

The Ten Commandments: The Ninth Word

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." Exodus 20:16

The context: The specific command is that an Israelite would not be a lying witness and falsely accuse someone of a crime. The Israelites have been rescued from Egypt and are being delivered into the Promised Land. Egypt was a place of injustice for them, and where they are headed is a land of justice. This command is interested in the future prosperity of Israel.

A liar is responsible for the judgment of the accused

On the evidence of two witnesses or of three witnesses the one who is to die shall be put to death; a person shall not be put to death on the evidence of one witness. (Deuteronomy 17:6)

"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. If a malicious witness arises to accuse a person of wrongdoing, then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who are in office in those days. The judges shall inquire diligently, and **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. (Deuteronomy 19:15-19)

"The hand of the witnesses shall be **first against him to put him to death**, and afterward the hand of all the people." (Deuteronomy 17:7)

Other forms of lying in the Old Testament

"You shall not steal, nor deal falsely, nor **lie to one another.**" (Leviticus 19:11)

"There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, **A false witness who utters lies**, And one who spreads strife among brothers." (Proverbs 6:16-19)

"Listen to the word of the LORD, O sons of Israel, For the LORD has a case against the inhabitants of the land, Because there is no faithfulness or kindness or knowledge of God in the land. There is swearing, deception, murder, stealing and adultery. They employ violence, so that bloodshed follows bloodshed." (Hosea 4:1-2)

The deeper meaning of the Ninth Word

False testimony is wrong because lying is wrong. And lying is wrong for the people of God because by their lies they communicate to the surrounding nations that God is not true, an attack on his good name. False testimony is wrong because injustice is wrong. And injustice is wrong for God's people because by their unjust speech they communicate to the surrounding nations that God is not just. This is an attack on God's name.

God is calling on Israel to be a nation of faithful witnesses - a nation of truth-tellers in court and in all their dealings with one another. And he is calling on Israel to be a faithful witness to him by its integrity. By their faithful testimony to one another, they give faithful testimony to the Lord.

Why do we lie?

You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for **he is a liar and the father of lies.** (John 8:44)

And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and **set on fire by hell...** no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. (James 3:6,8)

The Witnesses of Jesus

³⁰ "I can do nothing on my own. As I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³¹ If I alone bear witness about myself, my testimony is not true.

³² **There is another who bears witness about me**, and I know that the testimony that he bears about me is true. ³³ You sent to **John**, and he has borne witness to the truth... ³⁶ But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John. For the works that the Father has given me to accomplish, **the very works that I am doing**, bear witness about me that the Father has sent me. ³⁷ And **the Father who sent me** has himself borne witness about me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen, ³⁸ and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe the one whom he has sent. ³⁹ You search the **Scriptures** because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, ⁴⁰ yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. ⁴¹ I do not receive glory from people. ⁴² But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. ⁴³ I have come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes in his own name, you will receive him. ⁴⁴ How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God? ⁴⁵ Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father. There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. ⁴⁶ For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me. ⁴⁷ But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?" (John 5:30-32, 36-47)

The True Witness

¹² Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life." ¹³ So the Pharisees said to him, "You are bearing witness about yourself; your testimony is not true." ¹⁴ Jesus answered, "Even if I do bear witness about myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. ¹⁵ You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one. ¹⁶ Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true, for it is not I alone who judge, but I and the Father who sent me. ¹⁷ In your Law it is written that the testimony of two people is true. ¹⁸ **I am the one who bears witness about myself, and the Father who sent me bears witness about me.**" (John 8:12-18)

"...Jesus Christ **the faithful witness**, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth...The words of the Amen, the **faithful and true witness**, the beginning of God's creation." (Revelation 1:5, 3:4)

Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain **false testimony against Jesus**, so that they might put Him to death. They did not find any, even though many false witnesses came forward. But later on two came forward, and said, "This man stated, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days'" (Matt 26:59-61).

"**These have been written that you may believe** that Jesus is the Christ, the son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name." (John 20:31)

How has Christ fulfilled the ninth commandment?

And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, **and there was no deceit in his mouth.** (Isaiah 53:9)

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and **the truth**, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)

Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world--**to bear witness to the truth.** Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." (John 18:37)

Encouragement to speak the truth

"Therefore, laying aside falsehood, **speak truth** each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another" (Ephesians 4:25)

"**Do not speak against one another**, brethren. He who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks against the law and judges the law..." (James 4:11)

"But now you also, put them all aside: anger, wrath, malice, **slander**, and **abusive speech from your mouth.**" (Colossians 3:8)