

Telling the Truth, Nothing but the Truth Exodus 20:16

We're continuing our series on the 10 Commandments and we're now nearing the end. Today we're looking at the 9th Commandment. Would you please open your Bibles to Exodus 20:16? Sometimes it's also good to open your Bibles just to check that what you're seeing on the slide or what I'm telling you is what your Bible is telling you. Is Pastor Rolly being truthful? Is he quoting the Bible correctly? You can keep me accountable because today we're going to talk about truth.

Exodus 20:16, this is what it says, "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor." Other versions of the Bible say, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" or "Do not tell lies about others".

I have entitled this message, "Telling the Truth, Nothing but the Truth". The basic message of this commandment is being truthful especially with respect to another person.

Now, first we're going to talk about the part of the body that is involved here. What is it? The tongue, right? The apostle James has given us a very good essay about the tongue. We see that in James 3:5 and following. He says, "Likewise, the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell."

All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father,

and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing." (James 3:5-10)

Out of the same mouth, come praise and cursing. Bad things can come out of our mouths. And one of those things is saying bad things about another person.

The tongue is a tiny member of the body. In fact, it is hidden but its influence is enormous. That tiny membrane holds a lot of power. It has the power to build and it has the power to destroy. If we're not careful and let it loose, it creates a lot of damage to us and to others. Proverbs 13:3 says, "Those who guard their lips preserve their lives, but those who speak rashly will come to ruin." This proverb recommends putting a guard on our lips or our mouth. Of course, we don't literally put a muzzle on our mouths the way we do on a dog's mouth. The point is, we should watch every word we say. The words we say could either lift somebody up or put someone down.

During World War II there were signs in factories that manufacture planes, ships, tanks, and all others war machines which said, "Loose lips sink ships". Folks, loose lips destroy lives. Loose lips can kill.

So, today I'd like to share with you, first the 3 kinds of false testimony, and then the 4 things the Bible says you can do to become a truthful person.

What are the 3 kinds of false testimony?

1. Gossip

This is a biggie. What is gossip? Somebody said it's hearing something you like about somebody you don't. Somebody else said, it's mouth to mouth recitation. What do you call a person who spreads gossip? A person with a great sense of rumor. But, basically, gossip is simply repeating private information by somebody who is neither part of the problem nor the solution. Gossip causes a wildfire like what James says. A conflagration that destroys lives. Let's read these verses together. Proverbs 26:20 and 22. Let's read it aloud. "Without wood the

fire goes out. Without gossip a quarrel dies...The words of a gossip are like choice morsels. They go down to the inmost parts." It's saying we love to eat gossip.

Oh, it tastes good. It's choice morsels. We swallow it whole. We love gossip. Everybody loves good news, especially if it's about somebody else. Like the pastor when he got up and preached on gossip and the closing song was, I love to tell the story.

Now there are a lot of varieties, lots of **forms of gossip**. There's what I call **false sympathy**. This is when you put in your gossip you feel bad. Oh, it's so sad. It really breaks my heart about what happened to so-and-so, and then you share. Actually, what gossip does is it allows us to enjoy somebody else's sin. That's one way.

Another form of gossip is **asking questions**. That often sounds innocent enough, but it's really just gossip. Hey, have you heard? Is it true? Have you heard about so-and-so?

Still another form is **Christian gossip**. You know what it is? It is sharing prayer requests. You say, I'm just sharing this with you about so-and-so so you can pray about it. Folks, we'd be a whole lot healthier if we confessed our own sin rather than somebody else's gossip. It's a false testimony. Gossip. Now, the second kind of false testimony is

2. Slander.

What is slander? It simply means making false accusations. Trying to discredit somebody. What could be an example? Well, you've heard about the accusations of slander leveled against one another a few months back by these two famous celebrities, formerly a husband and wife and their case was watched eagerly by everyone. The trial was held here in Fairfax. Remember now? It ended up the woman had to pay \$10 million. Both of their reputations suffered a blow as a result. So, just like gossip, slander damages the reputation of another person.

Let's read James 4:11-12, together. “Brothers and sisters, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it...There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor?”

It would be easy to make a case against slander purely on the fact that it is damaging to other people. But James goes further: when you slander another brother or sister, you are judging that other person. And when you judge that other person, you are acting as if you were the judge. We have no right to judge our neighbor – rather we are to love our neighbor. In essence, James is saying, slander is putting yourself in the position of God over another person’s life and behavior. So, he says, “Who are you to judge your neighbor?”

