

“False Witness”
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Exodus 20:16
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Introduction: The Ninth Commandment

I hope you’ve got a Bible. Alright, here’s what we’re going to do. We’re at the ninth commandment. So, the ninth commandment—we’ll throw it on the screen—it’s in Exodus chapter 20 verse 16, and here’s what it says:

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

Now, if you look online, you’ll see lists of all the commandments. They never write the whole thing down. What do they say? Anybody know what they say? “Don’t lie,” right? Well, that’s true—you shouldn’t lie. So, we’ll just throw that out there: don’t lie. But that’s not what the commandment says, is it? What does the commandment say? It says, “You shall not bear false witness.” So, what is false witness? When do you bear false witness?

Well, you bear false witness when you’re in court, right? So, if I go into court and somebody accuses Randy of puncturing someone’s tires on the tractor so he’ll win the tractor pull or whatever—and I didn’t see any of it—but I go in and say, “Oh, I saw the whole thing. Yeah, Randy’s a bunch of slime. He did that.” And then they convict him, right? He goes off to jail and he’s serving time because I lied. That’s bearing false witness.

It’s the same if we did something good. If he did do that and I said, “Oh no, Randy didn’t do that. I was there. I watched it. Randy’s completely innocent. My eyes were focused on him. I didn’t see a knife and a tire.” That’s bearing false witness too. So, if it’s about lying, then why this? Here’s why. In the commandments, each one is kind of the ultimate sin in its category.

Understanding the Commandments as Ultimate Sins

When it says, “You shall not commit adultery,” adultery is kind of the worst of the sexual sins. There are all kinds of sins—like looking at a woman lustfully, or maybe two single people sleeping together when they shouldn’t—but the ultimate would be that I go and sleep with another man’s wife. That’s bad. Or a woman does the same thing. Adultery—that’s kind of it.

Now, I’m not saying the others aren’t important. I’m not saying they’re not bad. They all fall in that category. But when He lists the Ten Commandments, that’s kind of the ultimate one.

When we get to murder, Jesus says all these other things are murder too. It's not just actually taking someone's life. Even when you curse someone out, say "raca," or "you fool," or have hate in your heart—you've murdered in your heart. But the commandment says:

You shall not murder. Exodus 20:13 (NIV)

So, when we get to this commandment, it's about lying. But the ultimate would be this: that I testify against Hank and say, "I saw Hank murder that guy. I was there. I saw him take that person's life in cold blood." They convict him and give him the death penalty. That would be the ultimate. Now, there's all kinds of other lying—not quite as severe—but they're all there. That's the ultimate. And the reason that's important is because that was the reality in ancient times.

Justice in the Ancient World

In ancient times, the justice system was... well, I wouldn't say we've got a great justice system now, but back then it was really whacked. Bad. There was a lot of stuff in the justice system where the penalty was death. Even in early America—say, "She's a witch." Okay, let's burn her. The death penalty was for a lot of stuff. Adultery, all kinds of things. It wasn't just for murder. You could get it.

So, in the ancient world, the problem was that people could accuse someone—you only needed one witness. There wasn't a lot of forensics at the time. How are you going to convict someone? There wasn't a Sherlock Holmes of Jerusalem out there saying, "Oh, I'm putting two and two together and I've figured out it's him." There was none of that. It wasn't, "Oh, we've got the DNA," or other forensics. They didn't have that. Pretty much what convicted people was someone said, "You did it." And you said, "I didn't do it." And the judge said, "We believe the person who said you did it." And now we're going to kill you. Here's the problem with that: that's not justice. That's not truth. And what do we know about God? God is a God of truth. He's a God of justice.

God's Safeguards for Justice in Deuteronomy

When God is setting up His people after they left Egypt and were becoming a nation, He established rules. In the book of Deuteronomy, He lays out how they're going to function. He sets up specific safeguards to protect His people from injustice.

1. No Death Penalty with Only One Witness

The first safeguard is that there can be no death penalty based on just one witness. You can't just have one person say something and convict someone. That's not going to fly.

One witness is not enough to convict anyone accused of any crime or offense they may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.
Deuteronomy 19:15 (NIV)

Later, Jesus is walking around and testifying that He's the Son of God. And they say, "Wait a second, you can't do that—you're only one witness."

The Pharisees challenged Him, 'Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid.' **John 8:13 (NIV)**

Why? Because one witness isn't enough.

In your own law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is true. I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father who sent me. **John 8:17-18 (NIV)**

So, the first way God protects His people from injustice is by requiring multiple witnesses.

2. The Accuser Must Cast the First Stone

The second safeguard is that the accuser—the one who brings the charge—must cast the first stone in a death penalty case. Imagine you lie, convict someone, and you know they didn't do it. They're going to get the electric chair, and the judge says, "Since you're so confident, you flip the switch." That's what God set up.

