

TEN | Do Not Lie

Rob Rogers August 1, 2021

Introduction

Each week of our series on the Ten Commandments shows us from a different angle that the Law of God is not evidence of God's anger or a demand for obedience—the Law of God is evidence of God's **LOVE**.

We've seen that the first four commandments are all about loving God, and the last six commandments are about honoring and loving one another.

Today we get to the ninth commandment:

Exodus 20:16

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

There are two components to this commandment:

LYING BEARING FALSE WITNESS

Lying

Personal—This is the worst and dumbest lie I have ever told. I was fourteen years old, a freshman in high school, and I skipped school to go to my drug dealer's house. Unfortunately, his dog bit me and left four puncture wounds in my leg. I didn't want to get in trouble for doing what I shouldn't have been doing, but I was concerned about my leg. So I called my folks and lied about where I was, whom I was with, and when I got bit.

Among other things, my parents asked me to describe the dog. I made up a random description—I described a dog that didn't exist, at least not in that neighborhood. My poor mother, like the amazing mom that she is, made it her mission to find the dog that bit her son. She filed police reports about a dog that didn't exist, made signs and posters looking for a dog that didn't exist, and drove around after school for hours, going door to door, talking to neighbors, looking for a dog that didn't exist.

Now, if you get bit by a dog but can't identify the dog, guess what the doctor is going to do? Give you a series of rabies shots. I maintained the lie and endured rabies shots! The consequences of confessing to the lie would have been far less painful, but being the wise 14-year-old that I was, I would not concede. I was fully committed. I kept up the lie. I was afraid of disappointing my parents and of the consequences of my actions, so I hid the truth. It wasn't until four years later that I confessed to my parents.

Dr. Paul Ekman says there are nine reasons we lie¹:

1. To avoid punishment.
2. To gain something otherwise not obtainable.
3. To protect someone.
4. To protect ourselves from physical harm.

¹ <https://www.paulekman.com/blog/why-do-people-lie-motives/>

5. To win admiration and acceptance.
6. To get out of an awkward situation.
7. To avoid embarrassment.
8. To maintain privacy.
9. To exercise power over someone else by controlling the information they have.

One difficulty of lying is that we do it so often and in so many little ways we don't even recognize we're doing anything sinful and wrong. We lie to ourselves, we lie about others, and we lie about what we lie about.

Acts 5:1–5

But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the apostles' feet. But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things.

- This is the only instance in the New Testament where God struck someone dead.
- Ananias lied about the amount of proceeds he gave to the church, and after Peter called him out on it, he was struck dead. This wasn't even that big of a lie, and he lied while doing something good for the church.
- Later, his wife Sapphira maintained the same lie and was also struck dead.
- Great fear came upon all who heard about Ananias and Sapphira, and as a result, they took truth-telling really seriously.

In the Old Testament (**2 Samuel 12**), God sent the prophet Nathan to King David to rebuke him for his lies, for hiding his sin with Bathsheba, and for having her husband killed in battle.

Proverbs 12:22

Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal truthfully are His delight.

- You thought homosexuality was the only abomination to God? God says homosexuality and lying lips are on the same level. They're both an abomination to Him.
- I've got something to say: I don't know how this happened, but as western Christians, especially Southern Christians, we've convinced ourselves that it's our job to judge those outside of the faith for their wickedness. To rebuke them. To call them out as if somehow that's helpful or Christ-like.
- Just to be crystal clear, there was not one single moment in Jesus's earthly ministry where He railed against a lost culture. Not one. And whenever His followers did that, He rebuked them.
- So as people who claim to be followers of Christ, where in the world did we get the idea that somehow, even though Jesus Himself never did it and never once called us to do it, that somehow it's God honoring and Christ-like to call out our a pagan culture for being pagan?
- Read the Gospels. Did Jesus ever once do that with pagan Roman culture? Not one single time. You know who He called out? Those who claimed to be insiders.

1 Corinthians 5:12–13

For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person."

