

# Loving His Commandments

## The Ninth Commandment-B

*Exodus 20:16*  
Part Twenty-Three

*With Study Questions*

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# The Ninth Commandment-B

Exodus 20:16

**You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor (Exodus 20:16).**

## Introduction

Shortly after Roe v. Wade was passed in 1973 I was invited to a meeting. The speaker at this meeting discussed how we, as Christians were going to have to respond to this decision by the Supreme Court. It was at this meeting that I first heard two terms: *seizing the language* and *pro-choice*.

The speaker explained that those who supported this piece of legislation would not want their movement to be associated with the word, 'abortion'. They, therefore, had to seize the language. The needed language that would help them sound noble. Their rally cry would not sound as if it was supportive of abortion, but supportive of choice. The methodology has proven to be quite successful.

A quote, generally attributed to Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's Propaganda Minister, reads:

**If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it. The lie can be maintained only for such time as the State can shield the people from the political, economic and/or military consequences of the lie. It thus becomes vitally important for the State to use all of its powers to repress dissent, for the truth is the mortal enemy of the lie, and thus by extension, the truth is the greatest enemy of the State.<sup>1</sup>**

Shortly after that meeting I was assigned a book to read in one of my undergraduate classes entitled *How To Lie With Statistics* by Darrell Huff. The book probed the methods of establishing data in such a way as to favor your desired result. Things like how to tabulate results, what types of questions to

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<sup>1</sup> Some believe this is a variation of the Big Lie, an expression was coined by Hitler when he dictated his 1925 book *Mein Kampf*, about the use of a lie so "colossal" that no one would believe that someone "could have the impudence to distort the truth so infamously".

ask in a poll and many other nefarious methods to make things look like hard facts when they truly are not.

So often, people will seek to buttress whatever their position might be with the phrase, “these are the facts”. Years ago a heavily funded pro-choice (pro-abortion) organization (which generally presents itself as a family planning organization) was boasting that in the areas where they were more prominent there were fewer teens giving birth. Further investigation revealed that while that might have been true, pregnancy terminations in those same areas went up demonstrably.

All this to say, figuring what the truth is can be a difficult task. People are willing to lie (whether intentionally or not) and there is a skill involved in unearthing truth. And when one lives in a culture which self-consciously seeks to remove God from the equation of our thinking, that skill becomes rare. For seeking to know truth apart from knowing the Truth (and by the Truth, I mean Christ, as He is self-described), becomes an exercise in futility.

## **Review**

Last week we began with a discussion of how James used our lack of ability to bridle our tongues as an outward manifestation of useless religion (James 1:26). We then spoke of the duty involved in this commandment which is the preserving of truth. Truth is a non-negotiable for the faith. Jesus is the truth (John 14:6); the word of God is truth (John 17:17); truth liberates (John 8:32).

To give up the truth is to give up God Himself and the freedom He provides through the truth of the gospel. Conversely, to give up God (as if such a thing can even happen) is step one in shoveling the truth into the curb. Suffice it to say the fall of man resulted from the father of lies – the devil (John 8:44) getting Eve to question the truth of God and His word.

We also spoke briefly how the Triune God bears witness to the truth of Christ (John 8:18; 1 John 5:6). The greatest and most undeniable testimony ever given by God Himself is of the truth of His own Son. The certainty of this testimony is so strong that John indicates those denying it to be in the act of calling God a liar (1 John 5:10). In yet another one of His most audacious statements, Jesus conveyed that the incontrovertible certainty of His words are sufficient for judgment (John 12:48).

As much as people don't like it (in our very romantic notions of God and religion), there is structure to truth. Throughout history there are those

who have entered the church seeking to present God as some amorphous personality – as if God is beyond logic and reason – as if the unsearchableness of God is synonymous with the unknowable-ness of God. But when God defines Himself as One who does not lie or change His mind (Numbers 22:19; 1 Samuel 15:29; James 1:17), He is informing us of a structure in His character – a structure revealed to give us peace, hope and assurance or warning.