The hands of the witnesses must be the first in putting that person to death, and then the hands of all the people. **Deuteronomy 17:7 (NIV)**

So, the first person to cast the stone is the one who made the accusation. Then everyone else joins in. That's how they did the death penalty. No hanging, no electric chair—just stoning. So, what happens in John chapter 8? There's a woman caught in adultery. Remember that? They've all accused her of committing adultery—a capital offense. She's supposed to be killed. Jesus makes an interesting statement. He takes the law and says:

Let him who is without sin cast the first stone. **John 8:7**

Which of you is so righteous that you're willing to be the one to kill her for the crime you commit all the time? Justice. God's smart about how He lays this out.

3. False Witnesses Receive the Penalty They Intended

The third safeguard is this: if you testify falsely, the penalty for the accused crime is given to you. Whoa. Let's say I accuse Randy of burglarizing houses, and the penalty is death. But

I'm lying. Then they find out he didn't do it. They're going to put me to death because I testified falsely. God is serious about justice.

If a malicious witness takes the stand to accuse someone of a crime, and the witness proves to be a liar giving false testimony against a fellow Israelite, then do to the false witness as that witness intended to do to the other party. Deuteronomy 19:18–19 (NIV)

That's hardcore.

Bearing False Witness as Christians

God's people—you and I—we are not to bear false witness. Why? Because we are image bearers of God. We walk around as witnesses. This commandment is about bearing false witness, and we walk around as Christians bearing the name of Christ, bearing the name of God. We are witnesses of Him. If we walk around living in scum, living in untruth, living in a way that doesn't represent God properly—going out on the weekends, getting wasted, cussing up a storm, sleeping around—and then say, “Oh yeah, but I'm a Christian,” we are bearing false witness about God. We're lying about God in the ultimate court.

The Father of Lies vs. The God of Truth

Who is the one that tells lies? Satan is. Lying in court is about deception. It's about being false. God is the Father of truth, and Satan is the father of lies. So, who is your father?

*You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar. *When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. John 8:44*

Jesus is talking to the Pharisees, who claim that God is their Father, but they're living like Satan. They're doing Satan's work. So, Jesus says, “You belong to your father, the devil.” That's a hard truth.

Truth, Grace, and Difficult Choices

So, one of the things we're called to do, friends, is to bear witness to God—to bear witness of who He is. Now, somebody always asks me, “Is it always wrong to lie? Aren't there some circumstances where it's alright?” Let's say my wife comes in wearing a new outfit. She says, “What do you think of this?” I say, “It looks good, baby. You always look good.” She says, “That's not what I asked you.” So, I change the subject: “We got any Pepsi?” Is that alright? Do I have to say the truth?

Biblical Examples of Grace in Lying

What about in the Bible? Remember the midwives in Egypt? They had to lie because Pharaoh wanted to kill all the Hebrew babies. They lied to Pharaoh and saved lives.

*The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live. **Exodus 1:17 (NIV)***

What about Rahab? Rahab lied to her own people to protect the Israelite spies and facilitate what God was doing.

*But the woman had taken the two men and hidden them. She said, ‘Yes, the men came to me, but I did not know where they had come from.’ **Joshua 2:4***

What about Nazi Germany? You’re in the Netherlands. Nazis knock on your door. You’ve got Jews hiding under your floorboards. They ask, “Do you have any Jews in there?” You say, “Oh no, Officer. I ain’t got no Jews.” You just lied—but you saved lives.

Choosing the Lesser Evil

These are cases where people are preventing a more horrible sin from happening. They’re choosing the lesser of two evils. It’s like voting in America, right? The lesser of two evils. I don’t have a good option, so I’ve got to pick the one that causes the least amount of death and chaos—and honors God the most out of the two. Yes, lying is wrong. Was it wrong for the midwives to lie? Yes, it was wrong. But it was less wrong than allowing all those children to die. We live in a messy world. And I think we need to understand that.

Legalism vs. Righteousness

Legalism sometimes causes us to do what is more evil because we’re so concerned about being right. That was the problem with the Pharisees. Jesus’ biggest issue with the Pharisees was that they put on a face of righteousness. They said, “Look how righteous we are. We pray in public. We give in front of everybody so they all know what we’re doing.” They were showing how righteous they were. But on the inside, they were rotten. They were evil. They were ugly.

Jesus Confronts Hypocrisy in Matthew 23

Let me be really honest with you, because this is important for us as a church—and I’m about done. I bear false witness sometimes. If I’m honest with you, there are times when I exaggerate. Some of you maybe do that too. I’m a person who also sometimes looks with lust. I commit the sin of adultery in that way.

