

Exodus pt. 38
Bearing False Witness
Exodus 20:16

I. Introduction

- A. Today as we continue with our study of the Ten Commandments we will look at the ninth commandment. You may realize that we've skipped over the sixth, seventh, and eighth commandments. I will look at those three commandments next week all together as we prepare our hearts for Resurrection Sunday the following week.
- B. "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." (Exodus 20:16)

II. What Does this Commandment Teach us About God?

- A. The Details of the Commandment
 - 1. This commandment is often reduced down to simply "Thou shall not lie." We will see in a moment that the ninth commandment does include lying but it actually goes far beyond that. Notice the exact words, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."
 - 2. False Witness
 - a) The immediate context is in the confines of a legal case.
 - (1) "It governs the legal testimony that a witness gives in a public trial before a jury." (*Preaching the Word: Exodus*, pg. 614)
 - (2) A trustworthy witness will not lie, but a false witness utters lies. (Proverbs 14:5)
 - (a) If being a false witness merely means lying why does Solomon say that "a false witness utters lies?"
 - (3) "To understand this commandment it helps to know more about the justice system in the ancient world. In those days people who were charged with a crime had little protection. They were not presumed innocent until proven guilty, but presumed guilty until proven innocent. There were few standards for the presentation of evidence, and sometimes the accused didn't even get the chance to mount a defense. Furthermore, most ancient courts were willing to convict someone on the strength of a single witness. [...] since many crimes were treated as capital offenses, often the defendant's life was at stake. The words of a false witness could be fatal." (Ibid)
 - b) Extended principles
 - (1) Lying
 - (a) Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal faithfully are His delight. (Proverbs 12:22)
 - (2) Self lies
 - (a) The Bible talks a lot about self-deception.
 - i) Depression, anxiety, pride, self-hatred, self-condemnation, doubt, faithlessness,
 - (b) "We talk to ourselves more than anyone else."
 - (c) Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. (Philippians 4:8)

(3) Gossip

(a) There are six things which the Lord hates. Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, a false witness who utters lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers. (Proverbs 6:16 - 19)

i) Notice that God hates “a false witness who utters lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers.” He hates the false witness. He hates the one. He hates the person.

(b) A perverse man spreads strife, and a slanderer separates intimate friends. (Proverbs 16:28)

(c) An evildoer listens to wicked lips; a liar pays attention to a destructive tongue. (Proverbs 17:4)

(d) “An old rabbinic saying, [says] ‘slander kills three: the one who speaks it, the one who listens to it, and the one about whom it is spoken.’” (*Preaching the Word: Exodus*, pg. 617)

(e) “The Puritan Thomas Watson made a similar point when he said, “He that raises a slander, carries the devil in his tongue; and he that receives it, carries the devil in his ear.” (Ibid)

3. Against your Neighbor

a) The second part of this commandment is also important. Breaching this commandment requires that it be “against” that is hurtful, malicious, or hateful towards your neighbor.

b) So planning a surprise birthday party for your pastor and “lying” to him so the surprise is not ruined is not a violation of this commandment.

c) More seriously, I don’t believe that this commandment prohibits something that would protect the life, freedom, and happiness of others. For example, hiding Jews in the Holocaust would not be lying against your neighbor. Rather it would be for your neighbor’s safety, well-being, and life. That lie would be against an ungodly government committed to an ungodly mass genocide.

B. What Does this Commandment Teach us About God?

1. God is a God of Truth

a) Remember the whole point of Exodus is that Yahweh wants to demonstrate that He is the only True God. He dismantled the false gods of Egypt and has revealed Himself as the only True God.

b) Not only that but because God is the only True God, He is a God who loves truth. The Bible records that Satan is the “father of lies.” God is the Father of truth.

(1) ...let God be found true, though every man be found a liar...(Roman 3:4)

(2) ...it is impossible for God to lie... (Hebrews 6:18b)

2. God is a God of Love

a) Why does God give this commandment? Not only because He hates falsehood but because lies are inherently damaging to others. The Apostle John records that “God is love.” God loves His creation and especially His children. All of God’s commandments are rooted in both His personal holiness and His love for people. Bearing false witness is destructive against people and therefore God hates it.

