

Sermon Title: You Shall Not Bear False Witness

Speaker: Jim Harris

Scripture Text: Exodus 20:16 (10 Commandments # 11 of 13)

Date: 5-8-11

If you happen to be new with us, we are studying the Ten Commandments. So you can put yourself in context, they are revealed to us in God's Word in Exodus Chapter 20, where today we arrive at the Ninth Commandment.

If you look carefully at the things I publish, you will see that this is the eleventh sermon. Getting through nine commandments, how did we make it eleven out of nine? Well, we took two weeks to set the context. These didn't just fall from Heaven in a vacuum; it was a very specific time, to a very specific people, with a very specific purpose in mind.

And when we finish the Tenth Commandment—Lord willing, next week—we won't be quite done yet as well, because we want to talk then about how we bring all of this that we have said forward into the era in which we live, and how we related it to the rest of God's Word—this is only the second book of the Bible; how about all the other 64, and how everything ties together?

Today in the Ninth Commandment, we come to another one that is usually—I think I invented this term: under-understood. Most people stop short of seeing the full implications of "You shall not bear false witness."

Pretty simple outline:

Number 1: The commandment itself—"You shall not bear false witness."
and Number 2: How God treats false witnesses. And we will *look* at those implications of what He says to us.

So come with me, if you will, to Exodus Chapter 20, Verse 16. The words are quite simple: "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." (NASB-1995—and throughout, unless otherwise noted)

The operative Hebrew word which is translated "bear false witness" in our language comes from the realm of law. It means: "to give a false response to legal questions posed in a courtroom, or at a trial."

This is a case which immediately makes you think of many public examples of violations, and how our country continues in its long slide away from truth and into the belief that truth is relative—truth is different for different people in different situations. We could spend hours making that point that you already know, so I won't bother. The more important point is not to figure out how these apply to everybody else; it is how to apply these words to your own life.

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." Here, the word "neighbor" is idiomatic—it is used in the most general possible sense in both this commandment and the next commandment, about coveting something that belongs to your "neighbor." The word "neighbor" literally refers to anyone around you; it could be translated "another": "Do not bear false witness against another person. Do not bear false witness against *anybody*." It could refer to anyone from a best friend, to a person who literally lives near you and *is* your neighbor, to a casual acquaintance, to anyone you might never have met.

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While the specific word for "false witness" here has to do with a legal process, it is safe to say this is meant to apply to *much more* than what you say under oath at a trial. I've always thought it amusing, those people who call themselves "Christians" and say that they will never take an oath at a trial. Why in the world would a child of God have a problem saying, "I promise to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God"? For a Christian, that ought to be saying, "I promise to be me!" That is who we ought to be.

This commandment calls for the sanctity of truth in every aspect of our lives. If you despise truth, if you bend truth, if you ignore truth, you are *despising God!* He *is* "truth" in His very *essence* (Ps. 31:5; 45:19; 65:16); that is one of His attributes (Num. 23:19; Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18). "Truth" is what God desires of you whenever your lips are moving (Prov. 12:22)—or, your pen or your keyboard is in action.

I like that phrase "sanctity of truth"—I didn't think that up; I borrowed it from someone else—but it implies holding truth as sanctified, inviolable, to be protected from corruption. If you believe what the Bible says, you *will* sanctify the truth to your lips; you will make sure that your lips speak what is true (2 Cor. 13:8).

Proverbs 3:3-4 says: "Do not let kindness and *truth* leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. So you will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and man." Does that sound kind of New-Testament-ish to you—like, "speaking the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15)? "Truth" and "kindness" (cf. 2 Tim. 2:24-25).

Proverbs 21:28—"A false witness will perish, but the man who listens to the truth will speak forever." And notice that "*listening* to the truth"—*paying attention* to the truth—is related to this concept as well. You see, you can become a false witness by thoughtlessly repeating things you hear without verifying that they are the truth (e.g., Prov. 10:18b; 20:19). Liars and false witnesses are eventually going to be silenced—by God, if not by man (Rev. 21:8; 22:15)—but the one who speaks only what is true, the one who disregards what is false and what cannot be verified as true, *that* is the one whose words will stand "forever" (Prov. 12:19).

So this commandment forbids, in *every* situation, speaking anything that is false about another person. And that includes both sides of the same issue: You cannot lie in *favor* of someone, and you may not tell a lie *against* someone.

