out of their hands... Then Sedecias said to Jeremias: Let no man know these words and thou shalt not die. But if the princes shall hear that I have spoken with thee, and shall come to thee and say to thee: Tell us what thou hast said to the king, hide it not from us and we will not kill thee, and also what the king said to thee: Thou shalt say to them: I presented my supplication before the king, that he would not command me to be carried back into the house of Jonathan to die there. So all the princes came to Jeremias and asked him, and he spoke to them according to all the words that the king had commanded him; and they left him, for nothing had been heard.” (Jer. 38:14-18, 24-27)

Eliseus deceived the King of Syria

The holy Prophet Eliseus deceived the King of Syria by telling him that he was not Eliseus and that the town of Dothan was not the town of Dothan:

“And the heart of the king of Syria was troubled for this thing. And calling together his servants, he said: Why do you not tell me who it is that betrays me to the king of Israel? And one of his servants said: No one, my lord O king. But Eliseus the prophet, that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel all the words that thou speakest in thy privy chamber. And he said to them: Go, and see where he is that I may send and take him. And they told him, saying: Behold he is in Dothan... And the enemies came down to him, but Eliseus prayed to the Lord, saying: Strike, I beseech thee, this people with blindness. And the Lord struck them with blindness according to the word of Eliseus. And Eliseus said to them: This is not the way, neither is this the city; follow me and I will shew you the man whom you seek. So he led them into Samaria.” (4 Ki. 6:11-13, 18-19)

An Israelite woman hid Jonathan and Achimaas and told a falsehood to protect them

“And Jonathan and Achimaas stayed by the fountain Rogel, and there went a maid and told them. And they went forward to carry the message to king David, for they might not be seen nor enter into the city. But a certain boy saw them and told Absalom. But they making haste went into the house of a certain man in Bahurim who had a well in his court, and they went down into it. And a woman took and spread a covering over the mouth of the well, as it were to dry sodden barley, and so the thing was not known. And when Absalom’s servants were come into the house, they said to the woman: Where is Achimaas and Jonathan? And the woman answered them: They passed on in haste after they had tasted a little water. But they that sought them, when they found them not, returned into Jerusalem. And when they were gone, they came up out of the well, and going on told king David and said: Arise and pass quickly over the river, for this manner of counsel has Achitophel given against you.” (2 Ki. 17:17-21)

Catholics hid priests and told falsehoods to protect them

Catholic laymen hid Catholic priests and told non-sinful falsehoods to protect them. For example, if a priest was hidden in a house and the enemies asked the Catholics living

in the house if there was a priest in there, they would say “no.” And Catholic priests disguised themselves by dressing like laymen and told non-sinful falsehoods to evade being captured by enemies:

Wikipedia, “Priest Hole”: “A *priest hole* is the term given to a hiding place for a priest, built into many of the principal Catholic houses of England during the period when Catholics were persecuted by law in England. When Queen Elizabeth I came to the throne in 1558, there were several Catholic plots designed to remove her and severe measures were taken against Catholic priests. Many great houses had a priest hole built so that the presence of a priest could be concealed when searches were made of the building. They were cunningly concealed in walls, under floors, behind wainscoting and other locations, and were often successful in concealing their occupant.”

Nominal *Catholic Encyclopedia*, St. Nicholas Owen: “A Jesuit lay-brother, martyred in 1606. ...He was imprisoned on the death of Edmund Campion for openly declaring that martyr’s innocence, but afterwards served Fathers Henry Garnett and John Gerard for eighteen years, was captured again with the latter, escaped from the Tower, and is said to have contrived the escape of Father Gerard. He was finally arrested at Hindlip Hall, Worcestershire, while impersonating Father Garnett. ‘It is incredible,’ writes Cecil, ‘how great was the joy caused by his arrest...knowing the great skill of Owen in constructing hiding places, and the innumerable quantity of dark holes which he had schemed for hiding priests all through England.’ Not only the Secretary of State but Waade, the Keeper of the Tower, appreciated the importance of the disclosures which Owen might be forced to make.”

