

GOD'S TOP TEN – THE TEN COMMANDMENTS TODAY!

#9. DO NOT LIE

or “THE CHEQUE IS IN THE MAIL”

This is week two in our series “God’s Top Ten” where we are looking at the Ten Commandments. These commandments are now over 3,500 years old so we’re asking the question. *“Are they still relevant today?”* Last week we looked at commandment #10 **“You shall not covet”**. This week we’re looking at the ninth commandment. You’ll find it in Exodus 20:16, **“You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour.”** The Living Bible translation simply puts it this way. **“You must not lie”**.

I would hope most of us would agree that lying is wrong. But I suspect most of us would also admit that we sometimes lie both intentionally and unintentionally. We’re actually a pretty cynical lot. We live in the age of conspiracy theories, tampered evidence, padded resumes, false advertising, spin doctors and, of course, fake news. And, honestly, who really believes people who say to us, *“The cheque is in the mail.”* *“I’m starting my diet tomorrow.”* *“Open wide. This won’t hurt a bit.”* *“This survey will only take two minutes of your time.”* “When you hear those kind of things you just know people are lying to you, right?

But there’s another side to this. Sometimes we want people to lie to us. Who wants to be told things like this? *“Jim, you are the ugliest looking of all your family.”* *“Honey, that dress makes you look like a sack of potatoes”*. *“When you sing it sounds like a cat in heat”* Honesty, you see, is not always the best policy. Well, not if you want to live!!!

It’s amazing, isn’t it, just how complicated a little commandment like, **“You must not lie”** can be? **“You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour”** Now let’s be clear that we’re not just talking about lying in court, and that our **“neighbour”** refers to all those we’re in community with - at home, in school or at work. The truth is that lies aren’t just wrong. They are actually designed to mislead people, to hurt people and to cover up the truth.

Now God doesn’t just tell us NOT to lie. In Proverbs 6:16-19 (GNB) we’re actually told that God HATES lying and liars. ¹⁶⁻¹⁹ **There are seven things that the Lord hates and cannot tolerate: A proud look, a lying tongue, hands that kill innocent people, a mind that thinks up wicked plans, feet that hurry off to do evil, a witness who tells one lie after another, and someone who stirs up trouble among friends.**

Now there is a simple reason why God hates lying. It’s because He is Truth. Truth is His nature. His character. Psalm 31:5 (NIV) calls him, **“The God of truth”**. He tells us through the prophet Isaiah (45:19 NIV), **“I, the Lord, speak the truth”**. And at the beginning of John’s gospel (1:14 NIV) it says that God became flesh in Jesus Christ who was **“full of grace and truth”**. Jesus said of himself (John 14:6 NIV), **“I am the way, the truth, and the life.”** And Jesus prefaced almost everything he said with the words, **“I am telling you the truth.”** (E.g. John 3:3, 6:32, 8:58, 10:1)

Now a lot of people today will tell you that there is no “*absolute*” truth. That truth is relative. That you have your truth and I have mine. But let’s be clear that Jesus never said that. In John 17:3 he actually prayed, **“Now this is eternal life; that they (his disciples) may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”** Jesus clearly affirms that God is truth. He warns us in John 8:44 (NIV) that Satan, **“has no truth in him...for he is a liar and the father of lies’** That’s why Jesus way is the way of salvation, and Satan’s way is the way of death. In fact, Scripture actually warns us in Romans 1:25 not to exchange, **“the truth of God for a lie”**. And Psalm 119:137-138 (NIV) says, **“Righteous are you, O Lord, and your laws are right. The statutes you have laid down are righteous: they are fully trustworthy.”** Scripture is clear. There is such a thing as absolute truth and there is such a thing as absolute falsehood.

There’s an old Jewish story about a king who sent two of his servants on a mission. He tells one of them to bring back the greatest thing humanity has ever known. He tells the other, to bring back the most destructive thing that humanity has ever known. According to the story, both returned with a human tongue! Is that really surprising? Isn’t it simply true that the tongue can be an instrument of great truth and an instrument of great harm? No wonder the New Testament says that the tongue is like a two-edged sword. From it can come words that build relationships, express love, offer peace, give a blessing, and can inspire others to action. But from the same human tongue can come gossip, rumour, slander, hatred and cursing.

Have ever noticed that two of the Ten Commandments, this one and the third commandment, both relate to the use of the tongue? This ninth commandment, **“You must not give false testimony/you must not lie”** and the third commandment, **“You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.”**

So how can we fight the temptation to lie? First, we can recognize the power of the tongue. James 3:8 (NIV) says that the tongue is **“...a restless evil, full of deadly poison.”** *There’s a wonderful story from the Middle Ages. It’s about a man who went to a monk and confessed that he had been spreading rumours and lies about some people in the local community. He was now sorry for his action and wondered what he should do? The monk told him as an act of repentance to go and put a feather on every doorstep in his community. The man rushed away and did what the monk said. He then returned to the monk, who told him to go back and pick up all the feathers. But the man protested. “That’s impossible. By now, they will have been blown away by the wind and could be miles away’. “Yes”, said the monk, “And that’s what happened with your careless and hurtful words. Once they’re spoken they can’t be taken back.”* When we recognize the power of the tongue then hopefully we will use it carefully.

