

Am I a Liar? (Commandment #9) – Exodus 20:16; cf. Deu. 5:20

"Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour."

INTRODUCTION – White lies and black lies have become the norm in many people's way of life. I met a man who said that he would not lie or cheat a person but he has no qualms cheating or lying to an organization since an organization is not a person. Such reasoning is warped but it is common. As long as a person thinks that he can get away with deception or lying, he would deceive or lie. This is our world. Parents who lie and deceive will also teach their children to lie and deceive. "Like father like son" has more truth to it than parents realize! Our society is filled with liars who will not blink an eyelid if it can gain something by doing so.

Hollywood promotes it and turns lying into an art. It has even become fashionable to lie when the end justifies the means. It has been trivialized and is no longer considered a transgression. Lying has become a way of life to the extent that many do it so naturally that they sincerely believe that the lies are the truth. This may sound far-fetched but truth is stranger than fiction. How can such a thing happen in a person's life whereby he can believe that lying is the same as telling the truth? A person knows that he is a liar and he comforts himself that everyone else is as well! He accepts it as a norm and standard. He is surrounded by liars everywhere he goes and he has been doing this for decades, thus his conscience is seared.

The worst cases are not "the man in the street" but men who masquerade as men of God; men who are supposed to be truthful in all that they say and write. Pastors have been caught plagiarising, which is both stealing and lying; they lie that what they write are their words and thoughts! Pastors and elders have gone to court and have even placed their hands on the Bible swearing to tell the whole truth; instead they tell part truth and part lies. These are the signs of the end times.

True and genuine believers must not tell lies deliberately. They must be people of truth always. If and when they told a lie out of fear of retribution or for whatever reason, they must sincerely repent of the sin of lying and bear the consequence. Telling the truth is one of the hallmarks of a true believer!

I. 9th Commandment Explained – This is a commandment warning us not to tell lies. This commandment is also related to the 8th Commandment which is "thou shalt not steal". When a person tells lies about others to ruin their good name, he robs them of their good name. Bearing false witness is a very common sin. In some cases it is criminal, especially when in the court of law. We are duty bound to tell the truth. Lying under such circumstances could result in a jail sentence.

The world defines lying as a small sin; there are black lies and white lies. Black lies are no good and must be avoided at all costs. These black lies would include lies that hurt others. For example, if I lie to cheat you of an amount of money, that would be a black lie. A lustful man making a false promise of marriage to his girl friend in order to get her into bed with him is another example. White lies are defined by the world as good because they do not hurt but help. For example, your uncle has been diagnosed with cancer. He asked you what the doctor said about his condition. You believe that he will not be able to take the truth. Instead of telling him that he has cancer, you say that he has the common flu which is the cause of his body aches. This is the hierarchical application of the 9th Commandment by the world and even by some so-called Christians.

The Bible gives man Commandment # 9 to teach that lying is always a sin. There is no justification for lying. God always tells the truth. He is characterized by truth just as Satan is characterized by lies. **Titus 1:2-3** (KJV), "*In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began; 3 But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour.*" [Emphasis added] This means that God's children, who are like their heavenly Father, must also be characterized by truth. They must be lovers of truth. To believers, there are no such things as black and white lies. All lies are lies. They are a transgression of God's truth and once committed must be repented of and restitution must be made to whomever has been lied to.

II. False teaching on lying -- Some Christian teachers and pastors have taught that there are justifications for telling lies, such as saving a life. The 9th Commandment is part of the apodictic laws of God which are absolute. There can never be any justification for telling lies. The moment lying can be justified and accepted, the justification and acceptance would not just be limited to the 9th Commandment. It would mean that there is justification for murder, committing adultery, bowing down to idols, breaking the Sabbath, etc. When that happens, there will be no absolutes in the Bible, only casuistic laws which will result in the godless teaching called situational ethics. First and foremost, saving a person's life should not be the most important thing in the believer's life. The most important is to glorify God. The Israelites were commanded by God to wipe out everyone in the city of Jericho because the city was accursed (che-rem) by the LORD (cf. Joshua 6:17-19). They had to kill everyone because the LORD said so. The sins committed by the people in Jericho demanded such a response from the LORD. Israel was God's instrument of punishment. The infants who were killed in these wicked cities along with their parents would be given salvation grace by God. Believers must understand what death is from the biblical perspective always. Sometimes death is not an act of punishment but an act of mercy and a blessing to believers. A case in point is found in **1 Kings 14:13**, "*And all Israel shall mourn for him, and bury him: for he only of Jeroboam shall come to the grave, because in him there is found some good thing toward the LORD God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam.*"

