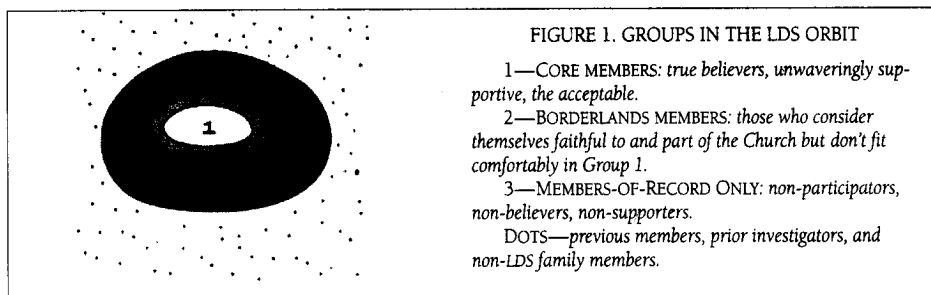


## THE DEVIL IS NOT IN THE DETAILS

by D. Jeff Burton



I WAS COPIED again on an unusual Wormwood email. I share it here because it relates to many Borderland experiences. I have been cc'd on these emails before, and have shared two of them in previous columns. The sender is apparently an "Uncle Screwtape" type, an Advanced Tempter Trainer in the Devil's Minions. He is overseeing his nephew, Wormwood, a Tempter Trainee assigned to a thoughtful young Mormon man with one foot in the Borderlands. Uncle himself is assigned to a well-regarded high priest serving on his stake high council.

From: Uncle666@temptationcentral.hel  
To: Wormwood001@cellblockboutiful.hel>

cc: D. Jeff Burton <jeff@eburton.com>  
Sent: Saturday, January 20  
Subject: Your recent message

My Dearest Nephew,

Your last email has provoked considerable distress on this end. Despite the fact that your man is moving into the LDS borderlands, you are having a devil of a time (as mortals say) tempting him into even the most basic of dishonest behaviors. Perhaps your latest failures will motivate you to better learn how to properly corrupt your man's natural desire to be honest.

You surely recognize that honesty is one of the chief cornerstones of our Enemy's principles of virtuous living. Honesty and

truthfulness, for example, are the first items of their Thirteenth Article of Faith, "We believe in being honest, true . . . , etc.," and their temple recommend interview includes the significant question, "Are you honest in your dealings with your fellow man?" Further, honesty will undoubtedly be one of the top measurement criteria at the Final Judgment.

Given that these facts are well known, one would think we would have a terrible time corrupting any Mormon's honesty. I must say, however, that we have had considerable success in perverting and obfuscating the very meaning of honesty and how it is to be applied to mortal life. For future reference, our methods work equally well in any religion.

It has been said that there is "not an honest man to be found" on the face of the earth. That observation comes close to reality for large chunks of humanity. Our Father Below, rightfully known as the "Father of Lies," should be credited for this resounding success. You must strive heartily to magnify your calling and follow as best you can the excellent methods developed by our most debased leader.

But before you go off blundering again, remember the basics. First, you have no hope of tempting your man into bald-faced lies. I am dismayed to read, for example, that when your man inadvertently slept late, you tried to tempt him to lie about his tardiness to work. "Tell them you had a flat

tire," you whispered in his ear.

My badness! You should have known your man wouldn't fall for that kind of straight-out dishonesty. Even when willing to tolerate some duplicity, most Mormons are clever and will avoid any too-obvious dishonesty. What if your man's boss had said, "Let's take your flat tire and get it fixed."

Busted!

Now read this next sentence carefully. Contrary to what you may think, you don't want your man getting caught by his fellows! Bear with me here. Humiliation is the one emotion men never forget. Being caught in a dishonest act or lie has created motivation in countless men to repent and curtail dishonest behaviors. So, your attempts at honesty corruption can actually be counter-productive to our cause.

Let us credit your clumsy efforts to a lack of knowledge. Though it is not for lack of trying on my part, your progress as a tempter worries me.

To be successful, a lie must *appear* to be truthful; it must not disclose any intent to harm the deceived one. It must be useful in some way to the liar; and, finally, it must convince the potential victim that your man really believes what he is saying. These four factors are the gold standard of successful dishonesty.

So now for today's lessons.

FIRST item. It is important that your man come to believe that all earthly creatures must necessarily be dishonest or deceitful in some circumstances. "It is in human DNA," you can tell him. "You can't help it." You can argue, for example, that it is as natural for a lioness to hide in the bushes so she can catch and carry food back to her hungry cubs as it is for a husband to tell his wife she looks beautiful when asked. In both cases, nature and survival are the authors of such "necessary" deceptions. In these cases, something positive and good has occurred.

Yes, this sounds counterproductive to our intentions. And perhaps there are times when this kind of deception results in overwhelming good. (We must ignore these rare episodes.) But in the end, confusion about honesty is very helpful to us.

