

Be Honest in All Behavior

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One of the principles of the BYU Code of Honor is:

Be honest in all behavior.

This includes not cheating, plagiarizing, or knowingly giving false information.

I propose to speak to you today about honesty and truthfulness.

There are few words in the English language with any more beautiful connotations than the word *truth*. In one of its meanings, the word *truth* is synonymous with the gospel of Jesus Christ. The scripture teaching us that the glory of God is intelligence adds “or in other words, light and truth” (D&C 93:36). The Psalmist referred to God as the “Lord, God of truth” (Ps. 31:5). John described Jesus as “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

The children of God have always been commanded to seek the truth and to say what is true. We are all familiar with the Ten Commandments the Lord gave the children of Israel through Moses. They include: “Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor” (Exod. 20:16). Proverbs contains this teaching: “A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape” (Prov. 19:5).

There is no more authoritative or clear condemnation of the dishonest and lying person than the Savior’s description of the devil as a liar and as the father of lies (John 8:44). In the apostolic letters we read these commandments: “Lie not one to another” (Col. 3:9), and “Wherefore, . . . speak every man truth with his neighbor” (Eph. 4:25). In his condemnation of the lawless and disobedient, the apostle Paul listed murderers, whoremongers, those that defiled themselves with mankind (an obvious reference to homosexuality), and “liars and perjured persons” (1 Tim. 1:9–10).

Jacob, the Book of Mormon prophet, declared that the liar “shall be thrust down to hell” (2 Ne. 9:34). Similarly, in the great vision on the three degrees of glory, the Prophet Joseph Smith included “liars, and sorcerers, and adulterers, and whoremongers, and whosoever loves and makes a lie” as among those who were to “suffer the wrath of God on earth,” and to be cast down to hell to “suffer the vengeance of eternal fire” (D&C 76:103–6; also D&C 63:17). Elsewhere in the Doctrine and Covenants we read: “Woe be unto him that

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lieth to deceive . . . for such are not exempt from the judgment of God” (D&C 10:28); and “Thou shalt not lie; he that lieth and will not repent shall be cast out” (the law of the Church—D&C 42:20).

Revealed scripture teaches us that truth is a “knowledge of things as they are, and as they were, and as they are to come; And whatsoever is more or less than this is the spirit of that wicked one who was a liar from the beginning” (D&C 93:24–25). To speak the truth is therefore to speak things as they were and as they are. In other words, to give an accurate account of the facts.

The thirteenth Article of Faith declares that “we believe in being honest, [and] true. . . .” To be “true” includes appearing to be what we really are. In this usage, truth is the opposite of the hypocrisy that our Savior condemned so vigorously. His stern rebuke of hypocrisy rings down through the centuries in all the sharpness with which it was originally issued:

Ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and the platter; but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness. [Luke 11:39]

For ye are like unto whited sepulchers, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness.

Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity. [Matt. 23:27–28]

Some Examples of Dishonesty

In speaking upon the subject of honesty and truthfulness I am keenly aware that most of our BYU students are honest and truthful, fulfilling the commandments to the best of their ability. But there are many who need reminding. We are told that one purpose of the gospel is to “make bad men good and good men better.” The commandments of the Lord pose a standard so high that we are all

challenged when commanded to live them to perfection.

I once attended a revival sermon preached by a minister of another church. His subject was sin. I soon learned that he was against it. Calling sin by name, he condemned it, castigated it, cussed it, discussed it, consigned it to outer darkness, and called his listeners to repent from it. After his vigorous half-hour sermon, I had no doubts whatever that he was against sin, but I was no wiser about what it was.

By now you know that I am in favor of honesty and truthfulness and against lying. To avoid any possible doubt about the kind of dishonesty and lying I condemn, I propose to give specific examples.

It is dishonest to write a check with insufficient funds in the bank to cover the check. The check, being a false representation of fact, is a lie. It is also a crime and deserves to be treated that way.

It is also dishonest to obtain merchandise on credit, such as by using a credit card, without knowing how you will pay the debt. At an aggravated level, when the individual, upon contracting a debt, has no intention of paying it, his obtaining merchandise by this means is the crime of obtaining property under false pretenses.

