

## Nothing but the truth, so help me God (Exodus 20:16) – October 29, 2023

This Reformation Sunday there's much to be thankful for from our reformed heritage.

- Tyndale risked his life to translate an English Bible the ploughboy could read and know.
- 500 years ago this year, in 1523 Tyndale began translating the Greek NT into English illegally.
- Luther sparked the reformation 6 years earlier, Oct. 31<sup>st</sup>, wanting all to know God's truth.
- He taught children and adults God's Law and Gospel, as did Calvin, other reformers.
- In Luther's Large Catechism, over half of the questions were on the Ten Commandments.
- The Westminster Shorter Catechism is about 40% Q&A on God's Law.

New England Primer used by schoolkids in America from 1680s to 1922 edition had the same.

DeYoung: 'The church has historically put the Ten Commandments at the center of its teaching ministry... For centuries... when people asked, "How do we do discipleship? How do we teach our kids about the Bible? What do new Christians need to know about Christianity?" their answers always included an emphasis on the Ten Commandments ...Across various traditions, there has been a historic emphasis on [Ex 20]'<sup>i</sup>

Today our emphasis will be v. 16, commandment #9: *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*

- The context of Reformation Day in the 1500s was the RCC bearing false witness:
  - o scripture plus tradition, grace plus works, faith plus sacraments,
  - o Christ plus His mother, and God's glory plus glory to saints, the Pope, etc.

Luther bore witness to the opposite truth: based on scripture alone, salvation is by grace alone

- through faith alone in Christ alone, and all to the glory of God alone.

He was put on trial for it and put on the witness stand, but PTL he refused to bear false witness.

For the sake of his neighbor and his Savior, he committed to tell the truth and be a true witness.

**May we say with him 'Here I stand, I can do no other, God help me.'**

The 9<sup>th</sup> commandment is the language of testifying, especially and technically in a legal context.

- Think of a courtroom, hand on Bible, 'I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth,
  - o and nothing but the truth, so help me God.'
- With God as witness you commit to be a true witness, nothing false against another.
- That's the main idea of the 9<sup>th</sup> commandment: never falsely condemn another.

Don't relax if you've never taken the witness stand in court and committed perjury.

- You know by now not to say 'finally, a commandment I've kept!'
- This isn't just about giving testimony at a trial, this is really about truth telling.
- It's about not wrongly speaking against and about others.

**Outline:    1. God's Law against false witness and lying  
                  2. Gospel truth and God's help to speak truth**

This Hebrew word *false* in v. 16 is often translated *lie / lying*.<sup>ii</sup>

- And sometimes another generic word for lying is substituted,
  - o ex: Hosea 4:2 '*lying, murder, stealing, and committing adultery.*'

Commandments 6-9 but instead of a technical 'false witness,' it's a general term for all lying

1 Tim 1:9-10 lists murderers, those committing sexual sin, and '*men-stealers ... liars [and] perjurers...*' (KJV).

- commandments 6-9 but the one against bearing false witness isn't just for perjurers, it forbids liars, too.

In Mt 15:19 Jesus lists commandments 6-9: '*murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.*'

- Jesus adds the term ‘slander’ to false witness.’

Mk 10:19 *You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, **Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud...**’ Same 6-9 same order with defraud*

*Prov. 6 says God hates and abominates ‘a lying tongue...a false witness who breathes out lies’*

Scripture links bearing false witness to lying related sins, defrauding, slander, etc. My favorite reformed statement of faith, Heidelberg Catechism says the 9<sup>th</sup> commandment aims ‘that I never give false testimony against anyone, twist no one’s words, not gossip or slander, nor join in condemning anyone rashly or without a hearing. Rather, in court and everywhere else, I should avoid lying and deceit of every kind; these are the very devices the devil uses, and they would call down on me God’s intense wrath. I should love the truth, speak it candidly, and openly acknowledge it. And I should do what I can to guard and advance my neighbor’s good name.’<sup>iii</sup>

*This is about character assassination, even misusing truth against someone’s reputation*

That was written in 1563 but in 2023 there’s unique ways to bear false witness electronically:

- ‘In court and everywhere else’ includes the court of online opinion or the world wide web
- On email or on Messenger, untrue messages or unsubstantiated links are often forwarded
- On social media, Christians share stories to score political points but don’t know it’s true
- On Twitter, churchgoers comment and condemn rashly without a hearing fellow believers
- On Instagram, it can be instant, or on a blog your misinformed comments join in instantly
- On Facebook I’ve seen pastors take shots at what another pastor said or did, starting with ‘I haven’t watched it, but someone said at SC about a pastor...If it’s true, then I think...’
- On YouTube, deception can go viral or all kinds of disinformation about a virus in 2020
- On the click of a mouse, church members share conspiracy theories, fake news, false info
- I saw an ad this month for a respected Christian leader giving testimony to sell medical marijuana, but as I did a little more searching, it was a slanderous fake false advertising
- I’ve seen ‘discernment’ bloggers and ministries misrepresent and twist words of leaders
- I’ve had people falsely impersonate me with text or email messages that lie, asking for Amazon or iTunes gift cards to give to a widow or someone in the hospital, a fake account

Some of you lie over the phone. Someone calls, ‘did I wake you?’ You say ‘oh no,’ but she did. They call and ask if you’re there but you hide or lie or ask others to.

- Or you text you’re on your way, but you’re really not yet and won’t be for minutes.
- Or you’re 15 minutes away but you say 10 because it sounds better.
- Or you lie to your iPhone when it asks “are you driving?”
- You sign or check online boxes untruthfully.

I’ll confess I’ve acted like I was on the phone just to avoid a conversation (a body language lie).

- I’ve called in to my boss a sick day just to go to a lake (long time ago, not at the church).
- Back in high school I lied to my parents on the phone about movies I watched.
- I even lied and said I was my dad one time by phone for a tow truck (that was bad).

I still feel bad about writing my name on Paul Latham’s math homework in 4<sup>th</sup> grade.

- Some of you lie on schoolwork or hours you didn’t do.
- Some of you lie on your time card or your taxes.

You round up on how many hours you really worked or numbers for accounting to benefit you.

- Maybe you call it a fib instead of false witness or a white lie instead of a wicked lie.
- Is it really a big deal to God to overestimate or overstate how much you made or gave?

Acts 5: Ananias claimed to give all the proceeds to the church, maybe even gave most of it but with Sapphira's *'full knowledge he kept back part of the money ... Peter said, "Ananias, how is it that **Satan has so filled your heart that you have lied to the Holy Spirit and have kept for yourself some of the money...? Didn't it belong to you before it was sold? And after it was sold, wasn't the money at your disposal? What made you think of doing such a thing? You have not lied to men but to God.**"* When Ananias heard this, he fell down and died... three hours later his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. Peter asked her, "Tell me, is this the price you and Ananias got for the land?" "Yes," she said, "that is the price." Peter said to her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord?... " she fell down at his feet and died... Great fear seized the whole church...' (NIV).

- This should make the church fear greatly today, when we pretend to make ourselves look more spiritual
- We can test God and keep back for ourselves while keeping up appearances before others on Sunday
- To claim more than or take credit for what we didn't do or ask family members to cover for us is a sin
- God is deadly serious about lies churchgoers tell to make themselves look better than they really are
- If you're still in Ex 20, it says in v. 20 God tests us so His fear will remain before us so we may not sin
- We should fear knowing we've exaggerated or embellished what we've done and we deserve to die, too
- Lying deserves eternal death, Rev 21:8 *'all liars shall have their part in the lake that burns with fire...'*<sup>iv</sup>
- Hell will be full of people who lied to themselves and others and ultimately lied to God and His Spirit
- Peter says your lying isn't against man, it's ultimately sin against God and from Satan filling your heart
- Jesus said in Jn 8:44 the devil's done that *'from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies'* (NIV).
- Satan deceived by questioning *'Did God really say...?'* and twists the truth from Genesis to Revelation

*Prov 30:6: Do not add to his words, lest he rebuke you and you be found a liar.*

The Catechism said: 'the very devices the devil uses...call down on me God's intense wrath.'

