

# Tax season 'tis the season for lying

If Christmas is the season to be jolly, then April 15 is the season to lie. The truth makes us free, the Bible says. But truth is hard to come by this time of year.

In fact, the IRS has developed an attitude that everyone lies and therefore the burden of proving innocence rests upon the taxpayer if he's ever audited.

When is it permissible to tell a lie? Machiavelli approved lying for princes. Nietzsche reserved the privilege of lying for his exceptional hero — the Superman. Emmanuel Kant insisted all lies were immoral — even those told to a murderer to protect an innocent life. Erasmus disagreed, but Cardinal Newman said Kant was correct. Instead of lying to a murderer, the cardinal said, we ought to say nothing, knock him down, and call the gendarmes.

The Talmud allows for lies for “bed” (inquiries into one’s sex life) and “hospitality” (if a host was generous, one could lie about it so the host would not be inundated by unwelcome guests). And, of course, the Bible says no liar will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.

Taken literally, that means anyone who has ever filled out a form 1040, sold a used car, or dated a homely girl needs to do some serious repenting.

And what do we do with politicians who stand before us and tell bald-faced lies — or who make promises they know they can never fulfill?

American social psychologist Jerald Jellison estimates that the average American outstrips Pinocchio by telling a whopping 200 lies a day. Incredible. But that includes lies to one self — “Today I’ll start on my diet”; lies to one’s wife — “Honest, honey, I think you look great with all that makeup around your eyes”; and lies to God — “I’ll never do it again, Lord.”

The fact that lying has become a socially, and in some instances legally, accepted practice gives us little comfort. The government lies to us. The requirement for the doctor to be honest with his patient is no longer in the

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## Perspective

by Jamie Buckingham

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medical oaths and code of ethics and is often frowned upon by teachers of medicine. Journalists use deceptive methods to uncover deception. Preachers laugh about “ministerial exaggeration.” And in a typical experiment in social psychology, the subject is misled about the aims of the study to see how he reacts under pressure.

Lying by the president of the United States, the members of Congress, judges and military leaders has so corrupted politics that the last Cambridge Survey indicated that 73 percent of the public believes the nation’s leaders consistently lie to us.

Do they? I think so.

Yet, like a lot of other Americans, I signed my tax return this week — and tried to be as honest as I could about where I got my money and how I spent it. This is the greatest nation on earth and I don’t mind paying a fair share for the privilege of living here, to protect it from the savages who would destroy it, and to help those who have less than I.

But inside, there is a deep sadness when I think that my tax return will be examined by someone who will not respect my honesty or morality, but will, instead, assume I am lying.

I yearn for the time when liars will not only be blocked from heaven, but from the county commission, the city council, and from the IRS offices as well. Until that happens, I’ll continue to teach my kids that honesty is the best policy. I have no illusions that we can turn this nation around, but I believe that in the middle of corruption, those who live truth can also find happiness.