

The Ten Commandments

The Ninth Commandment

“Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.”
Exodus 20:16

The Foundation

- God is a God of truth - Deuteronomy 32:4, Psalm 31:5
- Satan is the father of lies – Genesis 3:1-5, John 8:44
 - In Eden, Satan could be seen as either speaking as:
 - a witness of a conversation between God and man that he did not witness.
 - not truthfully reporting what God had actually said.
 - Either circumstance makes him a “false witness”.

The Commandment

- An analysis of the language shows this command is more specific than just a simple prohibition against telling lies:
 - “bear” - *anah* (Strong’s H6030) – to answer, respond, testify.
 - “false” – *sheqer* (Strong’s H8267) – lie, falsehood, deceit.
 - In Deuteronomy 5:10 a different Hebrew word is used for “false” – *shav* (Strong’s H7723) – empty, vain.
 - “witness” – *ed* (Strong’s H5707) – witness, testimony
- The idea then is to present something as true that is either known to be false or its veracity unknown to the presenting it as true.
- The emphasis is not just on telling the truth when acting as a witness, but on being a person devoted to the truth. Integrity is what matters. – Exodus 23:1-3.
 - Thus, an honest person would not bear false witness in public or private.

Historical Application for Israel

- The traditional Jewish approach has been to focus on this commandment as it relates to testimony in court hearings.
 - Honeycutt: “In relating the commandment to a ‘court,’ one should be cautious lest he conceive of ‘court’ in the same sense as our modern juristic system. For ancient Israel, the ‘court’ was in many cases the assembly of the elders who gathered at the city gate, or tribal leaders who heard complaints. Later, it may have involved the judges and formal courts of the monarchy. But whatever the specific nature of the authoritative body, the commandment was concerned with a formal hearing at which false testimony might be given against one’s neighbor.”
- 8 of the 613 commandments listed by Maimonides (1138-1204) regard testimony:

- 570. Anybody who knows evidence must testify in court (Leviticus 5:1)
- 571. Carefully interrogate the witness (Deuteronomy 13:15)
- 572. A witness must not serve as a judge in capital crimes (Deuteronomy 19:17)
- 573. Not to accept testimony from a lone witness (Deuteronomy 19:15)
- 574. Transgressors must not testify (Exodus 23:1)
- 575. Relatives of the litigants must not testify (Deuteronomy 24:16)
- 576. Not to testify falsely (Exodus 20:16)
- 577. Punish the false witnesses as they tried to punish the defendant (Deuteronomy 19:19)
- The penalty for being a false witness was to face the punishment of the case being tried – Deuteronomy 19:16-21
- Witnesses were required to initiate executions – Deuteronomy 17:7
- Many verses in Psalms and Proverbs speak against speaking falsehoods – Psalm 52:3, Psalm 119:29; Proverbs 12:19,22

Practical Application for Today

- The New Testament continues to speak against being a false witness and speaking lies – Romans 13:9, I Timothy 1:10 II Timothy 3:3, James 4:11
- Christ again points to the heart as the source of lying – Matthew 12:33-37, 15:19
 - Again, the concept is one of integrity: A liar lies while an honest man does not.
 - The difference is not the external actions but the internal attitude.
- Christ fulfilled the Law, in part by bearing witness to the truth – John 18:37, Revelation 3:14
- B.H. Carroll, answering the question, “Now in its fullness, what does this commandment forbid and inculcate?”
 - “Ans. – Of course you can see on the face of it that it forbids, when giving evidence in a case, bearing false witness against your neighbor. But it also forbids *every method of bearing false witness* against a neighbor, as has been explained in these numerous examples cited. You may tell a lie on your neighbor, bear false witness against him, by a sigh, or a shrug, or even just putting your tongue out, or a kind of gesture, or a mere intonation of voice; by slandering, biting him in the back, and this *sub rosa*, ‘just between you and me,’ and you lean over and whisper; that whisper starts out and grows bigger and bigger as it goes; it first says that this man got sick and threw up something that was as black as a crow; the next time he threw up a crow, and the next time he threw up two crows, and still later) three crows, and it goes on increasing that way. It forbids every kind of lie: blasphemy, sacrilege, perjury, flattery, deceiving words, distortion of meaning, using words with double meaning. You say a thing concerning a man that is capable of being understood in two contrary senses – duplex words, multiplex words, insincere words, uncandid words. What now does it inculcate? Everything the opposite of this. It inculcates truth when you speak of God and man; it is expected of a witness that he be found faithful, to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, not by a shadow of wavering to convey false impression.”
- The Christian community is to be an honest community – Ephesians 4:25