Remember the tizzy that the Pharisees and the Sadducees were in when they were trying to get Jesus sentenced to death; and they kept bringing in people, trying to find some witnesses where two would say the same thing—that He had done something wrong? (Matt. 26:59-60; Mk. 14:56) It was really hard for them to do—and those were supposed to be the spiritual leaders. I think the Ninth Commandment was on suspension that day! Finally, they pulled together a couple people who made up something untrue about Jesus.

My friend, everything you have ever heard about the sin of "gossip" is derived from the same moral foundation as the Ninth Commandment—Exodus 20, Verse 16 (cf. Rom. 1:29; 2 Cor. 12:20; 1 Tim. 5:13). Even if you don't deliberately set out to hurt someone with

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your tongue (e.g., 1 Tim. 3:11; 2 Tim. 3:3; Titus 2:3), but you are careless in repeating things that you hear, you can violate this commandment. Now, let that sink in; put a bookmark on that—I want to come back to that. Even if you do not *deliberately intend* to hurt someone, but you repeat gossip, you have broken the Ninth Commandment!

A pastor of a bygone century wrote this, in commenting on the Ninth Commandment; he says: "The slanderer wounds three at once: He wounds him that is slandered; he wounds him to whom he reports the slander, by causing uncharitable thoughts to arise up in his mind against the party slandered; and he wounds his own soul by reporting that which is false. This is a great sin, and I wish I could say it is not common. You may kill a man in his name as well as in his person. This is a sin for which no reparation can be made—a blot in a man's name being like a blot on white paper, which will never be got out. Surely God *will* visit for this sin. If 'idle words' shall be accounted for, shall not unjust slanders?" And he was referring, of course, to the words of Jesus in Matthew 12:36—"I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment." (cf. Nah. 1:3)

How important is it, in God's eyes, that you tell the truth, that you speak truth with kindness? Well, here is what that same pastor of that bygone generation wrote about a person who lies—especially a person who lies under oath about another person; he says this: "A perjured person is the Devil's excrement!" That's pretty picturesque! "He is cursed in his name and seared in his conscience! Hell *gapes* for such a windfall!" I think he caught on to what God thinks of speaking things untrue about another person!

That would misrepresent Christ Himself. John 1:14, speaking of Christ: "The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and *truth*."

Well, the obvious question, then, is: Other than having my lips sown shut (Prov. 10:19), how can I avoid sins against the Ninth Commandment?

Well, I think it ultimately boils down to realizing the truth that we *will* give an account for those things that we say. So, to put it in the simplest form: It is getting the fear of God into your thought process (Prov. 8:13a). Psalm 19, Verse 9, says: "The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord are true; they are righteous altogether." "The fear of the Lord is clean" because, when you understand you will answer to God, it cleanses your heart from evil things, and it tends to cleanse your tongue from speaking untruth, from being a "false witness."

Now, people sin all the time. People do it, frequently *without* a guilty conscience. Why? Because they have lost all sense of "the fear of God" (Ps. 36:1). You may think you are getting away with something, but you are not. God built into the Universe the principle that you "reap" what you "sow" (Gal. 6:7).

When I was in Brazil many years ago, on a little missions trip—the first time I was ever anywhere else in the service of Christ, outside of America—the Americans I stayed with were driving me around in the city of Sao Paulo one evening. Driving around in the city of

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Sau Paolo is a pretty scary thing, but it was interesting to be there, with *them* in charge. We were driving down this big boulevard, and the car in front of us made an illegal U-turn on that busy street. The driver saw what was about to happen, and he said, "Watch this!" So I watched. Before the car in front made the U-turn, they turned off their headlights; and then, when they were about half a block away, they turned them back on. And then my driver pointed out to me a traffic policeman on foot, standing on the cement median of this huge boulevard; he had a notepad and a little pair of binoculars.

And they explained to me that the way the system works there, you don't get pulled over for minor traffic infractions; if you did, no car would *move*, the way they drive there. Instead, they put the police out there on foot; and they take note of your license plate, the time, the place, and the infraction. Now, in America, we have caught on; and with technology, now we sometimes do that with traffic cameras. But when it comes time to renew your license, you get a letter in the mail that lists all of your transgressions and the fines that are imposed; and you have two choices: pay them, or quit driving—you don't get your license renewed. And there is no recourse for arguing your innocence; that's why the guy turned out his lights—so the cop could not see his license plate, so he couldn't make the list.

