

Foundations: The Ninth Commandment Deuteronomy 5:20 (AFBC 10/23/16)

This morning, we come to commandment number nine—so we're getting close to the end of our study of these ten ancient laws that continue to be so foundational to our lives—what we believe and how we live. Today's commandment reads: "You shall not bear false witness" or simply "You shall not lie."

In Baptist circles, we talk a lot about "witness." We're to guard against anything that would harm our witness, which consists of how we live our lives before others and what we say to others.

When we say something that's untrue—often referred to as "mis-speaking" today—or pass along accusations that are untrue, that's a false witness. This can take place in a court of law, in everyday conversation, or in an email, text, or tweet—whatever we call it, and however we convey it, God commands us not to do it! "You shall not bear false witness!"

Dr. Scott Peck, who first became well-known for his book, The Road Less Traveled, followed that with a second book called, People of the Lie. He pointed out that at the very core of evil, there is always lying.

Evil people lie to others in order to accomplish their plans, and they lie to themselves in order to rationalize their behavior. Evil and lying go hand in hand.

It's no coincidence that Jesus called Satan, "a liar and the father of all lies." By contrast, Jesus said, "I AM THE TRUTH." And the Holy Spirit is called the SPIRIT of Truth.

As Christians, we are told to ABIDE in the truth. Being truthful is how we live! But it's not easy when we're immersed in a culture where lying and deceit are increasingly accepted.

I heard a political analyst say that we are now living in a post-truth era. It seems many of us would rather hear a lie that we think validates our way of thinking than to hear honest-to-God truth that contradicts us. As long as it supports what we think, we'll believe most anything!

Steven Winn, who is a writer and observer of popular culture, put it this way: "We live in a society of widespread duplicity and deceit." He observed that American culture is "reveling in falsehood."

He gave as an example TV "reality shows" which, according to him, could hardly be more contrived. In other words, they're not reality at all! Why do I find myself relating this to our presidential campaign? It would seem more fitting as a "reality TV" show—yet it's much too important to be reduced to that.

Some of us grew up watching Superman on TV. Every afternoon we were told that Superman did what he did in defense of what?—Truth, Justice, and the American Way!

We can't help but wonder if truth and justice are still part of the American way—even among Christians who are sadly finding today's version of the American way more appealing than Jesus' "way, truth, and life!"

A minister noticed a group of boys standing around a small stray dog. So he asked, "What are you doing, boys?" "Telling lies," one of them said. "The one who tells the biggest lie gets the dog."

The minister seemed shocked: "Why, when I was your age, I never ever thought of telling a lie." The boys just looked around at each other, a little disappointed. Finally, one of them shrugged and said, "I guess he gets the dog."

I. WHY LYING IS SO WRONG? You've no doubt heard that in Old Testament times, this commandment was intended to protect people from false testimony in court. A guilty verdict often meant the death penalty. Truth was very serious business.

Listen to the witness of Scripture about this:

1) "There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers." (Proverbs 6:16-19)

2) "The LORD detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful." (Proverbs. 12:22) **3)** "No one who practices deceit will dwell in my house; no one who speaks falsely will stand in my presence." (Psalm 101:7). **4)** "Along with the unbelieving, the vile, murderers, and the sexually immoral, God says that all liars

shall have their place in the lake of fire.” (Revelation 21:8)

You kinda’ get the impression that God takes this pretty seriously!
You shall not lie! No false witness!

Is it really that important to always tell the truth? Yes. If we are to live in community together, we must be able to trust one another to always be truthful. This is vital to healthy relationships.

God wants to live in relationship with us and He wants us to live in relationship with Him and one another. At the core of these relationships is the way we communicate.

Do this right—tell the truth--and our words become the building blocks of community and righteousness and peace. Do it poorly, and dishonestly, and our words become weapons of destruction and division and evil.

It really is this important, friends, that we tell the truth and resist the temptation to lie. But let’s take a minute to ask this:

II. WHY DO WE LIE ANYWAY? Why do we choose to bear false witness against our brother? Why tell lies?

Well, we all have an inherent tendency to lie. Search your memory banks, and you can probably recall a few whoppers you’ve told. I can remember a few I told when trying to avoid the humiliation and pain of going out to the woods to get a switch which would then be applied to my backside.

