

The Seeds of Deception

by Barbara Buzzard

Who would have thought that with all the lies being told, accepted, even expected in our culture, that some of the most dangerous lies would be the lies we tell ourselves? Psalm 119:29a is a prayer of David asking God to keep us from deceiving ourselves: “Keep me from lying to myself” (NLT). Obviously we have a tendency to do so. And this goes hand in hand with the Proverb which warns that fools deceive themselves (Prov. 14:8b, NLT).

A nationwide best seller in the early 80’s was challenging to Christians not only because of the title but because its premise corresponds to Scripture: *People of the Lie* by M. Scott Peck. The author contends that people become “people of the lie” because of their inability or unwillingness to tolerate the pain of *admitting their own faults*. The lie that results is *self-deception*.

The people of the lie have these characteristics in common:

In their case, evil comes not from the absence of guilt but in the efforts to *escape* it.

They are scapegoaters, projecting onto others their own sins, while denying wrongdoing.

They deny their conscience and fail to hate themselves when they should.

While they lack any motivation to *be* good, they intensely desire to *appear* good.

Their “goodness” is all pretense. It is eye service. And therefore it is a lie.

This lie doesn’t deceive others as much as it deceives themselves.

Spy the Lie: The Truth about Lies

Author Dr. Peck aligns himself with Scripture in acknowledging that “pride goes before a fall.” He defines this pride as a feature which “unrealistically denies our inherent sinfulness and imperfection,”¹ and he affirms how very dangerous this is. Peck emphasizes that to “people of the lie” self-deception is an integral part of their behavior; so much so that they are *willing to sacrifice and harm and even destroy others in order to preserve their own self-image*. He names this trait malignant narcissism and finds it to be a root of evil and utterly perverse.

One characteristic of the people Peck describes is a failure to ever put themselves on trial. “Unpleasant though it may be, the sense of personal sin is precisely

that which keeps our sin from getting out of hand. It is a very great blessing because it is our one and only effective safeguard against our own proclivity for evil.”² Lies are devastating, and no less devastating when they are lies told to ourselves. It is damaging to ignore or otherwise escape one’s conscience. I am reminded of lepers and the fact that they cannot feel the pain which acts as a signal to escape, i.e. burning one’s fingers by touching a hot stove. The nerve endings which cause one to immediately retreat because of pain are, in fact, a blessing, saving one from further harm. So too, an active and functional conscience is our *friend*, a safeguard, preventing disaster. And should we fail, God has allowed us to be *blessed* by guilt.

Parenthetically let me add that Peck did not begin his practice in psychology with a view of Satan as an active being, but he became a believer in the power and personality of this being as a result of what he saw and experienced. The following is what he has come to believe: “Pervading this personality (Satan) is an active presence of hate. Satan wants to destroy us. It is important that we understand this...To think otherwise is to be misled. Indeed...perhaps Satan’s best deception is its (sic) general success in concealing its (sic) own reality from the human mind.”³

When Jesus said “Blessed are the poor in spirit” (or meek) was he not contrasting their behavior with the Pharisees or the fat cats of Jesus’ day? Isn’t pride the most basic of all sin? Isn’t it pride which convinces us of the rightness of our conduct — i.e. the sin of believing that we are without sin? All spiritually healthy adults must submit to their own consciences. Not to do so causes one to sin. We must win the conflict between guilt and the overriding or escape of that guilt. The seeds of deception activate our failure to *own up*. Guilt functions as a *good* thing *as long as* it moves us to repent of our actions and change course. It must not be eclipsed. And then of course, that marvelous miracle of forgiveness comes into action and will cleanse us not only of sin but of guilt.

A Reality

“Evil always has something to do with lies,”⁴ states Peck, and again he points out the danger of the self love behind these lies. He reminds his readers that Satan is the father of lies and that his greatest power is through human belief in his lies. One has only to remember the enormous emphasis on lying in Psalms

¹ *People of the Lie*, p. 80.

