

Honor Truth – Exodus 20:16

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *The Biggest Lie*

1. A pastor was out for a walk one Saturday morning when he noticed a group of boys standing around a small stray dog. He asked, “What are you doing, boys?”
2. One of the boys said, “Telling lies. The one who tells the *biggest* lie gets the dog.”
3. The minister replied, “Really?!? That doesn’t seem right. When I was your age I *never* thought of telling a lie.”
4. The boys looked at one another, each with a disappointed look on his face. Then they shrugged and said, “Okay mister, you win. The dog’s yours.”

B. *The Ninth Commandment*

1. We’re concluding our series on the 10 Commandments today by looking at the ninth in Exodus 20:16.
2. This commandment, while aimed specifically at the court system of ancient Israel, reveals a fundamental moral necessity of honesty for all those who call themselves the people of God.

II. TEXT

A. *The Commandment*

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

1. I’m sorry to say *most* commentaries, sermons, and Bible studies that examine this commandment do it a bit of dis-service in that they *overlook* its unique form to deal exclusively with the *principle* behind it.
 - a. what I mean is they paraphrase the command with something like, “You shall not lie.”
 - b. in fact, this is such a traditional understanding of the ninth commandment, many people have *memorized* it that way.
2. But the commandment, as originally given by God, deals *specifically* with the testimony given by witnesses in court.
3. The objective of the courts is the promotion of justice; and justice can only be arrived at when the truth is disclosed.
4. When God says, “**You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor,**” He’s placing upon all men and women the duty of telling the truth when they’re called upon to give testimony at court.
5. You see, God is a God of *justice*, and the *purity* of justice among His people is a high priority.
 - a. some of God’s most serious later condemnations of the apostate nation of Israel were against their perverting justice in the judicial system
 - b. national leaders were rebuked and judged because they played favorites with the rich & powerful by distorting the truth at the cost of the weak and poor.
6. The 9th commandment, is aimed at maintaining the integrity of the court system in Israel by forbidding the bending of truth by those who are called as witnesses.

B. *Broken In Spades*

1. We *are* going to take a look at the principle of truthfulness *behind* the commandment, but let’s make sure we grasp the *main thrust* of the command *itself* before we do.
2. Maybe, the best way to do this is to consider a story from the NT which is the ultimate *breaking* of the 9th Commandment: Turn to Matthew 26 . . .

⁵⁹ **Now the chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death, ⁶⁰ but found none. Even though many false witnesses**

came forward, they found none. But at last **two false witnesses** came forward ⁶¹ and said, “This fellow said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.’”

3. God had charged the courts and judges of Israel with the task of *promoting* justice, but here we see the highest court of the land bent on *perverting* it!
 - a. their goal was to **condemn** Jesus and they knew the truth stood in His favor.
 - b. if the truth would only serve to commend Christ, then they would turn to lies and deceit – and they sought, catch that –THEY SOUGHT false testimony that would accuse and condemn Jesus.
 - c. there were many who were willing to play the part of false witness who came forward, but none of their testimonies were confirmed by another – and in the Jewish judicial system, the accusations of one were not enough to condemn a man – it took a minimum of **two** witnesses who agreed.
 - d. think of if – Jesus lived a life of such **truthful righteousness** that even when there was a conspiracy to condemn Him through false accusations, they couldn’t get the liars to agree!
 - e. but finally they found two witnesses who said they’d heard Jesus make a claim that was sure to condemn Him – that He could destroy the temple and then rebuild it in 3 days.
4. **Technically** – Jesus **had** said something very close to that.
 - a. in John 2, where we read of Jesus clearing the temple of the money-changers, when the authorities came to intervene, they asked Him by whose authority He worked and what sign He would give of that authority.
 - b. Jesus’ reply was - “**Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.**”^[1]
 - c. John explains that He wasn’t referring to the temple in Jerusalem, but the temple of His body, which He did raise up on the 3rd day after the crucifixion.
 - d. the two false witnesses said that Jesus had said He was able to destroy the temple **OF GOD**, and rebuild it in 3 days.
 - e. the testimony they gave as witnesses was technically correct, but by adding two little words of their own skewed interpretation to what Jesus said, they distorted the truth.
 - f. and that is what **they intended**; distortion was their aim!
 - g. their testimony was not given to **expose** the truth, but to **hide** it, even when the words they spoke were for the most part technically accurate.