Similarly, it is dishonest for a student to run up a bill for rent, telephone services, or other obligations, and then skip out, leaving roommates to carry the burden. It is dishonest to make a long-distance call and charge it to a nonexistent number. It is also dishonest and fraudulent to use the telephone to send messages that do not result in fair charges on the telephone bill. This includes the use of an uncompleted collect or person-to-person call placed in such a way that it carries a coded message, such as “I have arrived safely at my destination.” Telephone executives advise that this is a major problem, and I regret that it involves our community as well as others. The

telephone company sells the service of its long-distance lines. When a person uses those lines to convey messages but evades payment, that person has stolen something from the company just as surely as he would steal from a movie theater by sneaking past the ticket window, or from a merchant by slipping merchandise past the cash register without paying. In each of these instances the crime of theft is aggravated by the lie the thief tells about his intent.

Also to be classified as a lie and a dishonest act, since it involves a falsification of identity or intent, is the practice of using another student's activity card or lending an activity card to give an unqualified person admission to facilities and activities. Another instance of falsification of identity has been used to obtain access to the Varsity Theater. When an attendant at the Varsity Theater observes a patron who is clearly in violation of our Dress and Grooming Standards, he is instructed to ask whether the person is a BYU student. We do this to permit us to take the person is a BYU student. We do this to permit us to take appropriate action for the student but to avoid giving offense to campus visitors, who are not subject to our Dress and Grooming Standards. I am sorry to report that some liars have denied their student status in order to avoid their responsibilities to our standards. That kind of reprehensible conduct not only corrupts the liar, it also inhibits our efforts to treat our guests with dignity and fairness.

A dishonest act is also committed by the person who, without authorization, pulls class cards for other persons at registration time. A student who solicits another to do this for him asks him to lie and commit a dishonest act. A handful of long-haired male students have engaged in another dishonest practice at registration. Unwilling to conform to our grooming standard on the length of hair and also unwilling to face up honestly to the consequences of that refusal, a few young men have come through the registration line wearing

short-haired wigs. That kind of conduct would be ridiculous and laughable if it were not such a classic example of lying deception to gain advantage. Persons guilty of this kind of dishonesty should remember President Tanner's statement in his message to the ten-stake fire-side last November: "If a young man is dishonest in any way, he is on the way to destruction."

Karl G. Maeser taught that sooner or later everyone of us "must stand at the forks of the road, and choose between personal interests and some principle of right" (Alma P. Burton, *Karl G. Maeser, Mormon Educator*, p. 74).

A person who faces up to the truth and speaks it honestly, without reservation and without attempted concealment, is on the path of growth and success. An individual who conceals and misrepresents, however small the matter, sows the seeds of his own corruption. As Thomas Jefferson observed:

He who permits himself to tell a lie once, finds it much easier to do it a second and third time, 'til at length it becomes habitual; he tells lies without attending to it, and truths without the world's believing him. This falsehood of the tongue leads to that of the heart, and in time depraves all its good dispositions. [Thomas Jefferson in a letter to Peter Carr, 19 August 1785, quoted in *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, 13th ed., p. 373]

Knowingly Giving False Information

Whenever I hear persons argue that it is only a "little lie," I think of the criminal who approached an employee and asked, "Would you help me steal your employer's property if I paid you one million dollars?" After a moment's thought, the surprised employee said that he supposed he would, for one million dollars. The criminal replied: "Well, I will give you twenty dollars, so lets get started."

The employee angrily replied, "What do you take me for, a thief?"

“We have already established that,” the criminal responded; “now we are just haggling over the price.”

Whether the amount is large or small, the crime is stealing. Whether the lie is large or small, the sin is lying.

At Brigham Young University we believe that we do not serve our students well if we teach them all the wisdom in the world but fail to give them the basic principles of righteous living that will give them direction in this life and eternal happiness in the world to come.

Since its earliest days, Brigham Young University has been concerned with the self-discipline, training, and conduct of the individual. Character training was an important part of the philosophy of Dr. Karl G. Maeser, the founding genius of Brigham Young University. No one was truly educated, in his eyes, unless his character, honor, and truthfulness were above criticism. He asked all who entered Brigham Young Academy to give him their word of honor that they would live in accordance with the high ideals and standards of the Church and the regulations of the school. We still ask students to make that promise, a commitment to live by the principles of the Code of Honor.