And it is not as if God is constrained by outward laws of logic, ethics or reason – as we might initially think. True logic, ethics and reason are themselves defined by the character and nature of God. If we are going to know of God’s love for us, the truth must be protected, cherished and contended for.

## Protecting Reputations

The Eighth Commandment addressed the protection of property. The Ninth protects reputations, which are, arguably, more precious. We are required, in this commandment, to maintain and promote the truth between man and man. We are also required to preserve our own, and our neighbor’s, good name.

In its most direct sense a false witness is one who goes before a civil tribunal and perjures himself against another person. In today’s court system perjury has become a bit of a minor infraction. The maximum penalty today, even for the most severe felony of perjury, is only about four years. We might find it surprising how concerned God is with honesty, especially as it pertains to the protection of the innocent. In the 19<sup>th</sup> chapter of Deuteronomy we are informed that a person who offers a false witness, will have done to them, what they intended to have done to the other via that false witness.

**And the judges shall investigate thoroughly; and if the witness is a false witness and he has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother. (Deuteronomy 19:18-19a).**

Of all the commandments, this one may be the most destructive in terms of personal relationships.<sup>2</sup> If you’re found to be a liar, trust is compromised. A husband, wife, parent, sibling, friend can work through almost any problem or sin in their relationship, but as soon as one is shown to

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<sup>2</sup> Except for murder of course.

be a liar, it is no longer 'us' who is working through the problem. This sin removes a person from the unity of the battle. Trust must then be won back which usually requires a great deal of time and effort.

### Justifiable, Obligatory Deception?

Is it ever justifiable to deceive? There is disagreement, even among the great theologians, as to when it is justifiable or even an obligation to deceive. Years ago at a church picnic I was playing volleyball. I pretended I was going to hit the ball in one direction then hit it another way. A lady on the other team called me a deceiver! Is it a sin to fake left then go right in a sporting contest? Is it wrong to deceive a mad dog in order to destroy him, or a murderous villain in order to prevent the death of an innocent, or deception in a military battle, etc.?

Jesus clearly uses fiction when He tells a parable. Of course all knew it was fiction. But He also uses deception to give a lesson.

**And they approached the village where they were going, and He acted (*prosepoiesato*) as though He would go farther (Luke 24:28).**

*Prosepoiesato* means to pretend. He was giving the impression that He was going to do something that He had no intention of doing. These are pretty mild examples.

But what of the lie of Rahab in Joshua 2. Through a lie she protected the men of God. There is also the example of the lies of the Hebrew midwives in Exodus 1. Through their lies they protected the babies of the Hebrew nation when Pharaoh would have killed them. Both of these events found the praise and reward of God, even though they included deception.

It is argued that their praise from God never directly includes a reference to their lies, and that may be true. Yet their deception was at the heart of the overall event for which they were praised. Calvin said of Rahab:

**And still the act of Rahab is not devoid of the praise of virtue, although it was not spotlessly pure. For it often happens that while the saints study to hold the right path, they deviate into circuitous courses.**

Perhaps there was a more sinless route Rahab or the Hebrew midwives could have taken to make their virtue spotlessly pure. But it seems in this life that we are often confronted with decisions where we must prioritize. Breaking the speed limit while seeking to get a sick child to the hospital or violating a city ordinance of staying off the grass when you can administer CPR to a dying person who happened to fall on that grass would be obvious examples of obligatory disobedience of one command in obedience to a greater.

These things can be difficult calls. Obedience requires wisdom. We should not seek to justify ourselves or look for loopholes in the law of God.

## No Partiality

The violation of the Ninth Commandment moves beyond the courtroom and into any social interaction.

**You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly. 'You shall not go about as a slanderer among your people, and you are not to act against the life of your neighbor; I am the LORD (Leviticus 19:15, 16).**

We tend to give certain people the benefit of the doubt depending upon the nature of our association with them. This passage tells us this shouldn't be. If we know a person intimately, it is easier to have a predisposition to either excuse or accuse them.