III. Faulty biblical examples – The biblical examples that the proponents of situational ethics use to justify lying include: The lies of Shiphrah and Puah (Exodus 1:15-21) and Rahab (Joshua 2.) Based upon these two accounts, they say that God blessed them for telling lies and therefore it must be all right to tell lies. They say that Shiphrah and Puah must have lied because women today do not give birth as described in Exodus 1. This kind of false understanding of Scripture is one of the biggest mistakes in the interpretation of the Bible committed by modern Christians. Just because it is not done in today's modern society does not mean that it could not be done in biblical times. The Hebrew women were strong and they gave birth before the midwives arrived. There was no lie at all in Exodus 1. Shiphrah and Puah were blessed by the LORD because they had the courage to defy Pharaoh's command and to obey the LORD. The Bible's commentary for their blessing is stated in **Exodus 1:21**, "*And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that he made them houses.*" They exercised faith in the LORD and were blessed.

Rahab did lie. She was a prostitute and she hid the two spies sent by Joshua and lied about their presence and their escape to the guards who came to kill the spies. The question is this, "Was she

blessed by the LORD for telling lies or for something else?" The answer is found in **Hebrews 11:31**, "*By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.*" Rahab was saved because of her faith and not for lying.

There can never be any justification for lying or for breaking any of the Ten Commandments.

IV. Satan is the father of lies – Satan is characterized by lying. He has no truth in him. He has been a liar from the time of his fall and deceiving the world ever since. **John 8:42-45** (KJV), "*Jesus said unto them, If God were your Father, ye would love me: for I proceeded forth and came from God; neither came I of myself, but he sent me. 43 Why do ye not understand my speech? even because ye cannot hear my word. 44 Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it. 45 And because I tell you the truth, ye believe me not.*" [Emphasis added]

From this passage we see that those who do not understand the Word of God are not believers. They are not able to obey the Word of God. They find the Word of God alien to their soul. They are indifferent to the teachings in the Bible. They will tell lies habitually. Lying is a way of life to them so much so that they are not even aware that they are lying. It has become second nature, next to their sinful nature.

V. Believer's protection against lying -- Matthew 5:33-37, "*Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.*"

In the days of the LORD it was common for people to say things with double meaning. They had every intention to lie except when it was an oath made in the name of the LORD. They would break their word as long as it benefitted them. The Lord had to deal with this distortion of God's truth. This passage is not against making vows or oaths absolutely. There are circumstances wherein vows or oaths are made such as becoming a member of a church, getting married, in national service, in a court room, etc. The thrust of Christ's teaching in Matthew was to correct the abuse that existed then. We are not to make oaths and then break them later on. Believers must keep their word always. There is no such thing as keeping our word for important matters and for less important matters we will break our word. The guideline is: let your yea be yea and nay be nay. "Whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil." The evil heart is a heart that lies resulting in a mouth that speaks with a forked tongue. The protection against lying is to tell the truth every moment of every day. When telling the truth becomes second nature, next to the new nature, one will always tell the truth.

The mature Christian is one who can control his tongue and not how much he knows God's Word. **James 3:1-2**, "*My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater*

condemnation. For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body."

APPLICATION

The application of this Commandment is found in Exodus 23. **Exodus 23:1-3**, *"Thou shalt not raise a false report: put not thine hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest judgment: Neither shalt thou countenance a poor man in his cause."*

The scope of the application includes private and public witness. At all times the Christian must be honest in all his dealings including spoken and written words. To do otherwise is unjust and sinful.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Will a true Christian tell a lie deliberately, i.e. pre-planned? Give reasons for your answer.
2. A criminal was arrested for murder. At the pre-trial, he denied that he is the murderer. While he was in jail awaiting trial, he accepted Christ and became a Christian. Should he now tell the truth and confess that he is the murderer knowing that he will go to the gallows?
3. Student A saw one of his classmates cheating during an exam. This classmate is a good friend and begged A not to expose him. What would you do if you are Student A who saw your friend cheating?
4. A pastor or elder lied during the interview before his ordination. After he was ordained and had been serving for 5 years, he became convicted by the testimony of his own son who shared about his repentance and struggle against lying. What should the pastor/elder do? If he confesses and tells the truth, he might "lose his office" and be defrocked. If he does not, his conscience would continue to prick him.
5. A Christian businessman lied to get a multi-million-dollar contract. He gives tithes, comes to church faithfully and even teaches in the Sunday School. He had been approached to be nominated for deaconship but declined because he knows he has been a habitual liar for the past 20 years of his life. Of course, the leaders of the church do not know this. Do you think he is a believer? If one day, a businessman whom he had deceived comes to church and tells you the truth about his lying ways, what would you do?