C. The Heart Of The Commandment

1. This story reveals to us the *heart* of the 9th commandment.
2. Truth and **being truthful** is about far more than **accuracy** and fact-telling; truthfulness, honesty, and integrity are issues **of the heart**.
3. When it comes to truth, our **motives** are just as important as our **actions** or **words**.
 - a. one day Sam got \$50 too much in his paycheck, but didn't say a word.
 - b. the next week the paymaster found the mistake, and reduced the next paycheck by \$50.
 - c. Sam went to her and said, “Excuse me, but my check is \$50 short this week.”
 - d. the paymaster replied, “You didn't complain last week when it was over by \$50.”
 - e. Sam came back, “No ma’am - I don't mind overlooking **one** mistake. But when it happens **twice**, then it’s time to say something.”
4. Truth is more than facts. It’s a **faithful** relationship with what’s real & right.
5. To be **truthful** means to make a commitment to what God is doing in a given situation.
6. Let me use an illustration:
 - a. a first mate had been derelict in his ship-board duties and had been disciplined by the captain.
 - b. a few days later the captain fell ill and the first mate got his revenge.
 - c. while filling in for the captain, he made this entry in the ship’s log –
 - d. “Captain sober today.”
 - e. now, that was a **technically** correct statement – but the **intent** behind it was to harm the

- captain's reputation with his superiors.
- f. he was factually correct, but by writing what he did, he actually promoted a lie!
7. Truth is more than *facts*.
- truth is the glue that holds the facts together and unites them under the plan and purpose of God.
 - a *bare fact* may be *brutal*; the truth is always *winsome* and *lovely*.
 - the cross of Christ is the perfect example.
 - the *bare fact* of the cross is a scene of abject horror and the epitome of injustice.
 - if one looks at nothing but the *visual image* of Calvary, all he/she sees is an innocent man, grotesquely abused, bleeding profusely, writhing in agony on a Roman implement of execution.
 - but if we look at the reason *behind* the cross, we see the ultimate expression of love and the very means of our salvation, and as *abhorrent* as the *visual image* of the cross is, our hearts are *drawn to* the One who hangs there.
8. *Truth* is more than just the facts; it's the *right use* of the facts.
9. And *being truthful* means a faithful commitment to God's plans & purposes *for* the facts.
10. The 9th commandment, cast as a negative – "You *shall not* bear false witness against your neighbor" *implies* a positive – "You *shall give true* testimony."
- truth shall be your aim!
 - you won't just report *facts* – you will be committed to the truth that ties them together.
 - this is what made the two at Jesus' trial *false* witnesses – they spoke *facts*, but had no regard for the truth.
 - in fact, the facts they told were aimed at *obscuring* the truth, not manifesting it.

D. The Truth Imperative

- In the 9th Commandment, God calls His *covenant people* to be a people *committed to truth*.
 - They are to be so because they are *His* people and He is the God of Truth!
 - Truth is as central to the character and nature of God as love and holiness.
- Deuteronomy 32:4** • He is the Rock, His work is perfect; For all His ways are justice, A God of truth and without injustice; Righteous and upright is He.
- In fact, truth is so much part & parcel of the nature of God, He *cannot* lie.
 - Hebrews 6:18 tells us it's *impossible* for God to lie.
 - Jesus identified Himself as the very embodiment of truth in John 14:6 when He said He was the Way, the TRUTH, and the Life.
 - If God is Truth, then from where does deceit come? Jesus tells us in John 8:44-45
 - in speaking to those religious leaders who opposed and rejected Him, He said -
- 44 You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do.**
- they had just been claiming Abraham as their father; not only their physical ancestor, but as the friend of God, their *spiritual* father.
 - Jesus says, "No – your spiritual father isn't Abraham. It's the devil!"
- He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. 45 But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me.**
- Catch that – don't miss it! Jesus said, "I am telling the truth because I AM the truth."
 - "if you do not believe Me, then it's proof whose family you're a part of."
 - as God IS truth, so the devil IS deceit & deception;
 - "there is no truth in him," Jesus said.
 - the devil is a liar, and the *father*, the *source*, the *origin* of "*it*" = meaning *deceit*.
 - Don't miss what Jesus is saying here:
 - there are two families into which the entire human race is divided;
 - there's the family of God and the family of fallen man under the sway and influence of satan.
 - these two families come under the fatherhood of either God or the devil.