- Even believers suffer consequences in this life short of death, as we see in Genesis.
- Adam and Eve didn't physically die the day they sinned, but their nature tried to hide.
- And that's passed on to children born ever since who hide and lie before they can talk.
- Ps 58:3 says about sinners *They go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies* (NKJV).
  - o Toddlers lie with body language, liars in diapers

When Moses wrote to the Jews the 9<sup>th</sup> commandment, they already knew the Genesis back story

- Abraham in the chapter he's introduced lies about his wife being his sister because of fear
- Gen 18:15: *Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh."* [the Lord] said, "Yes, you did..."<sup>v</sup>
- In Gen 20 father Abraham lies again about Sarah, tried to justify it as a half-truth, but brought judgment
- In Gen 26 like father, like son, Isaac also lied about his wife Rebekah, consequences in their family tree
- Rebekah later teaches their son Jacob to deceive old Isaac with his failing eyesight (stew and hairy arms)
- Isaac questioned his voice and how he got the food so quick, Jacob said *'Yahweh your God brought it... I am Esau your firstborn...'* *'Are you really my son?'* *'I am.'*... *'Come near now and kiss me, my son.'*<sup>vi</sup>
- Jacob deceived his blind dad for the blessing. And these are the good guys?! Abraham, Isaac and Jacob
- The family of Israel shows we can lie from fear, embarrassment (I didn't laugh), or for our own benefit
- Jacob reaps what he sows: Laban lies about the # of years and which daughter he'd wake up lying with!
- Jacob's sons with Leah then lie to old Jacob about what happened to Joseph (his colored robe all bloody)
- That's the forefathers and family history that brought these people to Egypt who Moses writes Ex 20 to
- Ex 20:5 says the sins of the fathers visit children to the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> generation. v. 16 is to stop that cycle
- As parents, we need to teach the 9<sup>th</sup> commandment and seek forgiveness where we fail to keep our word
- We need to recognize and repent at the root sin (fear of man, coveting better things, covering bad things)

Don't lie to family members with 'you always \_\_\_' or 'you never \_\_\_' (even if it feels like it').

Don't mislead to make yourself the good guy or misjudge others and their motives as bad guys.

- Don't lie about church family members or your fellow man.

DeYoung gives examples of how we can falsely accuse or assume: <sup>vii</sup> ““She didn't talk to me because she's really mad at me,” or “The way he wrote that email[text] —he must be thinking such and such.” We develop elaborate hypotheses and speculations, and when we tell other people, we pass it along as truth... Time out: Are you giving a true witness... we emphasize only the really mean thing they said to us... know how to leave out information and summarize long conversations in a way that makes us (or our side) look good and others (and their side) look bad... pass along information in a certain implied tone... passing along a report or rumor that cannot be substantiated... [or] pass along a true report unnecessarily... Ask yourself: would the person I'm about to talk about be happy if I were to pass along this info...?”

**Apply Christ's golden rule by talking about others the way we'd have them talk about us**

Don't even listen to slander or gossip

- or anything against your neighbor that may not be the full or fair picture.
- Prov 17:4 ‘...a liar gives ear to a mischievous tongue.’
- Thomas Watson: “He that raises a slander, carries the devil in his tongue; and he that receives it, carries the devil in his ear.”<sup>viii</sup>
- We need to stop giving ear to 2<sup>nd</sup> hand info without all facts behind his or her back.
- The Bible pattern is talk lovingly face-to-face and if it's sin, help in private 1-on-1.

Love your neighbor, 1 Cor 13 love speaks and believes the best until facts prove otherwise.

- Don't say things about a neighbor you wouldn't say to him,
  - o and on the flip side you can lie by saying things overly nice.

The opposite, flattery also lies to a neighbor. Ps 12:2 ‘Everyone utters lies to his neighbor; with flattering lips’

**Saying to their face what you'd never say ABOUT THEM TO others is flattery, fake praise**

One study: '91 percent of us lie regularly...31 percent...believe honesty is the best policy... [but lie] 92 percent of the time to save face and 98 percent of the time to keep from offending...’<sup>ix</sup>

We make excuses that aren't exactly true when we're embarrassed or don't want to embarrass.

- I'm tempted to embellish stories or exaggerate (hours I slept, how long something took).
- I say ‘I'll pray for you’ (but I fail to). Better to say ‘I'll try to’ or pray with them then.
- Maybe you're doing terrible, someone asks how you're doing and you say ‘great!’

Or you switch into a fake nice mode when you see other Christians.

- Or you pretend at church. Hypocrisy is lying.

