

GOD'S GUIDE TO A GREAT LIFE  
Sermon Series on the Ten Commandments

## BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO DON'T LIE ABOUT OTHERS

Exodus 20:16

*"You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor" [Deut. 5:20]*

A children's rhyme goes like this: Sticks and stones may break my bones,  
But words will never hurt me.

It's cute, but woefully unrealistic. Here's the real story: Sticks and stones may break my bones  
But words may hurt me permanently.

Fractures will heal. But false accusations and slander may scar a person for life. Sticks and stones crush the body, but cruel words crush the soul. Many of us would never think of striking another physically, but our sensibilities are not offended by repeating an unconfirmed story. Some who would faint at the sight of blood are not at all disturbed by the sight of a battered reputation.

Let's consider the Ninth Commandment, and why violating harms us, not just others; and why it is so odious to God:

### **1. What does it mean to "give false testimony against your neighbor"?**

The same command is in Exodus 20:16 and Deuteronomy 5:20. Exodus uses a Hebrew word which means lying or untrue. In Deuteronomy, the word means insincere, empty, and frivolous. Sometimes a false witness is not an outright lie; it is simply a frivolous, thoughtless word.

Though the primary focus of the Ninth Commandment is the legal context, dishonesty in general, not merely in court cases, is also forbidden. This commandment protects a person's name and forbids harming and defaming one's neighbor through slander and unbridled defamation.

#### **So how do we lie to each other? Let me count the ways:**

- a) Lying Under Oath
- b) Slander: slander isn't always transmitted by gossip, but gossip always causes slander [Prov. 26:28].
- c) The Direct Lie: a statement of what is known to be false with intent to deceive. The difference between mistakes and malice is motive.
- d) The Indirect Lie: It is easy to tell a lie but hard to tell only one.
- e) Exaggeration.
- f) Flattery.
- g) Keeping Quiet When You Know the Truth: If we sit in silence while a reputation is being discredited, when we know the truth or have good reason to question what is being said, we become party to slander and to the destruction of that person. Silence is not always golden; sometimes it is criminal.

## 2. Why does God hate this sin?

This commandment is rooted in the character of God. God set the parameters and guidelines for our life based on His character, and God's nature includes truthfulness. God is called "the God of truth" (Isaiah 65:16). Proverbs says that God hates "a lying tongue" and "a false witness who pours out lies" (Prov. 6:16-19). Jesus said He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6). So Jesus is not just a truth, but THE truth. Jesus said in John 8:44 that Satan is a liar, the father of all lies, and that lying is his native language. Finally, God hates lying because, God loves your neighbor too. Lying is an abomination to God.

## 3. Why do we lie?

For Christians, the root of all lying is a failure to trust God. I lie when I think God will not bless, protect, or vindicate me when I am living in truth or speaking the truth. Even when fear, pride and greed cause us to lie, all are ultimately related to a failure of trust in God.

## 4. Some Practical Measures to be freed of this sin:

- 1) Practice Prayerful Silence: "Does this exact information need to be communicated by me, to these people, at this time, with this motive, through this medium?" If you can't say "yes" to all 7 questions, shut up and pray.
- 2) Practice Speaking the Truth in Love (Ephesians 4:15). Speaking the truth doesn't give us a license to say whatever is on our mind. It is possible to speak the truth in a sinful and arrogant way. Paul urged us to speak gracious words, words "seasoned with salt" (Col. 4:6).
- 3) Practice Personal Accountability: contrary to what spiritual hermits think, you can't be holy in isolation. We need each other in the church family.

A word to victims: All of us have been victims of false accusation at one time or another. In fulltime ministry, it is one of the top 3 causes why pastors quit or desire to. Learn from the life of David and how he handled public slander by Shimei in 2 Samuel 16:5-14.

## Final Thoughts:

We must warn ourselves against the libel of labels. Label someone, and you may have done a libelous act. No one put it better than Shakespeare, in Othello:

*Who steals my purse steals trash; 'tis something, nothing;*

*But he that filches from me my good name*

*Robs me of that which not enriches him,*

*And makes me poor indeed. (Act 3, Scene 3)*

Lying insults not only our neighbor, whom we may manage to fool, but also God, whom we can never fool. "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" because God loves your neighbor too, and a lie is an offense to His character, and turns you into the opposite of what God is.