

The Sanctity Of Truth

Exodus 20:16

Pastor John Miller

Exodus 20:16 is the Ninth of the Ten Commandments, the Decalogue. "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."

I've intentionally chosen the title of this message as The Sanctity of Truth. Normally we think of the sanctity of marriage or the sanctity of life. But we don't normally think of truth as being from God, the sanctity of truth. But I've chosen this title for two reasons.

Number one, truth is intrinsic to God's nature and character. The Bible says that "God is not a man, that He should lie." It's impossible for God to lie, even though He is omnipotent and sovereign and can do all things. But He cannot violate His own nature. And as far as His nature is concerned, He is a God of righteousness, holiness and truth. God is the God of truth, Jesus is "the way, the truth and the life" and the Holy Spirit is called "the Spirit of truth." And the Bible is "the word of truth." So if we are believers, we obviously need to be speaking the truth.

Number two, lies are intrinsic to Satan's nature and character. So here we have God is truth and Satan is lies. John 8:44 says about the devil that "There is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for He is a liar and the father of it." His first, original lie was to Eve in the Garden of Eden when he said, "You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." And Adam took the fruit with Eve and ate of it. That plunged the whole world of man's history into the darkness of lies and death.

We live in a world that has abandoned God, so we have abandoned objective truth. Have you ever wondered why our culture today has gone so berserk, and there is so much lying going on and people believing falsehoods? They choose to believe the philosophy of Emmanuel Kant. He was a German philosopher during the Enlightenment who died in 1804. He thought that no one could ever know objective truth. All one could ever do was to impose one's personal, subjective, mental categories into reality.

That is a description of our culture today. There is no absolute truth. "Your truth is your truth. My truth is my truth." Whatever you want to be true, is true. According to Kant, truth is relative and is only subject to the power of the mind. If I'm a man biologically and I want to say I'm a woman, then it's true that I'm really a woman. And vice versa. We have completely rejected objective truth found in God and that comes from God. We've accepted the lie of this philosophy that everything is relative.

We live in a world of lies and of liars, and truth telling has fallen on hard times. But as Christians, we know that God and His Word are true. So no matter how much lying goes on in the world around us, you need to take a stand on God's unchanging truth.

So it all started with Satan in the Garden of Eden. He was the father of all lies. He said, "You will not surely die....You will be like God." That's the great lie from the pit of hell.

There was a book written years ago titled *The Day America Told the Truth* by Paterson and Kim. They discovered in their interviews that two out of every three people in America believe that there is nothing wrong with telling a lie. So we need this Ninth Commandment more than ever today.

There are three main points and several subpoints I want to make concerning this Ninth Commandment. First, I want to ask the question, "Is lying prohibited by God?" God says in verse 16, "You shall not bear false witness..."—or "lie"—"...against your neighbor." And the context is "against your neighbor."

This prohibition, in context, is that of perjury and perjuring oneself in a judicial trial or hearing. The context is of a courtroom where you are giving your testimony. You are not to perjure yourself or lie. And it's not just because you swear on a Bible. It's because God says in His Word that "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." So it is dealing with a courtroom setting.

And this prohibition includes any form of lying. There are so many different ways we can lie. We have a very narrow and limited concept of what it means to lie.

Let me give you the definition of lying. "Lying" means "to make a statement that one knows is false with the intent to deceive or anything that gives or is meant to give a false impression, whether by words..."—this is the sin of the tongue—"...or actions or by your silence." You can even break this Commandment by not speaking the truth when you should speak up.

And the Scriptures are clear; God hates lying in any form. When it says, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor," though it has the context of a courtroom, it applies in any area of life.

Let me give you some Scriptures about this. Proverbs 12:22 says, "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who deal truthfully are His delight." That pretty much says it like it is. Leviticus 19:11 says, "You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor lie to one another." That's pretty hard to miss. Don't lie to one another. Lying is prohibited. Proverbs 6:16-19 says, "These six things the Lord hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: a proud look, a lying tongue..."—which is second on the list—"...hands that shed innocent blood...a false witness who speaks lies." I could go on and give you other Scriptures.

I was overwhelmed by lying in the Bible. Everything in the Bible is about lying and telling the truth. It started with Satan in the Garden of Eden and God, who is true and always speaks the truth. And lying is a sin that is commonly committed by the tongue.

My second main point is, "Who can we lie to?" We should not lie, but who do we lie to? We can lie to our neighbor, which is the context, to ourselves and to God.

