

Text: Exod. 20:16

Title: You shall not lie about your neighbor

Time: 7/18/2021 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: In one respect, the ninth commandment touches a theme we find on nearly every page of our Bibles. Everywhere we look in Scripture we find the battle between truth and error, between what is real and what is false. Jesus is the Truth, and Satan is the father of lies, and their conflict is the content of Scripture.

The emphasis on the battle between truth and error in Scripture is rivaled perhaps by only one other conflict, the war between right and wrong. On nearly every page of Scripture, we can find the conflict of the ages between truth and error and between right and wrong.

These two battles are closely related, of course. John 1 sums up man's existence in terms of light and darkness. Jesus is the light, full of grace and truth, which shines in darkness, which is the dwelling place of man, void of grace and truth. It turns out that men love the darkness more than the light because their deeds are evil. Romans 1 describes the moral decay of a pagan society like our own, and the passage teaches that the battle between right and wrong is lost first by rejecting truth in favor of error. "[They] hold[down] the truth in unrighteousness," says the apostle (Rom. 1:18).

So, the sinful human heart has an affinity for what is false and feels repulsed by what is true. Even secular atheists have found this biblical axiom to be obvious. "A prime cause of our being deceived is, for all of us, always our own desire to be so deceived. . . . all of us constantly need to be asking ourselves what it is which we want to believe to be

true, and whether our desires so to believe are stronger than our desires to know the truth, however uncongenial to us that truth may be. It is a truly existential challenge" [Antony Flew, *How to Think Straight*, p. 10].

And so, the ninth commandment is related to this challenge for the sinful human heart. Will we choose truth over the falsehood that is attractive to us because our deeds are evil? But this commandment is focused more narrowly on one specific form of falsehood, the false witness. The command does not say "Thou shalt not bear false witness to thy neighbor"; it says, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against [or about] thy neighbor." The idea is that God forbids slandering people with falsehoods. He expects us to speak the truth about others, to not lie about our neighbor.

Unlike the larger battle between truth and falsehood, the term *false witness* appears only a handful of times in the Old Testament. From these passages I want us to understand three things about what the Lord is forbidding here when it comes to what we say about other people.

I. God hates lying about a neighbor (Prov. 6:16-19).

Illustration: James Madison was one of the great champions of our nation's Bill of Rights. It was his love of freedom that lay at the heart of these amendments to the US Constitution. Listen to the proposal he made for the wording of the First Amendment, which illumines with more detail the meaning of the text that was ultimately passed:

"The civil rights of none shall be abridged on account of religious belief or worship, nor shall any national religion be established, nor shall the full and equal rights of conscience be in any manner, or on any pretext infringed.

“The people shall not be deprived or abridged of their right to speak, to write, or to publish their sentiments; and the freedom of the press, as one of the great bulwarks of liberty, shall be inviolable.

“The people shall not be restrained from peaceably assembling and consulting for their common good; nor from applying to the legislature by petitions, or remonstrances for redress of their grievances.”

Application: Did you notice what Madison said about the freedom of the press? He says that this freedom is one of “the great bulwarks of liberty.” Now contrast that description of the press with the term that we hear constantly from our leaders today: “fake news.” What has turned our leaders’ description of the news media from “bulwark of liberty” into “fake news”? It is simple – too many violations of the ninth commandment by news outlets did that. Madison believed that the mainstream media was an honest institution, and no one really believes that anymore today.

The hatred that God has for fake news about our neighbor, whether it appears in the news media, or in our courts, or in our social media postings, or in our private conversation, is expressed in God’s instructions for how to deal with this violation of the ninth commandment (Deut. 19:16-21). Imagine what would happen to our judicial system if a plaintiff had to endure the punishment that he was seeking for someone else if his accusation were proven false. Would the voting machine company Dominion be suing Mike Lindell for billions of dollars under a law like that? I think not.

God hates lying about a neighbor, especially another brother or sister in Christ (Prov. 6:19 – “and he that soweth discord among brethren”). Eph. 4:25-27, “Wherefore putting

away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another. Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil." Satan is the great accuser of the brethren (Rev. 12:10), and it is important that we understand that our temptation to lie about a brother is a temptation to help him do his damage to the brethren. God hates lying about a neighbor, especially among His people.

II. Great harm is caused by lying about your neighbor (Prov. 25:18).

Illustration: You may remember the name Richard Jewell. Richard was a security guard at the 1996 Olympic Games in Atlanta, where a bomb went off that killed two and injured many others. The bomb would have been much more deadly had Richard not found the bomb in a bag and alerted his colleagues. His actions were truly heroic that evening.

The problem was that a reporter for the *Atlanta Constitution Journal* caught wind that Jewell was being questioned as a suspect in the crime. She published an article implicating Jewell, which intensified an 88-day firestorm of media coverage that made life difficult for him. After Jewell died of a heart attack ten years later at the age of 44, his mother Bobi told ABC News in an interview that she believed the whole ordeal killed her son [abcnews.go.com/US/mother-richard-jewell-hero-turned-suspect-1996-olympics/story?id=67694901; accessed 7/15/2021].