The second thing we need to do to avoid the temptation to lie is to remember the price of lying. A lie may cover up something in the moment, but it just stores up trouble for the future. When we lie, our lie has a negative impact on us by eating away at the core of our being. Lies blur the distinction between truth and fiction until even we can’t always remember what is really true and what the original lie was. Abraham Lincoln once said, **“No-one has a good enough memory to be a successful liar”**, Now isn’t that the truth! Lying can also make us unable or unwilling to

trust others. We start to wonder if other people can be trusted. And the more we lie, the more we actually destroy our ability to detect what is wrong in our lives. That's why the church has always stressed the need for us to confess our sins. So that we'll stay honest with God and with ourselves. Do you remember what the original sin was? It was when Adam and Eve lied to God by eating the fruit from the forbidden tree and then tried to cover up their actions. You see if we make a habit of lying to others, then lying to ourselves, and lying to God becomes really easy. That's why lying is so spiritually dangerous, and why the command NOT to lie is included in the Ten Commandments.

The third thing we can do to fight the temptation to lie is to stay away from gossip. James warns us about the power of gossip in James 3:5-6 (Msg), ***"5-6 It only takes a spark, remember, to set off a forest fire. A careless or wrongly placed word out of your mouth can do that. By our speech we can ruin the world, turn harmony to chaos, throw mud on a reputation, send the whole world up in smoke and go up in smoke with it, smoke right from the pit of hell."*** Gossip falls under this ninth commandment because gossip, by its very nature, is not the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Gossip is always shared with an underlying motive.

The best way to fight gossip is to ask yourself, before you share anything with someone else. *"If I wrote this down could I sign it and swear in a court of law that this is true?"* Or if someone tells you something and it seems to be gossip, why not ask them, *"Are you sure? Have you checked this out personally?"* Now here's the thing. It's not enough for us to reject telling lies. We also have to be people who value truth. That means admitting the things we do that are wrong. It means resisting the temptation to cover things up, or to blame someone else for something we did, or to try to sweep things under the carpet and pretend we never said that. The command of Scripture in Ephesians 4:15 (NIV) still rings true: ***"Speak the truth in love"***. Let me give you an acrostic to help you in the things you say to others. The word is THINK. Here's how we affirm the truth. Five questions:

T – Is this True?

H – Will it Help?

I – Is it Inspiring?

N – Is it Necessary?

K – Is it Kind?

To avoid being a gossip all you need to do is to THINK!

The fourth way to resist the temptation to lie is to be true to your word. Psalm 15 says this, ***Who may worship in your sanctuary, Lord? Who may enter your presence on your holy hill?*** Here is the answer. Notice how many of the things mentioned are covered in the ninth commandment. ***Who may enter your presence...? Those who lead blameless lives and do***

what is right, speaking the truth from sincere hearts. Those who refuse to gossip or harm their neighbors or speak evil of their friends. Those who despise flagrant sinners, and honor the faithful followers of the Lord, and keep their promises even when it hurts. Those who lend money without charging interest, and who cannot be bribed to lie about the innocent. Such people will stand firm forever. Can there then be any doubt that God was very serious when he gave us this Ninth Commandment?

Let's wrap this up. The Ninth Commandment, Exodus 20:16. ***"You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour" / "You must not lie"*** Here's a simple exercise you can do every night before you go to bed. Think about the conversations you've had. The words you've spoken. Ask yourself. Did I lie today? About what? Did I gossip? Did I break any promises today? What can I do to make amends? What can I do to avoid the same kind of behaviour tomorrow? What do I have to confess to God and seek forgiveness for before I go to sleep? And once you have done that, it is always good to affirm to God your desire to follow him who is the ***"the way, the truth and the life"***, and to ask the Holy Spirit to help you to be a person who values truth.

So is this ninth commandment still relevant today? In a world characterized by fake news, can there really be any real doubt? As Jesus said in John 8:31-32 (NLT), ***31... "You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings. 32 And you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."***

PASTORAL PRAYER

Ever true God,
 We thank you for Jesus
 who is the way, the truth and the life.
 We thank you that He revealed you to us
 as a God who calls us away from falsehood, and gossip, and innuendo,
 and into the grace and truth that he modelled for us.
 We pray that your Holy Spirit would fill us, and always lead us into your truth.

Today we again remember those whose lives
 have been shattered by Hurricane Irma.
 We pray comfort, strength and courage for those
 who have lost loved ones, homes, and livelihoods
 and who must now begin again.
 Especially we pray for the poor, the elderly, and the vulnerable
 who often suffer the most in times of disaster.
 We thank you for first responders who are in the front lines of disaster relief,
 and who day by day see tragedy that many of us never experience.

Protect them from harm we pray.

We pray for those who are responsible for relief and rebuilding efforts.

Grant them wisdom for their tasks,
and courage to make difficult decisions.

We pray also for those still mourning the loss of loved ones on 9/11,

and, as reflect on that day,

we remember the terrible cost of acts of terror,
and we pray for that day the prophet spoke about
when weapons will be turned into ploughs,
the lion will lie down with the lamb,
and humanity will study war no more.

Hear these our prayers and with them
the silent prayers in our hearts this day. Amen.