I’ve learned that many of you suffered this same indignity—being sent to fetch your own switch--always felt like cruel and unusual punishment! It would be like saying to the fellow in the electric chair, “Ooops, looks like we forgot something. Would you mind plugging this in?”

I’ve heard parents say, “Well, my little Billy would never tell me a lie.” Listen, that means little Billy is going to grow up to be a super salesman some day. Maybe he’ll even run for office if he’s already got his parents believing that!

Jesus described the Devil as a “liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44). Remember how this deceiver began his work in the Garden of Eden: **“Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’”... “You will not surely die...For God knows**

that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:1-5).

Later, after they fell for that lie, Adam and Eve tried to hide from God; tried to deceive Him by pretending they were not in the Garden when He came calling. God is truth, friends. From the beginning, it was our defiance of God and alienation from God that led to lying. They still do. To lie... is to defy the God of Truth.

In the New Testament, the letter of James speaks to this issue. Listen to what it says: **“If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.” (James 1:26)**

In chapter 3, the problem of the tongue is addressed again: **“Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell....With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God’s likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be so.” (James 3:5-6, 9)**

There’s nothing to add to that. So now let’s ask:

III. WHAT ARE THE WAYS IN WHICH WE LIE?

A. Some are guilty of **VICIOUS or DESTRUCTIVE LIES**—often motivated by jealousy or hatred. Those who seek revenge, or who attempt to make themselves appear bigger by making someone else look smaller, or spread rumors that do irreparable damage to reputations.

Pierre Van Paassen tells an unforgettable story of a hunchback named Ugolin, in a book called The Days of Our Years. Ugolin lived in a French village where Van Paassen once lived. He never knew his father; his mother was a drunken outcast; and the hunchback and his sister, Solange, had to fend for themselves.

One day Solange, the only person close to him in the world, is falsely accused of theft and sentenced to prison. When finally released, she can’t find work because of her criminal record. When Ugolin becomes ill, Solange, desperate to provide for him, sells

herself as a prostitute in order to buy medicine and food.

Later, an unruly mob attacks Ugolin. They toss the poor cripple in the air while chanting, "The lovers of thy sister pay a franc apiece." He's finally rescued by the priest who takes him to his own home.

The next day, in spite of the priest's efforts, Ugolin walks into the river and drowns himself. When his sister gets word of this, she is so distraught she takes a gun and kills herself. The old priest reflects on what's happened and laments, "Those children are not suicides. They have been murdered by a society without mercy."

The day of the funeral arrives. The church fills with people, and the priest begins his sermon:

Christians, when the Lord of life and death shall ask me on the day of judgment, "Pastuer de la Roudaire, where are thy sheep?" I shall not answer him. When the Lord asks me a second time, "Pastuer de la Roudaire, where are thy sheep?" I will yet not answer him.

But when the Lord shall ask me a third time, "Pastuer de la Roudaire, where are thy sheep?" I shall hang my head in shame and I will answer him, "They were not sheep, Lord; they were a pack of wolves!" [T. Cecil Myers, *Thunder on the Mountain* (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1965), 134].

Are we ever like a pack of wolves in our conversations, attacking one another with language that is both vicious and deceptive? On occasion, I've counseled with young people who've been victims of harsh attacks at school. Such bullying can leave scars that go deep and cause pain for a lifetime.

Among adults, lying and gossip are widespread. Slander and vicious criticism is heard everywhere you turn today. The airwaves are full of it. Often the workplace is too. If we're not careful, we begin to think this is normal; that this is acceptable. But God says it's not: "You shall not bear false witness."

Hopefully, as followers of Christ, we steer clear of this kind of lying and steer clear of those who indulge in it--except to confront them, of course, which is our responsibility as people of truth.

B. So there's vicious lying; but most of us are more likely to be tempted by a second kind of lying, called "**DEFENSIVE LIES.**"

In other words, we seek to protect ourselves and talk our way out of compromising situations by lying. One of the best known examples of this, unfortunately, is "I did not have sex with that woman." Defensive lying such as this only increases guilt.

Noel Coward, the playwright, once sent a note to twenty of the most prominent men in London. Each note said, "All is discovered. Escape while you can!" It's said that all twenty left town!

