

Thou Shalt Not Bear False Witness

Exodus 20:16

Phil Johnson

We're finally nearing the end of our study of the Ten Commandments, and with the end in sight, I want to keep going. So this morning we'll be looking at the ninth commandment, found in Exodus 20:16: "**You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.**"

Now remember that there is a twofold division in the law. The first four commandments deal specifically with our duty toward God, and the fifth through the tenth commandments deal with our duty toward our neighbor. Jesus said you could reduce it all to two great principles (Matthew 22:37):

"You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."

38 This is the first and great commandment.

39 And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

40 On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.

The first four commandments outline for us a broad description of what it means to love God, and the final six

commandments give a broad description of what it means to love our neighbor. As we have stressed from the beginning, these Ten Commandments are broad categories. They are not meant to be an exhaustive list of all our moral duties. They simply give a broad list of specific sins to avoid, and implied in that list is a host of positive moral duties to observe. In John Calvin's words, "It is not enough to refrain ourselves from doing evil without at the same time also procuring good."

So the commandments all imply far more than they actually say. When the fifth commandment tells us to honor our parents, it also means we should honor every person in our lives who stands in a position of authority analogous to that of our parents. When the seventh commandment forbids us to commit adultery, it also forbids us to lust in our hearts—or to commit any other sin that might be a prelude to—or provide an occasion for—adultery. Wherever a sin is forbidden, a positive duty is also implied; and wherever a positive duty is laid upon us, all the contrary sins are also forbidden.

So the dimensions of the Ten Commandments turn out to be incredibly broad and comprehensive. And that was the whole point Jesus was making in his Sermon on the Mount, when he unpacked these commandments. He challenged the narrow, limited interpretation that had been placed on the Ten Commandments by the rabbinical scholars of His day. He

said it's not enough to abstain from killing your neighbor; you're not even permitted to hate your neighbor or even call him names. And so Jesus said in Matthew 5:21-22, "**You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder, and whoever murders will be in danger of the judgment.'** But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, '**Raca!**' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, '**You fool!**' shall be in danger of hell fire."

This was the whole point of the Sermon on the Mount: God's standard of righteousness is absolute perfection, and the Ten Commandments are merely tokens of the perfection that is required of us. So when the decalogue forbids us to murder, it is really commanding us to avoid every moral imperfection that might lead to murder. When the law says we should not commit adultery, it means that we should cultivate every moral virtue that is inconsistent with the sin of adultery.

And those same principles apply to the ninth commandment. When we are forbidden to bear false witness against our neighbor, we are actually being commanded to do everything we can to preserve the truth in our dealings with men, to guard the reputation of our neighbor's good name, to uphold justice in our interaction with one another, and to use our tongues for speaking the truth in general.

Like all the other commandments, this one has huge dimensions. In fact, it might be the most complex of all the commandments. So when I began preparing for this message, the sheer size of the subject was so intimidating that I briefly toyed with the idea of doing a whole series about the sin of bearing false witness. And then I thought about doing more than one message on the Ninth Commandment in order to cover the ground more thoroughly. But I finally decided to press on and do this in a single message, even though there's much more that could be said. So what I'm going to give you this morning is just a broad overview of the subject.

And I want to look at this commandment by examining three broad areas of moral duty this commandment implies. If you want to take notes, I'll give them to you as we go. Here is the first one. It is the principle of:

1. CHARITY: THE DUTY TO GUARD YOUR NEIGHBOR'S REPUTATION

The first and most obvious aspect of this commandment is the obligation it lays upon us to safeguard the reputation of our neighbor. We're to love our neighbor as ourselves, and this is one concrete way to show that love: safeguard his reputation.

The Sixth Commandment forbids us to take our neighbor's life or injure his person in any way. The Eighth Commandment forbids us to steal his goods or damage his

property in any way. And this commandment forbids us to destroy his reputation or to diminish his standing in the community. All these are all ways of loving our neighbor as ourselves.

In context, this commandment seems to speak of giving formal testimony against our neighbor in judicial proceedings. That is its primary meaning. That is the scenario envisioned by the commandment. And it is expounded upon in Deuteronomy 19. Turn there, and let's look further at what the law of Moses said about bearing false witness against one's neighbor.

