

March 22, 2015

You Shall Not Bear False Witness

Exodus 20:16

Ephesians 4:20-25

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."

This ninth commandment, *"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."* implies a courtroom situation. The text speaks literally about a lying or false witness, giving testimony about a matter involving someone else. The way this played out in ancient times was that the accused was brought before the elders or the king, or someone who represented judicial powers in the community, and witnesses were brought in to testify to what he or she had or had not done. There were no lawyers to complicate the matter and everything could depend upon what the witnesses said. Since some of the crimes could carry the death sentence, the truthfulness of the witness was crucial. False testimony could lead to the wrongful death of the accused and would in that case amount to murder. This was highlighted by the fact that if at least two witnesses agreed that so and so actually committed the crime, that effectively made them the accusers. The law then said that a man's accusers must be the ones to initiate the death sentence. They would be the ones to cast the first stones.

In essence, this ninth commandment is a call to truthfulness in all our relationships. It is a call to stop lying. You shall not lie, deceive, wrong or perpetuate fraud upon your neighbor. Proverbs 24:28 says it like this: *Do not testify against your neighbor without cause, or use your lips to deceive.* And don't be tempted to ask like the lawyer in the gospel of Luke, 'Who is my neighbor?' You only ask questions like that when you want to limit your liability. And Jesus made it clear to him, and to us, that our neighbor is not limited to our little circle of friends and family, but rather everyone God puts in our way. So this commandment is a call to truthfulness in our dealings with everyone. Don't lie. Be honest with your words with everyone. So this morning we'll look at three things: **What is a lie?** That is, what makes a lie a lie? **Why do we lie?** And finally, **how do we become a people of truth?**

So what is a lie? How do you know when you're lying? I'm not talking primarily about bald-face lies that we know are lies, or whether or not a politician's mouth is moving. I'm talking about what makes a lie a lie. Generally speaking, dictionaries define a lie as a false statement made with deliberate intent to deceive. Deceit is at the root of this thing. And dictionaries define deceit as an act or practice ... intended to ... mislead by a false appearance or statement. In other words, we speak lies and we practice deceit. It is using words or doing actions that are intended to lead people to believe what is not true. In considering your words or actions, consider the motive. Are you intending to give people around you a true picture of things, or are you shading things for your own benefit? It is not only saying untrue things, we also lie by not saying all that is true – indulging in half-truths.

If you've been around me for any length of time, you know how much I love my grandchildren. But they're such little liars. You don't have to teach them about this – it comes automatically with birth. My youngest granddaughter, Eden, was over at my house with her sisters and her dad and I were talking in the kitchen while the girls were in the living room. At one point I walked into the living room and noticed two things: empty candy wrappers on the floor and Eden walking quickly out of the room. I immediately tied the two together and caught her before she could get away. I said, pointing to the wrappers, 'Eden, what are those?' Without missing a beat she said, 'Oh that's gawbige'. Well it was. But she knew that what I was really asking was 'Did you get into the chocolate without asking?' **Lying is deceiving others by not saying what is true and by not saying all that is true.**

Why do we lie? We lie for several reasons. The first is major, and obvious. We lie because that is our fallen, human nature. There are no classes we have to take to do this well. In John 8, Jesus tells the unbelieving Pharisees, *'You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.* It was his lie that led us into sin in the beginning – and from that point on, lying has become endemic to human nature.

In fact lying is such a part of being human that psychologists and psychiatrists have begun praising lying as a virtue. Dr. Michael Lewis of the Robert Wood Johnson Medical School wrote in 1990: "***Lying is an important part of social life, and children who are unable to do it are children who may have developmental problems.***" I'm not sure I see it the way he does. Never mind the fact I've never met a child who didn't know how to lie. But I've always considered lying to be a hindrance to development, not the other way around. In fact, it is more true that on the whole, people lie at the drop of a hat. The book ***The Day America Told the Truth*** says that 91 percent of those surveyed, lie routinely about matters they consider trivial, and 36 percent lie about important matters; 86 percent lie regularly to parents, 75 percent to friends, 73 percent to siblings, and 69 percent to spouses.