Application: Solomon may have concluded the same about Jewell's death. He calls lying about your neighbor using a war club, a sword, or a sharp arrow against your neighbor, all murder weapons. When Jesus called Satan the father of lies, He also said that he was a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the

lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.”) He said this to Jews who would keep lying about Him until the Roman authorities had killed Him.

One of the reasons lies are so damaging is that they are often wildly popular (Exod. 23:1-2, “Thou shalt not raise a false report: put not thine hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness. Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil; neither shalt thou speak in a cause to decline after many to wrest judgment [Do not testify in a lawsuit and go along with a crowd to pervert justice (HCSB)].”

Deadly lies are popular in our day: “My body, my choice”; “Homosexuals are born that way”; “My daughter may be a boy”; “Divorce will make us happier, and the kids will be ok”; “Christianity is not about church”; “music is amoral”; “the vaccine is proven safe”; “election results do not need to be audited”; “systemic racism is a problem in America.” The entire critical race theory is a violation of the ninth commandment as it attributes racism to people who are not racists. It is a false witness born against neighbors.

What can we do in a day when deadly lies are popular? We can remember that the Lord must do what must be done. Isaiah lived in a day like our own in this regard: “For our transgressions are multiplied before thee, and our sins testify against us: for our transgressions are with us; and as for our iniquities, we know them; in transgressing and lying against the Lord, and departing away from our God, speaking oppression and revolt, conceiving and uttering from the heart words of falsehood. And judgment is turned away backward, and justice standeth afar off: for truth is fallen in the street, and equity cannot enter. Yea, truth faileth; and he

that departeth from evil maketh himself a prey: and the Lord saw it, and it displeased him that there was no judgment. And he saw that there was no man, and wondered that there was no intercessor: therefore, his arm brought salvation unto him; and his righteousness, it sustained him. For he put on righteousness as a breastplate, and an helmet of salvation upon his head; and he put on the garments of vengeance for clothing, and was clad with zeal as a cloak. According to their deeds, accordingly he will repay, fury to his adversaries, recompence to his enemies; to the islands he will repay recompence. So shall they fear the name of the Lord from the west, and his glory from the rising of the sun. When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him. And the Redeemer shall come to Zion, and unto them that turn from transgression in Jacob, saith the Lord" (Isa. 59:12-20). The Lord knows what to do about popular and powerful lies, which do much harm.

III. God will judge lying about your neighbor (Prov. 19:5, 9).

Application: Isaiah's lie-filled world was populated with liars who had great faith in the reliability and effectiveness of their lies. He describes their confidence this way:

"Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves" (Isa. 28:15).

The problem with that approach, of course, is that truth corresponds to reality, and lies do not. I can believe the lie that I can walk through a wall, and that works ok until I finally get to the wall. We can pretend that weightlifter is a girl, but we get into trouble when he wins all the female gold

medals. Believing lies works for a little while, but at the end truth catches up to us. Our lies can never change what is real or alter our ultimate need to face reality. And because our God is the God of truth who cannot lie, and because He has commanded us not to lie about our neighbor, everyone who has done so will someday hit the wall of truth. Every lie we have told will be exposed for what it is, and there will be no hiding the truth anymore (Matt. 12:36-37). Truth wins. Will we be on its side when it claims its victory?

Conclusion: As we conclude our thoughts about the ninth commandment, I am reminded that the Hebrew word *neighbor* can also be used for a *friend*. Jesus said to you and me who know Him as our personal Savior, "You are my friends" and "You shall be witnesses unto Me."

So, Jesus is our neighbor or friend, and we are His witnesses, and so the ninth commandment has a special application to us as disciples of Christ this morning. It requires that in our witness about Jesus we tell the truth and not lie.

Peter thought that if anyone could do that simple task, he could. But the Lord corrected Peter with both a necessary warning and a needed assurance: "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not: and when thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren. And he said unto him, Lord, I am ready to go with thee, both into prison, and to death. And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me."

The warning was that Peter would experience what it is like to be a false witness about Christ. The assurance was that Christ had prayed for Peter's faith, would change Pe-

ter's life, and would use Peter to strengthen his brothers to become faithful truth-tellers in a world of lies. Jesus suffered as Peter lied about Him because Peter needed forgiveness for those lies, forgiveness that would change him.

That we too are witnesses of our friend Jesus the Scripture clearly teaches (John 15:26-27; Acts 1:8). Do our words and actions ever bear a false witness about Christ to the world around us? Do we need the Lord to pray for us, to change us, and to use us to strengthen our brothers in the truth?

After lying about his Savior, Peter went out and wept bitterly, repented, and found forgiveness, restoration, and renewed usefulness through the love of his Lord. Christ had died and risen for his sin. Perhaps we too need to be converted from false witnesses to true ones. Perhaps we ought to weep bitterly over what we have told the world about Jesus Christ as false witnesses about Him. Perhaps we need His forgiveness and restoration. Perhaps only then will we be a true source of strength for our brothers, like Peter was.

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching