



The Ninth Commandment, pt.1

Exodus 20:16 " You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."

Jesus Christ standing before Pilate declared, "*For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.*" (John 18:37)

I sometimes feel that the spirit of our age is summed up very nicely by Pontius Pilate's dismissive reply to Jesus "*What is truth?*"

Pilate of course was not asking a question. He was making the disdainful aside of jaded Roman official steeped in corruption. We too have reached a point where discussions of honesty are likely to be answered with a disdainful snort, as if only foolish children believed that there was any such thing. It is rare for instance to be able to listen to an entire edition of *All Things Considered* on PBS without hearing someone indicate that there is no such thing as absolute truth, and that all men dwell in a murky world of differing shades of gray. So when people like Pilate are confronted with statements about truth, all they can conclude is that the speaker is a naïve fool.

As a result our age has become one where people decide whether to tell the truth or to lie based entirely on expediency, and some people where men will actually defend a falsehood because the lies *should be true*, even if they aren't. For instance a few years ago an autobiography of a Guatemalan peasant entitled "I, Rigoberta Menchu" was published in which Menchu told how her poor family had been systematically persecuted by the Guatemalan army and US Funded death squads. In gripping detail she talked of her families grinding poverty, how her beloved brother had starved to death, how she had never been able to get an education because of prejudice and hate. Rigoberta won the Nobel Peace prize for her work.

Then a professor from Middlebury by the name of David Stoll made the mistake of doing some background research into her work. He found out to his horror, amongst other things that Rigoberta's family were wealthy landowners, that her brother was alive and well and that Rigoberta had attended no less than two private boarding schools. The academic community reacted to Stoll's expose with outrage, not at Menchu, but at Stoll for having the bad taste to point it out:

"Whether her book is true or not, I don't care. We should teach our students about the brutality of the Guatemalan army and the U.S. financing of it," fumed Wellesley College professor Marjorie Agosin to the Chronicle of Higher Education.

John Peeler of Bucknell stated of Menchu's lies: "***The Latin American tradition of the testimonial has never been bound by the strict rules of veracity that we take for granted in autobiography.***"

Most professors insisted they would continue using Menchu's books in their classrooms. And the Nobel Prize Committee defended Menchu, saying "*All autobiographies embellish to a greater or lesser extent.*"

In the modern version of the Emperor's new clothes, the little boy who calls out "The emperor is naked!" is seized by the mob and severely beaten.

But what does that mean for you? Followers of Christ today? Well it means that in modern society keeping the ninth commandment isn't going to be easy or even popular at times. But while post-modern society may have taken lying to new and thoroughly surreal heights, you make a mistake if you think that telling the truth in a fallen world has *ever* been easy.

We remember that the duty to tell the truth is founded in the very nature of God himself. Deut. 23:4 tells us: "*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.*" Therefore when man was created in the image of God, he was created, upright, holy and inherently truthful. But unlike God, man was created mutable and subject to change.

You only need to read to Genesis chapter 3 before you are first introduced to bearing false witness, or lying for short, when the devil lied to Eve saying "You will not surely die." If she were to break the command of God not to take fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. After this original fall, men's hearts became corrupt and suddenly we are masters at blame shifting, excuses, and then one short chapter later, Cain follows the first murder with the pathetic first attempt to cover it up with a lie: *Gen. 4:9 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?"*

Our first parents believed the lie of the Devil and ever after the hearts of natural men became like his. How did Jesus sum up the situation?

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.*"

Jeremiah is even more succinct in his summary: Jer. 17:9 "*The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?*"

So, *that explains* why you didn't need put your children through a class entitled "*fundamentals of lying to mommy and daddy.*"

But can we just throw up our hands and say, "well I guess lying is just our nature, keeping the ninth commandment is a hopeless endeavor." Some people have, they advocate teaching your children something named "situational ethics" What is that? Well I quote: *Situational ethics refers to a particular view of ethics, in which absolute standards are considered less important than the requirements of a particular situation. The standards used may, therefore, vary from one situation to another, and may even contradict one another. This view of ethics is similar to moral relativism, and is contradictory to moral universalism, and moral absolutism.*

So according to this solution, if a lie appears to be the most expedient thing to do and which will produce the happiest ending, go ahead and lie. It's only natural.

I hope that you understand, without me telling you just how abominable and thoroughly wicked that kind of thinking is.

Prov. 12:22 Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD, But those who deal truthfully are His delight.

And we know that, I am following my fallen heart will never be a sufficient excuse on the final day:

Rev. 21:8 "But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

Yes, the heart of natural men is deceitful and desperately wicked, and they would deserve to spend an eternity in hell, but it is not God's will that men remain in that abominable circumstance. God sent his only begotten son Jesus Christ into the world to *redeem the hearts of fallen men*.

Without that redemption, no matter how we fool ourselves our hearts will remain in their fallen and sinful state. But you remember how this morning we learned how one of the purposes of the gospel was to act as leaven in the hearts of men, working through them – changing them in their entirety. This is a process called regeneration by which men become what the bible calls *new creations*.

This is a radical and amazing work of heart surgery: ***Gen. 36:26 "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. 27 "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them.***

Think of it, in this work we have the most amazing heart transplant where a spiritual heart of stone that is opposed to God and his commands is replaced with a heart of flesh that loves him and desires to obey his statutes.

That is why Paul is able to write in Ephesians 4:23-25

***3 and be renewed in the spirit of your mind,
24 and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness.
25 Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another.***

IT is through the renewing grace of the Gospel that you are enabled to put off lying more and more, and to live in newness of life. No longer bearing false witness, and going along with the culture.

Christian, if your heart has been changed then that process that seemed so natural of asking in any given situation "Should I lie or tell the truth" and then weighing the merits and demerits of both should no longer go on. The situations, the exigencies shouldn't matter, the answer should be "I am a new

creation, lying is the way of death, it is an abomination before God, and even if it lands me in jail like Joseph, I will tell the truth."

Ah, but I would be a liar today if I said there wasn't often a struggle going on even in the Christian heart, as Paul himself described it: Romans 8:19 ***"For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice."***

Even Christians sin by lying. We should not, and there should be a struggle within us against this practice. For when we do it, we are acting contrary to our salvation, and our new nature. You who have been redeemed by Christ are no longer *captives* or *slaves to sin*. Therefore God can rightly command you

Zech. 8:16 These are the things you shall do: Speak each man the truth to his neighbor; Give judgment in your gates for truth, justice, and peace;

17 Let none of you think evil in your heart against your neighbor; And do not love a false oath. For all these are things that I hate,' Says the LORD."

And expect you to keep those commands, not perfectly, we will fail in many respects. And yet the redeemed are above all a people who are described thus: ***Psalm 15:2 He who walks uprightly, And works righteousness, And speaks the truth in his heart;***

We will discuss more about what it means to be someone who honestly speaks the truth in his heart next week as we examine the ninth commandment in greater detail

But let me close with this consideration: While Christians are truth tellers, should our own truth telling, our own ability can never be the grounds, even in part of our salvation. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. How then can we be saved, if not even the good works of the redeemed will suffice. Praise God that he hasn't left us in the dark about that:

Romans 3:20 Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

21 But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets,

22 even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe. For there is no difference;

23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

25 whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed,

26 to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.