

"THE NINTH COMMANDMENT: TELL THE TRUTH"

I. Introduction

- A. A short time ago, I came across an interesting piece of photo-journalism that dealt with the way fast food restaurants advertise their products.
1. The writer/ photographer went around and purchased the most popular fast food sandwiches, unwrapped them, and took pictures of them.
 2. He then took his pictures and lined them up alongside the pictures that the restaurants use in their advertisements.
 3. I imagine that you can guess what he discovered.
 4. The sandwiches looked a lot more impressive in the ads than they did in real life.
 5. We are not surprised when we hear about this sort of thing, because we know that there is plenty of dishonesty in the world.
 6. We come across dishonesty in the business world, in politics, in publishing, in sports.
 7. We have to deal with dishonesty in our workplaces, classrooms, neighborhoods, and families.
 8. We are confronted by the dishonesty that dwells in our own hearts.
- B. Honesty is a virtue that everyone appreciates.
1. Nobody wants to be lied to.
 2. At the same time, truth can get in the way of getting what we want.
 3. This explains why a recent survey indicated that an increasing number of people in our culture see lying as a legitimate means to

an end.

4. The fact that we are living in such a context makes it all the more important for us to think very carefully about the ninth commandment.

II. The God of Truth

- A. Even though commandments five through ten focus on our duty toward our neighbor, each is vitally connected to our duty toward God.
 1. The command to honor father and mother has to do with honoring the human authorities through whom God exercises his authority over us.
 2. Murder is prohibited because man is made in God's image.
 3. Adultery is forbidden because marriage is a picture of Christ's covenant relationship with his church.
 4. Stealing is forbidden because it demonstrates discontentment with God's providential provision.
 5. And lying is forbidden because the Lord is the God of truth.
 6. As the writer of Hebrews puts it, "it is impossible for God to lie." (Heb. 6:18)
 7. By way of contrast, Jesus says that Satan "has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies." (Jn. 8:44)
 8. The reason why God forbids lying is because lying is a satanic character trait.
 9. It stands in direct contradiction to God's character.

- B. In its original context, the primary application of the ninth commandment was to courtroom contexts.
1. In the ancient world, legal cases hinged almost entirely on the testimony of witnesses.
 2. There was no such thing as forensic science or DNA tests.
 3. The administration of justice depended upon the veracity of those who gave testimony.
 4. In cases involving capital offenses, the life of the accused was in the hands of the witnesses.
 5. Even today, the truthfulness of witnesses remains a crucial part of the administration of justice.
 6. This is why people are made to swear oaths before they give testimony in a court of law.
 7. When false testimony is given, justice is perverted.
 8. This is what the ninth commandment was intended to guard against.
 9. Stated positively, this commandment requires us to maintain and promote the truth and to protect our own and our neighbor's good name.
- C. In our study of the Ten Commandments, we have repeatedly noted that each commandment involves much more than what it explicitly says.
1. It is important for us to ponder this, or else we will be prone to deceive ourselves about our ability to live up to the holy standard of God's law.
 2. This is why our Larger Catechism provides such an extensive treatment of what is required and what is forbidden in each

commandment.

3. Here is a brief summary of what it has to say.
 4. In relation to our own good name, the ninth commandment forbids us from having too high or too low an esteem for ourselves.
 5. It forbids us from excusing our faults or downplaying our virtues.
 6. It forbids us from walking in any way that would bring dishonor to our name.
 7. With regard to our neighbor's good name, the ninth commandment forbids having low thoughts of others, being wrongfully suspicious of others, or being rash and uncharitable in our criticisms of others.
 8. It forbids foolishly admiring people without good reason, unnecessarily rehashing people's past sins, or failing to speak up for a neighbor's just cause.
 9. It forbids all flattery, gossip and listening to gossip, backbiting, scoffing, and slander.
 10. It forbids speaking what is true unseasonably, or maliciously to a wrong end, or perverting it to a wrong meaning.
- D. Positively, the ninth commandment requires that we judge ourselves rightly and have a proper love for and care of our own good name.
1. It requires us to have a charitable opinion of others and to desire them to have a good name.
 2. It requires that we grieve for our neighbor's sinful infirmities and that we cover over those infirmities in love whenever we can.
 3. It requires that we view our neighbor's words and actions and motives in the best possible light, always giving them the benefit of the doubt.