We must seek to evaluate each situation from a common starting point. If we don't make a determined effort to achieve this, we will find ourselves more open to gossip and slander when it is addressed to certain people. This isn't to say we shouldn't have greater suspicion of a pathological liar, but that we should seek fairness.

We also learn the principle here that there should be no favoritism, or discrimination, based upon income or social status. We should thoughtfully examine what we're about to say. Are we speaking to edify, encourage, lift up and rejoice or to vent and find an advocate for our grievance? Let us examine the words and wisdom of Solomon.

**The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, And they go**

down into the innermost parts of the body. Like an earthen vessel overlaid with silver dross Are burning lips and a wicked heart. He who hates disguises it with his lips, But he lays up deceit in his heart. When he speaks graciously, do not believe him, For there are seven abominations in his heart. Though his hatred covers itself with guile, His wickedness will be revealed before the assembly. He who digs a pit will fall into it, And he who rolls a stone, it will come back on him. A lying tongue hates those it crushes, And a flattering mouth works ruin (Proverbs 26:22-28).

He who speaks truth tells what is right, But a false witness, deceit. There is one who speaks rashly like the thrusts of a sword, But the tongue of the wise brings healing. Truthful lips will be established forever, But a lying tongue is only for a moment. Deceit is in the heart of those who devise evil, But counselors of peace have joy. No harm befalls the righteous, But the wicked are filled with trouble. Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, But those who deal faithfully are His delight (Proverbs 12:17-22).

### Purging Unclean Lips

What flows from our lips may be most tell-tale in terms of human depravity. Jesus teaches us that out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks (Matthew 12:34). It is no wonder that we find it so difficult to pray aloud what we seem to be so comfortable uttering privately. Our lips alone would be enough to condemn us on the great and terrible day of the Lord. One thinks of the inauguration of Isaiah.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His *robe* filled the temple. <sup>2</sup> Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. <sup>3</sup> And one cried to another and said: 'Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!' <sup>4</sup> And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke.<sup>5</sup> So I said:

**'Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I *am* a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The LORD of hosts.' <sup>6</sup> Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal *which* he had taken with the tongs from the altar. <sup>7</sup> And he touched my mouth *with it*, and said: 'Behold, this has touched your lips; Your iniquity is taken away, And your sin purged.'"**

Beholding the holiness of God caused Isaiah to come undone. He didn't resolve (at least here) to try harder or be a better person. He didn't take comfort in the fact the others were greater liars than himself, but rather viewed the lies of his fellow humans as a greater indictment against him. The wheels had come off his cart, and all he could do was lament.

I am reminded of when my children were little and had a bad dream. Their fear might overwhelm them. There were times when they couldn't even make it out of their room. All they could do is sit in bed and cry and wait for mommy or daddy to come and rescue them. Such is the case for all, who by the grace of God, have eyes to see (even in a veiled sense) the holiness of God.

The coal is too holy even for the angel to touch. It carries it with tongs and touches the lips of sinful man and behold his iniquity is taken away and his sin is purged. And the coal is Christ. Reminiscent, this is, of the angels who heralded the birth of the Savior who takes away iniquity and purges sin. The Savior, **"Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth"** (1 Peter 2:22). Isaiah took no comfort in his brothers of unclean lips, but found peace with God through One, who would call him brother (Hebrews 2:12), whose lips knew no deceit. Our faith must be in the righteousness of a holy God who has the power to save, through Christ alone. Amen.



## Questions for Study and Meditation

1. The Eighth Commandment protects property. What is protected by the Ninth Commandment?
2. Discuss God's disposition toward a false witness.
3. Why is lying so detrimental in relationships?
4. Discuss "justifiable deception".
5. When should we give certain people the benefit of the doubt over others?
6. Discuss the inauguration of Isaiah. What was his role? What was his disposition? What happened to him?