Catholic men deceived enemies to protect the chastity of virgins

Catholic men deceived enemies by dressing up as women to protect the virginity of Catholic women:

Roman Martyrology, 4/28: “At Alexandria, the martyrdom of the virgin St. Theodora. For refusing to sacrifice to idols, she was sent to a place of debauchery; but one of the brethren, named Didymus, through the admirable providence of God, delivered her by quickly exchanging garments with her. He was afterwards beheaded and crowned with her in the persecution of Diocletian, under the governor Eustratius.”

Roman Martyrology, 5/3: “At Constantinople, the holy martyrs Alexander, soldier, and Antonina, virgin. In the persecution of Maximian, under the governor Festus, Antonina, having been condemned to remain in a place of debauchery, was delivered by Alexander, who secretly exchanged garments with her and took her place. They were tortured together, both had their hands cut off, were cast into the fire, and received their crowns at the end of their heroic combat for the faith.”

It is impossible for God to lie

“It is impossible for God to lie” (Heb. 6:18) because everything God does is just and because God does not sin. However, God does tell and condone non-sinful falsehoods and thus non-sinful deceptions.

God commanded one of His angels to deceive false prophets

God deceives evildoers to punish them. Job says,

“He [God] changeth the heart of the princes of the people of the earth and deceiveth them that they walk in vain where there is no way.” (Job 12:24)

God Himself can deceive a man by putting a falsehood in his heart and mouth. For example, God can deceive false prophets:

“And when the prophet shall err and speak a word, I the Lord have deceived that prophet. And I will stretch forth my hand upon him and will cut him off from the midst of my people Israel.” (Ez. 14:9)

Or God can deceive evildoers by commanding a good angel to deceive them by putting a false prophecy in their hearts and mouths:

“Then the king of Israel called an eunuch, and said to him: Make haste, and bring hither Micheas the son of Jemla... The king said to him: I adjure thee again and again that thou tell me nothing but that which is true in the name of the Lord... And he [the prophet Micheas]...said: Hear thou therefore the word of the Lord: I saw the Lord sitting on his throne, and all the army of heaven standing by him on the right hand and on the left. And the Lord said: Who shall deceive Achab king of Israel, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth Galaad? And one spoke words of this manner, and another otherwise. And there came forth a spirit and stood before the Lord, and said: I will deceive him. And the Lord said to him: By what means? And he said: I will go forth and be a false spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And the Lord said: Thou shalt deceive him and shalt prevail: Go forth, and do so. Now therefore behold the Lord hath given a false spirit in the mouth of all thy prophets that are here, and the Lord hath spoken evil against thee.” (3 Ki. 22:9, 16, 19-23) (See also 2 Par. 18:18-22)

This “false spirit” that the good angel put in the heart and mouth of the false prophets (which is called a “lying spirit” in the Vulgate) was a non-sinful falsehood because the cause was just, to deceive the false prophets who were worthy of being deceived, and the falsehood was not intrinsically sinful. It was a factual error. St. Paul refers to this type of deception as the “operation of error.” I call it the “operation of error curse”:

“[Antichrist] whose coming is according to the working of Satan, in all power, and signs, and lying wonders, and in all seduction of iniquity to them that perish, because they receive not the love of the truth that they might be saved. Therefore God shall send them the operation of error to believe lying: That all may be judged who have not believed the truth but have consented to iniquity.” (2 Thes. 2:9-11)

Jesus deceived the apostles

And God can deceive His friends (men who are just) with non-sinful deceptions or evasions to protect them from information they should not know. Jesus deceived the apostles by telling them that He was not going up to a feast in Jerusalem, but He went up anyway:

“[Jesus said to the apostles:] Go you up to this feast, but I go not up to this feast because my time is not accomplished. When he had said these things, he himself stayed in Galilee. But after his brethren were gone up, then he also went up to the feast, not openly, but, as it were, in secret. The Jews therefore sought him on the

festival day, and said: Where is he? And there was much murmuring among the multitude concerning him. For some said: He is a good man. And others said: No, but he seduceth the people. Yet no man spoke openly of him for fear of the Jews. Now about the midst of the feast, Jesus went up into the temple, and taught.” (Jn. 7:8-14)

Because Jesus is God and thus knew all along that He was going to go up to the feast, it cannot be said that He believed He was not going up to the feast but changed His mind and then went, for all things are known to the Lord God, past, present, and to come. Jesus deceived His apostles because He wanted to go up to the feast secretly and only reveal Himself at the middle of the feast.

