

The Ten Commandments are the great cliché of Western religion. The classic protestation of integrity is "I live by the Ten Commandments." However, few, if any who refer to the "decalogue" in this way could recite the commandments or even locate them in the Bible. Perhaps the great need is not to "keep the commandments" but to break them--in the sense of breaking them down into the underlying spiritual laws.

"THOU SHALT NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS AGAINST THY NEIGHBOR." On the surface this says, "Don't tell lies about people. Don't exaggerate. Don't engage in excessive criticism." But let us examine the many additional dimensions of this important commandment. It sets forth the principle of the sacredness of the judicial system. In court, whether as plaintiff, sheriff or witness, a person must speak the truth in a charge involving his neighbor. A lie is a false witness. The testimony of a witness may convict a person or exonerate him. It might even send him to death. But when the witness gives his testimony he has no further responsibility. If there is a conviction, the courts administer the punishment.

In Moses' time when a sentence was pronounced on an accursed person, the witness against him had to carry out the sentence. If the sentence was death, the accusers and witnesses had to do the stoning. It was a strong deterrent to false witnessing. In addition, if a person was found to have given false testimony, the witness would receive the punishment that would have gone to the accused. The expression, "I'll stake my life on!" comes from another day when the witness did just that.

The word "witness" implies "seeing, knowing, and what we call consciousness." In legal cases much is made of testimony from an "eye-witness" or "ear-witness." The axiom is, "Seeing is believing." But in actuality, the opposite may be more true, "Believing is seeing." It is much easier to see a person doing something dishonest if you believe he is a thief. For the very act of seeing or hearing, even feeling, is influenced by your consciousness. You actually have a responsibility for what you see and hear and sense for you see not as things are, but as you are. There is a judgement involved.

The underlying implication of the ninth commandment is that you cannot bear false witness because what you say or report on expresses where you are and what you are. When you bear witness to error, you reveal the error of your own consciousness. Walt Whitman says, "In all men I see myself, not one barley-corn more, nor one barley-corn less, and the good or bad I say of them, I say of myself." If everyone understood this, most negative criticism and gossip would be eliminated. Bridge clubs and coffee breaks might lose their chief reason for existence. Consciousness being what it is, our dealing with negative things about others, whether true or untrue, not only bears witness to our own state of consciousness, but it opens the way to the manifestation of the same conditions within us. "That thou seest man, become too thou must; God if thou seest God; dust if thou seest dust."

The principle of causation implied in the ninth commandment is this, "What you say about another person will happen to you, for by saying it you indicate that it has already happened in you." Jesus said it first, "Judge not that ye be not judged, for with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged, and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again." The ninth commandment deals with the management of the tongue. This is very difficult to achieve, for we are verbal creatures. "Death and life are in the power of the tongue." Why? Because what I say about others I bear witness to as being within myself. Negative words have molding power. To talk about all the negation in the world is to set up time-bombs in our consciousness to periodically block the flow of life or send out poisons of self-limitations. Thus, we should realize the importance of saying only those things that we really want to see manifest in our lives.

Strongly implied in the ninth commandment is the matter of criticism. Why do we criticize excessively? Due to a poor sense of self-regard, we attempt to cut others down to a size where you feel comfortable in relating to them. Essentially, the word "criticism" comes from a word coined by Aristotle, meaning "to look for the good." Originally, it meant not fault-finding, but uncovering the frustrated potentiality. The purpose of constructive criticism is to build a person up, not to hurt his feelings or put him down. False witnessing is putting someone down, trying to show him up. Instead of trying to help him, you are bent on helping yourself to feel more adequate at his expense. And you are setting up causes for which you must pay the price. Life is consciousness.

The words "witness for Christ" normally means proselyting or giving personal testimony to Jesus. But when you know that Christ is not Jesus, but the divinity in him that is also in us, to "witness for Christ" means knowledge of the Christ indwelling...seeing, hearing, and feeling from that knowledge, and then projecting it in the words you speak, the things you do, and even the feelings you engender. Jesus said, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I unto the world, that I should bear witness to the Truth." This is the true business of each of us...to bear witness to the Truth of being which is health, harmony, success, freedom of expression, dominion. Are you witnessing to that? Once can see that we all bear false witness in some way, for who is perfect? Of course, it is not really a false witness, for we are accurately reflecting our consciousness. We need to work to change that consciousness, and to bear witness to the reality of our true being. This takes some doing.

A Truth student may think he is bearing witness to Truth when he memorizes a few affirmations and learns the vocabulary of metaphysics. Jesus said, "If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them." Not just talking Truth, but living Truth is needed. It involves revising all our ideas about ourselves, and changing our manner of speaking, thinking, seeing, feeling and acting.

There is a need for cleansing and purification of consciousness. In Biblical times this was symbolized in the act of going into a pool or river. Today it is called the rite of baptism. Originally it was for sanitary purposes. For people who rarely bathed, it indicated a commitment to make a clean breast of things. The bathing process today, could be an excellent symbol, reminding one of the daily immersion in the Allness of God, a daily reminder to keep in the flow, to keep the mind stayed on God, to keep bearing witness to the Truth.

Work with this commandment. Honesty and integrity in what you swear to will bring you rewards of consciousness. Know that you never really bear false witness, for what you say, good or ill, is revealing you. Resolve to bear witness to Truth, to the Christ within. It is an excellent commitment for the New Year.