

Dear Phil

ing from the north when you're really coming from the west is strategy, not a lie. God sets up this kind of strategy in His instructions to Joshua about the battle of Ai (Joshua 7). He told Joshua to set a few thousand men in front of the city to stage an attack, while he sent 30,000 men behind the city.

When the men of Ai came out to fight, the Israelites in front of the city were to fall back as though they were frightened and fleeing. This would lure the men of Ai out of the city so that the army behind the city could enter and destroy the city. As a result, the army of Ai was trapped in the open without any retreat and totally annihilated. I think the lying spirit from God that persuaded Ahab to go to his destruction can be explained within the framework of war as well (1 Kings 22:19-23).

I would suggest that you encourage the gentleman to avoid direct assertions of untruths in dealing with criminals simply for his conscience's sake (Rom. 14:23). On the other hand, he should recognize that leading a criminal into confessing a crime or telling the truth can be an exercise of godly wisdom.

Sincerely,
Philip Brown ■

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TRUTH-TELLING AND CRIMINAL INVESTIGATIONS

A gentleman in our church recently joined the police force and asked me about interrogation tactics. Often interrogators will mislead a suspect into believing that his partner has ratted on him, hoping this will lead to a confession. Is it biblically permissible to extract truth by means that are deceitful? —Ray

Dear Ray,

I don't claim to have studied this issue exhaustively. I would like to read a carefully thought-through treatment of this topic. Unfortunately, I don't know of any. So, here's my best shot.

The first thing that comes to my mind is the biblical example of the wisdom that God gave to Solomon. You remember the story from 1 Kings 3. Solomon was dealing with two prostitutes. Both claimed that the other had accidentally killed her baby and that the living child was hers. Obviously, one was lying, but Solomon didn't know which.

In order to identify the true mother of the contested baby, he commanded the remaining baby to be cut in two. By allowing both the liar and the truth-teller to think he was going to kill the child, he extracted the truth by comparing the expected response (compassion for the child) to the two mothers'

reactions (the liar didn't care, whereas the true mother did).

Did Solomon lie? Technically, he did not assert something that was untrue. However, he did do something that caused the two women to think he would kill the child, even though I don't believe that was his true intention.

Here's what I might say to your parishioner. The Bible makes it clear that we are to be truth-tellers (Eph. 4:25). God hates lying because His nature is one of truth (Prov. 6:16-17; John 14:6). The Bible teaches we are not to do evil that good may come (Rom. 3:8). We are to overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:21).

On the other hand, there is biblical data that suggests that, in situations like war and criminal investigations, the "enemy" does not have a right to the truth and thus our truth-telling obligations are different. In war, misleading the enemy into thinking you are com-