

Exodus 20:16 5-13-18

Thou Shalt Not Bear False Witness

Luke the 23rd chapter contains the story of the trial of Jesus. The accusers of Jesus dragged him before Pilate for judgment and sentencing and the text says they accused him bitterly, charging Him with misleading the nation and forbidding the payment of taxes. Was that a true accusation? Not at all. As you read their false charges against Jesus think of what Jesus spoke to the Jewish leaders in John 5:**45** *Do not think that I will accuse you before the Father; the one who accuses you is Moses, in whom you have set your hope.* In saying that He doesn't deny the clear teaching of Scripture that everyone will stand before the judgment seat of Christ. He doesn't say that Moses will be their judge. He says Moses will be their accuser. And by Moses He means the law and writings of Moses, the foremost of which are contained in the ten commandments of Exodus 20. And the ninth commandment of God thru Moses will bear witness against the enemies of Christ for it says there **16** *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*

Alright, we have developed a pattern in looking at each commandment. We begin by extracting the biblical principle upon which the commandment is based. The principles of the sanctity of life, and the sanctity of marriage and the right to private property have undergirded commandments six, seven and eight. What is the principle behind this ninth commandment? I believe, in this case, there are two principles. They are the sanctity of truth and the value of a good reputation. Both of these are merged together into one commandment but we will examine each of them separately beginning with the value of a good reputation, or the worth of a good name.

Proverbs 22:**1** (NLT) *Choose a good reputation over great riches; being held in high esteem is better than silver or gold.* A reputation as a person of integrity and responsibility is one of the most precious things you will ever have. It is something to be desired and won and protected. But it is so very easily stolen by a false witness, by one willing to spread lies. With the flash of your tongue or a brief tweet you can wipe out a good name which a man has spent years to establish. With hardly a thought you can do more damage to a man than a hundred thieves. This is why God includes in his big ten a prohibition against slander. This is why God says so much against this sin in the book of Proverbs 11:**9a** *With his mouth the godless man destroys his neighbor.* Much like the sin of murder is the sin of slander. It destroys a life. Proverbs 10:**18** *He who conceals hatred has lying lips, and he who spreads slander is a fool.* 19:**5** *A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who tells lies will not escape.* Maybe you know Proverbs 6:**16-19** *There are six things which the*

Lord hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: ¹⁷ haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, ¹⁸ a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, ¹⁹ a false witness who utters lies. How does God feel about the man or woman who does those things? God says this in Psalm 101:**5a** *Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, him I will destroy.* I am reminded of the story of Jezebel and Naboth. Remember that? Naboth owned a vineyard that the king of Israel, Ahab, wanted for himself but Naboth said it wasn't for sale. So Ahab's wicked wife decided to get that land as a present for her husband and she did it by violating commandments six, eight and nine. Here's how she did it. She hired two worthless men to come lie about Naboth, saying that he had cursed God and the king, and the bribed leaders of his city took him out and stoned him. When the prophet Elijah heard of what Jezebel did he went to her and said, "Where the dogs licked the blood of Naboth they shall lick your blood too." Slander is a terribly wicked thing. And one of the great dangers of slander is the permanence of its fallout. Naboth never had a chance to clear his name, did he? I heard the story years ago of a young man who spread lies about a woman in his town. He did it just for fun it seemed but the rumors spread and the reputation of this young lady was terribly stained so that the man began to feel quite bad about what he had done. He went to his pastor and confessed what he had done and asked, "Pastor, is there anything I can do to make up for what I have done?" The pastor thought and said, "Do this. Tomorrow you go and place a feather at the door of every house in our city. Two days later come back and see me." The young man didn't understand but did as he was told. When he came back to see the pastor three days later he said, "I did as you said. I put a feather at the door of every house in town. Now what should I do?" The pastor said, "Now go back and pick those feathers up." The young man said, "What! I can't do that. They would have blown away long ago." "Indeed," said the wise pastor, "so is the sin of slander. Once done the winds of gossip make it impossible to undo." Benjamin Franklin said, "Glass, china and a reputation are easily cracked and never well-mended." You put the thoughts in people's heads and they don't come out very easily. We get defiled by slanderous reports.