It is not “God cannot deceive nor be deceived” but “God cannot lie nor be deceived”

It is a fact that God deceives evildoers and just men. And these deceptions are not lies but non-sinful falsehoods, non-sinful deceptions. Hence the phrase in the Catholic *Act of Faith* which is translated “God, who cannot deceive nor be deceived” should be translated “God, who cannot lie nor be deceived,” just as the Fifth Commandment must not be translated “Thou shalt not kill” but “Thou shalt not murder.”

Sinful Falsehoods

An unjust cause

A falsehood that evades justice or defends or glorifies something that is intrinsically sinful is a sinful falsehood and thus a lie because the cause is unjust.

An example of a sinful falsehood that evades justice is as follows. Ananias and Saphira made a vow to God to give St. Peter and thus the Catholic Church the full price for a piece of land they sold. But they attempted to deceive St. Peter by holding back some of the money they made from selling the land. Hence they told a falsehood to St. Peter when they laid part of the money at his feet by pretending it was the full price for the land. But St. Peter, whose job was to bring justice in this matter, knew they lied, accused them of it, and God killed them:

“But a certain man named Ananias, with Saphira his wife, sold a piece of land and by fraud kept back part of the price of the land, his wife being privy thereunto, and bringing a certain part of it, laid it at the feet of the apostles. But Peter said: Ananias, why hath Satan tempted thy heart that thou shouldst lie to the Holy Spirit and by fraud keep part of the price of the land? Whilst it remained, did it not remain to thee? And after it was sold, was it not in thy power? Why hast thou conceived this thing in thy heart? Thou hast not lied to men, but to God. And Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and gave up the spirit. And there came great fear upon all that heard it.” (Acts 5:1-5)

An example of a sinful falsehood that defends or glorifies something that is intrinsically sinful is as follows. A false god is intrinsically evil (sinful). In order to make men believe in the false god Bel, pagan priests told a falsehood that the statue of Bel ate

food in order to make it seem that the statue was alive. This falsehood was a sinful falsehood and thus a lie because the cause was unjust for glorifying a false god:

“Now the Babylonians had an idol called Bel; and there were spent upon him every day twelve great measures of fine flour, and forty sheep, and sixty vessels of wine. The king also worshipped him and went every day to adore him, but Daniel adored his God. And the king said to him: Why dost thou not adore Bel? And he answered and said to him: Because I do not worship idols made with hands, but the living God that created heaven and earth and hath power over all flesh. And the king said to him: Doth not Bel seem to thee to be a living god? Seest thou not how much he eateth and drinketh every day? Then Daniel smiled and said: O king, be not deceived, for this is but clay within and brass without, neither hath he eaten at any time. And the king, being angry, called for his priests and said to them: If you tell me not who it is that eateth up these expenses, you shall die. But if you can shew that Bel eateth these things, Daniel shall die because he hath blasphemed against Bel. And Daniel said to the king: Be it done according to thy word. Now the priests of Bel were seventy, beside their wives, and little ones, and children. And the king went with Daniel into the temple of Bel. And the priests of Bel said: Behold we go out; and do thou, O king, set on the meats, and make ready the wine, and shut the door fast, and seal it with thy own ring. And when thou comest in the morning, if thou findest not that Bel hath eaten up all, we will suffer death, or else Daniel that hath lied against us. And they little regarded it because they had made under the table a secret entrance, and they always came in by it and consumed those things. So it came to pass after they were gone out, the king set the meats before Bel; and Daniel commanded his servants, and they brought ashes and he sifted them all over the temple before the king. And going forth they shut the door, and having sealed it with the king’s ring they departed. But the priests went in by night according to their custom, with their wives and their children, and they ate and drank up all. And the king arose early in the morning and Daniel with him. And the king said: Are the seals whole, Daniel? And he answered: They are whole, O king. And as soon as he had opened the door, the king looked upon the table and cried out with a loud voice: Great art thou, O Bel, and there is not any deceit with thee. And Daniel laughed, and he held the king that he should not go in, and he said: Behold the pavement; mark whose footsteps these are. And the king said: I see the footsteps of men, and women, and children. And the king was angry. Then he took the priests, and their wives, and their children, and they shewed him the private doors by which they came in and consumed the things that were on the table. The king therefore put them to death and delivered Bel into the power of Daniel, who destroyed him and his temple.” (Dan. 14:2-21)

What follows are some examples of sinful and non-sinful falsehoods:

1) A husband who privately commits the sin of adultery must not tell his wife. Hence if his wife asks him if he was ever unfaithful to her, he must tell her a non-sinful falsehood by saying “no” in order to spare her unnecessary grief and discord and distrust between them. However, if his sin is public or is made public and his wife finds out and asks him about it, then he must tell her the truth or his falsehood is sinful and thus a lie. Of course, if he is Catholic he must confess his mortal sin to a priest, whether it was private or public, and amend his life if he wants God to forgive him.