1 Jn 1:6 *If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness [i.e., habitual hypocritical living in unrepentant patterns], we lie and do not practice the truth ...* <sup>8</sup> *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us...* <sup>10</sup> *If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.*

If you say you have no sin or haven't sinned by lying, you're deceived and even call God a liar.

1 Jn 2:4 *Whoever says “I know him” but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him ...* [again a willful habitual pattern of disobedience]. 4:20 *If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.*

Professing Christians who hate are liars. You say you believe, but don't keep His law; you lie.

**The Law bears witness against us, only God is true though every man is a liar**

We're all guilty of violating this law and need **2. Gospel truth and God's help to speak truth**

Our generation needs this, as most Christian youth don't believe in an objective truth standard.<sup>x</sup> But into this world comes Jesus 'full of grace and truth' and John bore true witness to Him (Jn 1).<sup>xi</sup> Jesus said in Jn 18:37 "**For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice.**"<sup>38</sup> Pilate said to him, "What is truth?"

The Pharisees accused Jesus of false witness: 'You bear witness of Yourself; Your witness is not true.'<sup>xii</sup> But Jesus said His works and His Word bore a true witness about Him and His truth (5:36, 59).

- Jesus didn't just come to speak truth,
- He came to be truth. 'I am the way, **the truth**, and the life' 14:6.

Jesus promised 'I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth...**he will bear witness about me**' (15:26).

- Jesus prayed for believers what helps us overcome lying:
  - o 'sanctify them in the truth, your word is truth' (17:17).

Acts 10:43 '...all the prophets **bear witness** that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins...'

- And all of us who believe are called to bear witness to gospel truth
  - o and be witnesses to the ends of the earth, 1:8

**We tell them Jesus is the truth and the only way to the Father through Him**

Your sins bear witness against you but there is a righteousness of God the Law bears witness to.

- The world says being good gets you to heaven,
  - o God's Word says that's a lie from the pit of hell.

The gospel truth is that we're all bad but Jesus is the Good Shepherd who died for us bad sheep. If you turn from your sin to trust Him alone you'll know the truth, and the truth will set you free

The gospel story has hope for us who falsely excuse our own sins

- or who others falsely accuse.
- Jesus was slandered as a Samaritan, a sinner, a Sabbath-breaker, even Satan-empowered.
- In His false trial His enemies got false witnesses, but they couldn't get 2 or 3 to agree.
- They took out of context words on destroying the temple to falsely accuse Him in court

The night He died enemies said to get guards '**that deceiver** said "After three days I will rise again."<sup>xiii</sup>

- Even His disciple Peter in fear lied and denied he knew the man 3x.
- But Jesus had grace for Peter and has it for us.

**Our Savior offers healing and hope and help for the deceit in our mouth**

By the power of the gospel the risen Lord restored Peter when he reaffirmed that he loved Him. Peter later wrote '**Christ suffered for you... no deceit was found in his mouth...He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.**'<sup>xiv</sup>

- That's 1 Peter 2 and he starts the chapter saying we need to put off all deceit and slander and hypocrisy
  - o and then taste and see the Lord is good.
  - o The good news is the only One with no deceit suffered for your sins of deceit.

For us who have borne false witness against our neighbors He bore our sin and the wrath of the lake of fire for it

To the end of the Bible and end of time, the book of Revelation calls Jesus '*the faithful witness*'

- and the risen returning one sitting '*a white horse... called Faithful and True*' (1:5, 19:11).
- He'll throw the false prophet who deceives in the lake of fire (19:20)
  - o and '*Satan, the deceiver of the whole world*' He'll cast in the abyss for a thousand years
    - '*so that he might not deceive the nations any longer*' (20:3).

Truly, truly He says those things, and His power that will defeat Satan can also defeat our sins.

- His gospel truly changes His children to walk in truth,
- And there's no greater joy than to see that in our children.