Deuteronomy 19, starting at verse 15. Moses' law says this:

15 "One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established.

16 "If a false witness rises against any man to testify against him of wrongdoing,

17 "then both men in the controversy shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who serve in those days.

18 "And the judges shall make careful inquiry, and indeed, if the witness is a false witness, who has testified falsely against his brother,

19 "then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother; so you shall put away the evil from among you.

20 "And those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you.

21 "Your eye shall not pity: life shall be for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

That passage set up the judicial procedure by which civil complaints and criminal charges against a person were to be tried. And the principle was simple. If there were as many as two or three credible witnesses against a person, and if they all said the same thing and their testimony was examined and found to be credible, the accused was to be found guilty and punished in accordance with what the law demanded.

By the standards of American jurisprudence, the biblical standard of proof required doesn't seem all that rigorous. *Our* courts require that in criminal cases, the guilt of the accused must be proven beyond a reasonable doubt. That's why trials in our country are often long and expensive, and sometimes justice is clearly not done. The guilty are often acquitted, because the standards of proof are so high. Under the Hebrew system, justice was more swift and trials were less complex.

But under the Hebrew system, there was a greater risk that if two or more false witnesses conspired together to commit perjury, an innocent person could be convicted. That is exactly what happened in the case of Naboth, remember? The wicked king, Ahab, wanted Naboth's land for a garden, so Jezebel suborned perjury from a couple of false witnesses. They falsely accused Naboth of blasphemy against God and sedition against the king. And they held a kangaroo court where Naboth was convicted, and he was put to death. So Ahab seized Naboth's land by Jezebel's treachery. It was a huge miscarriage of justice, and God ultimately judged both Ahab and Jezebel severely for it.

To help avoid situations like that, the penalty for *perjury* under Moses' law was extremely severe. According to Deuteronomy 19:18 (the passage I just read), judges had a duty to investigate the testimony of witnesses, and if their testimony proved to be false, whatever penalty might have been given to the accused because of their false testimony was to be dealt out to the false witnesses. If the accused would have been fined, the false witnesses were assessed the same fine. If the person was on trial for a capital crime, the false witnesses had to pay for their perjury with their own lives. No mercy was to be shown to the false witnesses. That is what verse 21 means: "**Your eye shall not pity: life shall be for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.**"

And all of this was to be done publicly (according to verse 20), so that **"those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you."**

Because the whole justice system in Israel hinged on the integrity of the witnesses, being a false witness was an extremely serious crime.

But more than that, by its very nature, bearing false witness is a devilish sin. A person is never more like Satan than when he bears false witness against his neighbor. Scripture says the devil is the father of lies. John 8:44: **"He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it."**

Notice how all the commandments are linked. The moral evil of this sin is very much like the sin of murder—so much so that the devil is called a murderer because he does not stand in the truth. There's morally not much difference between depriving someone of his life by murder and depriving him of his reputation by bearing false witness against him.

Furthermore, if you take the stand and perjure yourself by giving sworn testimony against your neighbor falsely, you have not only broken the Ninth Commandment; you have

also violated the Third Commandment and taken the Lord's name in vain by violating your oath of honesty.

But it *is* possible to break this commandment even in an informal setting when you are not giving sworn testimony in a courtroom setting. Every kind of false report or evil speaking about someone else is a violation of the Ninth Commandment. Consider all the ways this is commonly done:

First, there is the sin of slander. To report any lying or exaggerated testimony against anyone in *any* context is to bear false witness against him. Exodus 23:1: "**You shall not circulate a false report.**" And verse 7: "**Keep yourself far from a false matter.**" Psalm 101:5—God says: "**Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, Him I will destroy.**" Proverbs 10:18: "**Whoever spreads slander is a fool.**"

The apostle Paul said people were slandering him by misrepresenting his teaching. Romans 3:8: "**[it is] slanderously reported, and . . . some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? [Their] damnation is just.**" So slander, Paul said, is a damnable sin. It is the very sin that is forbidden by the Ninth Commandment.