Now, that is often the media's problem but what about us? Are we blameless in this matter? By no means. We are guilty of treating a man's reputation lightly when we pass on reports that may or may not be true. We are guilty when we describe what someone did and only give one side of the picture -- usually that side that makes us look best and the other guy look worst. As I worked on this I thought of myself. Just recently when I heard someone offer a bad report about another

person I saw an opening to air my complaints about the guy as well. Even when it's true, it is seldom needed. If you accused me of slander I would deny it, but if you asked whether I treated his reputation as precious the answer is *no*. I despised it. I sinned. I broke the spirit of this law which is built on the value of a man's reputation and the worth of a good name.

The second principle behind the ninth commandment is, of course, the sanctity of truth. TRUTH - I can think of nothing that ought to mark out the Christian more than this. We are to be a people of truth because we are the people of God and God is TRUTH. Jesus said, "I am the Truth," and to lie is anti-Christ. It is opposed to the very nature of the Lord Himself whom Paul said cannot lie. So when you oppose truth in any way, shape or form you position yourself against God. And when you position yourself against God guess whose side you are on. Whereas God is called The Truth and the Spirit of Truth, the devil is called the deceiver and the father of lies. Jesus was speaking to the Jewish leadership of His day who were hostile to Him and He said John 8:**44** *You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.* It is the lie that Satan used against Eve in the garden. The lie is his best weapon, dare I say even his only weapon. It expresses the very essence of who he is. There is a cosmic battle raging around us people. It is the kingdom of God which is called the kingdom of light vs. the kingdom of Satan which is the kingdom of darkness. It is a battle for the allegiance of the human race and it is the war of truth against falsehood. God against the devil, and my friend, every time you lie you cast your vote for the devil, the father of lies, and against the Lord who is truth. Few sins are as direct an assault upon the character of God as this one. It is anti-Christ. It strikes against the very nature of God. And, it provokes His wrath. Proverbs 12:**22** (NLT) *The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in those who tell the truth.* "The Lord detests lying lips." We saw this in Proverbs 6, where two of the seven things God said he hated pertained to lies. Lying is an attack on the nature of God.

Then too it is a sin that is anti-others. Billions of people are spiritually lost because of lies and when you lie you cast a vote for their destruction, you indirectly contribute to their ruin. Furthermore, lies to and about specific individuals cause a great deal of grief in some obvious ways. Some of you have been crushed by lies haven't you? Some of you have crushed others with your deceitfulness. Proverbs 26:**28** *A lying tongue hates those it crushes, and a flattering mouth works ruin.* Deceit is not only ungodly it is inhuman, it is anti-God and anti-others.

Thirdly, deceit is anti-self. The person who lies usually thinks he is doing himself a favor by lying but the Lord tells us here that quite the opposite is true. Proverbs 11:3 *The integrity of the upright will guide them, but the crookedness of the treacherous will destroy them.* 12:13a *An evil man is ensnared by the transgression of his lips.* You know what that is like don't you? Haven't you ever been caught in a lie? You lied in order to obtain some advantage but it backfired on you? Those can be awful experiences. There is nothing more embarrassing than to be caught in a bold-faced lie. I heard this week about a butcher who only had one chicken in stock when a woman came in and asked for a chicken. He weighed it and said, "She's a beauty. That'll be \$4.25." "Oh, that's not quite large enough," said the customer, "Don't you have any bigger ones?" The butcher took the chicken back to the icebox, rolled it in ice several times, brought it back out and with his thumb on the scale said, "This bigger one is \$5.00." The lady said, "Oh that's fine, I'll take them both." Trapped by his own deception. That kind of thing is not rare in the least. Your lies can leave you standing red-faced before men. But what is more important to realize is that your lies will leave you standing red-faced, naked and ashamed before God some day. You might be clever enough to get away with a ton of lies in this life but you are not fooling God. Every lie that you think lifts you higher and higher only makes your place in the pit lower and lower. Proverbs 19:5 *A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who tells lies will not escape.* 19:9 *A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who tells lies will perish.* You are getting away with nothing when you lie and furthermore you are heaping misery on your own head. 20:17a (NLT) *Stolen bread tastes sweet.* Oh there is the temporary benefit! Lying can give you some sweetness. 17 *Stolen bread tastes sweet, but it turns to gravel in the mouth.* There will be big-time regret. In the book of Revelation I've noticed that liars hold an especially high-profile position. But it is not the kind of high-profile you want. 21:8 *But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.* Then, speaking of the eternal city we read this in Revelation 21:27 *Nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.* 22:15 *Outside are the dogs and the sorcerers and the immoral persons and the murderers and the idolaters, and everyone who loves and practices lying.* Man oh man, you talk about truth or consequences. Hell is the eternal home of those who love and practice lying. You wouldn't tell a lie if you knew you were going to get found out would you? God's word says you will be found out, often in this life, always

at judgment Proverbs 19:5 *A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who tells lies will not escape.* Because that is so and that is sure, the sin of deceit is anti-self. It is the way of the fool.