First, what does it look like to lie to our neighbor? In Ephesians 4:25, Paul says, “Put away lying...”—that means to take off a soiled piece of garment—“...‘Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor’...”—why?—“...for we are members of one another.”

In this section of the Ten Commandments, we are dealing with the relationships with our neighbors. And Jesus said that you should “love your neighbor as yourself.” So the context of this Commandment is loving your neighbor. And that means that you don’t kill him, you don’t steal his wife and commit adultery, you don’t steal from him, you don’t lie to him and you don’t covet what he has.

And as Christians, we are also to speak the truth. And Ephesians 4:25 is the positive, counterpart to the negative in the Commandment, in the Decalogue. “You shall not lie, but you shall speak the truth” because “we are members of one another.” So Paul was saying, “Stop lying to your neighbor; put it off.”

Now how do we lie to our neighbor? Let me list some of them in three categories. First, there is destructive lying. These are lies born of malicious intent; you purposely, intentionally, maliciously lie to try to hurt another individual.

You ask, “Well, Pastor John, aren’t all lies destructive?”

“Yes; sin leads to death. And lying is a sin.” But this category is malicious, intentional, destructive lying. It comes under the heading of slander and gossip. The Bible calls these liars “whisperers” or “tale bearers.” It’s a false tale that damages a person’s character or reputation. It is very destructive.

You hear a whisper about somebody else. You don’t know if it’s true or not, but you spread it to somebody else. This also tells you about your own heart, if you’re listening to that kind of stuff. We should always ask, “Is it true?” Go to the source. So when you are passing on gossip and slander, you are a liar.

Gossip and slander are terrible things. I think of Joseph. He was lied about, sold as a slave and when he was in Potiphar’s house, his wife had eyes for Joseph. She told Joseph, “Lie with me,” but Joseph resisted that temptation. Then she lied about Joseph, so he ended up in prison. Joseph told the truth but he still went to prison. So many times out of fear we lie and don’t speak the truth to cover ourselves so we don’t suffer.

I also think of King Ahab, in 1 Kings 21, who coveted Naboth’s vineyard. The king had everything he ever wanted, except Naboth’s vineyard, which was next to the king’s palace. The king offered to buy the vineyard from Naboth, but Naboth said, “No. I can’t sell it; it belongs to my family.” And in the book of Leviticus, Naboth was instructed by God not to sell his land and remove it from his inheritance. But the king was upset, he went home, threw himself on the bed facing the wall and was whining, pouting and complaining.

His wife, Jezebel, said to him—and I paraphrase—“You big baby! You wimp! What’s your

problem?”

The king started crying and said, “Naboth won’t sell me his vineyard and I want it.”

She said, “Well, aren’t you the king?! What’s the deal here? I’ll get the vineyard for you.” Then she wrote letters in Ahab’s name to the elders of the city where Naboth lived and told them to have a celebration, with Naboth the honored guest, and then hire two scoundrels as false witnesses against Naboth for blaspheming God and the king and have him put to death. That’s just what happened. The witnesses at the celebration said, “Naboth has blasphemed God and the king!”

That was an outright, flat lie. It’s what you call a “direct lie” for the purpose of hatred and malice.

So they took Naboth away from the celebration and stoned him to death. Then when Ahab found out that Naboth had died, he confiscated Naboth’s vineyard.

This lie started with King Ahab coveting; he wanted to have Naboth’s vineyard. Then Jezebel lied under the authority of the king, they were involved in murder and they stole Naboth’s vineyard. All these laws were violated by the king.

If you ever have any girls in your family, don’t name them Jezebel.

As King Ahab walked through the vineyard, eating grapes and feeling good about himself, Elijah the prophet showed up. The Bible says, “Be sure your sin will find you out.” Elijah rebuked the king and said to him, “In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth, dogs shall lick your blood, even yours,” and he said, “The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel.” Both King Ahab and Jezebel were destroyed by the judgment of God, because of their lying, covetousness, stealing and murder.

That is a graphic illustration of what it means to do destructive lying.

In Leviticus 19:16, it says, “You shall not go about as a talebearer...”—or “slanderer”—“... among your people.” How important that is.

Could politicians lie more than they do right now? One example is Gavin Newsom. He ran ads in Florida saying, “Come to California. We’re here for you if you need an abortion.” And what he put on the sign was, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than [this].” He was advertising to come to California to kill your baby, because we want to love you, as Jesus said. You talk about lying through your lips!