Whether you are under sworn oath or not, if you tell a falsehood about your neighbor that is designed to hurt him—or even if you hurt him unintentionally by giving false testimony against him (in other words, even if your main

motive in giving false testimony was merely to protect yourself or to help someone else)—you are guilty of violating the Ninth Commandment.

Slander is a deadly sin. Slander can hurt the reputation of even the most holy person. As puritan Thomas Watson says, "The lamb's innocence will not preserve it from the wolf." Christ was slandered by those who said he was the friend of sinners. It's true in the most pure and holy sense that He *is* the friend of sinners, but His enemies meant it as a reproach to His holy Name. They accused Him of being gluttonous, and a winebibber. The same people had accused John the Baptist of being demon possessed because of his austere lifestyle. Jesus said in Matthew 11:16,

whereunto shall I liken this generation? It is like unto children sitting in the markets, and calling unto their fellows,

17 And saying, We have piped unto you, and ye have not danced; we have mourned unto you, and ye have not lamented.

18 For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, He hath a devil.

19 The Son of man came eating and drinking, and they say, Behold a man gluttonous, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners.

They were so determined to slander the righteous that they accused John the Baptist because of his abstinence, and then they attacked Jesus for the very opposite reason!

There are two kinds of slander. One involves the false imputation of evil against someone who is not guilty. The other kind of slander is when you fail to give your neighbor due credit for his good qualities. In the one case, you sin by accusing your neighbor of being something he is not. In the other case you sin by diminishing his virtue. Both are ways of bearing false witness.

Then there is the sin of gossip. Slander involves telling lies about someone else. Gossip is the sin of spreading negative information unnecessarily about your neighbor, even if it's true. Even if everything you say is true, if you tell someone negative information about your neighbor with the aim of being hurtful rather than helpful, you have violated the spirit of this commandment. Leviticus 19:16: "**You shall not go about as a talebearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD.**" Proverbs 11:13: "**A talebearer reveals secrets, But he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter.**"

There is probably no sin that is more common, or more easily committed, than the sin of being a talebearer, or a gossip. When we repeat negative things unnecessarily about

our neighbor—even if what we say is true—we are sinning against him, destroying his reputation, and thereby violating the Ninth Commandment.

To have the tongue of a gossip or a talebearer shows that we secretly delight in our neighbor's faults. We sin against our neighbor by making him despicable in the eyes of our hearers. It is absolutely inconsistent with the principle of love. Love "**Rejoiceth not in iniquity,**" according to 1 Corinthians 13:6.

Sometimes it is actually our *duty* to conceal a matter when revealing it would damage the reputation of our neighbor. First Peter 4:8: "**Love will cover a multitude of sins.**" Proverbs 12:16: "**A prudent man covers shame.**" Proverbs 10:12: "**Hatred stirs up strife, But love covers all sins.**" Proverbs 17:9 "**He who covers a transgression seeks love, But he who repeats a matter separates friends.**"

Now, there are times when it is right, and necessary, to expose a person's sin. For example, when you can minimize the consequences of an evil, or when you can keep someone else from being hurt by exposing sin, it is right to do so. It is also sometimes necessary to expose sin in order to bring the sinner to repentance. That is no sin. Those are all circumstances that make it *necessary* to expose the sin of another person.

But those situations are not nearly as common as most of us imagine them to be. Remember, according to Jesus, the

time to make someone's sin public normally comes only after the person has been confronted first privately, then in the presence of just two or three witnesses. Even then, according to Matthew 18, only if the guilty person remains unrepentant does the matter need to be told to the whole church. And when that happens, the ultimate goal should still be to restore, not to destroy, the individual who has sinned.

But there's something perverse in fallen human nature that makes us delight in talking about or hearing about other people's sins. And we just can't wait to pass the news along to someone else. Scripture is full of condemnation for people who delight in spreading evil reports about others.

Almost nothing reveals the horrible depravity of our nature than our natural love for talebearing and gossip. There is nothing more wicked than the person who is secretly glad when the imperfections of others give him an occasion to spread the reproach and disgrace by whispering news of the evil into the ear of another.

