

AUGUST 6TH

YOUR NEIGHBOR MATTERS PART 2

“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” **EXODUS 20:16**

What is the meaning behind God’s words here about “bearing false witness”? Hughes unpacks the original meaning for us in this way: “strictly speaking, this Commandment was originally focused against perjuring oneself in a judicial trial, not against other forms of lying and deception.” Indeed, this was a problem for the Israelites, as you can see from the false testimony about Jesus before the Roman courts. As Jesus unpacks God’s commands, He exposes the sinful heart behind the temptations to break them. This commandment is no different. Think about what God says in Proverbs 6:16-19: “There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.” Did you notice how the last verse ends? A false witness who breathes out lies and sows discord among brothers. Those two things appear to be connected. As we interpret this command, we begin with the negative...and the negative isn’t just lying in a court of law, it’s lying about someone else’s character.

Matthew Mitchell defines gossip as: “bearing bad news behind someone’s back out of a bad heart.” Words have the power to build up or the power to destroy. The problem in our world is that we compete with others. As men, we want to win. Therefore, we skew the truth in order to get ahead. What we discover about ourselves is that we like it. The lies we tell about someone else tear down someone else and lift us up. The Bible describes this slander and gossip as tasting like sweet morsels to us. Mitchell puts people into four categories...where do you find yourself: the spy (looking to find dirt on someone), the grumbler (also known as venting), the backstabber (looking to retaliate), and the chameleon (trying to fit into the crowd, so you join in). Perhaps you may not struggle with spreading gossip, but you may not do much to stop it either. If you hear a lie and don’t do anything to stop it, you’ve contributed to its greater spread. Make no mistake about it, these are all examples of breaking this commandment.

How does God reveal His character here? God is true. He is perfectly faithful and good, bringing justice on sin and grace on sinners that receive Christ. The first command in the Garden of Eden was true. God said that when they ate of the tree that He commanded them not to eat, they would surely die. But do you notice Satan’s tactic in that garden? He attempts to call God a liar, without coming out and slandering God as a liar. He deceives Eve. “You will not surely die, for God knows that when you eat of it, you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” In essence, Satan is saying, “God has given this command not to protect you, but to block you, or limit your potential.” It’s the oldest lie and it continues today. Satan is described as the father of lies by Jesus in John 8. But God. God was, and is, and is to come. And He comes as truth. He calls us to mimic His character and be truth tellers. How will we respond to our God today?

Spend some time examining how you use your words. Confess to the Lord any gossip and ask Him for strength to be a truth teller that shows grace to others.

For Further Reading: James 3:1-12