² *Ibid.*, p. 72.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

and Proverbs to make a connection with what Peck is saying. Our culture seems to have reduced lying to no more than being untidy or late (e.g. fibs and white lies). Scripture seems to view it quite differently, i.e. the difference between being a fool and not. “The poor, deluded fool feeds on ashes. He is trusting something that can give him no help at all. Yet he cannot bring himself to ask, ‘Is this thing, this idol that I’m holding in my hand, a lie?’” (Isa. 44:20, NLT).

This is a critically current issue. I find it heartbreaking that this lie which Peck speaks of (the pretense of blamelessness, etc.) has become somewhat prominent in the counseling field where the “move on” approach seems to have done away with repentance, and remorse is made to seem unnecessary. The sorrow and remorse which accompany guilt and recognition of wrongdoing are *good* emotions, not to be avoided or done away with. They are cleansing tools and an integral part of a healing process.⁵

The only way *out* is *through*, not avoidance. Let us not rewrite the story of the prodigal son to say that if the son sneered and swaggered into his father’s house and demanded certain things, then the father would react in much the same way as he did, hugging his neck, having a feast prepared, etc. Do you think?! Repentance cannot be replaced by group hugs. Isn’t this an abrogation of moral judgment; an unwillingness or inability to recognize sin? And yet Proverbs 28:13b tells us that the confession of sin and the forsaking of it will gain us the mercy we all desire.

An Invitation

Dare we change the modus operandi as given to us in Scripture? In one sense, all of Scripture is a story of repentance and forgiveness. It is God’s invitation to change direction and walk a new path. But it is also a *contract that we must enter into*. If one half of the agreement is removed (our part) in favor of a “moving on” approach, we have done it our way and not God’s way. “For evil arises in the refusal to acknowledge our own sins.”⁶ Could we be at the point described in Psalm 12:8 where “evil is praised throughout the land”? *Doing away with repentance is doing away with conscience*, and according to Dr. Peck’s thesis that would be a major disaster.

⁵ A critical reader will make the point that the “snowflakes” and “cupcakes” (spoiled millennials) of our day often don’t have the same degree of conscience that

An Imperative

An intense concentration on lies causes me to consider truth and how dangerous it is to be without it. We are all prey to the propaganda that truth is only subjective. The very idea of truth or a search for truth may sound foreign, and yet truth should be injected into every thought, every expectation, moral view, value system and philosophy that we operate from. One of the most important things we can do to have greater power and confidence is to *identify lies*. They then lose their power over us. We do this by countering the lie with the truth and denouncing that “lie in my right hand” (Isa. 44:20).

The Hope

Dr. Peck emphasizes that one of the most important reasons for identifying evil is the *healing* of its victims, as his subtitle states: “The *Hope* for Healing Human Evil.” I am reminded of Proverbs 17:15 which warns us that “The Lord despises those who acquit the guilty and condemn the innocent.” Very interesting, as it appears that one is as bad as the other. We must not be guilty of either one. It is incumbent upon us to recognize the lie so as to disown it. It is further absolutely required of us to walk in the truth. The sole point of concentrating on this evil side of our nature and on the Evil One who tempts us is not to badger/berate/condemn but to help/heal/equip all of us who are at risk.

Consider Daniel 8:25a, which confirms how self-deceit and lies work hand in hand to produce evil: “His deceitful lies will make him so successful that he will think he is really great” (CEV).

The “people of the lie” are not correctable. That is their great sin. Both the Psalms and the Proverbs are treatises on the correction which we all need: if you are *this*, then you must become *that*. What does it mean to be meek? Our hope lies in this quality, as not only will the meek be recognized by our Father but rewarded with that promised land we have all heard of (Matt. 5:5).

The hope for healing human evil is spelled out here: “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and heal their land” (2 Chron. 7:14). And the conclusion of the matter is this: “The sacrifice you want is a broken spirit; a broken and repentant heart, O God, you will not despise” (Ps. 51:17). ✧

the older generation possess.

⁶ *People of the Lie*, p. 233.