For example, Mormon history is replete with "acceptable" and "necessary" deceptions, e.g., those surrounding the practice of polygamy, the operations of the shadowy Council of Fifty, and so forth. Since such deceptions have never been completely repudiated in most Mormon minds, secrecy,

deception, and dishonesty appear acceptable in “certain circumstances.” Plus every Mormon well knows the concepts of “milk before meat,” “faithful history,” “apologetics,” “discriminating truth,” and other subtle twistings of straightforwardness.

When you can enhance your man’s acceptance of the “naturalness” of dishonesty and exaggerate “all the good” that can occur when he is given the opportunity to be deceptive, he will become much more willing to justify a broad range of “necessary” falsehoods and expand the scope of “certain circumstances” that “require” deception. He will become more adept at overstating the “need” for artifice and moving ahead with confidence. He will be able to select truths that help him and ignore those that don’t.

**S** ECOND item. There are four types of honesty—two that are detrimental to our cause and two that are helpful. Your corruption work must be tailored to the specific types of honesty your man favors.

The first helpful type—one that I personally love—is what we sometimes term “fierce frankness” or “brutal honesty.” This is where your man is enticed to say (what is to him) “the simple truth.” He must think of it as “plain honesty.”

Now it may sound counterproductive for us to champion any type of honesty, but hear me out. As I mentioned before, suppose your man is asked by his wife, “Do you think I’m pretty?” Thanks to your promptings, he should answer, “Not really. Your hair is greasy, and because of your cold, your nose is kind of red. That’s what I honestly think.” Such correct (but hurtful) “truths” and (destructive) “honesty” will

naturally lead to other sinful behaviors by both of them! Trust me.

Another type of “honesty” we support is something I call the “presenting truth,” PT, for short. Many mortals employ the presenting truth or reason when explaining themselves to their betters, answering touchy questions, or trying to justify questionable behavior. It is the one statement calculated to win someone over to their side; it is the single best-sounding answer.

For example, if my man were asked why he pays tithing, I would have him solemnly respond with the best PT there is, “Because it is a commandment of God.” If he insists on saying more, I will encourage him to repeat one or two self-serving PTs, “I couldn’t afford not to pay tithing” or “It is an excellent way to learn how to share.”

But then, of course, he should do no more thinking or talking beyond the presenting truth. I do not want him to think about or say any other truths, e.g., “I want to maintain a temple recommend,” “My wife would be upset, and that could result in less fun in bed,” “I would lose my prominent calling in the stake,” “I would be embarrassed at tithing settlement,” “I’m afraid that God might take away all my stuff,” “God might make me sick,” “The Church needs the money,” “Because my boss is a bishop, I might lose my job promotion,” and so forth.

Not being upfront about such other truths (to themselves as well as to others) is a wonderfully subtle form of dishonesty that many Mormons do not readily recognize or, if they do, simply ignore. No matter. They are on our path.

On the other hand, one of the detrimental types of honesty is sometimes called complete, thoughtful, or transparent hon-

esty. This type you must try to keep from your man at all costs. He should not be allowed to consider it . . . or even to know about it.

This approach recognizes that honesty is often not “right or wrong” or “black or white” but a continuum with many facets to explore. It takes work and thoughtfulness to approach the “whole truth” of most matters affecting human behavior and thought.

Let me refresh your memory with your own man’s recent experience—one of your failures. As you recall, he was asked why he attends church. Because you had not properly coached him, he responded with something approaching the complete truth.


“Well, there are a lot of reasons,” he said. “I’d have to think about it to give you the complete answer, but these thoughts come quickly to mind. First, we are asked to attend—maybe even commanded for some meetings; I usually learn something new about how to live my life better; my friends are there; my wife expects me to be there with her; I want to keep my temple recommend; it feels good to be thinking about Jesus and how he would live if he were here in my shoes; my parents would be upset; I would feel guilty staying home; I am afraid that if I didn’t attend, I might not get some blessings and/or God might punish me; I like the peace and quiet of meetings; and finally, I suppose, it has become a habit.”

Yikes! Approaching the truth in this complete and thoughtful way allows mortals to see themselves more clearly and encourages them to make positive changes in their lives which makes our task that much more difficult.

Yet another ominous honesty type is

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called "personal honesty," or "self-honesty." it is closely allied to the complete truth mentioned above. Having personal honesty is being able to recognize all the motives and reasons for one's actions, being able to know and plumb the depths of one's mind and soul, and being able to account for, accept, and act on one's actual and genuine beliefs, emotions, and behaviors. Again, this is a form of honesty that we must continue to avoid and corrupt with all our might.

LET me give you an unfortunate example of my man in one of his rare displays of self-honesty several years ago. It occurred one weekend when I was away escorting a former successful client to Outer Darkness.

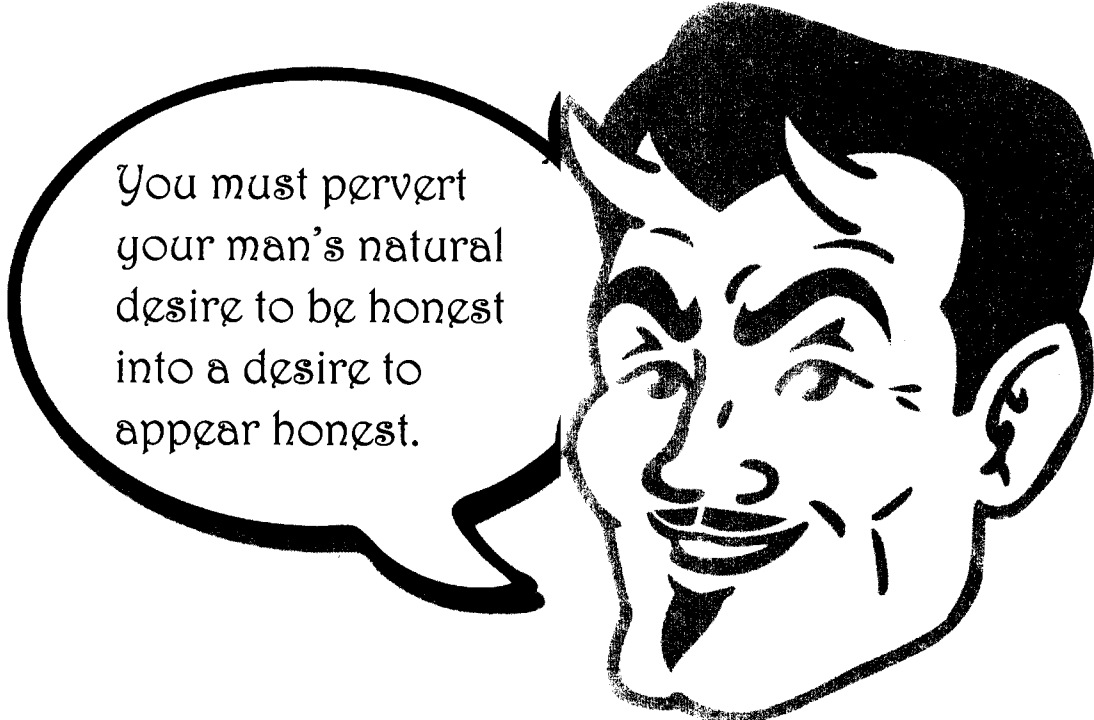
My man went to the stake president's office to renew his temple recommend and, among other things during the conversation, was asked what he thought about the possibility of serving as a stake high councilman. My man was excited but held his composure and quietly told the stake president, "Yes, if you think it would be appropriate."

The stake president responded with, "Well, that's why we're having this little chat—to discuss the possibility. Do you think it would be a good calling for you at this time?"

My man immediately stated a common and "harmless" deception (which everyone knows is the requisite false humility in these circumstances and is thus mostly ignored) plus an appropriate presenting truth.

"I really don't have any ambitions for such a calling," he said humbly. "But I am always willing to serve you and our Father in Heaven in any calling you . . ." My man paused to let the President "fill in the blanks" but the stake president just smiled and waited for my man to continue. So far, so good.

Then suddenly, because I was not there to guide him, my man began to share with



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the stake president some of the complete truth, showing an uncharacteristic degree of personal honesty. He went on about how he was a sometimes-prideful man who enjoyed being in the limelight, that the calling would give him stature in his family and ward, that it could help him in his daily job because his boss was a bishop; that he had always wanted to sit on the stand, and even that it might make his neighbor jealous. He even admitted to wondering if the Enemy had rejected him by withholding "higher" callings from him before.

It was a frightening performance, believe you me! Of course, the stake president was pleased by my man's honesty and humility, told him so, and soon gave him the calling. That's how my man got on the stake high council, much to my dismay (and later, amusement).

When Slobog found out about this whole sordid affair, he was about ready to banish me to Outer Darkness. But I convinced him that it was only a temporary setback. Slobog gave me another chance, thank the Devil.

Remember, young tempter, you must tailor your temptations to each situation. Help your man discount dishonest acts through plausible rationalizations such as, "a lot of good will come of it," "it doesn't

hurt anything," "everybody does it," "it's part of nature," "no one will know," "no one will care," "the situation calls for it," and so forth.

You must pervert your man's natural desire to *be* honest into a desire to *appear* honest. A subtle difference on the surface, but as deep as hell.

And finally, you must keep in mind the fact that a truly honest man is also likely to be kind, patient, thoughtful, caring, and generous and possess other nasty traits that take him far from our path.

I look forward to a positive report from you soon!

— Your Caring Uncle

Please send me your  
experiences from life  
in the Borderlands.

D. Jeff Burton,  
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