- d. God's family operates in the sphere of truth, so if you're in that family, then you'll believe in Jesus because He **IS** the truth and His **Word** is true.
 - e. satan's family operates in the realm of deceit.
 - 1) they may have the right facts, the right information
 - 2) but as Jon Courson says, they twist and distort it into the **wrong implication**, because of a **corrupt motivation**, through **satanic inspiration**, to a **hellish devastation**.
10. Think of his original temptation of Eve.
 - a. he questioned her understanding of God's command, quoting it virtually word for word.
 - b. he twisted the facts and suggested a **meaning** to them that was not at all what God intended.
 - c. think about his temptation of Jesus in the wilderness.
 - d. again, he dared to quote the very words of scripture, but then twisted them into an application that was unfaithful to their meaning.
 12. Friends, this is what you and I must take to heart about the 9th commandment – that God calls us **as His people** to be committed to the truth – and the truth is far more than just a set of bare facts.
 13. It's the meaning **behind** the facts, the reason those facts exist in the first place.
 14. And the devil is an inordinately subtle and clever manipulator of the facts, so we must be on our guard, lest we fall into his web of deception.
 15. The Fall in the Garden of Eden ought to serve as a wake up call to the reality that there's a **weakness** in our humanity toward entertaining error.
 - a. and just as we saw last week that children **steal** at a young and tender age,
 - b. so every parent knows the penchant little children have toward telling lies.
 - c. no one has to teach them **how** to lie; they do it quite naturally.
 - d. if anything, children have to be taught to **tell the truth**.
 16. As soon as Adam and Eve fell, the first thing they did was **cover up**, seeking to hide their shame and embarrassment.
 17. When they heard God coming to meet them, they hid themselves in the bushes.
 18. When He confronted them, challenging them to 'fess up, Adam failed to take responsibility and blamed Eve; she was a quick study and blamed the serpent.
 19. It was **all** deceit – and that deception is renewed whenever a little child lies to escape shame, embarrassment, or punishment for getting caught in his/her sin.
 20. What we need to take to heart today is that being saved means moving out from under the headship of the father of lies and being adopted into the Family of the God of Truth.
 21. Being a Christian means much more than just **not** telling lies; it means LIVING the truth!
 - a. deception in any and every form must be rooted out of our lives.
 - b. we must be a people of **honesty**, meaning, yes - we **tell** the truth.
 - c. but we will also be a people of **integrity**, meaning the standards we say **others** should live by, *we* endeavor to live by.
 22. Deception must find no place in us – in any form.
 - a. **slander** must stop.
 - b. **gossip** must be repented of.
 - c. **flattery** must end.
 - d. **exaggeration** which pumps up the facts so they're more impressive must never be used.
 - e. simple **carelessness** that takes a lazy attitude toward truthfulness must cease.
 - f. **technically correct words** meant to hide the truth must be resisted.
 - 1) like the guy who went to the fresh fish market at 4 PM one afternoon and stood 10 feet away from the clerk and asked him to 'toss' him the 5 largest trout he had.
 - 2) when the clerk asked why, the man said, "I've been fishing at the Lake all day and haven't caught a thing. When I go home tonight I want to say I 'caught' 5 big trout."
 - g. as lovers of truth we must reject the use of **insinuation**, which is what that first mate used when he made that entry about the captain's sobriety in the ship's log.
 - 1) satan tried to use insinuation against Job when he accused him before God.
 - 2) he asked, "Does Job fear God for nothing?"

- 3) the implication was that Job's faith was only mercenary and selfish.
- 4) insinuations often come in the form of questions that are meant to cast doubt on another's motives.
- 5) caution – this is a common error Christians make.
- h. as people of truth, we must also make a right use of *silence*.
 - 1) sometimes silence is *demand*ed by truth, at other times truth demands we speak up.
 - 2) when lies and deceit are muddying the waters and truth is being obscured, then we must speak up and boldly hold forth that truth in a manner that loyally portrays the character of Christ.
 - 3) but we must also seek the direction of the Holy Spirit on *when* to be silent, and not publish the truth abroad because to do so would *interfere* with the plans and purposes of God.
 - a) remember the times when Jesus told those He had just healed to *tell no one?*
 - b) you'd think that such a miracle would be prime cause to give loud and very public praise to God, but Jesus told them to keep silent.
 - c) they didn't, and the crowds that came out to see *more* of the miraculous became so pressing and numerous, Jesus' ministry there was cut short. ^[2]
 - 4) when Jesus stood before the High Priest, Pilate, & Herod, being false accused and condemned, He remained silent – and He IS THE TRUTH!
 - 5) while truth is usually best served by *openness & disclosure*, there are times when wisdom demands a tender carefulness on the *timing* of that disclosure.
 - a) Proverbs 17:9 • He who *covers* a transgression seeks love, But he who repeats a matter separates friends.
 - b) Peter, in summing up several of the Proverbs says that Love covers a multitude of sins. ^[3]

III. CONCLUSION

A. *Make It Positive*

1. Often in the Christian life, we're confronted with a change we need to make, a doubtful habit we need to break or an unhealthy attitude we need to repent of.
2. And we put all our effort into **NOT** doing it any longer or **NOT** thinking that way any more.
3. But this approach to the life of following Christ is doomed to failure because our attention is focused on the very thing we're trying to avoid.
4. Right now, don't think about a nice hot, juicy double-double sitting next to a steaming order of golden brown fries, and a rich, thick, creamy chocolate shake in a frosty glass with a bendable straw pointed right at your mouth.
5. That's the way we often go about changes in the Christian life, by concentrating on not doing the very thing we don't want to do.
6. As we've considered the 9th commandment today, don't focus on not lying in any of the ways we've considered.
 - a. why you'd have to get a copy of the tape/CD and listen to it again and again –
 - b. and think about all the ways these things manifestations of deceit might work themselves out in your unique circumstance.
 - c. that's an exercise in futility.
7. Rather, set your sights on one thing – **TRUTH!**
8. Ask God to create within you a heart and passion for truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.
9. You know the oft-told illustration of how they train bank tellers how to detect counterfeit money.
 - a. they don't have them examine fake bills so they can recognize them when they come to the bank.
 - b. they just have the tellers handle lots and lots of the real thing –

- c. and an interesting thing happens; they learn how to detect a fake bill simply because it doesn't *feel* right.
 - d. I can verify the truth of that from my years of counting deposits in the restaurant business.
10. Instead of looking for every little instance of deceit, get passionate about truth.
 11. Go after it like a miner goes after gold, because as Shakespeare wrote, "No legacy is so rich as honesty."
 12. Psalm 51:6 says that God desires truth *in the heart*.
 - a. being truthful isn't just something we *do*
 - b. as the followers of Him Who IS True – truthful is something we *are*.

B. Living It

1. I want to end with a true story.
2. In the fourth round of a national spelling contest in Washington 11 year old Rosalie Elliot from South Carolina was asked to spell *avowal*.
3. In a sweet, soft, Southern accent she spelled it.
4. But the judges couldn't decide if she'd used an 'a' or an 'e' as the next to last letter?
5. For several minutes they listened to a recorded playback, but the critical letter was accent-blurred.
6. Chief Judge John Lloyd finally put the question to the only person who knew the answer, young Miss Elliot; "Was the letter an 'a' or was it an 'e'?"
7. Surrounded by whispering young spellers, she now knew the correct spelling of the word.
8. But without hesitating, she replied she'd misspelled it and walked from the stage.
9. The entire audience stood and applauded, including some 50 newspaper reporters, one of whom remarked that the judges had put quite a burden on an 11 year-old.
10. Is truthfulness a burden? Only when lies and deceit are accepted as the norm and what's to be expected.
11. The standing ovation Rosalie Elliot received that day is evidence of how rare truthfulness and honesty are in this day.
12. What an opportunity for the Body of Christ to reveal the reality and power of the God Who *is* **TRUTH**.

[1] John 2:19

[2] Luke 5:15-16

[3] 1 Peter 4:8