Gossip, slander, and the third kind is

3. Flattery.

What is flattery? Flattery is insincere praise, when you compliment somebody and you don't really mean it. Proverbs 26:28b says, “...a flattering mouth works ruin.” The word in Hebrew that is translated flattering can also be translated smooth. So, someone who flatters has a smooth tongue, someone who is a slick talker. Why do we flatter? Why do we say things to people when we don't really mean it? Proverbs 29:5 says, “Those who flatter their neighbor are spreading nets for their feet.” What's he saying? He's saying when you flatter somebody, it's a trap. It's to butter them up, it's to manipulate them. We flatter them when we think we can get something out of them. And so, we kind of butter them up. We're setting a trap for them. Proverbs 26:23 says, “Smooth words may hide a wicked heart.” So, be careful when you receive praises like “I like your dress”, probably the person wants you to give her that kind of dress on her birthday.

Or “You are getting slimmer”, probably the person is discouraging you to get Panera bread with chocolate inside, you know, because she wants that bread herself. Or “I envy your big muscles”, probably the person is planning to ask you to move some stuff.

Gossip, slander, flattery, three kinds of false testimony. As Christians, we ought not to indulge in these things. It’s not Christlike. We ought to follow the example of Jesus who always told the truth. Because he is the Truth. But, I know, it’s tempting. Especially the first one. Gossip. You know, gossip can cause the ruin of any church. Jim Cymbala, the pastor of the Brooklyn Tabernacle, is aware of this so much so that when introducing new members in their church he would ask these new members, “Do you commit to not spreading false rumors or gossip about anyone as long as you are a member of this church?” He understands greatly the power to divide that gossip creates.

But let’s move on. How do we become truth-tellers instead of false-witnessers? Briefly, let me share with you 4 things you can do to become truth-tellers. First,

1. Examine your heart

In other words, have a spiritual checkup. Why do we lie? Why are we dishonest? Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is” (what?) “DECEITFUL above all things and desperately wicked.” My heart is deceitful; your heart is deceitful. I’m not OK, and you’re not OK. And because we have deceitful hearts we speak deceitfully. We have a heart problem. Jesus says, “For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.” (Matthew 12:34). Now what is it in our heart that causes us to be dishonest? What motivates us to lie? I think there are a number of things.

- a. Fear is an example - when we’re afraid of what might happen to us if we tell the truth. Do you remember Bob Barker on TV? He had a show in the

1950's through the 70's called — “Truth or Consequences.” Folks, truth has consequences.

Many Americans lie on their ITR's every year because telling the whole truth about their income will cost them a lot of money. So they lie. Every time you tell the truth there are consequences, and when we lie, it is often because we don't have the courage to face the consequences of telling the truth. So, we use an alibi, a cop-out. Adam and Eve were the first to tell a lie in the Garden of Eden, and they did it because of fear -- they were trying to cover up. The crime in “Watergate” was the cover-up, and it was the cover-up that toppled the president and all of his men.

b. **Anger** is another cause of dishonesty. When we want to retaliate and get revenge, we just decide to circulate some stories, and spread some rumors, to discredit an enemy.

c. **Pride**. When we want to put ourselves in a better light, we lie like when we want to impress people with how good we are, we exaggerate; we often find that in our resumes. Writing a resume can often be the height of creative writing.

Folks, to become a truth-teller, we need to examine our heart first. We need a spiritual heart transplant. We all need a change of heart. The second thing to do to become a truth-teller is to

2. **Think about honest things.**

Whatever goes into your mind is going to come out. It's the old statement — “Garbage in; garbage out.” Let's read **Philippians 14:8: “Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”**

You think about honest things, and it will come out in your life; but if you're always watching TV shows or movies where people are dishonest crooks, that's going to affect your life inevitably, because subconsciously it becomes a model for you.

3. **Refuse to give or receive gossip.** Proverbs 11:13 (NLT) says, **"A gossip goes around telling secrets, but those who are trustworthy can keep a confidence."**

When you're tempted to pass on a rumor, just stop and ask yourself, "Am I willing to sponsor this story by signing my name to it?" You've all seen that TV commercial by the telephone company about "putting it in writing." If you're not willing to put it in writing and sign your name to it, you'd better not share it. People talk about "speaking off the record." Folks, nothing is ever "off the record." If you say it, you're going to get quoted. If you don't want to be quoted, don't say it. And remember, God hears it.

And don't just refuse to utter gossip; refuse to receive it. Don't let somebody go on and on and on in your presence while you just sit sucking it all up like a vacuum cleaner. Challenge it. Ask the person, "Have you checked that out with the source?" It's amazing how many people will back off when you ask for verification of a rumor.