4. It requires that we speak the truth plainly, that we exercise wisdom and discernment when we need to lovingly reprove people for their faults, that we praise and commend those who do well, and that we defend our neighbor's good name when his cause is just.
5. I think it is safe to say that if we think carefully about the breadth of ground that is covered by this commandment, we will see that we all stand condemned under it.
6. God is true, but every man is a liar.

III. The True Witness

- A. As we have seen again and again in this series on the Ten Commandments, God's law drives us outside of ourselves and away from all confidence in our own performance.
 1. The law exposes our need for the righteousness of God that has been manifested apart from the law — the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ.
 2. Jesus is the source of grace and truth. (Jn. 1:17)
 3. He is the way and the truth and the life. (Jn. 14:6)
 4. No deceit was ever found in his mouth. (1 Pet. 2:22)
 5. When Jesus appeared to the apostle John in the book of Revelation, he revealed himself as "the true one" (3:7) and "the faithful and true witness." (3:14)
- B. One place in the Gospels where we see Jesus bearing witness to the truth is when he was on trial before Pontius Pilate.
 1. Jesus told Pilate that he came into the world to bear witness to the truth.
 2. In making that assertion, Jesus was saying that he came to fulfill the same role that the Old Testament prophets fulfilled.

3. Israel's prophets functioned as God's covenant prosecutors, bringing lawsuits against God's people when they broke the covenant.
 4. Jesus came into the world as the ultimate covenant prosecutor, giving truthful testimony against the world on God's behalf.
 5. Jesus shines forth the light of God's truth in order to expose our sin and to call us to repent and believe the gospel.
- C. Jesus also told Pilate, "Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."
1. Of course, the only people who can be described as people "of the truth" are those whom God has graciously appointed to eternal life — the elect.
 2. By God's grace alone, these people listen to Jesus' voice.
 3. They accept his testimony as true.
 4. This is how Christ's kingdom is advancing throughout the world.
 5. It is not being built through coercion or through cultural influence but through Jesus' testimony to the truth.
- D. Pilate responded to what Jesus said by asking, "What is truth?"
1. Now, there is nothing inherently wrong with that question.
 2. It is a good question.
 3. Pilate's problem was that he did not wait for an answer that question.
 4. He went back outside to talk to the Jews.

5. By doing so, he demonstrated that his question wasn't an honest question.
 6. He wasn't really interested in the truth.
 7. He was apathetic to the truth.
 8. Truth was a matter of indifference to Pilate, just as it is to so many people in the world today.
- E. Jesus was the only perfectly honest man that the world has ever seen, but he was put to death as one accused of breaking the ninth commandment.
1. The Jewish leaders handed Jesus over to be executed because they believed that he was a blasphemer.
 2. They accused him of bearing false witness about God.
 3. Jesus came to bear witness to the truth.
 4. But he died the death that liars deserve because he died as a substitute for liars.
 5. He died to pay the debt that those of us who believe in him have incurred by all of the ways that we break the ninth commandment.

IV. People of the Truth

- A. The ninth commandment no longer condemns those who have been redeemed by Christ, but it still serves as a rule of life for us.
1. Christians are called to be a people of the truth.
 2. The New Testament contains a sobering reminder of this in Acts 5.
 3. There we read how a man named Ananias and his wife Sapphira were put to death by God for selling land and giving some of the proceeds from the sale to the church while making it look like they

were giving it all to the church.