God can help us to think on what is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, excellent, praiseworthy.<sup>xv</sup> He makes us new in Christ to obey Col 3:9 *Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self...*

**Now turn to Eph 4 for more of God's help to speak truth**

Paul in Eph 4 gives gospel applications after 3 chapters of gospel truth, how to put it in practice. 4:15 *Rather, **speaking the truth in love**...* The truth isn't enough if you're rough, truth must be spoken in love. ...<sup>21</sup> *assuming that you have heard about him and were taught in him, as **the truth is in Jesus**,*<sup>22</sup> *to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through **deceitful desires**,*<sup>23</sup> *and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,*<sup>24</sup> *and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in **true righteousness and holiness.***<sup>25</sup> *Therefore, **having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another**...*<sup>29</sup> *Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear...*<sup>32</sup> *Be kind...*

Before you speak, T.H.I.N.K.. Is what I'm about to say... T – True? (v. 25)

H – Helpful? (v. 29)

I – Imparting grace? (v. 29)

N – Necessary and edifying? (v. 29)

K – Kind (v. 32, 15)

Some Christians are more than willing to “tell it like it is,” but there is something brutal about their honesty...keeping the 9th commandment does *not* mean saying whatever comes to mind. There are many situations in life when it is better to say nothing at all...the 9th commandment means...saying the honest thing—when it is our duty to say it—in a loving way.<sup>xvi</sup>

Westminster Larger Catechism: ‘The ninth commandment forbids everything detrimental to the truth and the good reputation of others...passing an unjust sentence, call[ing] evil good or good evil...expressing any kind of judgmental opinion that is rash, harsh, or... misconstruing intentions, words, and actions... thinking or speaking too highly or too poorly of ourselves or others; denying the gifts of God or the effects of his grace on us; exaggerating the significance of trivial faults; concealing, excusing, or rationalizing our sinful behavior when we are called to confess it voluntarily; gratuitously revealing the problems and failings of others... harboring evil suspicions...and, finally, failing to promote everyone's good name, and doing, not avoiding, or not hindering in others, as we can, those things that give people a bad name.’

SLIDE – pray God's help Ps 119:29 *Keep me from deceitful ways; be gracious to me through your law.* (NIV)

Psalm 120:2 *Deliver me, O LORD, from lying lips, from a deceitful tongue.* (ESV)

Psalm 141:3 *Set a guard, O LORD, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips!* (ESV)

Proverbs 30:8 *Remove falsehood and lies far from me...* (NKJV)

So help us God to tell the truth to others and to ourselves. Don't lie to yourself as you leave. James 1:22 *be doers of the word, and not hearers only, **deceiving yourselves.***<sup>23</sup> *For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror.*<sup>24</sup> *For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.*<sup>25</sup> *But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.*<sup>26</sup> *If anyone thinks he is religious and does not bridle his tongue but **deceives his heart**, this person's religion is worthless.*

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<sup>i</sup> Kevin DeYoung, *The Ten Commandments: What They Mean, Why They Matter, and Why We Should Obey Them* (Crossway, 2018), p. 17.

<sup>ii</sup> In ESV, Psalm 7:14, 31:18, 52:3, 69:4, etc.

<sup>iii</sup> Question 112.

<sup>iv</sup> NKJV.

<sup>v</sup> NIV84.

<sup>vi</sup> Genesis 27.

<sup>vii</sup> DeYoung, 146-47.

<sup>viii</sup> Thomas Watson, *The Ten Commandments* (1692; repr. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1965), 169-170.<sup>viii</sup>

<sup>ix</sup> As cited by Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of Grace: God's Ten Words for a Vital Spiritual Life* (Crossway, 1993), 154-55, 158.

<sup>x</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *Written in Stone: The Ten Commandments and Today's Moral Crisis* (Crossway Books, 2003), 192.

<sup>xi</sup> John 1:7 (ESV) He came as a witness, to **bear witness** about the light, that all might believe through him...<sup>9</sup> The **true light**, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world...<sup>14</sup> And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and **truth**.<sup>15</sup> (John **bore witness** about him...<sup>17</sup> For the law was given through Moses; grace and **truth came through Jesus Christ**...<sup>32</sup> And John **bore witness** ...<sup>34</sup> And I have seen and have **borne witness that this is the Son of God.**"

<sup>xii</sup> John 8:13 NKJV.

<sup>xiii</sup> Matthew 27:63 NIV.

<sup>xiv</sup> 1 Peter 2:21-24 NIV.

<sup>xv</sup> Philippians 4:8 ESV.

<sup>xvi</sup> Ryken, *Written in Stone*, 193-194.