Living Word
Lutheran Church
LCMS

Someone told me that an excuse is really a lie. Is that true?

An interesting question, since we all make excuses daily for things we did or didn't do. The answer to that question could have very important implications for our lives.

I checked a dictionary for the "official" word and found this:

EXCUSE: (n)   1. justification: a reason or explanation, not necessarily true, given in order to make something appear more acceptable or less offensive
2. false reason: a false reason that enables somebody to do something he or she wants to do or avoid something he or she does not want to do.

The dictionary backs up my "gut feeling" about the question: Chances are really good that an excuse is, at it's most basic level, a lie. Excuses tend to be "holy-sounding" reasons for why we did or didn't do something. The problem is that the "holy-sounding" reason really isn't the truth - it's not the real reason. Maybe that's why people seem to feel they need to use the phrase "legitimate excuse" those few times when an excuse really is the truth.

Excuses tend to be made on a couple of occasions.

1) We make excuses to keep from taking personal responsibility for things we've done wrong.

Remember Adam and Eve? Instead of simply admitting he was wrong, Adam tried to make himself look "holier" by putting the blame on Eve. Likewise, Eve, instead of just admitting that she blew it, tried to make herself look "holier" by inventing the line that made Flip Wilson rich "The devil made me do it."

2) We make excuses for things we know we should do, but don't want to.

A couple guys in the New Testament come to mind here.

 [59] He [Jesus] said to another man, "Follow me."

But the man replied, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father."

[60] Jesus said to him, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God."

[61] Still another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-by to my family."

[62] Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God."   Luke 9:59-62

Jesus' answers may seem a little strange, until you realize that He saw these excuses for what they were: "holy-sounding" lies for not following Him.

Excuses didn't end in Bible times. I just heard a room full of confirmation students exclaim that they didn't have time to get their confirmation assignments done because they have so much homework from school every day. No mention was made of the hours spent in front of the computer or TV or on the cell phone or listening to ipods. Too much homework from school is a much better sounding reason. The problem is it's still a lie.

Not to point fingers at the confirmation students. We adults are just as good at giving excuses (lies) for why we don't do what we should do - or why we did something wrong. Try paying attention to how many excuses you give and you may be surprise how often you give false reasons for your actions - reasons that are designed to make you look better than you really are.

This verse from God's Word is a good reminder for us when we are tempted to offer a "holy -sounding" reason that really isn't true:

   You know my folly, O God; my guilt is not hidden from you. Psalm 69:5

We may fool some people with our excuses, but God always sees them for what they are.

Thanks for asking the question. Maybe this will help us all think twice before offering an "excuse."

Thanks for asking,
Pastor David

Send your questions to pastor@livingwordlutheran.net