



Deut 5:20
Caught in Web of Deceit?

20 ' You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

The way that the ninth commandment is preached by Moses to God's people here is slightly different from the way that it is expressed when it was given earlier in Exodus. Although the meaning is essentially the same, the word for false witness in Exodus 20:16 is **sheqer** or *falsehood, deception* while here the word is **shav** meaning *vain or empty*. It strengthens the commandment and shows that more than just deliberately attempt to deceive is prohibited, but anything baseless and not founded in truth, gossip or rumor or idle talk is banned as well. It serves to emphasize the fact that when God's people transmit something to others, they had better be sure their testimony is true.

Now obviously the way the commandment is framed here has direct application to the law court, where giving false testimony against your neighbor had dire consequences, Perjury could result in his economic ruin or in a capital case in his death. Therefore God was desirous that his people Israel would have a society founded on telling the truth. Scripture is not naïve regarding the temptations however to lie in these circumstances, and speaks of the temptations that might come from Fraud and Greed in Lev. 19:11-13, from hatred in Lev. 19:16-18, from crowd pressure or conspiracy in Exodus 23:1, and even from misplaced favoritism and family loyalty. It was for that reason that there was a requirement that a testimony be confirmed by the mouth of more than one witnesses: ***Deuteronomy 19:15 " 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."*** and also that if someone was found guilty of perjury they themselves would have the same punishment that they had hoped would be visited on another. As David Wright commenting on this puts it well, ***"One wonders what a salutary effect such a law might have in the modern world, which is plagued with miscarriages of justice notoriously caused by false testimony and conspiracy."*** But of course that alone would not prevent the perversion of the truth. Scripture gives us several terrible examples of the results of perjury, for instance the case of Naboth in 1 Kings 21. There wicked Queen Jezebel suborned perjury against an innocent man, so that he was condemned to death in order that her husband, Ahab could confiscate his vineyard.

[One could wish that all cases of lying were visited with the same kind of quick justice Inscription on the Market-Place of Devizes: 'The mayor and corporation of Devizes avail themselves of the stability of this building to transmit to future times the record of an awful event, which occurred in the marketplace, in the year 1753—hoping that such record may serve as a salutary warning against the danger of impiously invoking Divine vengeance, or calling on the holy name of God, to conceal the devices of falsehood and fraud. On Tuesday, January, 1753, Ruth Pierce of Potterne in this county, agreed with three other women to buy a sack of wheat in the market, each paying her due proportion toward the same. One of the women, in collecting the money, discovered a deficiency, and demanded of Ruth Pierce the sum that was wanting to make good the amount. Ruth protested that she had paid her share, and said, she wished she might drop down dead if she had not She rashly repeated the awful

wish—when, to the consternation and terror of the surrounding multitude, she instantly fell down and expired, having the money concealed in her hand.']

But of course along with the corporate importance of truth telling, there is of course and even more important personal dimension. Kids as we have been going through the Ten Commandments, this time, I have been trying to show how I was going to try to show how rather than being oppressive or heavy they were given by God to free His people from bondage and slavery to sin, how they were designed to take away the heavy yoke of the commandments and traditions of the world, the flesh, and the devil and replace them with the light and easy yoke that comes with serving Christ. While you cannot be saved by keeping the Ten Commandments, the person who has been born again and saved by Faith Alone in Christ Alone has been given a new heart and the commandments should be the rule and guide for his new life in Christ.

As the Westminster Confession of Faith puts it: ***“Although true believers are not under the law, as a covenant of works, to be thereby justified, or condemned; yet is it of great use to them, as well as to others; in that, as a rule of life informing them of the will of God, and their duty, it directs and binds them to walk accordingly”***

No true Christian, once he has been saved can lose his salvation, but true it is that many a Christian has made his life needlessly difficult by flaunting God’s law, and endured long seasons of lost assurance and sorrow. We know for instance that David was a true believer, a man after God’s own heart, but because of his decisions to commit adultery, and to lie, and ultimately to commit murder, he squandered many privileges, and introduced terrible suffering into his own life, and that of his family and his people. You will find that as you grow in grace as believers, that the degree to which you ignore God’s commandments is the degree to which you will wound your conscience, damage your witness, and bring yourself back into the very same bondage to sin from which Christ delivered you. One of the worst kinds of bondage, is the bondage that comes of lying. I say that not only because that is what scripture tells us, but from my own personal experience.