Some people just can't wait to be the bearer of evil tidings! They can barely cover their joy, and they tell their sordid tales with obvious delight and derision.

Others are more skillful at disguising their malice. You know the type. They sigh, and look downcast, and act sad as they whisper the story about how someone else has fallen into sin. And then they whisper the same thing to someone else, and then to still another person, and another—until they

have made it as public as they can. And meanwhile they are hypocritically telling everyone to keep it secret.

If you do that, or tell negative things about your neighbors in a way that is hurtful to them, even if what you are saying is true, you have transgressed the spirit of the Ninth Commandment. And because of the damage you do to your neighbors' reputations, you are just as guilty as if you had borne false witness against them.

And even if you merely *listen* to an evil report with delight, you are as guilty as the talebearer. Proverbs 17:4 says, **"An evildoer gives heed to false lips; A liar listens eagerly to a spiteful tongue."**

Another sin that violates the Ninth Commandment is the evil of twisting someone else's words to mean something other than what the speaker intended. If you recount what someone else has said, but change the meaning by omitting words or putting a spin on the words that misrepresents what the speaker meant, you are violating the Ninth Commandment. Even if what you are reporting is technically accurate and true, if you deliberately misconstrue the meaning, you are bearing false witness.

As a matter of fact, that is exactly how the Sanhedrin prosecuted their false charges against Christ, isn't it? Matthew 26 describes what happened. Turn there and let's look at it:

59 Now the chief priests, the elders, and all the council sought false testimony against Jesus to put Him to death,

60 but found none. Even though many false witnesses came forward, they found none. But at last two false witnesses came forward

61 and said, "This fellow said, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to build it in three days.'"

62 And the high priest arose and said to Him, "Do You answer nothing? What is it these men testify against You?"

Notice that verse 60 explicitly refers to these two as "**false witnesses.**" And yet, what they said was technically true.

John 2:18:

the Jews answered and said to Him, "What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?"

19 Jesus answered and said to them, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

20 Then the Jews said, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?"

21 But He was speaking of the temple of His body.

They twisted His words to give them a meaning He did not intend, and therefore they were false witnesses.

This was Satan's whole strategy when he tempted Christ in the wilderness, wasn't it? Remember, he kept quoting Scripture, but twisting the words? Matthew 4:6; the devil said to Jesus: "**If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, 'He will command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone..'**" He was quoting Psalm 91:11-12. But he was giving the words a literal interpretation that was not true to the original meaning of the text. That is the same thing as bearing false witness.

Another way to bear false witness is by the sin of flattery. Listen to the beginning of Psalm 12:

Help, LORD, for the godly man ceases! For the faithful disappear from among the sons of men.

2 They speak idly everyone with his neighbor; With flattering lips and a double heart they speak.

3 May the LORD cut off all flattering lips, And the tongue that speaks proud things,

Proverbs 26:28 equates flattery with those who deliberately crush others with hateful lies: "**A lying tongue hates those who are crushed by it, And a flattering mouth works ruin.**" In other words, flattering someone is just as bad as bearing false witness against them.

And if you think about it, flattery is just another way of bearing false witness. The flatterer gives testimony to that

which is not true about someone else. And flattery is always done with selfish, self-aggrandizing motives. Therefore it is a sin against the one who is being flattered.

There are *many* ways to bear false witness against your neighbor. Let me mention just one more. It is possible to report that which is true about your neighbor, but if you do it with the intention of causing hurt to him, it is the same sin as telling a lie about him. Let me give you a biblical example.

In 1 Samuel 22, when Saul was pursuing David, Saul became frustrated by the fact that David had the favor of all the people. He could find no one to side with him against David. So according to 1 Samuel 22:7,

Saul said to his servants who stood about him, "Hear now, you Benjamites! Will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, and make you all captains of thousands and captains of hundreds?"

8 "All of you have conspired against me, and there is no one who reveals to me that my son has made a covenant with the son of Jesse; and there is not one of you who is sorry for me or reveals to me that my son has stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as it is this day."