- If the Apostle Paul didn't view it as his responsibility to do that, and if Jesus Himself didn't do it, what in the world makes us think that somehow it's our job to do it?
- On top of that, why in the world would we expect outsiders to live up to a standard they don't hold for themselves when we don't live up to the standard we do hold for ourselves?

Paul is saying:

- Don't yell at a godless culture for living like a godless culture. What else would you expect?
- Instead deal with the godlessness that exists in the midst of the people who claim to know God! Deal with the sin in your midst! Address the compromises you've made internally: greed, slander, division, selfishness, and deceit.
- If you do that, then maybe some of those outside the church will finally see something different, appealing, and attractive in us. The change will never start out there and work its way in. It has to start with us. That's true individually and collectively.

If you're in the habit of stretching the truth, or you have deceit in your heart, then that sin is an abomination to God, not because you disgust God, but because God hates the destruction that sin causes to His children.

Bearing false witness

Psalm 141:3

Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips.

Proverbs 30:7–8

Two things I request of You (deprive me not before I die): Remove falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches—feed me with the food allotted to me . . .

Proverbs 6:16–19

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.

Exodus 20:16

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

- The 9th commandment deals with lying in general but also addresses lying about other people.
- What does this mean? Spreading falsehood about others. Tarnishing or damaging another's reputation unjustly. Gossip, slander, and sowing discord among the community.

Let me put my finger in your chest this morning:

1. A number of years ago, it was reported² that Howard Schultz, the CEO of Starbucks, said that if you hold to a "traditional view of marriage" you should take your business elsewhere. I heard about it. I know some of you no longer buy Starbucks for that reason. I don't care if you do or don't buy Starbucks. What I do care about is what's true. Church, do you know that Howard Schultz never said that? He never said it, but many of us shared it on social media and spread falsehoods because we wanted to be outraged! We're addicted to

² <https://www.forbes.com/sites/frederickallen/2013/03/22/howard-schultz-to-anti-gay-marriage-starbucks-shareholder-you-can-sell-your-shares/?sh=3fa3793443fa>

being outraged at everything, all the time. It leads to lying lips and bearing false witness against our neighbor. Yes, even against Howard Schultz.

2. *The Huffington Post* several years back wrote an article³ about a personal hero of mine, Timothy Keller. The article said that he believed the Bible gave room to embrace gay marriage. Anyone who took two minutes to dig into the interview done with Keller would've seen that the author of the article not only took what Keller said out of context but intentionally misrepresented what he believes and stands for. But it didn't matter, because American Christians went on an absolute frenzy against him, a father in the faith who has impacted hundreds of thousands if not millions for the Kingdom. It happened because Christians are just fine with spreading slander and half-truths, because we love being outraged.

We're not people of grace. We're people of condemnation. Before we start judging people out there, we have to take a good look at the godlessness and sin that exists right here. Church, we need to repent of our absolute lack of commitment to truth.

Proverbs 20:19

He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with one who flatters with his lips.

- This proverb says that being close with someone who does not put a guard over what they say is dangerous and will bring destruction into your life.
- The Bible encourages you to stay away from people who say one thing to your face and another as soon as you're no longer present. They are toxic, corrosive influences, and to be completely blunt, they are relational cowards. Even though they might be grown physically, internally they are emotional infants.

The Scripture commands us to avoid people like this, and, more importantly, don't be a person like this. If you've done this: 1. Cut it out. 2. Confess it. 3. Seek forgiveness.

Christ calls us to forgiveness, but forgiveness doesn't mean restored relationship. I don't know how they'll respond, but I do know that we have got to take seriously the things God takes seriously, and what we can't do is only take seriously other people's sins while dismissing our own.

Proverbs 26:20–26

Where there is no wood, the fire goes out; and where there is no talebearer, strife ceases. As charcoal is to burning coals, and wood to fire, so is a contentious man to kindle strife. The words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles, and they go down into the inmost body. Fervent lips with a wicked heart are like earthenware covered with silver dross. He who hates, disguises it with his lips, and lays up deceit within himself; when he speaks kindly, do not believe him, for there are seven abominations in his heart; though his hatred is covered by deceit, his wickedness will be revealed before the assembly.