There was a study, published in the *Journal of Basic and Applied Psychology* a few years ago, where two strangers were put together in a room for a 10 minutes to converse with each other. The study found that 60 percent of people had lied at least once during the 10-minute conversation, saying an average of 2.92 inaccurate things. "People almost lie reflexively," the researcher said. "They don't think about it as part of their normal social discourse." But it is, the research showed. "We're trying not so much to impress other people but to maintain a view of ourselves that is consistent with the way they would like us to be," Feldman said. We want to be agreeable, to make the social situation smoother or easier, and to avoid insulting others through disagreement or discord. Men lie no more than women, but they tend to lie to make themselves look better, while women are more likely to lie to make the other person feel better.

Jesus, in Matthew 15 tells us that lying is a matter of the condition of our heart: ***For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.*** It is the natural state of the unregenerate heart. And the impulse of that heart is to ***promote yourself, protect yourself, please yourself, and punish people you don't like.*** And lying fits the bill quite nicely. **We lie to promote ourselves.** To make ourselves look better than we really do. You see this all the time when two people are in contention over something. Each story is shaded to make the teller seem like he is in the right. ***The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him.*** Proverbs 18:17 We often lie to impress people and make them feel we are more important or valuable than we really are.

Sometimes we promote ourselves through flattery – saying things to a person's face that you would never say behind their back. It is the fine art of telling a person what he thinks of himself in such a way that he also thinks that you are his best friend and a great guy. Psalm 12:2 says '***Everyone utters lies to his neighbor; with flattering lips and a double heart they speak.***' Flattery is a lie that is intended to manipulate. It is different from trying to encourage someone. It all depends on the motive. Flattery stems from a motive to manipulate. You tell your boss he's really sharp or a great guy and you think his vision for the company is innovative and brilliant, but you're really thinking '***He might have a full six-pack but he's missing the plastic thingy that holds it all together***' [The wheel is turning but the hamster is dead] because you want a promotion or a raise or whatever.

Sometimes we promote ourselves through exaggeration. Ever been guilty of exaggeration? Making things out to be a little better or worse, bigger or smaller, than they really are? I'm often guilty of this. I know I am because my wife tells me my stories get more elaborate every year. I say they get more interesting. "It was so cold where we were," said the Arctic explorer, "that the candle froze and we couldn't blow it out." "That's nothing," said his rival. "Where we were, the words came out of our mouths in pieces of ice and we had to fry them up to hear what we were talking about." How cold was it? 'Last winter it was so cold that the squirrels were throwing themselves at the electric fence just to warm up'. Exaggeration. That's not hyperbole. Hyperbole is blowing things up to make a point, and people understand that. Exaggeration is when you lie to promote yourself. We inflate our resumes. We minimize our faults.

We lie to protect ourselves. We lie to cover up the fact that we've sinned in other ways. Four high school boys one fine spring day could not resist the temptation to skip morning classes. After lunch they showed up at school and reported to their teacher that their car had a flat tire. Much to their relief, she smiled and said, "Well, you missed a quiz this morning, so take your seats and get out a pencil and paper." Still smiling, she waited as they settled down and got ready for her questions. Then she said, "First question--which tire was flat?"

We lie to please ourselves. We lie for personal gain. Who hasn't told a lie or shaded the truth to gain an advantage? People do, businesses do. There is a store that sells products for the office and they have a rewards program that offers items, like a case of paper for \$40 with \$30 rewards. Ads say, "It's like getting it for \$10." But it isn't! To use the \$30 reward, you have to buy something else for \$30 or more. So it isn't like getting something worth \$40 for \$10. It's getting things worth \$70 for \$40! That's a lie.

We lie to punish people we don't like. We do it through gossip, slander, outright untruths and innuendo. There was a captain and a first mate on a ship who did not get along, and they each took turns making the official log entries on the ship. One day the first mate, who normally did not drink, drank a bit too much rum and got drunk. The captain, who hated him, entered in the daily log: "First mate was drunk today." He knew this was his first offense, but he wanted to get him fired. A few days later the first mate was keeping the log, and concluded it with: "Captain was sober today."

