



The Ninth Commandment, Pt. 2

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

Just prior to the American Revolution a British commentator remarking on the rampant practice of smuggling in the colonies noted the following practices of supposedly church-going Christian captains. All of the Captains docking at Boston were supposed to present their ships manifest at the Royal Customs office and then swear an oath that it was accurate, they were thus testifying that their ships contained no foreign contraband which would be subject to seizure or that they would have to pay a duty on. One Christian captain had the habit of showing up at the customs office in the wee hours of the morning before it was open, where he would solemnly swear an oath that all the other oaths that he would swear that day would be false. He would then go back to the office when it was open and swear that his ship's manifest was accurate.

Another Christian captain kept a two manifests one false and the other true, and on docking he would put the true manifest up his sleeve and taking the false manifest in hand would present it to the custom's office. He would then swear that this manifest, by which he meant the one hidden in his shirt sleeve, was true and accurate.

Is this really what Paul means when he says "*Therefore, putting away lying, "Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor," for we are members of one another. (Eph. 4:25)* When Christians enter into that kind of chicanery are we really preserving truth in public witness bearing, are we keeping the commandment?

Hardly! and yet if we were to pretend that those Captains were the last Christians to do something like that "to keep the commandment" we would be lying to ourselves. Christians unfortunately can become very adept at fooling themselves that what they are doing is not breaking the commandment when in fact it is. Whether it be, the quote "harmless white lie" told in order not to hurt someone's feelings, the crossed fingers promise of children, or the gossip bearing disguised as a prayer request, or even convincing one's self that unlike all the other commandments, the ninth commandment is not subject to being broken by omission so that if I just don't openly lie to someone but omit to tell them the truth, I haven't actually told them a lie. For instance, if the Pastor can't figure out what is going on in my life, and doesn't ask a direct question about such and such I'm not going to tell him. **"It's not my fault if he didn't ask if I was secretly going out and going drunk and driving home on Thursday night." He only asked if I was keeping clear of trouble over the weekends.**

In this as in all the commandments, there is a positive command given to followers of Christ to keep the commandment in the most God glorifying manner, not to be people who are constantly seeking to get as close as possible to breaking the commandment without actually doing so. How then can we keep, who are followers of the truth ensure that we are truth tellers ourselves?

I am going to suggest that your best course of action as Christians should lie under three headings:

1) *First, you must do all that we can to protect and preserve the good name of our neighbor and ourselves.*

3) *Secondly, **you** must speak the truth*

2) *Thirdly, **you** must love the truth*

1) *First, must do all that we can to protect and preserve the good name of our neighbor and ourselves.*

Proverbs tells us that NKJ Proverbs 22:1 ***A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, Loving favor rather than silver and gold.***

You should be mindful of the fact that it is easier to rebuild a fortune that has been lost, than a good name. Once someone's reputation in society has been damaged or destroyed, it is seldom possible to ever recover it to its former state. This is especially true in the case of those in whom a public trust is vested such as civil magistrates or judges. But perhaps the most important category are the elders and ministers of the church, they must maintain a life and a bearing that is above suspicion, as the scriptures say "***in all things showing yourself to be a pattern of good works; in doctrine showing integrity, reverence, incorruptibility, sound speech that cannot be condemned, that one who is an opponent may be ashamed, having nothing evil to say of you.***"

Now that is a high standard to maintain, but it is very necessary, for when a minister falls into evil practices not only is the flock ill-served, but the honor of Christ and the glory of the gospel is dragged through the mud. We should weep for instance, at the damage that high-profile televangelists have done to the office of minister in the eyes of the world, and we need to remember that the world does not discriminate between one denominations ministers and another. I was shocked to find, for instance, that polls indicated that the recent scandals involving Roman Catholic priests had also had a negative impact on the way *all ministers* including Protestants are conceived of. That may not be fair, but if you understand that you can perhaps then understand part of the reason that Christ and the Apostles were so vehement about the hypocrisy of the Pharisees – because these wolves brought shame and dishonor upon all the church.

Although it is not popular these days, we should be zealous with our own honor and our good reputations before men, and be so far from dragging them through the mud by our own conduct or lying but to love and care for them and even to defend them when as the Larger Catechism says need requireth. This morning we saw how the Apostle Paul frequently was called upon to defend himself and his name from the false accusations of the Jews. But keep in mind, Paul was able to do so, precisely because he was innocent and their charges were base and slanderous. Brothers and Sisters, lawfully defending your name depends upon your being innocent of the accusations. If not, then repentance and humility are the way of the godly man or woman.

