

## To Tell the Truth

Exodus 20:16

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Let's begin with a brief survey. Raise your hand if you've ever lied. If you didn't raise your hand, it's likely you just lied because Psalm 116:11 says, "***All mankind are liars.***"

In 2002, a University of Massachusetts study found "*that 60 percent of people lied at least once during a 10-minute conversation and told an average of two to three lies.*" The study also found lies told by men and women differ in content, but not in quantity: "*Women were more likely to lie to make the person they were talking to feel good, while men lied most often to make themselves look better.*"

This makes me think of the guy who saw a sign in front of a house which said, "*Talking Dog for Sale.*" He rang the doorbell and the owner told him he could see the dog in the back yard. The guy went around the house and asked the dog: "*Can you really talk?*" "*Yep,*" the dog replied. The man responded, "*So, what's your story?*"

The dog looked up and said, "*Well, I discovered my gift of talking pretty young so I told the CIA and in no time they had me sitting in rooms with world leaders, because no one figured a dog would be eavesdropping. The travel really tired me out, so I signed up for a job at the airport to do some undercover security work and now I'm just retired.*"

The guy was really impressed so he asked the owner how much he wanted for the dog. The owner said, "*Ten dollars.*" The guy asked, "*Are you serious? That dog is amazing. Why on earth are you selling him so cheaply?*" To which the owner replied, "*Well, he's a big liar. He didn't do any of that stuff. You can't believe a word he says.*"

Can people believe the words you say?

Today, we come to the ninth commandment found in Exodus 20:16: "***You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.***"

Last week we summarized Commandment #8 this way: *When we steal, we take from the person who possesses it, and from God who owns it. When we trust*

*God's providential provision, we will treat people and their property with respect.* I appreciated the perspective of a pastor who said the sixth commandment protects a person's life; the seventh protects marriage; the eighth protects personal property; and the ninth protects the reputation of others.

Jen Wilken writes: *"As the third word bade us to honor God's good name, the ninth bids us to honor the good name of our neighbor. Just as we must not misuse the name of the Lord our God, we must not misuse the name of those created in His image."*

Let's review the summary statements we've been using to help us remember the 10 Commandments.

1. One God
2. No idols
3. Revere His Name
4. Remember to Rest
5. Honor Parents
6. No murder
7. No adultery
8. No stealing
9. No lying
10. No coveting

Here's what I'm hoping we learn today: *Because God is truth, we must tell the truth.* Simply put, God wants us to be truthful because He is truthful. Everything God says and does is true because He Himself is truth. In Isaiah 65:16, He is called the **"God of truth."** Hebrews 6:18 says **"it is impossible for God to lie."** Numbers 23:19 declares, **"God is not a man, that He should lie..."** In Psalms 51:6, David tells us what God delights in: **"Behold, you delight in truth in the inward being."**

In Proverbs 6:16-19 God includes abuses of the tongue as three of the seven things He hates the most: **"There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies and one who sows discord among brothers."**

We see how highly God values truth in Zechariah 8:16-17: **"These are the things that you shall do: Speak the truth to one another; render in your gates**

***judgments that are true and make for peace; do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath, for all these things I hate, declares the LORD.***

*Because God is truth, we must tell the truth.* Let's consider eight ways this command is broken.

**1. False accusations.** In studying Exodus 20:16, I realized this command forbids more than just not lying, though it certainly includes that. Let's consider it carefully: ***"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."***

The cultural context is one of an ancient courtroom. For the pagan nations surrounding Israel, there were few standards or protections for the accused. In some cases, defendants couldn't give a defense and were presumed guilty until proven innocent. Because there were no DNA tests, fingerprinting, or video evidence, defendants could be convicted and condemned based on just one witness.

In contrast, God provided protection for the accused in the commands He gave to His people. Because witnesses were very important in the ancient world, God expressly prohibited anyone from bearing, or giving, ***"false witness."*** The word ***"false"*** means, *"without cause."* When this command was repeated 40 years later in Deuteronomy 5:20, a different word for ***"false"*** was used which means, *"empty or vain."* To ***"witness"*** is to testify or answer. This could be translated, *"You will not answer as a lying witness,"* or more literally, *"You shall not be a lying witness against your neighbor."*

Albert Mohler writes, *"In an honor culture, where reputation meant everything and life and death could hang in the balance, false witnesses could kill...truth must always be spoken about one's neighbor, for even one incident of false accusation could unravel the social fabric of an entire community."*

The injunction against bearing false witness is stated throughout Scripture. Just a few chapters later, we read in Exodus 23:1-3: ***"You shall not spread a false report. You shall not join hands with a wicked man to be a malicious witness. You shall not fall in with the many to do evil, nor shall you bear witness in a lawsuit, siding with the many, so as to pervert justice, nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his lawsuit."*** Proverbs 24:28 warns: ***"Be not a witness against your neighbor without cause, and do not deceive with your lips."***

False witnesses are a threat to justice being served, they can harm or even put to death the innocent, they can disrupt the life of the community at large, and they can undermine public confidence in the judicial system.

Our nation's laws are based on the Judeo-Christian foundation of truthful testimony. We can't have true justice when people don't tell the truth. That's what's behind the question asked of a witness who [often] puts his hand on the Bible, "*Do you swear that the evidence you shall give to the court in this matter shall be the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth [so help you God]?*"

God gave three other safeguards to ensure justice was served.

- **There had to be more than one witness.** Deuteronomy 19:15 says, "*A single witness shall not suffice against a person for any crime or for any wrong in connection with any offense that he has committed. Only on the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses shall a charge be established.*" This is still followed today as prosecutors look for corroborating testimony from multiple witnesses.
- **A lying witness was given the same punishment the accused would have received.** Deuteronomy 19:16-19: "*If a malicious witness arises to accuse a person of wrongdoing...if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.*" I'm sure this served as a big deterrent.
- **A witness had to throw the first stone.** Deuteronomy 17:7: "*The hand of the witnesses shall be first against him to put him to death, and afterward the hand of all the people. So you shall purge the evil from your midst.*" Most people are not willing to take part in punishing someone unless they are convinced the person is guilty. Jesus had this passage from Deuteronomy in mind when He lowered the boom on some false witnesses in John 8:7-8: "*Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her...But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones...*"

While this commandment is rooted in the ancient courtroom, it has other implications in other contexts. We see this in the second half of Exodus 20:16: "*...against your neighbor.*" The word "**neighbor**" has a broad definition and can mean, "*friend, adversary, associate, companion, or fellow citizen.*" Literally, it

means a “near-one.” According to Douglas Stuart, “a neighbor is anyone you have dealings with, either actually or potentially.” In the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37, Jesus defines a neighbor as anyone we encounter who needs our help.

Have you noticed how easy it is to sin against those closest to us? When we break this commandment by lying to our “neighbor,” we hurt our spouse, our children, our parents, our best friends, our classmates, our co-workers, and the people we live next to.

Let’s consider some other ways this commandment is broken.

**2. Lying.** The first sin ever committed on earth was when Satan told a lie to Eve in Genesis 3:4: “**You will not surely die.**” In John 8:44, Jesus said this about Satan: “**He is a liar and the father of lies.**” When we lie, we are dining with the devil and demonstrating we hate God and people as seen in Proverbs 26:28: “**A lying tongue hates those it hurts.**” When we lie, we’re not loving our neighbor. Rather, we’re demonstrating how much we hate him or her.

To say it positively, our speech is a measure of our love for God and for people. Proverbs 12:19, 22: “**Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue is but for a moment...lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who act faithfully are His delight.**”

A lie never travels alone because you end up creating an alternate reality. You not only need to remember the true event, but how you altered it. This leads to suppressing the truth while speaking the lie you made up. It’s hard work, but some are pretty good at it.

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**3. Gossip.** Someone has said, “A gossip is just a fool with a keen sense of rumor.” Proverbs 26:20: “**For lack of wood a fire goes out, and where there is no whisperer [gossip], quarreling ceases.**” Remember this rule about gossip: “*The more interesting it is, the more likely it is to be false.*” Proverbs 16:28: “**A gossip separates close friends.**” I need to know my name is safe when I’m out of the room if you’re in the room, and you need to know that your name is safe with me.

Several years ago, our family was invited to a party at someone's house. After we were done eating, a group of adults started playing volleyball. Meanwhile, the children gathered into groups and held up bed sheets while a couple of us launched water balloons into the air. The idea was for them to catch the balloons on the sheet without breaking them. As I gently lofted balloons to the kids, I turned to my buddy, gave him a sinister smirk, and pointed to the volleyball players located about 50 yards away. He instinctively knew what I was thinking, and we began unleashing balloon bombs on the unsuspecting adults.

We were out of control and didn't stop our volley until all the balloons were launched. The kids wanted more, while the volleyball players kept looking up at the sky in dread of missiles coming their way.

Our water grenades were small, and yet they had the ability to cause delight or destruction, depending on how they were used. Likewise, our words have the same power; they can bring pleasure or cause pain. Just ask someone who unleashed a tweet, only to regret it when it went viral. Proverbs 18:21: ***"The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit."*** Our tongues can build others up, or they can tear them down. Have you been guilty of launching any gossip grenades?

One problem with gossip is the information is often false and in our cancel culture, we're quick to assume the worst about people. It was Cordell Hull who said, *"A lie can get up and go halfway around the world before the truth even gets its britches on."* The other problem with gossip is it's delectable according to Proverbs 18:8: ***"The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the body."***

One of the best ways to stop gossip is to simply refuse to listen to it. Proverbs 17:4: ***"A wicked man listens to evil lips; a liar pays attention to a malicious tongue."*** When someone is sharing something juicy with you, tell him or her you don't want to hear it because it sounds like gossip. If they have an issue with someone, they need to go talk to that person, not talk to you *about* that person. Another idea is to reroute the conversation by sharing something positive about the person being raked over the coals. When you hear someone speaking against someone, simply speak *for* that person.

We need to take this seriously, because as one pastor puts it, *"Every negative remark about someone is a prayer to the devil...and is fulfilled immediately."*

I heard about a man who did a lot of gossiping. After learning someone he had gossiped about was dying, he was convicted about his sin. He went to the man and asked forgiveness. The man immediately forgave him but said, *“I’d like for you to cut open this feather pillow, go to the window and dump all the feathers out the window.”* The man was puzzled but did what he was asked.

Then, the dying man said, *“Now I’d like you to gather up all those feathers.”* The man replied, *“That’s impossible. The wind has blown them everywhere. I could never retrieve all of them.”* To which the dying man said, *“Exactly. In like manner, it’s impossible to undo the hurt you’ve done to me with your gossip. I do forgive you, but my reputation has been irreparably damaged.”*

BTW, those who gossip to you will also gossip about you.

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**4. Slander.** Slander is making a false statement designed to harm someone. God has no tolerance for this kind of verbal assassination. Listen to Leviticus 19:16: ***“You shall not go around as a slanderer among your people, and you shall not stand up against the life of your neighbor: I am the LORD.”*** Psalms 101:5: ***“Whoever slanders his neighbor secretly I will destroy.”*** 1 Peter 2:1 is a call for all Christians to get rid of this kind of speech: ***“So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander.”*** It’s noteworthy that Romans 1:29-30 lists gossiping and slandering as marks of a depraved lifestyle.

The ancient rabbis taught slander *“kills three: the one who speaks it, the one who listens to it, and the one about whom it is spoken.”* The Puritan Thomas Watson said something similar: *“He that raises a slander, carries the devil in his tongue; and he that receives it, carries the devil in his ear.”*

This sin spreads like gangrene on social media today where people, politicians, pastors, and public figures are skewered with vitriolic verbiage, often with no evidence of truth or grace.

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**5. Flattery.** Flattery can be defined as *“the act of giving excessive compliments, generally for the purpose of ingratiating oneself with the subject.”* Most of us like being flattered, but the Bible warns us to be on guard against those who sweet-talk. Psalms 12:2-3: ***“Everyone utters lies to his neighbor; with flattering lips and a***

***double heart they speak. May the LORD cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that makes great boasts.”***

I appreciate the insight of Kent Hughes, “*Gossip involves saying behind a person’s back what you would never say to his or her face. Flattery means saying to a person’s face what you would never say behind his or her back.*” Proverbs 29:5 says: “***A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet.***” A flatterer is one who pats you on the back today only to locate a soft spot to insert a knife tomorrow.

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**6. Deception.** It was Sir Walter Scott who said, “*Oh, what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive!*” Deception can be defined as “*the act of misleading another through intentionally false statements or fraudulent actions.*”

Proverbs 24:28 says, “***Do not deceive with your lips.***” Romans 3:13 describes the depth of our depravity and our proclivity to deceive: “***Their throat is an open grave; they use their tongues to deceive.***”

A lot of deception takes place online today with spoofers, spammers, and scammers spreading their fraud. The FBI received a record number of complaints about cybercrime last year, including scams related to COVID-19, costing Americans a staggering \$4.2 billion in losses. This is an increase of 69% over 2019!

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**7. Silence.** Ecclesiastes 3:7 says there’s, “***a time to keep silence, and a time to speak.***” We can break the ninth commandment by simply choosing to remain silent when we hear someone being falsely maligned, or when we go quiet while an injustice is occurring.

Leviticus 5:1: “***If anyone sins in that he hears a public adjuration to testify, and though he is a witness, whether he has seen or come to know the matter, yet does not speak, he shall bear his iniquity.***” When we don’t speak up, our silence amounts to giving consent. We are guilty of the “slander of silence” and become a party to the deception by not setting the record straight.

One author says it well: *“If we know our words are needed and yet we withhold them, we are as guilty of bearing false witness as the reviler who began the lie.”* Consider James 4:17: *“So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.”*

Two passages from Proverbs have greatly informed and impacted my preaching about abortion and other injustices over the years.

- Proverbs 24:11-12: *“Rescue those who are being taken away to death; hold back those who are stumbling to the slaughter. If you say, ‘Behold, we did not know this,’ does not He who weighs the heart perceive it?”*
- Proverbs 31:8-9: *“Open your mouth for the mute, for the rights of all who are destitute. Open your mouth, judge righteously, defend the rights of the poor and needy.”*

This week I posted something from Matt Smethurst which captures how important it is to not be silent when human life is involved.

Embryo =	Human
Fetus =	Human
Infant =	Human
Toddler =	Human
Adolescent =	Human
Teen =	Human
Young Adult =	Human
Adult =	Human
Elderly =	Human

Will you speak up and not stay silent in the face of injustice?

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I want to mention one more way this command is broken.

**8. False teaching.** While Christians have always had to defend against deadly doctrines, the pace in which false teaching is being propagated today is staggering. As cultural trends make inroads among Christians, we need churches that will not capitulate or compromise on God’s truth.

Listen to these words of warning from 1 Timothy 4:1-2: ***“Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared.”***

Jude 1:3 says we’re to ***“contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.”***

I’m thrilled that Pastor Kyle, Jason Crosby, and Justin Rumley will be ordained in a special service on Sunday, August 8 at 3:00pm. I hope you’ll come and show your support to these men as we celebrate the title “Reverend” being added to their names. I’ll bring a message from 2 Timothy 4:1-4: ***“I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.”***

I don’t have time to list all the areas where itching ears have led to accumulated error, but here are ten I’m concerned about.

- Moral therapeutic deism
- Progressive Christianity
- Abortion
- Human sexuality and marriage
- Increasing immorality among believers and church leaders
- Gender matters
- Prosperity theology
- Evolution
- Easy believism
- Worldliness

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## **Response**

**1. Tell the Truth.** The Bible is very clear about the importance of telling the truth and not disseminating deception. As Chuck Colson used to say, since we live in a “*post-truth society*,” we’re called to be people of the truth. Ephesians 4:25 gives us a strong challenge: ***“Therefore having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.”***

As a way to filter your words, use the acronym THINK, and ask these 5 questions before you speak:

- T** - Is it **True**?
- H** - Is it **Helpful**?
- I** - Is it **Inspiring**?
- N** - Is it **Necessary**?
- K** - Is it **Kind**?

**2. Teach the truth.** We must make sure everything we teach is the truth. This applies to our preaching, in our children and student ministries, in our growth groups, and in our intentional discipleship groups. BTW, we’ve had 50 students attend camp this summer! According to Deuteronomy 6:6-7, parents are also charged with teaching God’s truth to the next generation: ***“And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.”***

We must constantly combat lies by teaching truth. I like how Matt Smethurst modeled this recently:

World: “Follow your heart.”  
Jesus: “Follow me.”

World: “Believe in yourself.”  
Jesus: “Believe in me.”

World: “Discover yourself.”  
Jesus: “Deny yourself.”

World: “Be true to you.”  
Jesus: “Be true to me.”

**3. Testify to the truth.** The final command Jesus gave is for us to be witnesses who testify to His life, death, burial, and resurrection. Acts 1:8: ***“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”***

If we hope to see conversions, we must make sure our conversation is seasoned with grace and truth according to Colossians 4:5-6: ***“Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person.”*** We’re called to live on mission by walking in wisdom, using wise words as we witness.

**4. Trust the truth.** In John 14:6, amid error, false teaching and cultural confusion, Jesus declares: ***“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to Father except through me.”*** In John 8:32, He said, ***“And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”*** Are you ready to trust Jesus, who alone is the truth, so you can be set free from your sins? Some of you have been living a lie. Others of you need to be delivered from deception.

Why is it so hard to say kind things with our tongues? It’s because our tongues are inextricably linked to our hearts. Listen to what Jesus said in Matthew 15:19-20: ***“For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a person.”*** Our words are but the public pronouncement of the private place of the heart. We need new hearts and new hopes.

To quote Jack Nicholson, can you handle the truth? I’m reminded of Pilate’s question to Jesus in John 18:38: ***“What is truth?”*** He asked the right question but didn’t stick around to hear the right answer.

I like these lyrics from the song “Voice of Truth” by Casting Crowns: ***“Out of all the voices calling out to me, I will choose to listen and believe the voice of truth.”*** Repent of your sins right now and receive the free gift of forgiveness and eternal life, purchased for you by the death of Jesus on the cross and His glorious resurrection from the dead.

Please stand and let’s read this quote from Albert Mohler together:

*God's people are a people of the truth. We are to honor and tell the truth, to defend the truth and discern the truth, to love the Bible as the Word of God that is truth without any mixture of error, and to stand for the truth. We are to uphold the truth, even if the whole world disbelieves, hates, and subverts the truth. We are the people of the truth for one single and irreducible reason – our God is true!*

**New Members @ 9:00 am: Tom and Sarah McGee**