9 Then answered Doeg the Edomite, who was set over the servants of Saul, and said, "I saw

the son of Jesse going to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub.

10 "And he inquired of the LORD for him, gave him provisions, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine."

11 So the king sent to call Ahimelech the priest, the son of Ahitub, and all his father's house, the priests who were in Nob. And they all came to the king.

Now, everything Doeg reported to Saul was absolutely true. But it made Saul so angry that he went and killed Ahimelech and carried out a great slaughter against the priests. Doeg himself, according to verse 18, killed 85 priests.

And David wrote Psalm 52 as a response to that slaughter. The inscription on Psalm 52 says, "**A Psalm of David, when Doeg the Edomite came and told Saul, and said unto him, David is come to the house of Ahimelech.**"

Now listen to the psalm:

52:1 Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man? The goodness of God endures continually.

2 Your tongue devises destruction, Like a sharp razor, working deceitfully.

3 You love evil more than good, Lying rather than speaking righteousness. Selah

4 You love all devouring words, You deceitful tongue.

5 God shall likewise destroy you forever;

Notice that David equated Doeg's treachery with telling a lie. Even though what Doeg had said was completely true, his reason for telling it was to devise destruction. Doeg loved evil more than good. He loved devouring, destructive words. And that is a sin that is equal to and morally tantamount to bearing false witness. So David in this inspired psalm charged Doeg with bearing false witness.

So that is the first area of moral duty that is covered by the Ninth Commandment. Charity, with particular emphasis on our duty to guard our neighbor's reputation. Here's a second virtue we are commanded to cultivate by this commandment. If you're taking notes, it's:

2. INTEGRITY: THE DUTY TO GUARD YOUR OWN GOOD NAME

Why are we forbidden to bear false witness? Because it is a sin to do any harm to our neighbor's good name.

Ecclesiastes 7:1 says, "**A good name is better than precious ointment.**" Proverbs 22:1 says, "**A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches.**" A puritan writer named Ezekiel Hopkins wrote, "Indeed, a good name is so excellent a blessing, that there is but one thing that is to be preferred before it; and [that] is a good conscience. When these two stand in competition, credit must give place to duty, and it is far better to lose our [reputation] with men, than our acceptance and reward with God."

The point is this: when you deliberately damage another person's reputation, you are doing more harm to him than anything else you could do, short of causing him to defile his conscience. His good name is more important and more valuable than all his material possessions, so if you take his good name from him, you have committed a far worse sin against him than if you stole all his other possessions.

Now, if a good name is so important, it is clearly our duty to protect our own good name. There's a principle here that parallels the principle we saw in the sixth commandment, "**Thou shalt not kill.**" If it is a sin to kill or injure another person unlawfully, it is also a sin to kill or injure ourselves.

The sixth commandment by implication lays upon us the duty to preserve our own life and health.

In a similar way, *this* commandment places us under the duty of preserving and improving our own reputation. And that means we must be people of integrity in every way.

If you hold too high or too low an opinion of yourself, you are guilty of bearing false witness against yourself. Remember the sin of the Pharisee in the parable of Luke 18? Jesus said in Luke 18:11,

The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.

He had too high an opinion of himself. He testified before God that he was not like other men, "**extortioners, unjust, adulterers,**" and so on. He thought he was better than the publican who was praying next to him. Jesus condemned him for his arrogance. If he thought he could stand before the law and declare himself innocent of violating its demands, he had too low a view of divine righteousness, and too high an opinion of himself. He had failed to let the law do its work in his heart, and it caused him to bear false witness about himself before God.

At the other extreme of the spectrum are people who sin by *undervaluing* the divine gifts and works of grace in themselves. Moses did that, remember? God called him to deliver the Israelites, and in Exodus 14:10, Moses said, "**O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.**"

Ezekiel Hopkins wrote,

Sometimes men detract from themselves, out of a lying and dissembled humanity: making this kind of detraction only a bait for commendation; . . . knowing the ball will rebound back the farther to them, the harder they strike it from them. This is usually an artifice of proud and arrogant persons; and those, who cannot endure to be contradicted in anything else, would be very loth you should yield to them in this.