2) A man who breaks the law and commits a sin by doing illegal drugs, such as cocaine, and gets arrested must tell the truth to the law enforcement officers whose job is to bring justice in this matter. If he tells a falsehood and thus says he did not use cocaine, then this is a sinful falsehood and thus a lie. But if the man tells the truth and accepts his punishment, then he can conceal this sin from others who have no right or good reason to

know about it. Hence if a person (such as a blackmailer or detractor) who has no right or good reason to know about his crime asks him if he ever used illegal drugs, he should tell a non-sinful falsehood and thus say “no” to protect his reputation. “Be not ashamed to confess thy sins, but submit not thyself to every man for sin.” (Eccus. 4:31)

3) Parents are responsible for law and order in their family. Therefore it is their duty to bring justice regarding sins that are committed by their children. Hence if their son steals from his sister and his parents ask him if he stole from her and he says “no,” then he told a sinful falsehood and thus a lie. If he admits he stole from her and says he will not do it again and makes restitution, then this sin should be concealed from the other siblings. And if his siblings ask if he stole, they should say “no” to prevent scandal and protect his reputation.

4) Some private sins, however, must be made manifest to all if the sinner’s sin threatens the welfare and common good of the community and the souls of its citizens. For example, because of the nature and horror of the sin of pedophilia (the sexual molestation of children by adults), pedophiles must always be considered a threat to the community even if they confess their sin and amend their life. Hence they should be put to death if possible. If that is not possible, then they should be imprisoned for life. If they are put to death or imprisoned for life, then they are not a threat to the community and thus their sin does not have to be made manifest to the community. However, if the State does not kill them or imprison them for life and thus lets them go free, then they and their sin must be made manifest to the community in order to warn and protect its citizens from potentially falling prey to them.

5) If a nominal Catholic privately holds a heresy and he is admonished and abjures his heresy, then the fact that he held the heresy does not have to be made manifest to all but only to those who knew he held the heresy. But if this nominal Catholic again holds the same heresy privately, then he and his heresy must be made manifest to all because he is obstinate and dangerous to the souls of others even if he abjures his heresy.

A just cause but a sin in telling it

Jehu’s cause was just but he sinned in telling his falsehood

Jehu’s cause was a just cause because he wanted to kill all the idol worshippers among the Israelites and destroy their pagan temple. But the falsehood he told to deceive them was sinful because he told them that he was an idol worshipper in order to lure them out in the open to kill them. It is a dogma of faith that God’s chosen people are forbidden to worship or even pretend to worship idols. Hence his falsehood was sinful and thus a lie:

“And Jehu gathered together all the people, and said to them: Achab worshipped Baal a little, but I will worship him more. Now therefore call to me all the prophets of Baal, and all his servants, and all his priests; let none be wanting, for I have a great sacrifice to offer to Baal. Whosoever shall be wanting shall not live. Now Jehu did this craftily, that he might destroy the worshippers of Baal.” (4 Ki. 10:18-19)

“And Jehu and Jonadab the son of Rechab went to the temple of Baal, and said to the worshippers of Baal: Search and see that there be not any with you of the servants of the Lord, but that there be the servants of Baal only. And they went in to offer sacrifices and burnt offerings; but Jehu had prepared him fourscore men

without, and said to them: If any of the men escape whom I have brought into your hands, he that letteth him go shall answer life for life. And it came to pass when the burnt offering was ended, that Jehu commanded his soldiers and captains, saying: Go in and kill them; let none escape. And the soldiers and captains slew them with the edge of the sword and cast them out, and they went into the city of the temple of Baal and brought the statue out of Baal's temple and burnt it." (4 Ki. 10:23-26)

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