We lie because that is the nature of our fallen being. It's built in. It's there in the heart. Out of the heart comes false witness. Out of the heart comes lying. We don't have to do anything to get that upgrade. And because it comes from the heart it is motivated by the desire to promote ourselves, to protect ourselves, to please ourselves and to punish those we do not like. **So how do we live so as not to lie?** How do we live truthfully? How do we not lie? We will never speak the truth if we do not know the truth. We'll never live the truth if we do not embrace the truth. And the Bible says, *A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who pours out lies will not go free.* Proverbs 19:5 and *A false witness will perish, and whoever listens to him will be destroyed forever.* Proverbs 21:28 And the Bible is not just speaking of the consequences of lying in this life. Yes, most liars will be caught and they will find themselves trapped in the webs they spin in the here and now. Ultimately lying is a bad way to live your life.

But there is a greater eternal truth this points to as well. Listen to what the final book in the Bible has to say about liars: *But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.* Revelation 21:8 And that means we're in trouble. John just summed up the Ten Commandments and what happens to those who don't keep them. And if something doesn't change for us, that's where we're headed. I think we've already seen in commandments one through eight, that on our own, we're not doing that great in keeping God's law. To be a people of truth we need to embrace the truth. And unlike Pilate who asked sarcastically, 'What is truth?', we need to ask sincerely, 'What is truth?' And then embrace it when it comes.

We can only do that because truth is not a thing – truth is a person. Jesus said, 'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life'. Truth is found in Jesus Christ – nowhere else. If you want to know the truth about who you are, what life is all about; if you want to know the secrets of the universe, if you want to live in truth, you have to look at Jesus. 2000 years ago, Truth was put to death by the lie. False witnesses were produced against the King of Glory and it was their hands that nailed Him to the cross. But Jesus went to the cross willingly so that He could die the death we liars should have died and absorbed in His body the ultimate punishment for lying so that we could now live in truth. Unless we trust in Christ and embrace this truth, we'll be liars in this life and join all the liars in the lake of fire in the next.

So what does that look like when we trust in Christ? Do we automatically stop all lying? I think you know the answer to that. No. We read that passage in Ephesians chapter four this morning and I want to end with that. Paul is writing to these believers in Ephesus, and in the fourth chapter he reminds them of who they are in Christ because there seems to be an integrity issue. They say they're Christians, but Paul says 'You're acting like you are still pagans. There's anger and bitterness and malice and gossip and lying going on'. And he says, *But that is not the way you learned Christ!-- assuming that you have heard about Him and were taught in Him, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.*

Essentially he tells them that when they trusted Christ, something new is born. **The Christian life is not a moral self-improvement program that we work at to change ourselves.** It is an entirely new life that is created. God creates the new person we are to put on. The old self is the sum total of all of the emotions, attitudes and actions that characterized me before the new birth – that one had no possibility of moral improvement, it always lies and it is a product of the Fall, totally corrupted and on its way out. That's why Paul says **'Put it off'**. And put on the new created self that is the sum total of all that Christ is in emotion, attitude and actions. And this is a choice we must make. When God creates the new person, He doesn't cancel our responsibility to make choices. The choice when you become a Christian is: **'Will you follow the path of deceit or the path of truth?'** The new creation is not an elimination of choice but a transformation of the heart that makes choices. Your center of operations has shifted from the old nature, corrupted and being corrupted by deceit to the new nature that is created after or according to the likeness of God in the truth. Where once your life was characterized by lying, now it is characterized by truth.