Well, that's a lot like what sinning is like in this world. You may not get caught at the time; and even if it *seems* like there are no consequences, *make no bones about it*: Your sins *are* noted (Num. 32:23; Prov. 15:3). When you stand before God in judgment, you will discover that every single sin of omission, every sin of commission, every sin of attitude—including the evil thoughts and the intentions of your heart (Ps. 44:21; Lk. 16:15)—*have all been logged against you* (Rev. 20:12-13; cf. Ecc. 12:14); and you will either spend eternity paying the penalty for those sins (Rev. 20:10, 14-15), or they will be totally forgiven, based on what "Christ" did for you by "dying for" your "sins" (1 Cor. 15:3; 1 Pet. 3:18; cf. Jn. 5:24; Rom. 8:1). And the difference is whether you receive "the free gift" (Rom. 6:23; cf. Jn. 3:16, 18; Acts 10:43; Rom. 3:21-26). And "the fear of the Lord" is what should *drive you* to receive the free gift (2 Cor. 5:11).

Do not be deceived into thinking that an apparent absence of consequences in this world gives you the freedom to go on sinning (Ecc. 8:11). Don't be deceived into thinking that if no one sees you, you have gotten away with your sin. And don't be deceived into thinking that the secret sins of your heart will remain secret forever. God knows, and He *will judge*! That's why you need a Savior! Galatians Chapter 6, Verses 7 and 8—I've referred to it already—"Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life."

Let the fear of God grow in your heart. Let His Word penetrate you *now*, that you might have the greatest joy *now*—and not be surprised in the end. Hebrews 4:12-13—"For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." Next time you think you're getting away with something, remember that!

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That's the idea: God's Word penetrates to the *depths of your heart*! Everything in your soul, everything in your spirit, everything in your mind, everything you intend to do—it's *wide open to Him* (Ps. 90:8); so be honest before Him! (cf. Ps. 15:2; 51:6) Speak the truth with compassion and with gentleness.

That is why it is so crucial to learn *now* to fear the Lord (Ps. 119:38; cf. Is. 66:2, 5a). Fear the Lord, and stick to the truth. These are God's words in Proverbs Chapter 1, starting at Verse 26—"I will also laugh at your calamity; I will mock when your dread comes, when your dread comes like a storm and your calamity comes like a whirlwind, when distress and anguish come upon you. Then they will call on me, but I will not answer; they will seek me diligently but they will not find me, because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord" (vss. 26-29).

You don't want God to "mock" you when you stand before Him in judgment! You want to already be "clean" (Jn. 15:3); you want to already actually be *excused* from the "Great White Throne" judgment because you are with Christ when that takes place (Rev. 20:11; cf. Jn. 5:24; Rom. 8:1).

Proverbs 16:6—"By lovingkindness and truth iniquity is atoned for, and by the fear of the Lord one keeps away from evil." My point is that what will guard you from sins against the Ninth Commandment—oh, and the Eighth and Seventh and Sixth and Fifth, and all the rest—is "the fear of the Lord." Somehow, it seems particularly vivid with this one, because we all use our voices nearly every day (Prov. 10:19; cf. Matt. 12:34b; Jas. 3:2).

Remember, also, what we said at the start of this series: Every commandment which is stated negatively—as in, "You shall not" do something—implies a corresponding positive response. So, not only do you obey this commandment by not speaking evil of someone else, but you must stand up for others and vindicate them when they are injured by lies! In other words: You must speak the truth at all times, for all people. You can commit a sin against someone by *remaining silent*, just as much as by telling lies (cf. Jas. 4:17). "You shall not bear false witness."

But there is a lot more to this one. This commandment has, if you will, commentary later in the Law. There's part of applying this commandment that especially merits our attention, because God got very specific about people who make false accusations. Deuteronomy 19:15 says this: "A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed."

Now, notice some important points there:

It is valid for a person to be held accountable for sin (e.g., Ex. 21:12-36; 22:1-20; Deut. 13:5; 17:7, 12, etc.). That was true in Israel, just as it is true in the church (e.g., 1 Cor. 5:5, 13; 2 Cor. 2:6; 2 Thess. 3:14; 1 Tim. 1:20). But for an accusation to be dealt with among God's people, it had to be in the category of "iniquity" or "sin"—two words for sin, two words for breaking the Law of God (1 Jn. 3:4).

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It has to be something which the Bible clearly teaches. Breaking one of the Ten Commandments—that's a sin. Breaking any other commandment in the Bible is a sin. Indeed, all the other commandments, you could very well say, are sub-points of the Ten Commandments. Attacking the "church" that Jesus is building (Matt. 16:18)—that's a sin. "Gossip" is a sin (1 Tim. 3:11). Refusing to worship and serve alongside your spiritual family in the church—that's a sin (Heb. 10:25). "Immorality" is a sin (1 Cor. 6:13, 18). Teaching false "doctrine" is a sin (1 Tim. 1:3).