3. God is a God of Justice

- a) God cares deeply about justice, about right and wrong, about fairness. This is enshrined in the entire Bible. One of the dominant themes of the Old Testament is that God hates any form of injustice.
- b) What would be more flagrantly unjust than to falsely accuse someone resulting in their execution?

III. How Does this Commandment Point us toward Christ?

A. Jesus is the Truth

- 1. Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me." (John 14:6)

B. Jesus Told the Truth

- 1. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously; and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by his wounds you were healed. (1 Peter 2:21 - 24)
- 2. There was no deceit found in Jesus' mouth. Remember that "it is impossible for God to lie." Jesus is God in the flesh. Just as the Father cannot lie, neither can the Son.

C. Jesus' Death was Brought on by False Witnesses

- 1. Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, so that they might put Him to death. They did not find any, even though many false witnesses came forward. But later on two came forward,... (Matthew 26:59 - 60)
 - a) How does the ninth commandment point us to Jesus? It was the very commandment that was broken that led to Jesus' death. The religious leaders sought out and bribed false witnesses to accuse Jesus.
 - (1) "There is no hatred so bitter as hatred based on crude religious feelings." (Barton, 163)
 - b) Do you see the irony of dead religion? These religious leaders claim to care deeply about keeping God's Laws. So much so that they seek to kill Jesus because, in their mind, He has violated the Law of Moses. Yet they are fine with paying false witnesses to violate the ninth commandment. They can justify this by saying, "well we didn't lie. They did. They are guilty and we are not."
 - c) Just like they pay Judas to betray Jesus and when he attempts to return their payment they cannot because it would be illegal to receive "blood money." Why is it blood money? Because you paid Judas to betray an innocent man. This is the heart of lifeless religion and legalism. In stead of seeing God's Laws as a blessing that should be used to honor Him and help others, we beat people with it, we attempt to sidestep it, we play games with God.
 - d) They make a mockery of God's Law in order to suit their evil desires. I fear many modern Christians act in similar ways as this. Outwardly being legalistic while inwardly not caring at all for God, His Word, and His Kingdom.

IV. How Does this Commandment Point us toward the Gospel?

A. The gospel itself is the message of truth

1. In Him, you also, after listening *to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation* - having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory. (Ephesians 1:13 - 14)
- B. The gospel neither bears false witness against God nor us.
 1. The gospel says that God is perfect in holiness, justice, and love. So He is.
 2. Likewise, the gospel tells us that we are all guilty before God for our sin and so we are. We deserve condemnation. But the good news of God is that because of Jesus' living a perfect life on our behalf and dying an atoning death on our behalf we can be forgiven and free.
 - a) The ninth commandment prohibits lying about an innocent man so that he would be put to death. The gospel says that guilty men who deserve death receive life because Jesus died in our place. Jesus came to fulfill the Law. The gospel is actually a reversal of the ninth commandment. Not only does God not bear false witness against us, He actually demonstrates His mercy for pardoning us when we are guilty.

V. How Does this Commandment Apply to New Testament Believers?

- A. We are Called to Be True Witnesses of Jesus
 1. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth. (Acts 1:8)
 2. We saw this in our discussion of the third commandment, "do not take the Lord's name in vain." To be a Christian means we literally are carrying the name of Christ. We either carry it honorably or dishonorably. Likewise, Jesus commands us, as Christians, to be His witnesses. If we live in such a way that dishonors or misrepresents Jesus, we are being false witnesses. We are supposed to live in such a way that Jesus is seen clearly through us.
- B. We are Called to Be Speakers of Truth
 1. Therefore, laying aside all falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. (Ephesians 4:25)
 2. Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear. Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:29 - 32)
- C. We Are Called to Hold to Truth
 1. We live in a post-modern culture that doesn't believe that objective truth even exists. The biblical worldview maintains that there is objective truth. God is the standard of truth and His Word records it. The Word of God is true and sufficient for faith and practice.
 2. "Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man that built his house on the rock." (Matthew 7:24)

VI. Conclusion and Application