When I was a student at BYU twenty years ago, I often heard President Wilkinson refer to one of Karl G. Maeser’s teachings about honor. The example was so vivid and applicable that I often recalled it after I left BYU. I will share it with you:

My young friends, I have been asked what I mean by word of honor. I will tell you. Place me behind prison walls—walls of stone ever so high, ever so thick, reaching ever so far into the ground—there is a possibility that in some way or another I may be able to escape. But stand me on that floor and draw a chalk line around me and have me give my word of honor never to cross it. Can I get out of that circle? No, never! I’d die first! [Alma P. Burton, Karl G. Maeser, Mormon Educator, p. 71]

President McKay was fond of quoting a well-known Scottish writer who declared that “it is a greater compliment to be trusted than to be loved” (George Macdonald, quoted in *Richard Evans’ Quote Book*, p. 179).

One of the most grievous forms of lying is a lie told to a bishop or branch president or stake president or other Church officer. Serious also are lies told to university personnel, to public officials, or to others with important responsibilities that can be frustrated by the lie and the liar. President Spencer W. Kimball has written:

Those who lie to Church leaders forget or ignore an important rule and truth the Lord has set down: that when he has called men to high places in his Kingdom and has placed on them the mantle of authority, a lie to them is tantamount to a lie to the Lord; a half truth to his officials is like a half truth to the Lord. [The Miracle of Forgiveness, p. 183]

A lie is not always told in so many words. It may be a creature of concealment or a misrepresentation by action or a half-truth. According to Elder Richard L Evans,

Truth or untruth is not always altogether a matter of literal language, but often of implication, of inflection, of innuendo, of subtle suggestion. A clever person intent on being untruthful can give a false impression, even when his literal words can little be called into question. [“The Spoken Word,” Improvement Era (November 1961), p. 854]

What would you say about the conduct of a Church member of my acquaintance who once bragged to me about the following incident? His Church responsibilities required him to attend a stake auxiliary meeting that was held during a time when he was required to be present for shift work at his place of employment. He asked his employer for permission to attend the meeting, but permission was denied. “But I fooled him,” this brother told

me; “I had my wife call me in sick so I could attend my meeting.”

The same kind of lying is done by our own students who refrain from registering their automobiles as required by our university regulations and then gain access to the campus, even with preferred parking, by approaching one of our traffic control booths, denying their status as students, and representing themselves as visitors to the campus.

To cite another example, I have recently received a disturbing report about the conduct of a few of our students receiving veterans’ benefits. The full monthly payment is dependent upon the student’s maintaining a full load in school. Occasionally a student registers for a full load and then drops a class. When this happens, the University is required to report the reduction in load to the Veterans Administration so it can reduce the monthly payment to the veteran. We have had instances where students have become furious at University officials who reported this change in registered hours. Some students have urged our staff to falsify the record so they will not receive a reduction in their monthly payment. I hasten to add that this reprehensible conduct is limited to a tiny minority of the eligible persons. The overwhelming majority of our veterans on campus, just like our student body at large, are honest and would not stoop to this kind of fraud and deceit.

Our Code of Honor includes three examples of our standard of “honesty in all behavior.” I have already given illustrations of what we condemn as knowingly giving false information. The second example is plagiarism, which is a variety of lying consisting of representing the work of another person as one’s own thoughts or writings.

Cheating

The third example of dishonest behavior treated specifically in our Code of Honor is cheating. It should be obvious to everyone that

the person who cheats on an examination lies to his or her teacher and commits a dishonest act of serious dimension. Misrepresentations of fact within trusted relationships—such as husband and wife, parent and child, or teacher and pupil—are particularly vicious since they cause serious deterioration in these crucial relationships.

The aftereffects of cheating are vividly described in a letter I received last week from a former BYU student who wrote to apologize for cheating on several examinations at BYU ten years ago. I quote from her letter:

How paltry the false reward of a slightly higher grade compared to the pangs of conscience I have felt as a result of my dishonesty. Let no one scoff at “a little” cheating as being a minor offense of no account, for the conscience of anyone who knows the commandments of God and the truths of the Gospel of Jesus Christ will prove him gravely mistaken, as I have learned most painfully.