When David, the mighty king was accused to his face of secret adultery and murder by Nathan the lowly prophet, his answer was a simple "I have sinned."

When considering how you should safeguard the reputations of your neighbors, you need to also remember that by neighbors is meant not only *your* friends and neighbors, but all children of Adam which is what Jesus clearly teaches in the parable of the good Samaritan. And here remember well merely because men are in an opposing camp, be it political or religious, does not give you carte blanche to trash their good names. Here we must be zealous to ensure that a partisan spirit does not become an excuse for breaking the commandment. We must be as zealous for the good name of others as we would be of our own.

That means practically that as the Larger Catechism counsels us *"a charitable esteem of our neighbours; loving, desiring, and rejoicing in their good name; sorrowing for, and covering of their infirmities; freely acknowledging of their gifts and graces, defending their innocency; a ready receiving of a good report, and unwillingness to admit of an evil report, concerning them; discouraging tale-bearers, flatterers, and slanderers;"*

That means that even in the case of men who could potentially hurt our cause, we should speak nothing of them but that which we are assured is the truth and discourage those who would bear malicious gossip to us about them.

Have you ever considered how much Jonathan had to lose by defending David? Not only had the Lord said that David would be the man to inherit the kingdom instead of Him and His children, but he knew that his father blindly *hated David and would not act favorably to his supporters*. He had good reason to fear Saul for his ferocity knew no bounds and he was even willing to kill the Ahimelech the priest, all his family including nursing infants, and all the priests who ministered with him – only for giving food to David when he and his men were starving.

And yet it is written of Jonathan in 1 Sam. 19:4 *Thus Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father, and said to him, "Let not the king sin against his servant, against David, because he has not sinned against you, and because his works have been very good toward you.*

2) *You must speak the truth:* The Larger Catechism counsels that you must be people who are committed to *"speaking the truth, and only the truth, in matters of judgment and justice, and in all other things whatsoever"* This is of course is of greatest importance when it comes to matters of justice. No consideration should ever cause you to lie in a matter of law, whether it be in order to benefit yourself or another. Consider this, even if you should attain some fleeting temporal benefit from false testimony or score against your enemy, know that the breaking of the commandment is a far more serious thing. God's contempt for the false witness was so great that in Deut. 19:16 we read

16 "If a false witness rises against any man to testify against him of wrongdoing,

17 "then both men in the controversy shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who serve in those days.

18 "And the judges shall make careful inquiry, and indeed, if the witness is a false witness, who has testified falsely against his brother,

19 "then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother; so you shall put away the evil from among you.

20 "And those who remain shall hear and fear, and hereafter they shall not again commit such evil among you.

21 "Your eye shall not pity: life shall be for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

So what, according to the word of God, would happen to the man of ancient Israel who gave false testimony against his neighbor in a murder trial? *He himself would be put to death!*

As Christians the giving of false testimony in law should be particularly abhorrent to us when we recall that it was by precisely that methodology that the leaders of Israel connived to have Jesus put to death. Brothers and sisters, it is better to stand and be condemned with the falsely accused savior, than to stand with his vile accusers.

We will not cover over or conceal the truth, but rather will defend it and reveal it, even when it doesn't work to your immediate temporal benefit. I say *immediate temporal benefit* because you need to remember that truth telling will always work to your ultimate good. So while revealing to the waiter that he gave you the wrong check may mean that you end up paying more for your meal, what does that matter compared to the blessedness that comes from a clear conscience and the knowledge that you did the right thing and that it will not stand against you.

3) *You must love the truth*: This will only happen, we will only love the truth if we our hearts have been changed by the grace of God, we will only desire truth if we now desire Jesus and his kingdom more than anything else in the world

John 3:19 "And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

20 "For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

21 "But he who does the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be clearly seen, that they have been done in God."

1 John 3:18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

19 And by this we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before Him.

John 14:15 " If you love Me, keep My commandments.

As A'Brakel put it: "If the heart is truthful and loves the truth, it will bring forth truth, and man will be prevented from lying—be it that this is either to our advantage or disadvantage, or that the person is either friendly or hostile toward us."

1 Cor. 13:4 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up;

5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;

6 does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;

7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.