And then wonderful Stacey Abrams, the gubernatorial candidate for Georgia. She was meeting at her alma mater and was on a panel discussion. She said that when you go in to have a sonogram to have your baby checked and you hear the baby’s heartbeat, it’s really not the baby’s heartbeat; it’s a manufactured sound. There really is no heartbeat. She said it was just man’s attempt to influence women, so they can control their bodies. And she is running to be

governor of Georgia! And the liberal media says nothing about this. It's unbelievable what's going on! You talk about lying!!

And we could go on and on like this.

When you hear something about someone else, ask yourself these questions. Is it true? Is it helpful? Is it necessary to pass it on? Is it inspiring? Is it essential? Is it kind? Think about that.

I heard about a woman in a church who was famous for gossiping and slander. She went to her pastor and ask, "Pastor, the Lord is really convicting me about my tongue. I've repented and asked God to forgive me. I'm going to lay my tongue on the altar."

The pastor said, "There's not an altar big enough."

That's the power of the tongue to destroy. Make sure you are "speaking the truth in love."

Second, there is defensive lying, often born out of fear: fear that we'll lose face, fear of embarrassment, fear that we'll be found out, fear that our sins will be uncovered.

I heard of a little boy in a Sunday school class who was asked by his teacher, "What is lying?"

The little boy thought for a minute and answered, "Lying is an abomination to God and a very present help in time of trouble." I think he got his verses confused.

Many times we lie to impress people, to make them think we're something we're not or to protect ourselves from getting punished.

Kids learn to lie at such an early age to protect themselves. You don't have to teach little kids how to lie; it just flows naturally. You have to teach them to always tell the truth and to be honest.

Peter was warming himself by the enemy's fire when Jesus was being tried in the court of Caiaphas. A woman near the fire said to Peter, "You also were with Jesus of Galilee."

But Peter said, "I do not know the Man!" Three times Peter denied Christ out of fear of what might happen to him. Peter lied about his relationship to Jesus.

Third, there are defective lies. Yes, all lies are defective, but I'm talking about subtle lies. Sometimes we call them "white lies." By the way, lies don't come in colors. You say, "As a white lie, it won't hurt anybody."

Let me give you a list of this type of lie. Flattery. It is saying something to someone's face what you would never say behind their back. Gossip is saying something behind their back what you would never say to their face. So flattery can be a form of lying, saying things that aren't true.

In 1 Thessalonians 2:5, Paul says, "Neither at any time did we use flattering words." And Proverbs 20:19 says, "Do not associate with one who flatters with his lips."

Another form of defective lying is exaggeration. We don't often think about this as lying. This is a tough one for fishermen; "You should have seen the one that got away!" This is false boasting or exaggerating.

Many times in marriage we do this by saying, "You always...." or "You never...." Always? Never? "You never put your socks in the clothes hamper!"

"Yes; I did it 25 years ago. I did it once! You're lying!" So we exaggerate and expand. It's so sad and tragic.

We also exaggerate reports for work and exaggerate and extend our files.

Many times exaggeration comes into the church when pastors talk about the size of their congregations. They speak evangelastically instead of evangelistically. They're always stretching the numbers. They're trying to make themselves look better. It's so sad.

Fourth, there is what I call "careless lying." This is said of people who are chronically inaccurate or who say "lazy lies." This is one of my pet peeves. These are people who just spout information, but you know they don't know what they're talking about. It's not factual and they just make it up.

Have you ever known anyone who is an "expert" in every area of life? When any topic comes up, they have something to say about it. They just make it up to look good.

Don't make stuff up! If you don't know something about a subject, keep your mouth shut. It's better to be silent and let people think you're smart than to open your mouth and confirm otherwise. They think they have to be experts in every field. Just say, "I don't know about that." People who really do know don't have a problem admitting they don't know. That's a smart person.

Fifth, there is insinuation. This is a subtle form of lying. Satan did that in the Garden of Eden. He said, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" You make an insinuating remark, and people know that you are insinuating something other than what you said.

Sixth, silence is also a form of lying when it involves not correcting untrue statements. When you are in a group of people and someone says something about someone else that you know is not true, speak up and say that it isn't true. The group may not like hearing you say that, but stand up for truth. When you know that something is false and you keep silent, then you are complicit in that lie.

Seventh is distortion. This is a very common form of lying. This would involve false teachers

who twist the truth to gain power over people. I sometimes watch TV preachers analyze a text, or their “sermonettes for Christianettes.” I see them read the text, they spring from the text and they twist the Scriptures to their own liking, to gain a following and influence over people. God hates that kind of distortion.