The point is: Sin is clearly defined in the Bible. Sin is *doing* something God says not to do—that's a sin of commission, you commit evil (e.g., Jas. 2:11); or, *not doing* something that God says to do—that's a sin of omission, failing to do "the right thing" (Jas. 4:17). Everything else is a matter of taste, a matter of wisdom, a matter of freedom, a matter of personal conviction—and not something for others to judge or to confront (Rom. 14:4).

I have encountered people that make up sins which are not taught in the Bible, and then they hold people accountable to them (cf. Mk. 7:1-5; Col. 2:20-23). Making up sins which are not taught in the Bible is a grievous sin! That's "legalism"—that's adding to what God says (Prov. 30:6). Not liking how someone else does something—that's not a sin. Someone not agreeing with your opinion is not a sin. Now, it's *good* to agree with *my* opinions! *Agree with me*, and you'll be much wiser, better off, and all of that. But if you don't agree with my opinions on things not in the Bible, that's not a sin! Someone holding convictions different from your convictions—that's not a sin! Someone not dressing the way that you prefer they dress is not a sin—unless it's immodest; and in that case, it's a sin because it's immodest, not because *you* don't like it (1 Tim. 2:9).

Judging someone else's motives is a great sin (1 Cor. 2:11a). I have had people tell me that I have done certain things because I am guilty of such-and-such in my heart. They don't know my heart, and I don't know yours. Let God take care of those things.

Now, look at Deuteronomy 19:15. God requires *confirmation of facts*—not opinions, not judgments—before someone is to be dealt with. And notice also that God's standard is two or more "witnesses." Now that means: "witnesses"—people who saw something, people who know a fact. In other words: You cannot accuse someone of something, and then go gossip to your friend about it, and then claim that the one you gossiped to is a witness! See what we're doing here?

And look how seriously God treats the sin of being a *false* witness. Keep reading in this context; look down at Verses 16 and 17 in Deuteronomy 19—"If a malicious witness rises up against a man to accuse him of wrongdoing, then both the men who have the dispute shall stand before the Lord"—in other words, the accuser and the accused. Where did we get the idea in our legal system that you have a right to face your accuser? It came directly from the Bible! They "both...shall stand" up—you cannot *secretly* accuse someone—and they "shall stand before the Lord, before the priests, and the judges who will be in office in those days." God was promising He would provide people who would be able to handle such situations. He would provide the structure, within Israel, for sorting out false accusations from accurate ones. And He has done the same thing in the church, which we will see in a minute.

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The procedure is very specific; keep reading. Verses 18 through 20—"The judges shall investigate thoroughly, and if the witness is a false witness and he has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you. The rest will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such an evil thing among you."

Now, *that* is strong! How many people in our society do you think would go suing somebody for 40 million dollars if they knew, if they lost the case, *they* would be liable for 40 million dollars? You would be careful about what you would accuse, wouldn't you?

When one person in Israel accused another of a sin, of a crime, the facts had to be investigated. Now, we could study all through Exodus 20—the end of the Ten Commandments through Deuteronomy—to get a list of all the things that God revealed to keep Israel holy and to keep them on track for His blessings. But look how serious it is in God's eyes to accuse someone falsely: "You shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother." If the accuser wanted a monetary settlement or some other restitution, a public apology, or anything else, it had to be leveled against the false accuser.

And notice, He says: "Thus you shall purge the *evil* from among you." It is *evil*, in God's eyes, to falsely accuse someone! "The rest will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such an evil thing among you." God designed this to be a powerful deterrent against slander, gossip, false accusation. Don't ask for someone else to be punished unless you are *so certain* of the facts, and you know there is no doubt, or the punishment will be inflicted on *you*. And notice again that God calls it an "evil" thing.

And you say, "But then, if I'm not *completely sure*, then they are going to get off!" Yeah—*exactly right*! And guess who saw the whole thing? God did (cf. Ecc. 12:14). Would you rather deal with things on an earthly basis, or in final judgment?

And look at Verse 21 of Deuteronomy 19—"Thus"—in other words, "In light of what I just said"—"you shall not show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot."

Most people take the verses that sound like that and turn them into, "That's taking *revenge*." No, what it means is: Be even-handed. There is to be no partiality, no special circumstances. You accuse someone falsely, you are to receive whatever penalty you wanted the accused to receive. And the penalty needs to fit the crime.