Why then? Why, we must ask would someone resort to lying and deception if these are the God-promised consequences? What is the motive behind deceit? Why do we lie when we know it is wrong?! Well, the answer to that is very simple. Lies come in handy. Someone said, “A lie is an abomination to God and a very present help in time of trouble.” Lies, seemingly, can do us a great deal of good. The first of our three reasons for lying is convenience or ease. When someone calls me up and asks if they can use our building for their wedding on June 10 the easiest thing for me is to say, “I’m sorry, our building is already booked on that day.” Easy, effective. But honesty usually requires me to go beyond that and tell the inquirer what it would take for them to be married in our church and possibly go thru the steps of arranging that for them. That is a hassle. One little lie could save me the trouble. Laziness leads to lying for the sake of ease and convenience.

Then too we lie in order to look good and avoid looking bad. This may be the biggest reason for most of us. Our arrogance leads to lies. We want to be liked, get our way, cover our tracks. We exaggerate our successes, understate our failures, we falsely deny blame and take credit. When something goes wrong at work and the boss says, “Who did this?” Everyone says “Not me.” In the cartoon *The Family Circus* they sometimes would bring out this character called “Not-me” who is a little ghost that gets blamed for everything. Who got the sink dirty? Not me. Who let the dog out? Not me. He is a creation of dishonesty which is promoted by pride. We want so much to be admired by others that we lie! It goes back to fearing man more than God. It is a terrible thing. This is what motivated Ananias to lie. He was trying to look good before his Christian buddies so he lied about his giving. Peter wanted to look good before his non-Christian peers so he lied about knowing Jesus. You misrepresent what you have done and who you are because you crave approval and praise of men and it leads you to be rejected by God.

The third reason why we lie is to get something we want. We are motivated to lie by our lusts. You want more money so you lie about the condition of the car you are selling. You lie on your income tax form. Oh now I know you dear people don’t do these things. I’m just saying that for the sinners in our TV audience OK? A little boy and his parents were getting tickets from an airline agent. The little boy who looked to be around five told the ticket agent that he was only three years old. The agent looked at him sternly and said, “Young man do you know what happens to little boys who lie?” The kid said, “Yes, sir, they get to ride for half-price.” Have you ever felt

that temptation to fudge on the truth a little to save some money? Right after our daughter Sarah had turned three she went with us to Disney world. The difference in cost between a two year- old and a three year-old was around \$30. Sarah still looked and even acted like a two year-old. No one had ever checked on her age before and I'm sure no one would have this time. I bet there were plenty of other three years olds getting in free that day. What difference would \$30 make to a big outfit like Disney? But the rules said she had to pay. What do you do in a situation like that? Make a deal with God that you will give half the savings to the church? 90% of the savings to the church? Or do you do what is honest and pay the price? Proverbs 19:1 *Better to be poor and honest than to be dishonest and a fool.*

You can easily see why a lie would be attractive, can't you? These are what lead us to lie: our laziness, our lusts, and our pride. These are the attributes of the old man, the sinful nature that still haunts us as believers made new by Christ. I found it interesting to see how the apostle Paul connected so closely a lifestyle of lying to the old nature of sin. Look with me at Ephesians 4:20-22 *you did not learn Christ in this way, ²¹ if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, ²² that, in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit or deceitful lusts. Deceit is at the very center of this corruption. Read on in Ephesians 4:24-25 *Put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.*²⁵ *Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor.* The same connection can be seen in Colossians 3:9 *Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices.* You see, as Christians we just don't do that anymore. Our days of deceit are behind us. We are to be changed from those who use lies to get our way into those who speak truth and are men and women of truth even as God is the Spirit of truth. That is the challenge for us today and that is where I want to go from here. We have seen the sin of deceit and the motives for deceit now let's turn our attention to the challenge before us to be people of integrity.*

