

The Ninth Commandment

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A primary purpose of going through these last six commandments, which concern our relationships with our fellow human beings, is to show how trust within communities is destroyed when they are broken. Dozens of statistics have been presented to illustrate how overwhelming the breaking of them is—that vast numbers of people just do not care about keeping them because they do not fear God.

To the average person, the personal issues and concerns in normal human life seem exceedingly more important than God and each other. One of the results of this attitude is that most people live with an uncomfortable measure of apprehension of danger. We are wary and somewhat suspicious of our fellow man instead of at peace with him.

Regarding the ninth commandment, few, if any, statistics are kept. One cannot go to a library or onto the Internet and find reams of charts, graphs, and figures compiled by the FBI on lying as one can with stealing. What one does find, though, is that this sin confirms in a thousand different ways that we Israelites have a tremendously difficult time being trustworthy.

The breaking of this commandment seems to be a problem that particularly afflicts Israelites. Indeed, deception seems to be "in the genes." John 1:46-47 records a remark made by Jesus to this fact: "And Nathanael said to [Philip], 'Can anything good come out of Nazareth?' Philip said to him, 'Come and see.' Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, 'Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!'" *Without deceit* means "simple, without subtlety, candid and sincere." Was this a compliment or a mild sarcasm? Jesus may actually have been pleasantly surprised.

All need to pay heed to His comment, in which He is teaching that "a real Israelite is one in whom is no falsehood." Nathanael represented the way a true Israelite should be, a person without deceit, candid and sincere. Jesus seems to be referring to the post-conversion character of the once-deceitful Jacob, the ancestor of the Israelites, whose name God changed to "Israel." Before Jacob's conversion, Isaac had said to Esau, "Your brother came with deceit and has taken away your blessing" (Genesis 27:35), yet afterward, Jacob dealt honestly and fairly with others.

Falsehood Is a Way of Life

However, lying is such an integral part of the fabric of our lives that we have coined such expressions of mild disbelief as "Is that so?" and "Do you really mean it?" We expect advertisers to exaggerate the quality of their products. We expect politicians to be crooked, to lie, to be evasive, to use their positions to become wealthy, and to make under-the-table deals with contractors or even crime figures. We expect policemen to be "on the take" and businessmen to give little in return for as high a cost as the traffic will bear.

Indeed, the protestors of the 1960s justified the turmoil on the streets because of their disillusionment with the obvious hypocrisies of leaders becoming wealthy on a prolonged, senseless war. During that

same general period, Presidents Eisenhower and Johnson were caught openly lying at news conferences. A web of intrigue and lies brought about President Nixon's resignation. Even General Motors misrepresented Oldsmobile cars with Chevy engines!

People in government commonly lie "in the national interest," as the saying goes. Many have testified that Bill and Hillary Clinton spent eight years continuously lying about a wide variety of personal failings, moneymaking deals, and political intrigues they were involved in. The media took the Bush administration to task on its obfuscations regarding the Iraq War.

British Prime Minister Winston Churchill served his nation most critically in wartime, during which artful lying, called disinformation, is a common tactic. He once said, "In wartime, truth is so precious that she should always be attended by a bodyguard of lies." Do we as a people think that no one is listening?

True Values Needed

God says in Isaiah 29:13-15:

"Inasmuch as these people draw near with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men, therefore, behold, I will again do a marvelous work among this people, a marvelous work and a wonder; for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hidden." Woe to those who seek deep to hide their counsel from the Lord, and their works are in the dark; they say, "Who sees us?" and "Who knows us?"

This charge against Israel is to a people so insensitive to God and truth that they are blind to dishonesty's destructive power. On the national scene, we parade slogans such as "In God We Trust" and "One Nation Under God." Daily in the courts, citizens by the thousands swear on Bibles and then proceed to lie on the witness stand. Millions attend church on Sunday but then conduct business Monday through Saturday in the normal, self-centered, "let's get as much as we can" fashion.

We Americans grew up in this twisted environment and perhaps never really questioned it—we merely accepted it as normal. To some degree, it has conditioned our approach to life. In Isaiah 29, God accuses His people of hypocritically playing games with His truth and of not facing up to its standards in daily life. Jesus quotes verse 13 in Matthew 15:8, charging the scribes and Pharisees with being hypocrites. In both cases, the context is strikingly similar. In both, deceived and hypocritical people mishandle God's revelation. However, after a period of persistent practice, the deception or hypocrisy establishes itself as the way of life!