If you think about it, every type of hypocrisy is a way of bearing false witness about ourselves. When our words say one thing but our minds say another, we are guilty of bearing false witness. When we do that, we destroy our integrity, diminish our own good name, and are tainted with the same guilt we would incur if we gave lying testimony against our neighbor.

I have to move on. I could multiply examples of all the ways that we sin by bearing false witness against ourselves, but you get the point.

This law demands of us *charity* toward our neighbor for the sake of his reputation; it demands *integrity* from within for the sake of our own good name. And here's a final moral principle covered by this commandment. It's the principle of—

3. HONESTY: THE DUTY TO GUARD THE TRUTH IN GENERAL

Let me be absolutely clear about this: all forms of lying are prohibited by the moral principle that this commandment affirms. This precept of the law demands truthfulness in *every* context, and that is made clear by the way the Lord summarizes the vital moral precepts in Leviticus 19:11-12: "**You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another.** 'And you shall not swear by **My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.**"

So *all* forms of lying are forbidden, and there is a very simple reason for that: Lying is inimical to who God is. He is a God of truth. Titus 1:2 describes Him as "**God, who cannot lie.**" I find that fascinating, because God *does* on occasion kill, and hate, and get angry. And he can do all those things without violating His own holy character one bit. But

God will *never* lie, because lying is utterly and inherently inconsistent with His character.

First John 2:21 says, "**no lie is of the truth.**" No lie can ultimately advance the cause of truth. God is a God of truth. And Scripture affirms this about God repeatedly. He is, above all, a God of truth. Write these references down, because we don't have time to turn to them all: Psalm 31:5-6: "**Thou hast redeemed me, O Lord God of truth. I have hated them that regard lying vanities: but I trust in the Lord.**" Psalm 146:6: God "**keepeth truth for ever.**" Even the false prophet Balaam acknowledged, "**God is not a man, that He should lie, Nor a son of man, that He should repent; Has He said, and will He not do it? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?**" (Numbers 23:19). 1 Samuel 15:29: "**The Glory of Israel will not lie or change His mind; for He is not a man that He should change His mind.**" And in Ezekiel 24:14, He says, "**I the Lord have spoken it: it shall come to pass, and I will do it; I will not go back, neither will I spare, neither will I repent.**"

The Holy Spirit is called "**the Spirit of truth**" (John 15:26). And 1 John 5:7 adds, "**It is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is the truth.**" In a similar vein, Christ said, "**I am the . . . Truth**" (John 14:6). So all three members of the Godhead are linked with truth. Truth is essential to the whole idea of deity.

In contrast, Scripture says that Satan **"is a liar, and the father of lies"** (John 8:44). He, along with **"everyone who loves and practices lying,"** according to Revelation 22:15, will be eternally excluded from heaven. In fact, all liars shall have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone (Rev. 21:8).

From beginning to end Scripture condemns all lying. I already read Leviticus 19:11-12: **"You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another. 'And you shall not swear by My name falsely."** We're told in Proverbs 6:16-17 that a lying tongue is an abomination to the Lord. Proverbs 19:5 says, **"A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape."** Proverbs 119:9 says almost the same thing: **"A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall perish."** (v. 9). Verse 22 adds this: **"It is better to be a poor man than a liar"** (v. 22).

Lying is named in Scripture as the epitome of all wickedness. Psalm 58:3: **"The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies."** Psalm 62:4: **"They delight in falsehood; They bless with their mouth, But inwardly they curse."** That is why the psalmist prayed, **"Deliver my soul, O Lord, from lying lips, From a deceitful tongue"** (Ps. 120:2).

As Christians we are commanded in Colossians 3:9, "**Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him.**" Ephesians 4:25: "**Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another**" (Ephesians 4:25).

Bearing false witness is a sin not only because of the damage it does to our neighbor, but also because of what it does to the truth. And therefore any kind of sin that involves lying partakes of the very same evil that is forbidden in the Ninth Commandment.

There's nothing more tempting and no sin easier to fall into than the sin of lying. But the Ninth Commandment reminds us of our moral duty to uphold the cause of truth, especially when we are speaking about others.