



The Ten Commandments

Part 11 – Tell The Truth

Exodus 20:16

Those commandments which make up the second table of God's moral law (commandments 5-10) are about the well-being of the whole covenant community. They are not concerned with the right conduct of individuals solely. Certainly each commandment governs individual conduct and must be honored. But the concern expressed in these commandments goes beyond personal piety. The concern is to preserve a community of believers who are building one another up and united in their fellowship. As important as personal integrity is in all these matters addressed from the fifth to the tenth commandment, God's word always has in view the effect of the individual's behavior on the whole body.

And so this commandment is given not simply because God wants us to be truthful people. Of course God desires each of us to be truthful. But the call truthfulness has an aim which reaches well beyond the individual.

God gave us this command because of his concern for the wellbeing of the covenant community. In the Ninth Commandment God helps us to understand that lack of truthfulness is harmful to the whole community and a withholding of love from our neighbor.

Main Idea: Because God is the God of truth we honor him and love our neighbor by always being truthful.

1. The value of truth is grounded in the character of God.

- Lying is antithetical to the nature of God. As it is written in Numbers: "God is not man, that he should lie, or a son of man, that he should change his mind. Has he said, and he will not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it?" (23:19). Jesus proclaimed himself to be "the truth" (Jn. 14:6). In Revelation 3:7 he is called "holy and true." He is "the Amen, the faithful and true witness" (Rev. 3:14). Likewise the Holy Spirit is the "Spirit of truth" (Jn. 14:17).

2. The necessity of truth in the life of the Christian.

- A rejection of truth is characteristic of the fallen world. In the garden the woman was deceived in part by a subversive question from the serpent: "Did God really say...?" (Gen. 3:1b). While not calling God a liar outright, the serpent craftily planted a seed of doubt in the woman's mind about the trustworthiness of God's Word. Only later did he openly call God a liar: "You will not surely die" (Gen. 3:4). God has turned sinner over to their own lusts precisely because they "exchanged the truth of God for a lie..." This, the Apostle writes is the seedbed for idolatry: "...and worshiped the creature rather than the Creator..." (Rom. 1:25).

a) Salvation depends upon believing the truth.

John 3:16-17

John 20:31

Romans 15:13

b) Christian maturity depends upon believing the truth.

The church is built upon the Word of God. The gospel is a message to believe (1 Cor. 15:1ff). We are called out of conformity to the world through the renewing of our mind in God's Word (Rom. 12:1). The church assembles for the purpose of instruction in God's Word (Acts 2:42).

3. Twisting the truth is a failure to love.

- The Ninth Commandment applies most directly to giving false testimony. It prohibits perjury. Giving false testimony in court undermines the ability of a society to do justice which does great harm to the whole community.
- For a person to give false testimony or false evidence in such a setting had four negative effects. First, it injured the innocent accused. To give false testimony was a direct assault upon the freedom and dignity of another member of the covenant community. Secondly, it hindered the administration of justice in that particular case. Thirdly, it undermined public confidence in the judicial system. Fourthly the practice of false testimony could lead to societal breakdown. The stability of the nation was threatened by the corruption of the system of justice.

a) We must never lie.

- The Ninth Commandment prohibits lying. We must never say something we know to be untrue. We must not say "yes" when the truth is "no."

b) We must care about our neighbor's reputation.

- The Ninth Commandment prohibits slander and gossip. God's people are not to employ speech that is harmful to our neighbor's reputation. The Ninth Commandment is a call to love God and neighbor with our words. While a particular act of gossip may be technically true in the details the effect is to cast someone in a particularly negative light which will always tend toward undermining the truth.
- We ought to have charitable opinions and estimations of our neighbors. Do we tend to think the worst of our neighbor? Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor. 13:7).
- Certainly this is not a call to naivety. But we ought to strive toward having charitable opinions of our neighbors. This sort of hopefulness is grounded not in our neighbor but in God who is able to bring about what is good and true. Truthfulness does not require that we give verbal expression to every negative thing in our neighbor's life. Neither does truthfulness give license to use the truth as a club.
- As we know from passages like 2 Corinthians 12:21 the Apostle Paul was not fool about the genuine condition of those he loved. But he never rejoiced in the poor reputation of others. For him it was a matter to grieve. Likewise, we must rejoice in our neighbor's good reputation and grieve when they fail.

c) We are to be faithful to the spirit of the command.

- It is possible to say something that is true while being dishonest at the same time. Honesty demands that we be open, free, clear, and sincere in our words. By being **open** we do not conceal anything that might clear up a matter. In being **free** with the truth we offer it without the need of threats or punishment. No one should have to drag the truth out of us. When we are **clear** we refuse to cloud or obscure the truth. We should speak in such a way that all understand what we are saying. Finally we must be **sincere** without any intention of concealment or deception or partial counsel. All of that is involved in being obedient to this commandment.