Notice this vivid contrast in Deuteronomy 32:1-4:

Give ear, O heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth. Let my teaching drop as the rain, my speech distill as the dew, as the raindrops on the tender herb, and as showers on the grass. For I proclaim the name of the Lord: Ascribe greatness to our God. He is the Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice, a God of truth and without injustice; righteous and upright is He.

This description of God is exactly the opposite of that of America's national character. Our God is a God of truth, meaning He is unswervingly faithful. He is the Rock, implying One who is impervious to change. He is our Foundation, indicating One who provides firm footing in a way of life. He is our Fountain, the Source of a refreshing, productive way of life that He intends His people to use.

However, Deuteronomy 32:5-6 adds,

They have corrupted themselves; they are not His children, because of their blemish; a perverse and crooked generation. Do you thus deal with the Lord, O foolish and unwise people? Is He not your Father, who bought you? Has He not made you and established you?

His people have rejected following His example in order to practice and live by lies that bring only destruction and death.

Notice the contrast to us as shown by Jesus in the New Testament. Revelation 19:11 testifies of Him, "Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war." Jesus says of Himself in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." This statement confirms the faithfulness of His nature: He is reliable, trustworthy, and of unwavering integrity.

What does being trustworthy mean in practical application? Who does God show are the most important persons to the overall welfare of the community, state, or nation? It is not the doctors, lawyers, politicians, or businessmen but the preacher and the king because they should teach, administer, exemplify, and provide the values upon which the community will function. God expects those values to be His.

What does God consistently show in His Word? Notice the context in which these verses appear. In both Deuteronomy and Revelation, a new culture, a new nation, is either being established or about to be established. God is indicating that the preacher has a slight edge in importance.

When God established Israel as a nation, He first appointed and sent the preacher—the prophet Moses. In the New Testament, Christ came first as a rabbi, a preacher to teach the way of God. Upon His resurrection, He became our High Priest, a post that has both religious and administrative functions, and He will return as King to administer God's Kingdom. This is why God's Word places so much importance on these two community positions. The preacher should exemplify God's values and deliver instruction containing them, and the king should live them and administer them to the nation.

Without true values, civilization will soon descend into revolution and anarchy. God's doctrine is true and faithful. It will produce gently and without corruption, or as Moses puts it in Deuteronomy 32:2, it will "drop as the rain" and "distill as the dew," whereas a hard-driving rain destroys. Any society or family built on God's doctrines will prosper and become great.

Not only does Jesus characterize Himself as truth in John 14:6, but He also adds in John 17:17 that "[God's] word is truth." In I Corinthians 15:45, 47, Paul refers to Jesus as "the last Adam" or "the second Man," the beginning of a new order, of an entire race or family of beings just like Him, just as all of mankind is in the image of our first forefather, the first Adam.

Truth Practiced Is Faithfulness

Many can say, "I have told you the truth." However, Jesus did not just tell the truth, He embodied it. He put truth into a visible, concrete form so all who so desire can see it. What credibility that gives! A teacher can present a mathematical, grammatical, scientific, or historical truth, and what kind of a person he is does not matter much. However, if a person teaches or administers moral truth, his example—what he is in his character—is all-important. Do people want to be lectured on purity by an adulterer or on honesty by a liar and thief (Romans 2:21-24)?

"Truth" in John 17:17 is the Greek word *aletheia*, which means "reality, the manifested, unconcealed essence of a matter." Truth is the reality lying at the foundation of a righteous example. It is pure unadulterated reality.

Contrast this with what Jesus says of Satan to the Jews in 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.

Satan is Christ's diametrical opposite, one hundred percent unmodified deceit. God's entire plan is based on the premise that the converted know that God is true. If He is not true to His Word or to His own way of life, how can He be trusted? We must live by faith in this true Being and in what He says! Truth forms the basis, the foundation, the reality, for a person's conversion.

Consider this: There is a personal, living, almighty God whose ways and laws are intrinsically right—they are true. Therefore, a person who has God's Spirit and is honest, who is willing to speak the truth and acknowledge it when it is shown to him, and who will use it in everyday, practical situations must eventually become like the One he models himself after.

God is making us kings and priests, that is, leaders and teachers of a way of life based on revealed truth. He will not have anyone in His Family who does not embody truth as Jesus did. In other words, we, too, will be truth personified. However, for this to occur we must live it to the best of our abilities now.