People who are in conflict often resort to defensive lying. It may be a husband and wife, a parent and child, two people at work, or whatever. A counselor listening to both parties will soon realize that someone has to be lying. Both can't be telling the truth.

Interestingly, the two parties involved may not be intentionally lying. Refusing to face the reality of the situation, trying to defend themselves instead, they have lied to themselves.

They may have rehearsed the story so long they now believe it themselves. This is one of the reasons counseling can be so difficult, and it's often unproductive because of this. Nobody can get at the real truth! Everybody's defenses are too strong.

C. Another common form of lying is what's called the "**POLITE LIE.**" We may call it "**a little white lie.**"

People who come from other parts of the country tell us that we Southerners tend to be quite good at this. We defend ourselves by accusing them of being too blunt and mean-spirited, suggesting they would be better off to follow our lead and use a bit of this polite deception.

I love the story about Lillian Carter, Miss Lillian, beloved mother of President Jimmy Carter. She was once asked by a very aggressive reporter about the President's truthfulness.

He said, "Your son has been traveling the country, telling people not to vote for him if he ever lies to them. Can you, knowing a son as only a mother can, honestly say he's never lied?"

"Well, perhaps a little white lie now and then," Miss Lillian replied. "And what," responded the reporter, "is the difference between a white lie and any other? Define white lie for me."

"I'm not sure I can define it," she said sweetly, "but I can give you an example. Do you remember when you came in the door a few minutes ago and I told you how good you looked and how glad I was to see you?" I really liked Miss Lillian.

We have to be careful with this, though. Let me share with you something that Lewis Smedes, the Christian ethicist, wrote:

"The white lie as a way of life gradually creates cynicism in both liar and deceived. Gradually nobody trusts the other to tell the truth. When we have told 'white lies' often enough, we assume that others do the same to us.

The game of life, we assume, calls for both people in a conversation to be gentle liars. But does it stop there? Once you assume that I lie in polite circles, can you trust me in business or politics ...?

In the long run, truthfulness in social intercourse, occasionally painful as it may be, is better than the evils that heap up from our perpetual festival of the 'white lie' [Lewis B. Smedes, *Mere Morality* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 227].

Sort of gives us something to think about, doesn't it? The ninth commandment insists that truthfulness should be sacred in every arena of life.

Jesus told us that our talk should be honest, straightforward, and simple. He said, "Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one." (Matthew 5:37) So now let's talk about Jesus, who is...

IV. THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE: If you saw the movie "A Few Good Men," there's one scene that probably stands out for you. Tom Cruise plays a military lawyer who's questioning a tough commanding officer played by Jack Nicholson.

Cruise is getting nowhere with his questions, so he finally yells, "I WANT THE TRUTH!" And Jack Nicholson shouts back, "YOU CAN'T HANDLE THE TRUTH!" Remember that scene?

Well, truth can be tough--hard to handle. Jesus said "The truth will set you free." But as someone observed, "The truth that makes us free is for the most part the truth which we prefer not to hear."

We resist the truth. Maybe we think we can't handle it, or we just don't want to deal with it.

So how do we become the people of truth that God wants us to be? We need to seek the truth. We need to know the truth. Jesus said, "I am the Way, THE TRUTH, and the Life."

"THE TRUTH," you see, is not a set of facts. THE TRUTH is a PERSON. The truth is revealed in Jesus Christ. We can't know the TRUTH without knowing Him.

We know Jesus by living in relationship to Him, seeking to be obedient to Him while growing in our knowledge of Him. His truth sets us free from all the lies and self-deceptions and defensive mechanisms that can literally keep our lives in bondage.

Jesus Christ loves us, accepts us, forgives us, and grows us to the place where we can love and accept and forgive one another. But we have to get real honest to come to Jesus. Brutally honest. Honest enough to confess, "I'm a sinner. I need God's forgiveness." That's the truth!

Follow Jesus, friend, and He will keep you honest. And right there is the freedom. No more cover-ups, self-deceptions, pretenses or put-downs. No more harmful or hateful speech. No more false witness.

Just freedom in the truth--freedom to love and be loved, to trust and be trusted. Jesus Christ is THE TRUTH that sets us free from everything that's false!