Secondly, we can lie to ourselves. It is self-deception. James 1:26 says, “If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one’s religion is useless.” It’s interesting that this is the only place in the Bible where the word “religion” appears. This verse means that you are living out what you believe, living out your Christianity. But if you think you are a real Christian and you don’t hold your tongue, you are self-deceived and are lying to your own heart. That’s a very tragic way to lie.

In Romans 12:3, Paul says, “For I say...not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly.” When you think too highly of yourself, that’s a form of self-deception. The Bible says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.”

Don’t believe Satan’s lies. He tells people that they aren’t sinners and people believe it. He tells people that God won’t judge them and they believe it. Satan says, “There’s no hell,” and we believe it. Satan tells people that only “good” people go to heaven, you’re a “good” person so God won’t judge you. That is a lie from the pit of hell.

And the way to counteract Satan’s lies and our self-deception is to have your mind renewed by the truth in God’s Word. “Thy word is truth,” the Bible says. Read the Word; let it sanctify you by the power of the Spirit of truth and form you into the image of Jesus Christ.

Who else can we lie to? We can also lie to God. In Acts 5 we read of the story of Ananias and Sapphira. The early church was growing, and people were selling their property and giving the proceeds to the church to distribute to those in need. “They had all things in common.”

Ananias and Sapphira thought this was a pretty good deal. They saw the platitudes and recognition people received for their giving, so they decided to sell their property. But they agreed to give only a portion of the proceeds from the sale to God and pretended—it’s called “hypocrisy”—that they were giving all the proceeds to God. People would think they were giving all the proceeds to God and would clap for them.

So the congregation gathered together, Ananias came to them first without his wife, and he took a portion of the money from the sale of his property and laid it down at the apostles’ feet. Everybody clapped for him.

But Peter got a word of knowledge from the Holy Spirit, so he 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?”

If they only wanted to give a portion of the proceeds, that was fine. The sin was in their hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is not only lying to people, it’s also lying to God. But God sees through it.

Peter went on to say, "You have not lied to men but to God." It is a reference to the fact that the Holy Spirit is God. So we can lie to God by hypocrisy.

"Hypocrisy" means "to speak under a mask," a phony mask. It means that you aren't being who you really are. So if you are playing the part of a hypocrite at home, at work or at church, God sees the real issue, He sees your heart. You can't fool God. This is lying to God, pretending you're something when you are not.

You don't think God takes lying, hypocrisy seriously? Ananias was struck dead. Then they took him out and buried him. Think about that: people are dropping dead in the church service!

Then Sapphira comes in and Peter asked her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for so much."

She said, "Yes, for so much."

So Peter said to her, "How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out." Then she fell down dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. Then the Bible says that "Great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things."

Thank God He doesn't judge us today the same way that He did at that time. This was a young church, and God wanted it to remain pure. Today we wouldn't even make it through a song service before judgment came. We sing,

"Take my silver and my gold;

Not a mite would I withhold."

Those singers would be dying all over the sanctuary. So it's pretty serious. "Woah; I'm finding another church to go to!"

Hypocrisy is a form of lying. Don't play the hypocrite; be honest with your neighbor, with yourself and with God. "Speak the truth in love."

My third main point is, "How do we win over lying?" There are two simple things. If you are a Christian, make sure you are truly born again. If you have not been born again, you are not a Christian. No one is a Christian who is a Christian in name only. Just professing that you are a Christian, or just going to church doesn't make you a Christian. You must be born again. That's the work of the Holy Spirit of truth in your heart.

If you don't know if you're a Christian, then repent and believe in Christ as your Savior and Lord. 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

If there is any hypocrisy, any duplicity, any form of deceit or lying in your mind or heart, you need to repent of it today, and ask God to fill you with His Holy Spirit, the Spirit of truth.

Pray, read your Bible and fellowship with believers. Ephesians 4:25 says, "Put away lying. 'Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,' for we are members of one another."

But if you are not a Christian, why not? You are in the grip of Satan. You believe in Satan's lies. Maybe Satan is lying to you right now by saying, "You have plenty of time to get right with God. You have plenty of time to repent of your sins." Or maybe he is saying to you, "God isn't going to send anyone to hell; God won't judge you." Don't believe that.

So you need to repent, reject Satan's lies and you need to receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord. Trust Him today. You also need to turn to Jesus and yield your life to Him.

Second, ask Him to fill you with His Holy Spirit. The Spirit of holiness is the Spirit of truth. When the Holy Spirit is working in the heart of the believer, you cannot practice deceit or lying.

Revelation 21:8 says, "All liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." And I could quote many more verses about lying. Liars won't be in heaven, but redeemed liars, forgiven liars, regenerated liars will be.