Bearing False Witness

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Exodus 20:16) has very far-reaching spiritual applications. *Bear* means "to spread, carry, render, or give." At first glance, the commandment appears to involve only lying in a court of law, and this might be true if the words in the commandment were to be taken only at face value. Jesus clearly shows that there is a "spirit," an intent, to God's laws in addition to the letter that carries their application far beyond mere face-value judgments.

Many scriptures show that the commandment covers lying under *any* circumstance, including hypocrisy and self-deception. That is, it covers any wrongful word or example that would tend to injure. The ninth commandment is in a similar position in man's relationship to other men as the third commandment is in man's relationship to God. This commandment directly involves faithfulness and loyalty in our speech and in our witness for God before men.

Proverbs 22:1 says, "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, loving favor rather than silver and gold." *The Soncino Commentary* remarks that a person's good reputation, his name, is his most valuable asset. Indeed, the Bible shows that God guards and protects *His* name very jealously. This is because His name represents what He is.

So it is with us. But why do so many lie, sowing the seeds for the destruction of their reputation? It is the desire for the approval of others that leads them to twist a story or to deliberately exaggerate or diminish their parts in it in the retelling.

When we hear a name, images of that person and what he or she is immediately spring to mind. What we are and how others perceive us has everything to do with what we believe and practice. So, is what we believe and practice true? If we want to have a good name (reputation) in the eyes of both God and man, we, too, have to recognize truth—wherever and whenever it arises in daily life—understand it, and submit to it. This process produces faithfulness.

This is where truth in a person's witness begins. If truth does not form the foundation of a person's life, he is already behind the eight ball to some extent. The urge to lie must be met and overcome. At the base of this problem is a deceitful heart (Jeremiah 17:9) that continually lays traps to make lying an appealing course to follow. Besides lying before men, some of us keep lying to ourselves, and thus our name before God is not good. Faithlessness is the result. In order to have a good name, we, as God's children, must face up to our vanities and quit deceiving ourselves that God will just have to take us as we are.

We need to stop blaming our failures, problems, and shortcomings on others, which tendency provides us with justifications for what we are and what we do. Within the family, Mom and Dad are frequent targets of this. They are usually guilty to some extent, but God puts the pressure on *us* to change. Change will not occur in this way of life until we face up to the truth that we are responsible for what we are. We also bear much of the responsibility of becoming what we hope to be. Nobody can do this for us.

This is the day-to-day "stuff" on which trustworthiness and righteous reputations are formed. They are built on the witness of what we do before others. God wants our reputation before men to be built, first, on His truth and then on truth in general. Are we honestly doing this as well as we could be?

Solomon writes in Proverbs 13:15, "Good understanding gains favor, but the way of the unfaithful is hard." When a person consistently has a perception of what is true and lives it, he gains a force of beauty of character. In other words, faithfulness creates favorable impressions that open doors for him.

For example, to whom would we rather loan money, to a person with a record of steady work and payment of debts or to one who cannot keep a job and consistently defaults on his obligations? Which one is more likely to get the loan? A person of good character recognizes his responsibility to truth, understands it, and submits to it. This produces the witness that glorifies God.

If a person will not follow this process, he will not have the good character and the good name to go with it. If he recognizes and understands his problem but does not submit to the truth, he is deceiving himself.

This principle holds true in every area in which a name is built, including marriage, childrearing, and health issues. Many run from the truth about themselves. Hardly anything will destroy a reputation quicker than for others to know an individual is lying to himself about what or how much he eats, his failure to discipline his children properly, or his careless inattention to his spouse. Such faithlessness provides a strong foundation for hypocrisy.

This commandment, then, not only covers bearing false witness verbally, but also bearing false witness about one's relationship with God by displaying a spotty example of conduct, all the while claiming to be Christian. To make a bad witness in ignorance or weakness is one thing, but to know better and deliberately mislead is another matter altogether.

Principles Regarding Lying

Why do we lie? Often, it is to cover up our irresponsibility. We fear that something about ourselves we wish to keep hidden will be exposed, so we lie to protect the image we want others to see. We also lie to rise above our feelings of inadequacy or inferiority. We also do it to lower a third party in the eyes of others, which, of course, has the effect of elevating ourselves in our own eyes and, we hope, in the eyes of others.

