

Eph 4:25 NIV

Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.

False Memory

The likelihood of error increases when memories recall accounts of complex events rather than just simple perceptions or intentions. As William James noted at the end of the nineteenth century,

The most frequent source of false memory is the accounts we give to others of our experiences. Such accounts we almost always make both more simple and more interesting than the truth. We quote what we should have said or done rather than what we really said or did; and in the first telling we may be fully aware of the distinction. But ere long the fiction expels the reality from memory and reigns in its stead alone. This is one great source of the fallibility of testimony meant to be quite honest.

In a word, we are prone to embellish our memories - and we do so often and quite innocently, especially in storytelling. Even honest embellishments, suggested James between the lines, may be motivated by a subconscious desire to present ourselves in a better light. We should have said or done something, but we didn't. Helped by the passage of time, we improve upon the original by remembering that we have said or done what we should have said and done but clearly have not. Here memory is only tenuously related to what actually happened; for out of it has grown a fictive image or story fed by attitudes we find desirable and practices we find useful.

Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World*, pp 45-46 (Eerdmans, 2006)

John 8:32 NIV

Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."