The system was different in Israel than it is now—I will grant you that. Israel was a theocracy: The government and the religious system were one and the same; they were inextricable. Now, even though it is *different* for us, the same principles apply. In our society, in our legal system, perjury—lying under oath—is a *very* serious offense. That is nothing other than a secular application of the principle of Deuteronomy 19.

And in the church, the same thing applies. Sadly, we have had to apply this recently in our church. Matthew 18, the words of Jesus: "And if your brother sins, go and reprove him in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother" (vs. 15, NASB-1977).

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In other words: "Speak the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15), "in private," with the goal of getting that person to get back on track (2 Thess. 3:15; Gal. 2:11-14; 6:1; 1 Tim. 5:1). "But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed" (vs. 16). Now, that sounds strangely familiar to something I have read recently! That's because *God is the same God*, the standard is the same! "And if he refuses to listen to them"—the "two or three"—"tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax-gatherer" (vs. 17). That kind of sounds like God is saying, "And thus you shall purge the evil from you." One who brings sin into the fellowship of the believers—and will not acknowledge it, will not repent of it, will not turn from it—is to be turned away (1 Cor. 5:13b).

Do you see the same standard here? "By the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed." And by the way: That is *so crucial*, it is repeated or alluded two *five times* in the *New Testament*! This is one of the things we are going to talk about when we finish the Ten Commandments: how they apply *today*, even though we are no longer "under the Law" (Gal. 5:18; cf. Rom. 6:15; 1 Cor. 9:20).

Dealing with sin and wrongdoing among His people is *extremely important* to God. But *abusing* the system to cause trouble for someone by false accusation is *also extremely important* to God.

Look again at the echoes of Deuteronomy 19 and the words of Jesus in Matthew 18; both have to do with the *same* concept in the same context: holiness, collectively, among God's people—Israel in the Old Testament (Lev. 11:44-45), the Church in the New Testament (1 Pet. 1:15-16). And *always*, God requires proof to validate accusations (e.g., Deut. 13:14; Ezra 10:16). And both require the punishment for those who are found to be guilty of sin (e.g., Deut. 13:6-11; 1 Cor. 5:1-2). And by the way: If somebody goes and *tries* to apply Matthew 18 by falsely accusing someone else, we have another problem—and it should be done to that one, as he wanted done to the accused.

Now, here's something else: Jesus knows just how much we enjoy dealing with things like this. How many of you *like* to confront somebody else's sin? No volunteers. Okay, so we won't form a committee of sin-confronters here. *We don't like to do that!* But it is extremely important (Lev. 19:17; Ps. 141:5; Prov. 25:12; 27:5-6).

So Jesus continued: Matthew 18, Verse 18—"Truly I say to you, whatever you shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (NASB-1977). "Binding" and "loosing" were rabbinical metaphors for pronouncing someone guilty or innocent—"binding" them to the penalty for the sin, or "loosing" them from the penalty because they are innocent (cf. Jn. 20:23). And there is a complicated verb combination in this verse which gives the sense that Jesus is saying that when you follow this procedure with integrity, the decisions rendered on Earth *are* God's will from "heaven." This is how you know: When you have obeyed His Word rigorously, you are doing His will on Earth. Now, my friend, that is a *humbling* responsibility! And that should *certainly* make us *very* humble and *very* circumspect about *ever* accusing someone. It has to be *clear*, and it has to be *confirmed*.

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So Jesus went on. Verse 19—"Again I say to you..." Now, when He says, "I'm going to say this to you again," then He is saying the same thing that He said just before, and He is elaborating; He is making it clearer. "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven."

When I was a new Christian, the first time I heard that, it was somebody teaching about prayer, and saying how important it is that we pray together in groups so that "two" of us "agree about anything," and so "it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven." And I thought, "Wow! I'm wasting my time, praying *alone*! I have to find somebody to pray with all the time!" And then one day, I found this verse *in its context*! *It's not about praying*! It's about confirming the guilt of a sin by two or three witnesses, just as is the standard all the way through the Bible! It is *not* about how to get your prayers answered at Prayer Meeting! It's about confirming on Earth what is the truth, and then doing what is the will of God concerning the purity of His people, individually and collectively.