And I’ll tell you what—I’m very, very careful, maybe just like you are, that when I do those things, I don’t let you know about it. When I have impure thoughts, I don’t come up on Sunday and say, “Hey everybody, guess what? Had some really impure thoughts this week.” Actually, sometimes we go to some trouble and put energy into making sure we’re not genuine about who we are. Here’s the big question I have:

How much time and energy do you spend bearing false witness to everyone around you about who you really are?

And here’s why I ask that—because what makes this place special is that you can be real here. God doesn’t want us to be fake. One of the things about God is He says, “Listen, I’ve come to forgive you. I’ve done everything to forgive you. But here’s what I’m asking: I’m asking you to be honest with Me.” He’s not going to forgive sin that you don’t think you’ve committed. He’s not going to forgive sin that you pretend isn’t even there. He’s dying for the sin that is confessed. Don’t pretend you’re one person when you’re not.

The damage that causes within the church is that people start thinking, “Oh, I can’t be in this place because this is where the good people are. All the good people go to that church.” And the reason they think that is because they’ve never seen anything negative in your life. They’ve never heard that you struggle with anything. Your life looks squeaky clean. On the outside, you look like a whitewashed tomb.

*Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of bones of the dead and everything unclean. In the same way, on the outside you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness. **Matthew 23:27–28 (NIV)***

Bearing False Witness as Christians

God’s people—you and I—we are not to bear false witness. Why? Because we are **image bearers of God**. We walk around as witnesses. This commandment is about bearing false witness, and we walk around as Christians bearing the name of Christ, bearing the name of God. We are witnesses of Him.

If we walk around living in scum, living in untruth, living in a way that doesn’t represent God properly—going out on the weekends, getting wasted, cussing up a storm, sleeping

around—and then say, “Oh yeah, but I’m a Christian,” we are bearing false witness about God. We’re lying about God in the ultimate court.

A Call to Authenticity and Truthful Worship

Don’t pretend that you’re one person when you’re really another. The damage that causes within the church is huge. All of a sudden, you get a church where everybody thinks, “Oh, I can’t be in this place because this is where the good people are. All the good people go to that SonRise Church.” And the reason they think that is because they’ve never seen anything negative in anyone’s life. They’ve never heard that people struggle with anything. Their lives seem squeaky clean. They look like whitewashed tombs—beautiful on the outside. But the truth is—and I know this because I go to this church—there’s a whole lot of dead bones and rot inside us that we’re struggling with. And God offers cleansing for that.

He says, “That’s why we’re here.” We are here to be a **hospital**, not a shrine to all the holy righteous people. We’re here to be a shrine to **one righteous man—Jesus**. We love Him because He’s the one who takes all of us with the rotten insides and makes us clean. He makes us clean.

Let’s Not Bear False Witness in This Place

So, my encouragement to you, as far as false witness goes: let’s not bear false witness in this place. If you’re struggling on a Sunday morning and you think, “I don’t want to come up and pray because people will think I have a problem...” Okay. Or “If I come up here and pray, people are going to be wondering, ‘Oh, I wonder what they’re praying about. I bet they’re praying about this or that.’” You know what? That sounds like small-town kind of crap.

If you need prayer—pray. It surprises me each week that there’s anybody still in the pew. The only reason I’m not down here is because I’ve got to lead the music. If somebody wants to take over, I can be down here praying all the time. We took a lot of time in prayer. We can take some of that time just on our knees before God, having people pray over us and share. We can do it that way too.

True Worshipers Worship in Spirit and Truth

*Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. **John 4:23 (NIV)***

To be a true worshiper, we need to worship not only in spirit but in truth. We need to be real and authentic. True witnesses tell the truth about Jesus. So, as you go out into the world and say, “I believe this about Jesus,” don’t bear false witness by hiding the truth. Don’t bear false witness by saying, “Oh, I just don’t want anybody to know what I believe.” No—be yourself. Bear true witness. Don’t lie by implying that you agree with something that is a lie, just because you don’t speak up.

Closing and Prayer

I think we did pretty good today. Let me pray for us, and then we’ll be dismissed. We’ll come back next week. Next week there’s not a sermon—we’re going to be celebrating what God’s doing. So come, bring lots of food. That’s the best part of the annual meeting—we eat really good here. And if you can’t make anything, just come. There’s always plenty of food. Lots of food.

Let’s pray.

God, I thank You for each person here. I thank You for Your Word. God, we want to be truth-tellers. We don’t want to be half-truth-tellers—we want to be truth-tellers. God, and we want to be especially in this place honest about who we are. God, we want to lay ourselves before You so that You can wrap Your arms around us and cleanse us and heal our hearts and turn our hearts of stone into hearts of flesh. God, I thank You for each person here. God, I pray that somehow through the chaos of this morning, that there would be work going on in the hearts of each person—including me. I pray in Jesus’ name. Amen.