Proverbs 26:18-19 says, "Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death, is the man who deceives his neighbor, and says, 'I was only joking.'" These two verses begin a section largely devoted to illustrating the fruits of lying. They might be better translated as, "A man who deceives his neighbor and disguises his deception as a joke is as dangerous as a madman shooting arrows at a crowd. Someone will surely get hurt." Lying is never a joke, and someone always gets hurt, even though it may not be immediately apparent. Lying is sin and sin brings death. Do we believe this in the actual practice of life? Though the lie, when discovered, may cause laughter, a reputation has been stained and trust diminishes.

Proverbs 26:23-25 adds: "Fervent lips with a wicked heart are like earthenware covered with silver dross. He who hates, disguises it with his lips, and lays up deceit within himself; when he speaks kindly, do not believe him, for there are seven abominations in his heart."

The proverbs from here to the end of the chapter primarily involve hypocrisy. Lying lips create a false sense of security and cunningly hide the reality of a deception that will bring loss and pain. Though his voice sounds gracious, the liar is full of countless wickedness. He is particularly wicked by selling himself as a benefactor while intending to do evil. This is the kind of heart involved in financial scams that promise large profits in return for small investment, as Bernie Madoff's infamous Ponzi scheme did.

Solomon writes in Proverbs 26:26, "Though his hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness will be revealed before the assembly." This verse is directly connected in thought to the previous ones, telling us in no uncertain terms that this sin has an obvious boomerang effect! The liar will fall into the pit he digs for others, and in the process, he will be exposed before others. This is exactly what happened to Mr. Madoff.

Proverbs 26:28 adds, "A lying tongue hates those who are crushed by it, and a flattering mouth works ruin." Clearly, lying is an act of hatred. It is so bad that it can bring ruin to those it is used against, and like a boomerang, it will return to destroy those who employ it.

Here is a good maxim to live by: Never believe anything bad about a person unless you know it to be absolutely true; never even tell that absolute truth to another unless it is absolutely necessary; and remember when you do tell it, God is listening.

Galatians 6:7-8 contains an important principle: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life." All who believe God must deal with this reality. God cannot be fooled. Neither can God's law be fooled, just as the law of gravity cannot be fooled. A person cannot treat God or His law with contempt and get away with it. We are accountable to it whether we wish to be or not.

This principle teaches that what a man does to life, life does back to him. It is inescapable. "Do men gather grapes of thornbushes or figs of thistles?" Jesus asks (Matthew 7:16). The hypocrite cannot fool God's laws, only other people—and himself—for a while. This principle is instructing us not to delude ourselves into thinking that we will somehow escape its power. We must always strive to live the truth, which is a difficult job considering the heart within.

The prophet writes in Jeremiah 17:9, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?" The Hebrew word translated *deceitful* can mean in this context "faithless, insincere, hypocritical, underhanded, false, dishonest, treacherous, sneaky, double-dealing, tricky, cunning, and crafty." They all apply.

The phrase *desperately wicked*, which can also be rendered as "perverse" or "incurable," implies that the heart knows better but does it anyhow. It is addicted to deceit or faithlessness! Who can fathom its treachery or corruptness? We know where this came from! "The prince of the power of the air" is largely responsible for this evil proclivity because his spirit dominates life in this world (Ephesians 2:2; II Corinthians 4:4; Revelation 12:9). He was a liar from the beginning (John 8:44), deceiving himself into believing that he could overcome his Creator (Isaiah 14:12-14)!

Solomon says in Proverbs 11:9, "The hypocrite with his mouth destroys his neighbor, but through knowledge the righteous will be delivered." This proverb comforts Christians by reminding us that we have a hedge about us. It also reminds us that, eventually, truth will out. The flipside of this is that the lies, too, will be exposed and with them the condemnation of the liar. Why is this certain? Because there is a God in heaven overseeing His children's well-being.

Proverbs 14:8 counsels, "The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way, but the folly of fools is deceit." The wise, prudent person follows truth. He consciously weighs his options and deliberately chooses not to twist the truth. He does not walk on blindly, leaving things to the chance that his deceit will not be discovered. True wisdom is the ability to judge present circumstances with the view of future success. Truth is always ultimately successful.

Conversely, *folly* means "foolishness, senselessness, idiocy, brainlessness, silliness, and irrationality." Why is a person's folly senseless? Because the one senselessly deceiving is himself deceived. As we might say, "He is shooting himself in the foot," not grasping the fact that he, too, will be crushed by his deceit.