- Gossip, deceit, slander...oooh, it's fun! It's attractive, like delicious morsels.
- But verse 26 tells us that the slanderer's wickedness will be exposed in the assembly.
- In other words, your sin will find you out. Don't inflate your own ego at other people's expense. Don't be so committed to your own deception that you destroy people.
- It's not worth what it will cost you. Lying, deceit, slanderous speech, and spreading discord will cost you far more than you could possibly imagine. It's not worth the price you'll have to pay.

³ https://www.huffpost.com/entry/evangelicals-gay-marriage_n_2956917

Conclusion

In 1563, the Heidelberg Catechism spoke brilliantly to the 9th commandment. It answered the question, “What is required in the 9th commandment?”

Here’s what it says:

That I bear false witness against no man,
nor falsify any man’s words;
that I be no backbiter, nor slanderer;
that I do not judge, nor join in condemning any man rashly, or unheard;
but that I avoid all sorts of lies and deceit, as the proper works of the devil,
unless I would bring down upon me the heavy wrath of God;
likewise, that in judgment and all other dealings
I love the truth, speak it uprightly and confess it;
also that I defend and promote, as much as I am able,
the honor and good character of my neighbor.⁴

I love this because it’s not just about hating deception, it’s about loving the truth.

Questions—

1. If you sow deception, lies, and slander, do you know what you reap?

Captivity & Isolation

People will begin to avoid you, because they know intuitively, “If you’re talking this way about that person, what are you saying about me behind my back?” You’re constantly reinforcing the reality that you are not a trustworthy person, that you’re volatile, unpredictable, and dangerous. You’ll reap what you’ve sown.

2. If you sow truth and transparency, do you know what you reap?

Freedom & Friendship

People will gravitate to you, because if you’re committed to the truth, even at your own expense, you’ll reap trust.

Three practical questions to ask yourself as it relates to bearing false witness:

1. Am I telling the whole truth?
 - Am I adding anything? Am I leaving anything out? Am I stretching? Exaggerating? Minimizing? Burying? Shading the truth in any way whatsoever?
2. Before I talk about them, have I talked with them?
 - Before I say something about someone who isn’t present, have I talked with that person? Have I given them the benefit of the doubt? Am I going to damage this person’s reputation, livelihood, or well-being by saying what I’m about to say?
3. Do I stop slander when I see it?
 - It’s not just about not doing it, but are you willing humbly to call it out when you see it?

⁴ Ursinus, Zacharius. *Heidelberg Catechism*. 1563.

- If you're with other believers and there is gossip or slander going on:
 - Don't be weird about it. Don't walk up and go, "In the name of Jesus, this sin shall stop! Cease your wicked words. Repent of your slander before God or burn in the fires of hell for all of eternity!" As entertaining as that would be for everyone else, don't do that.
 - Be tactful and humble and say, "Hey, I think we may be crossing a line here. We may be stepping out from underneath God's covering and blessing by talking about this person while they're not present."

John 14:6

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

- The truth will set you free: If I choose the way of truth, I'm following in the footsteps of the One Who is truth itself, Who will one day eradicate every lie, slander, and vain word and deed for all of eternity.
- The devil is called the father of lies: If I choose the path of deception and deceit, I'm following in the footsteps of the devil who sowed the first lie in the Garden of Eden and caused a rift in all of creation that continues to this day.

In the words of the famous theologian Bob Dylan, "Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord, but you're gonna have to serve somebody."⁵

Discussion Questions

1. What are some reasons we lie?
2. Do you consider lying a serious sin? What does God say about lying? How is the story of Ananias and Sapphira convicting?
3. What is bearing false witness?
4. What does Scripture say about bearing false witness?
5. How can you live a life of honesty? Why is this important?

⁵ Dylan, Bob, performer. "Gotta Serve Somebody." *Slow Train Coming*, 1979.

NOTES