And Jesus *still* wasn't through! To give us *another* layer of encouragement to obey what He had just said, He spoke what we call Verse 20—"For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst." It also has *nothing to do with praying*. How many Christians do you have to have present to have Jesus "there in their midst"? One—or else the rest of the Bible is not true (e.g., Matt. 28:20b; Rom. 8:9; Col. 1:27). The "two or three" is mentioned in the context: confirming the sin by "two or three witnesses" (vs. 16)—which is the objective standard, which goes all the way back to Deuteronomy Chapter 19. It is to protect people from false accusation.

Another passage is relevant for us in the church: First Timothy 5:19-21—"Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning. I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels, to maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality."

That's the "Church Version" of the "Israel Version" which is in Deuteronomy Chapter 19: Be fair and impartial. Punish the false accuser with the punishment that he desired for the accused. Make the punishment fit the offense—as in, an "eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth" (Ex. 21:24; Lev. 24:20)—without "partiality," no matter who it is.

But also: Protect people from *false* accusations by requiring *clear* confirmation of facts from more than one source. In this case, where Paul was writing to Timothy about leadership in the church, he specifically points toward "elders" because those who lead—in the everyday spiritual warfare of battling for truth and confronting sin—are the *most likely* to be falsely accused. I love the verse in the King James Version, from Proverbs 9:7—"He that rebuketh a wicked man getteth himself a blot." I *love* that! "Rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee" (vs. 8), but "he that rebuketh a wicked man getteth himself a blot." You point out somebody's evil, and if they are not a true child of God, if they are not willing to repent, then it's going to come back on you (cf. Prov. 15:12; 23:9).

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And so, Paul is warning Timothy; and remember, Timothy had a reputation for being a little bit timid (1 Tim. 4:12-14; cf. Titus 2:15); and he's saying, "Timothy, without bias, stand for the truth. You are going to get things splattered on you; so are the elders you train. But do the right thing. And those who are found to be guilty of bringing ongoing sin into the camp of God's people, into the church—those who refuse to repent are to be exposed publicly, so that others will be deterred from sinning"—just like God said in Deuteronomy 19. This is *very important* to God.

And my friends, this stuff gets ignored a lot! I have a dear pastor friend elsewhere, right now going through a situation like that, in which a single witness has accused him falsely (cf. Rom. 3:8; 1 Cor. 4:13). And in his situation right now, the outcome is still up in the air, pending the answer to many prayers from many people that that church's leaders do right. False accusation is a *terribly* destructive sin!

Some sins bring consequences very directly on *you*—all sin does; you *will* "reap what you sow." You will *always* be better off obeying God! But when it comes to "*false witness*," that is a sin that, *by its very definition*, sends repercussions through the lives of other people. It's a *terrible* sin. For leaders, it is also an occupational hazard. But stay away from it!

Whether it is a pastor, whether it is anybody else in the Body of Christ, the standard is the same. Ephesians 4:15—"Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ." "Speak truth" to each other. Do it in "love." Even if you are pointing someone to the truth when you think they are not obeying the truth, do it in love, with gentleness. Ephesians 4:25—"Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another." That is the standard!

And it always *has* been the standard; it was the standard in the Old Testament as well (e.g., Ps. 120:2; Prov. 6:16-17, 19; 12:22; 13:5; 19:5, 9; 24:28; 30:8a). Zechariah, near the end of the Old Testament, says this in Chapter 8, Verses 16 and 17—"For thus says the Lord of Hosts (vs. 14), 'These are the things which you should do: speak the truth to one another; judge with truth and judgment for peace in your gates. Also let none of you devise evil in your heart against another, and do not love perjury; for all these are what I hate,' declares the Lord."

And you know what? You could put that into just a few words: "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."

Let's pray:

Our Father, Your Word is truth. May we speak the truth of Your Word, and may we always do it in love, that we would build up one another. Teach us to hate what You hate, to run from what would cause any harm to the fellowship of Your people walking in truth. Give us the courage to confront what needs to be confronted, to expose what truly is sin, but give us the grace to seek the forgiveness and the reconciliation of those who are guilty.

Sermon Title: You Shall Not Bear False Witness

Speaker: Jim Harris

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Father, I pray for my pastor friend today; You know of whom I speak. Please, bless his ministry, and honor the years of his faithfulness; and may the false accuser be exposed for what he is, that Your work, Your church, not be damaged. And Father, keep us circumspect. Teach us to walk in the fear of the Lord, that we would be diligent to not ever bear false witness, or to listen to those who do bear false witness. So again, as always, my prayer is simple: Whatever You need to do in each of our lives, do it, we pray, that we would be the more useful for Your glory. In Jesus' name. Amen.