You know, the law says that if you accept stolen goods, you are as guilty as the person who stole them. Now the same thing is true of gossip. When you receive stolen information, you're as guilty as the person who gossips to you. Noah committed a sin (Genesis 9:18-27). You remember how, after the flood, he got drunk, and he lay around his tent naked and made a big fool of himself. And his son Ham came into the tent and saw him and then, big blabbermouth that he was, he went out and told his two brothers. Now Noah was forgiven of his sin, but Ham carried a curse upon himself for the rest of his life. God said that talking about someone's sin is even worse than committing it.

And here are two things never to do: (1) never read an anonymous letter; and (2) never react to anonymous critics. It's impossible to evaluate a statement if you don't know where it came from. The context makes all the difference in the world. And do remember - the person who will gossip to you will gossip about you. You can count on it.

4. **Make it your goal to be an encourager.** Look at **Ephesians 14:29: "Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen."** God says, "You share things that build up others, according to their needs." Isn't that a wonderful challenge?

Alan Metcalf is a pastor in England, and he said his church was going through a difficult time and so one night he said, "We're going to have, starting tonight an MEF. How many of you want to join? MEF stands for mutual encouragement fellowship." And he continued, "We're going to encourage each other rather than discourage each other. He said how many want to join? Everybody raised their hand. He said there's only one qualification for you to join. You have to be willing to say "I will think before I speak". I will think before I speak. And he came up with an acronym. I thought it was so good that I thought I would share it with you this morning. **THINK.** Five questions to ask yourself before you say another word to anybody about anything.

T - Is it the Truth? Is it true? Do I have my facts right?

H - Is it Helpful? -- Some things are true but not helpful. They may be true but they're not helpful.

I - Is it inspiring? -- Does it encourage or does it discourage?

N - Is it necessary? -- A lot of things we say would be better left unsaid.

K - Is it kind? -- Is it a kind thing to say?

You see, there's always a qualification. The Ninth Commandment encourages us to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. But it is not a license to blow people away with the truth. Someone says, "But it was the truth." Just because something is the truth does not give you the right to share it.

If your grandfather was a horse thief, would you like me to go around telling everybody? **Ephesians 4:15** says, "Speak the truth in love." Love is always the qualifier. The truth is never a license to blow people away.

Jesus always spoke the truth in love. That was His nature. You may say, "Why does God make such a big deal about honesty? What's the big deal about gossip? It's harmless." It is not harmless. It is a false testimony. God is a God of truth. That's His nature. Jesus said, "I am the Way; I am the Truth." Jesus is totally truth. That means that when I lie, when I'm dishonest, when I gossip, when I slander, when I flatter, I am being the exact opposite of Jesus Christ.

Now, is there any benefit in being honest? There certainly is! Look at **Psalm 34:12,13**: "Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from telling lies." What God is saying here is this: "The key to a long and enjoyable life is honesty." Why? Well, for one thing, you can go around with a clear conscience. I like what Mark Twain said, "If you always tell the truth you never have to remember anything!" You see, if you tell someone a lie, you have to backpedal, and cover up, and you're always thinking, "Whom did I tell that to?" And you're going to get caught! The Bible says, "Be sure your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23). The Bible says, "Do not be deceived. God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows" (Galatians 6:7). If you gossip, you will be gossiped about. If you lie, you will be lied to. What you sow, you'll reap.

Now folks, I could lie to you; and I could lie to other people; and I could even lie to myself; but I cannot lie to God and get away with it, because He knows everything that's going on.

The truth is God loves you so much that he doesn't want you to live a life that is based on a lie. A lie that the Devil told in the very beginning to Adam and Eve. Do you know that you can become like God? Do you know that you can be independent of God? Do you know that you can know right from wrong?

Folks, that is a big lie. If it wasn't, the world would be in a better shape than it is now. The reason we're living in a world like this is because we don't know what is right from wrong, what is good and evil. We hate each other, we do mean things to each other. We harm each other.

Friend, you may have bought into that original lie by the devil. Perhaps, you're looking for a way out. Your life is a mess because of the many lies you've heard like you can go it alone, you don't need God, it's all right to break the ten commandments, and so forth.

God wants to restore order in the world and in your own personal life. The way he did that is by sending his Son Jesus to right the wrongs that were unleashed in this world because of the big lie by the devil. The way to conquer lie is by the truth. Jesus is the Truth. He said, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through me." He conquered the lie of the devil by sacrificing himself on the cross for our sins. Then he was buried but on the third day he rose again from the dead, declaring victory over the Devil.

Friend, God wants you to know the truth that he loves you more than you know. Just receive his love for you by receiving Jesus in your heart as your Lord and Savior. The Bible says, "Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God". (John 1:12)

Would you do that today?