The writer of this letter was seeking to confess her wrong and complete the repentance she needs to clear her mind of this matter. As I read her letter, I thought of the teaching in the Doctrine and Covenants:

By this ye may know if a man repenteth of his sins—behold he will confess them and forsake them. [D&C 58:43]

I also thought of the cleansing miracle of forgiveness, which promises that when we have truly repented of our sins we will be forgiven and the Lord will “remember them no more” (D&C 58:42). In contrast, if we are unrepentant and rebellious, the Lord has decreed that in time to come our “iniquities shall be spoken upon the housetops, and [our] secret acts shall be revealed” (D&C 1:3).

Standards of Dress and Grooming

Another aspect of honesty and truthfulness for students and employees of Brigham Young University is the matter of adherence to our Dress and Grooming Standards. This becomes a matter of honesty and truthfulness because each student admitted to Brigham Young University promises in his or her admissions application to abide by the principles of the Code of Honor and the Dress and Grooming Standards, and that commitment is renewed each registration. Students who are in deliberate violation of the Dress and Grooming Standards are therefore promise breakers, and when that violation is continued through the promises of another registration period, the violators are *liars* in addition. If that word seems harsh to you, how would you fairly characterize such behavior?

The importance of our standards of dress and grooming and other principles of our Code of Honor was recently reemphasized by the First Presidency. In a letter of January 2, 1973, to all stake and mission presidents, bishops, and branch presidents of the Church the First Presidency directed that the interview of prospective students for BYU and other parts of the Church Educational System “should be conducted very carefully and should make specific reference to the Code of Honor and to the Dress and Grooming Standards that are a part of the specific requirements to which bishops must refer in attesting that a prospective student is worthy and will abide by these special standards.”

The First Presidency further instructed that “in view of the special expectations we have concerning students in the Church Educational System, it is a serious mistake to recommend an individual for admission—even for rehabilitative reasons—who would detract from, rather than support, the special environment that thousands of others create and rely upon.” The Presidency’s letter concluded with this unambiguous declaration: “Bishops and

prospective students should know that the Code of Honor and the Dress and Grooming Standards have the full support and approval of the First Presidency and the Twelve.”

This is not the time to speak at length on the reasons underlying our Code of Honor and our Dress and Grooming Standards. The reason for the principles of the Code of Honor, such as the requirements to respect personal rights and property rights, to obey the law, to avoid drug abuse, to live the law of chastity, and to observe the Word of Wisdom, should be self-evident. These are all principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Our standards of dress and grooming have several purposes. Our requirement that women’s skirts must be of “modest length” embodies an eternal principle—the modesty our leaders have always asked us to cultivate as a principle of decency and propriety, as a principle of “respect for one’s self, one’s fellowmen, and the Creator of us all” (*Priesthood Bulletin* [September 1970], p. 1).

Our rules against bare feet in the public campus areas and against shorts and cut-offs and grubby attire of all types, including the wearing of Levi’s or blue jeans by young women, are responsive to our desire to promote the beauty and harmony of the campus. They are also responsive to our conviction that people’s attitudes and thoughts and behavior are related to the way they present themselves to those around them. This concern with grubby apparel applies to men and women alike. In a letter to “Dear Abby” a young woman recently complained about high school dress and grooming standards quite similar to those at BYU. “Do you honestly believe that a person’s dress affects his behavior?” the writer asked. Abby’s response asserted that studies had shown that people’s dress did affect their behavior. She concluded with this thought: “Kids who dress like they’re going to a hayride are more inclined to horse around” (*Deseret News*, 23 January 1973, p. 14-A).

Our rules against beards and long hair have the same purpose as the requirements our Church makes of its missionaries. In this university, which is largely supported by the tithes of faithful members and which stands as a beacon of Latter-day Saint values, we wish to avoid an appearance that has become associated with rebellion and rejection of values we hold dear. A recent book by Jerry Rubin, the clown prince of the hippy movement, gives this vivid characterization of the meaning of long hair:

Long hair is communication. Young kids identify short hair with authority, discipline . . .—and long hair with letting go, letting your hair down, being free, being open. Wherever we go, our hair tells people where we stand on Vietnam, Wallace, campus disruption, dope. We're living TV commercials for the revolution.