When I was a child my parents would take me on Saturday mornings to a place called the Cora Hartshorn Arboretum, and there a man named Mr. Vitzuhm would show us nature movies (this was before the age of video, back then they used an actual movie projector) and talk about science and birds and snakes, and various insects. The place was jammed packed with stuffed foxes, and Indian arrowheads, and a glass beehive where you could watch the bees at work. I remember one morning they had in an expert on Arachnids, that is spiders and of course we were all fascinated, I remember asking how it was that the spiders didn’t get caught in their own webs. And he said that only some of the lines in the web were sticky, and some were not, and the spider knew to move along the non-sticky lines. He said they were capable of amazingly fancy footwork, and that while we probably wouldn’t be able to keep track, they were.

I wish I’d learned a lesson from that, because as a child I was a web spinner as well. Unfortunately the webs I wove were webs of lies and deceptions. I spun tale after tale, and unfortunately more often than not I couldn’t keep track of the lies I told, or the people I’d told them to, and unlike those spiders ended up hopelessly tangled in my own web, and sadly after a while people learned not to trust a word I said. It got so that when I was telling the truth people didn’t believe me. The story of the boy who cried wolf pretty well sums up a lot of my childhood and if I can I would have you avoid the pain of becoming known as a liar. But why did I do that?

I lied as child, because it was my nature to do so, I was not regenerate I didn't know the Lord and I followed the wicked designs of my heart and what Jesus said of the Pharisees was certainly true of me:

John 8:44 "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. 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.

Yes, the heart of natural men is deceitful and desperately wicked, and they would deserve to spend an eternity in hell, but it is not God's will that men remain in that abominable circumstance. God sent his only begotten son Jesus Christ into the world to redeem the hearts of fallen men.

Without that redemption, no matter how we fool ourselves our hearts will remain in their fallen and sinful state. But you remember how this morning we learned how one of the purposes of the gospel was to act as leaven in the hearts of men, working through them – changing them in their entirety. This is a process called regeneration by which men become what the bible calls new creations.

This is a radical and amazing work of heart surgery: Gen. 36:26 *"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.*

27 "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.

Think of it, in this work we have the most amazing heart transplant where a spiritual heart of stone that is opposed to God and his commands is replaced with a heart of flesh that loves him and desires to obey his statutes.

That is why Paul is able to write in Ephesians 4:23-25

3 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind,

24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.

25 Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another.

IT is through the renewing grace of the Gospel that you are enabled to put off lying more and more, and to live in newness of life. No longer bearing false witness, and going along with the culture.

Kids, if your heart has been changed then that process that seemed so natural of asking in any given situation "Should I lie or tell the truth" and then weighing the merits and demerits of both should no longer go on. The situations, the exigencies shouldn't matter, the answer should be "I am a new creation, lying is the way of death, it is an abomination before God, and even if it lands me in jail like Joseph, I will tell the truth."

Ah, but I would be a liar today if I said there wasn't often a struggle going on even in the Christian heart, as Paul himself described it: Romans 8:19 "For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice."

Even Christians sin by lying. We should not, and there should be a struggle within us against this practice. For when we do it, we are acting contrary to our salvation, and our new nature. You who have

been redeemed by Christ are no longer captives or slaves to sin. Therefore God can rightly command you

Zech. 8:16 These are the things you shall do: Speak each man the truth to his neighbor; Give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace;

17 Let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor; And do not love a false oath. For all these are things that I hate,' Says the LORD."

And expect you to keep those commands, not perfectly, we will fail in many respects. And yet the redeemed are above all a people who are described thus: Psalm 15:2 He who walks uprightly, And works righteousness, And speaks the truth in his heart;

We can think of many poor examples of those who confessed the name of Christian One of the most shocking stories in the bible is that of Ananias and Sapphira.

But let me leave you with a better example

When George Washington, the president of the United States of America, was about six years of age, some one made him a present of a hatchet. Highly pleased with his weapon, he went about chopping every thing that came in his way; and going into the garden, he unhappily tried its edge on an English cherry tree, stripping it of its bark, and leaving little hope of its recovery. The next morning, when his father saw the tree, which was a great favourite, he inquired who had done the mischief, declaring he would not have taken five guineas for it; but no one could inform him of the offender. At length, however, came George, with the hatchet in his hand, into the place where the father was, who immediately suspected him to be the culprit. 'George,' said the father, 'do you know who killed that beautiful little cherry-tree yonder in the garden?' The child hesitated for a moment, and then said, 'I cannot tell a lie, father,—you know that I cannot tell a lie—I did cut it with the hatchet.' 'Run to my arms. Glad am I, George, that you have killed my tree—you have paid me for it a thousand-fold. Such an act of heroism in my son is of more worth than a thousand cherry-trees, though blossoming with silver, and their fruits of gold.' – From Parson Weems' account

Col. 3:9 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds,

10 and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him,

As A'Brakel put it: "If the heart is truthful and loves the truth, it will bring forth truth, and man will be prevented from lying—be it that this is either to our advantage or disadvantage, or that the person is either friendly or hostile toward us."