Job 31:33 says, "If I have covered my transgressions as Adam, by hiding my iniquity in my bosom. . . ." Job makes this statement because he has been accused of being a hypocrite, so he is defending his integrity. "Adam" represents mankind in general. Unlike mankind in general—though it is the natural

thing to do—Job does not hide himself from the deceit of his heart, showing both his conversion and his wisdom. Sir Walter Scott wrote, "Oh what tangled webs we weave/ When first we practice to deceive." Job understood that either lying with the tongue or presenting a visible hypocrisy creates problems, not solve them.

James 1:26 adds a startling truth that needs our consideration: "If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless." Putting a bridle on our tongue is absolutely essential because a liar is not merely deceived. Each additional lie gets him in deeper and deeper until he loses track and believes his own lies. He tells them or lives them so often that, like an alcoholic, he loses his grip on reality. Each lie adds to the difficulty of changing for the better. If it continues, the person becomes addicted to it as a way of life.

Proverbs 16:6 points us in the right direction: "In mercy and truth atonement is provided for iniquity; and by the fear of the Lord one departs from evil." If a person is ever going to change, he must confront his fault, since there is no magic bullet! The proverb's advice can be understood this way: By God's mercy and truth and by our recognition and use of truth, iniquity will be purged because we fear God and submit to Him. One commentator renders the last line of the proverb as, "By loyalty and faithfulness one escapes evil." Another translates it as, "By one's loyalty and faithfulness to God's truth one will escape evil." "Evil" implies the second death. Living the truth does not forgive sin, but it does help to purge the mind of its habitual focus on sin.

He Who Speaks the Truth

David writes in Psalm 15:1-5:

Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? He who walks uprightly, and works righteousness, and speaks the truth in his heart; he who does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor does he take up a reproach against his friend; in whose eyes a vile person is despised, but he honors those who fear the Lord; he who swears to his own hurt and does not change; he who does not put out his money to usury, nor does he take a bribe against the innocent. He who does these things shall never be moved.

It was surprising to discover two new things in this passage. The first is that while Christians usually choose Psalm 23 as their favorite psalm, Jews often choose Psalm 15. The second is that the Hebrew of the phrase "who shall dwell" does not suggest "living in," but rather "visiting with"—that is, being acceptable to come into God's presence. In other words, the psalm has at least an equally strong present tense application as it does a future one.

It is essential, therefore, for us to consider whether God allows us to visit Him, and thus whether He hears our prayers. The person who has these qualifications most certainly will be heard. In him is no false way at all, no pretense, no deceit, no gossip, no guile, and no hypocrisy. He has no hollow friendships, nor does he give vain compliments. His heart, hand, and tongue are in unison in believing and doing truth. This is a model for all of us to strive to reach.

Another proverb, Proverbs 25:19, instructs us, "Confidence in an unfaithful man in time of trouble is like a bad tooth and a foot out of joint." Faithfulness always indicates a person who deals truthfully;

he can be trusted. Yet, dealing with unfaithful people is usually painful because one never knows whether they will come through. Thus, our evaluation of ourselves comes down to this question: How can God trust us if we are not striving to be honest *now*?

II Corinthians 4:1-2 sets a standard:

Therefore, since we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we do not lose heart. But we have renounced the hidden things of shame, not walking in craftiness nor handling the word of God deceitfully, but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

Paul's proclamation fits right into the description of the acceptable person in Psalm 15. Our responsibility is to manifest truth. We must make honest and diligent use of God's gracious gifts without craftiness. Is our way Christ's way and therefore acceptable to God? Can we say that we have nothing to do with hidden and shameful methods?

Paul is not saying that we act with unscrupulous cleverness, but that we do not adulterate truth in any form at all. By making truth clear, whether in word or deed, we commend ourselves both to human conscience in the sight of God and please Him at the same time. We should be childlike and open, leaving as little room as possible for people to misinterpret our motives, misunderstand our actions, or twist our words out of their real meaning.

Does it make any difference what people think of us? Some take the approach that "I'm going to do what I want to do, and what others think doesn't matter." However, it matters very much to God. If it did not, He would not show such concern in His Word regarding being a good witness for Him. Nor would He warn us about protecting our reputation—or His—because much of our effectiveness in witnessing depends on our being trustworthy.

Keeping this commandment begins with not letting our deceitful heart trick us into doing anything less than what is honest and true in God's sight, regardless of what we think men might discern from what we say or do. To do this, we may have to override strong internal drives to make ourselves look good, but doing what is right is something that must be done to remain pure and glorify God.