That is what Paul is talking about when he says, in between verses 22 and 24: *be renewed in the spirit of your minds...!* The bridge from the old to the new has to do with a renewed way of thinking. If you have never been born again, there is no possibility of renewed thinking because the source of this new thinking is the new, created self. That is why the command to put off and put on is rooted in the work of God and not based on our ability to do the thing ourselves. That is why I say that the Christian life is the experience of the sovereign and supernatural. There are many who think that the Christian life is simply a self-improvement course. Books like **Your Best Life Now** and **Become a Better You** are wildly popular because we think all we need to do is clean up our act. We simply take what we have and improve upon it. But the Bible teaches that what we have naturally is corrupted and in need of removal. 'Take off those old clothes and put on the new ones' Paul says. The old ones are ready for the burn bin and can't be washed or mended enough. When we get to glory – there won't be any old rags showing up.

That is the picture that Jesus paints in Matthew 22 when He tells the parable of the marriage feast. The invitation to come and dine with the wedding party was thrown open to anyone who would come. And then Jesus said: *But when the king came in to look at the guests, he saw there a man who had no wedding garment. And he said to him, Friend, how did you get in here without a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then the king said to the attendants, Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.* Matthew 22:11-13

I believe there will be many on that day who will be shocked to discover that they never changed their clothes at all. They tried to mend the torn and ragged places, tried to scrub out the dirt and stains, but never exchanged the old for the new. When Jesus said, 'Change your clothes', they straightened their ties, tucked in their shirts, maybe shined their shoes, but they would not take off those cherished habits, or remove those addictions to pornography, or strip off the love of money, or take off the clothes of anger and abusive speech and lying. **They wanted the hope of heaven but they wouldn't dress for it.** They had never had the experience of a new birth. That is why, if you are here this morning and have never embraced the gospel of Jesus Christ – you have never committed your life to Him as Lord and Savior, then you cannot know what it is to put off the old self and put on the new. Which is why I, along with Paul, urge you to be reconciled to God this morning, lest you find on that day you've just been gilding the lily – trying to mend old clothes.

I say all of this so that you don't read this next section and think that you just need to change your behavior in some respects. The commands that follow verses 22-24 are **rooted in the new creation – not our ability to change.** That is why Paul leads with this: *Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.* Ephesians 4:25 **Therefore** – because you have a new nature created in righteousness and holiness of the truth – put away falsehood. Actually a better reading there is **'Having put off the lie, speak the truth.** This is a direct reference back to verse 22: *to put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires,* The foundation of the old self is lying. Sin lies because it promises things it cannot deliver. Paul is not simply saying, 'Stop lying'. He is saying, 'Stop living in the lie'. Stop living in the lie that sin is lovely – or that its pleasure will last – or that the promise of sin is true – or that a life of sin won't kill you – or that doing what you please will somehow satisfy and fulfill you. Lying is an attempt to cover the fact that we are not as put together as we seem and that joy and pleasure, satisfaction and fulfillment can be found in someone or something other than Christ. And Paul says, 'Stop living like that'.

How do we live so as not to lie? How do we live truthfully? How do we put off the lie – and put on the truth? Paul says, ***having put off the lie, speak truth***. We embrace Jesus who is Truth through the gospel and we start living in the truth, and we continue to speak that truth to our souls and to others. We need to know the power of another life, a completely truthful life, the life Jesus lived, to come in and break the power of the old lying life of sin we were born with. We need to embrace the gospel, that Jesus suffered and died in our place so that we could be rescued from the bondage to lying lips and deceitful hearts; and we need to continue in the gospel. We need to continue to rehearse the truth of the gospel to our souls and to each other. Having put off the lie, speak truth to your neighbor. We need to ransack the word of God for His life-giving promises that release us from the prison of lies into the freedom of His Son. We need to rehearse these truths daily so that the transforming power of God's word begins to wash through our minds and over our souls to battle the deceitfulness of the lie. Stop living the lie this morning, embrace Jesus who is the truth and start speaking truth.

Our gracious heavenly Father,

Thank You for Your word this morning. Don't let this word be momentary and fleeting. Cause Your word to rest on us. Let it penetrate to the center of our souls, renewing our hearts and minds to the truth that is in Jesus. Let these lips that You created no longer be employed to lie but rather in righteousness and holiness be used to speak the truth. May our speech that has been used to promote ourselves, protect ourselves, please ourselves and punish others now be used in ceaseless praise to You we pray in the precious name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.