What does it mean to be a man or woman, boy or girl of integrity? It means that your word can be trusted. It means that you say what is true and nothing else. The basic issue is - can you be trusted to represent reality when you speak? When you say I'll be there at 4:00 what is your word worth? Can we count on you? Some people we can count on not being there so little do they care about their word. And when you tell us, "Oh I'm late because my car wouldn't start." should we believe that? You say, "Oh those are such little things." Alright they are little things but where do

you draw the line? Little lies are okay but big lies are awful? I don't see that in the word of God. What I do see is that truthfulness is our rule all the time. I am to be a man of my word whether I speak that word to the President or to my daughter. The issue is still the same. I heard of a man who asked a woman if she would go to bed with a stranger for a million dollars. The woman thought for a moment and then said, "yes, I would." The man then said, "Well how about me for 5 bucks?" The woman looked at him in disgust and said, "what do you think I am?" He said, "Miss, we have already established what you are, now we are just haggling over the price." You see the basic question addressed by that story is whether your body is for rent? And the basic question you must face today is whether your word is your bond. Little issues, big issues, can I believe what you say because I know you are a person of truth?

Now folks, this is a challenge for us, because we not only have the motivations to lie that we have already discussed but we live in a society that does not take this sin seriously. We are not careful what we say and what we sign today and we don't care what we said or signed yesterday. The world basically says that deception is okay if you can get away with it. A couple years back, Steve Alford, signed a contract to be the basketball coach at the University of New Mexico for ten years. In accepting this position, Coach Alford said: *This is a commitment that I wanted to make more than anything else, because I found an institution, I found an area of the country that I really, really like.* Really? He said "really" twice, but eleven days later he broke that contract to sign a more lucrative one with UCLA. These are the men we ask to teach our sons. It's hard to be people of integrity in a world like this. Newsweek recently reported about the epidemic of cheating on college campuses. Newsweek ran some articles a while back on cheating in American colleges. I quote from one of them: *Cheating is so prevalent in US schools that the cheater seems almost to be the normal college student. So widespread is the practice of cribbing that many students do not look upon it as being morally wrong. They call it "The Good Neighbor Policy" or "The Wandering Eye."* Let me tell ya folks, God doesn't call it that. But a frequent scenario is this: The American young person who values career success above all else struggles valiantly to the top by lying on his loan application form. He then manages to graduate by cheating on his tests and papers. When he gets out of school he becomes a crooked businessman who never pays back his college loan, cheats on his taxes, and his wife and his partner. Do you know that 60% of government sponsored college loans are not paid back? That is our world.

So what shall we do? Two things at least. First of all, let's nurture a hatred of this sin of deceit. I believe that certain sins are so attractive that if you don't hate them you will never stop them. You gotta hate lying. God hates it. Proverbs 12:22a *The Lord detests lying lips*. I want to detest anything God detests. Think about what we have seen - that lying is anti-God, anti-others, anti-self. We get very angry when we are lied to. Don't you? Don't you hate being deceived? Sure you do, but you know I don't think there is any area of ethics where we hold a more blatant double standard. It is wrong for them to deceive us but it's okay for us to deceive them. We have to hate this sin in others and especially in ourselves.

Another reason to hate this sin is because of what it does to relationships. Honesty is an essential of healthy relationships. If I can't trust you or you can't trust me our capacity to support each other is shot. That's why I want so very much to be able to trust my wife. When we were raising children we made a big deal about truthfulness in relationships. The most severe discipline our kids received occurred when we caught them in a lie.

A second practical thing to do is to be more careful, more thoughtful in what you say. Think about what you say and, when you do, the first thing you must consider is whether you are about to speak what is true. There are lots of lovely things written or spoken that are not true but the first test of any statement is the truthfulness of it. I could get up here and tell you that when I was 18 God miraculously healed me of a fatal heart condition, delivered me from six demons and saved me from a life of crime and drugs. You may find all that highly encouraging, it may result in praise to God but since it is not true God would hate it. Man, if I wasn't locked into telling the truth I could be a fantastic preacher. I could tell you some stories that would knock your socks off. Lots of preachers lie or, more likely, stretch the truth to make their sermons more effective; the people often like what they hear but God doesn't. Think before you speak. Are you telling the truth?

Last question. Will you be miserable because of it? Will honesty hurt you by hindering your career and your family plans and your reputation? Friend, Psalm 15 says this is the type of man who will abide in the sanctuary of God and come into His presence where there is fullness of joy. You will never regret honesty. Proverbs 12:19a *Truthful lips will be established forever*. God will establish the person of integrity because He says in Proverbs 12:22b *That is what I want to be, a child who delights His Father*. How about you? Let's stand for prayer.