4. Their sin was not that they kept some of the money.
 5. Peter's words to Ananias make it clear that the land was theirs and the money that they got for it was theirs to do with as they pleased.
 6. Their sin was that they told the church that they were donating all of the proceeds when in fact they were keeping some for themselves.
 7. They lied in order to boost their reputation in the Christian community.
- B. We are often tempted to do the same thing, and we all yield to that temptation in a variety of ways.
1. We are tempted to put up a front in order to impress others.
 2. While this is not an unforgivable sin, it is a sin that God takes very seriously.
 3. The church is not to be a false or dishonest community.
 4. Our God is the God of truth, and he calls his people to reflect his character by being a people who love the truth.
- C. There are many ways in which we can live as people of the truth.
1. One of them is that we need to be honest about ourselves.
 2. This means regularly telling the truth about ourselves to God by confessing our sins to him, including our sins of dishonesty.
 3. It means admitting our wrongdoing and seeking forgiveness whenever we offend others.

4. It means not putting up a front in hopes of impressing others and winning their admiration.
- D. The ninth commandment teaches us to be a people who openly acknowledge the truth and rejoice in it.
1. We are to be stubbornly loyal to God's truth and bear witness to it in a kind and respectful manner.
 2. We are to gently and humbly confront sin and error, speaking truth in love.
 3. Of course, the only way we will be able to do this is if we know the truth and have the wisdom to see its implications and applications in various contexts.
 4. This is why every Christian is called to be a lifelong student in the school of the Holy Spirit.
 5. We need to be students of God's Word, making the best possible use of the ministry through which Spirit imparts insight into God's truth.
- E. As we think about living as people of the truth, we need to be aware that there will be situations in which we will be tempted to think that truth can be sacrificed for a seemingly higher purpose.
1. We may be tempted to pursue peace or happiness or success by setting truth aside.
 2. We may be tempted to win people's favor by refusing to confront sin and error.
 3. Our culture has thoroughly embraced that sort of mindset.
 4. For many people, the only way you can be their friend is to affirm whatever it is that they decide to do, regardless of what you think about it.

5. John Calvin seems to be speaking about 21st century America when he says, "For today the world has come to the point that it seems we are not good friends and are not faithful and loyal to those with whom we associate unless we acquiesce in their favor when they are wrong." [*Sermons on the Ten Commandments*, 209]
 6. What a foolish notion that is.
 7. How is it being a good friend to tell someone who is walking down a treacherous path that he has nothing to worry about?
- F. On a related note, we should not think that it is okay to lie in order to protect ourselves or others from suffering.
1. There may be times when that approach seems to make a lot of sense, but the flaw in that reasoning is that it assumes that it is always God's will for us to avoid suffering.
 2. That is an unbiblical assumption.
 3. Of course, there is nothing wrong with trying to avoid suffering, but we never have the liberty to sin in order to avoid suffering.
 4. Even in the example of Rahab the prostitute, who lied in order to protect the Israelite spies, we need to remember that the writer of Hebrews commends her for her faith and for her reception of the spies, not for lying. (Heb. 11:31)
 5. Rahab's intentions were good, and God accepted her because of her faith, but this does not mean that it was right for her to lie.
- G. As people of the truth, we should strive to be honest in both the big things and the small things.
1. Don't let yourself think that it is okay to fudge on the truth in seemingly trivial matters.
 2. That is a very dangerous thing to do.

3. If you see no problem with being untruthful about small matters, you are cultivating a habit that will most likely cause you to be untruthful about big matters.

V. Conclusion

- A. One of the buzzwords in our culture is the word 'authentic.'
- B. People are yearning for authenticity.
- C. This should not be a surprise to us when we consider the amount of spin-doctoring and posing and manipulating that takes place in the world today.
- D. All of this dishonesty makes people cynical.
- E. In such a context, an honest man can be a breath of fresh air, although not everyone will see him that way.
- F. Such a person will only be a source of irritation to those who are hardened in their cynicism and apathetic about truth.
- G. Regardless of how people see you, if you are a Christian, you are called to be a lover of truth.
- H. Remember who you are.
- I. You are a new creation, united by faith to the One whose very name is Faithful and True.
- J. "at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them." (Ephesians 5:8-11)