Long hair is the beginning of our liberation from the sexual oppression that underlies this whole military society. [Jerry Rubin, *Do It*, pp. 93, 95–96]

While I am on the subject of dress and grooming, I will add a word about the rules we apply. I still receive quite a number of communications from students and faculty asking for clarifications of the standards. Currently most questions relate to the length of men's hair and sideburns. This matter of definition is in the hands of the Campus Life Committee. I invite those who have questions on this subject to visit their office in Room 329 of the Wilkinson Center and obtain a copy of the guidelines. These guidelines consist of the dress and grooming standards and a few administrative clarifications. For instance, the dress and grooming standard that hair "must be styled so that it does not cover the ears and must be above the collar in the back," has been interpreted to mean "it must be cut above the ears so that it cannot cover *any part of the ear*." Long hair in front swept back over the ears is not

appropriate. The cut line in back must be above a regular dress shirt collar."

In this connection I repeat my urging that individuals not skate on the thin ice at the edge of the standards, but place themselves clearly within the limits defined by these important standards. During the last registration almost one hundred faculty members assisted the Campus Life Committee in checking the dress and grooming of students who were registering. Now we should have a thousand faculty doing the same thing as they meet their classes and counsel with their students. I have heard a good many complaints about a lack of consistency. I think we must concede that when a standard is being applied by so many individuals it is inevitable that there will be some lack of consistency. But it is also true that this lack of consistency will work to the detriment of those only who persist in being close to the line, whether it is in the matter of sideburns, hair length, or grubby apparel. I urge that those students who would avoid the unfavorable consequences attaching to the inevitable lack of consistency should not persist in skating along the thin ice at the edge of the standard. Stay well within the limits, and live at peace with yourself and the standards.

Absolute Honesty: the Easiest Way

Every person in a position of responsibility, including teachers, employers, church leaders, and others, is asked to write evaluations and recommendations for students or fellow-workers. Prospective employers and educational institutions invariably request these recommendations because they need something more than the objective measures of a person's competence, such as grades. They need evaluations of such intangibles as dependability, honesty, and truthfulness. How satisfying it is when a teacher or employer can record that an individual has those hallmarks of character. How distressing it is when one must refrain, however tactfully, from an

unqualified recommendation of character. How doubly tragic it is when the individual who is being evaluated has been false to a trust, a purveyor of deceit, or an unreliable steward, and that fact must be reported to those who are responsible for his future opportunities. A person who possesses all of the attributes for success, including talent, brilliance, and skills, cannot attain the heights of his potential without the quality of absolute honesty.

The qualities of honesty and truthfulness are the foundation of all organizations and all personal relationships. If a husband or an employee or a student or a teacher cannot be relied upon to tell the truth—not just usually but invariably—a relationship with that individual can never be a satisfactory one. Like their companion virtue of loyalty, honesty and truthfulness are not valuable unless they are absolute. How much trust would you place in a person who told you the truth ninety-five percent of the time? How much value is an employee who does not steal from his employer—ninety-five percent of the time? The ninety-five-percenter is like a leaky bucket: the hole may be small, but it renders the entire vessel unworthy of its purpose. Unless the hole can be mended, the bucket is bound for the trash heap.

In the long run, the course of absolute honesty and total truthfulness is not only the *best* course but also the *easiest*. The person who lies and then must tell another lie to cover the first, and then another and another until he has built a whole overlapping shingled roof of lies is a person to be pitied. At some point one of those covering lies will be exposed, and the whole overlapping structure will come down with a clap of thunder like the doomsday bell. The liar's iniquity will truly be "spoken upon the housetop."

A person who is only partially honest and only partially truthful is always having to make hard decisions about whether each new circumstance of life calls for honesty or deceit. How much better to commit oneself to the way of absolute honesty and truthfulness. A person with that commitment will waste no time or energy on deciding whether or when or the extent to which he will compromise with principle.

Happy is the individual whose personal code of honor dictates behavior consistent with the eternal principles of growth. Free from internal conflict and external deception, that individual can enjoy the blessings of peace in the present and growth in the eternities to come. That person will know the meaning of our Savior's declaration that "my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:30).