

Thou shalt not bear false witness

Recently, my wife Tricia and I were privileged to visit South Africa and, although we love that beautiful country and our church members there very much, there were two things about it that reminded me of the ninth commandment:

Firstly, near Cape Town there is a beautiful body of water that was misnamed “ False Bay .” The name “ False Bay ” was applied early on (at least three hundred years ago) by sailors who confused the bay with Table Bay to the north.

Secondly, one of our church members there, Oom Gert De Jager, who used to own a huge ranch in an area called the Little Karoo, tells a wonderful story of how he corrected employees (who were like family to him) of a lying problem that affected his whole business. (Ask me to tell you that complete story one time!)

How do we know when someone is lying to us? In the media and particularly the Internet, it is increasingly hard to determine the true from the false. We can be easily fooled. For example, after those awful south-east Asian tsunamis a few years ago, bogus photos were circulating over the Internet of amazing fish that the waves purportedly washed up on the beaches and of the wave supposedly smashing into a town. Quite a few web-sites have been initiated in order to attempt to expose what have become known as “urban myths” – which are nothing better than widely-spread lies.

You probably know people who are chronic exaggerators, truth benders, story padders, or even worse – persistent liars! When I was working for the telephone company, I once had a boss who bragged to me that when he was out of town on business, he would tell people he met in bars or restaurants that he was in their city to purchase expensive racehorses!

People have laughingly boasted to my wife and I how they have falsified statements to customs authorities at Canada-U.S.A. border crossings in order to avoid payment of the required duties and taxes. Others have told us of relationships that were originated and built upon falsehoods. Potentially, such relationships are like houses of cards just waiting to collapse!

But let’s face it, we’ve *all* at some time in the past exaggerated a story or bent the truth; or we’ve padded stories when we couldn’t remember the actual details, so as to make our account sound more plausible, colourful or interesting.

But why? Why do people do it? Why have *we* done it?

People lie in order to make themselves appear to be smart, well-off, or even righteous. What a paradox this last one is! But the bottom line is that lying is vanity. Lying is not humility. It is part of Satan’s “way of get,” not of God’s “way of give.” Lying breaks the ninth commandment. Lying breaks God’s holy law – and sin is the transgression of God’s law (I John 3:4). Therefore lying is most certainly a sin!

In order to hammer home God’s point of view on the sin of lying, I would like to use His words as much as possible, rather than my own.

Old Testament warnings

Right up front, here is the Ninth commandment – stated in two places with slightly different wordings:

Exodus 20:16:

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

Deuteronomy 5:20:

Neither shall you bear false witness against your neighbour.

For some unknown reason, some Christians feel that this ninth commandment is somehow the least important of all the Ten, and that to break it is somehow pseudo-acceptable.

It amazes me that some will come up with all kinds of excuses why they think that certain types of lies are acceptable. It seems quite obvious to everyone that lies which harm neighbours are wrong. But then people start asking justifying, “what if” questions like: What about “harmless fibs” or “white lies”? What about lies that are apparently *not really* against any neighbour? Aren’t they OK? And who is my neighbour anyway? If a person is not my neighbour, isn’t it biblically OK for me to lie against him?

What does God’s Word say to these questions?

Proverbs 19:

5: A false witness... *{Please note that there is no mention of being against a neighbour}*... shall not be unpunished, and he that speaks lies shall not escape.

Verse 9: A false witness... *{Again, please note that there is no mention of being against a neighbour}*... shall not be unpunished, and he that speaks lies shall perish.

Solomon didn’t think that “white lies” were O.K. Neither did the God who inspired these two verses. He even added a repetition for emphasis!

Warnings from Jesus' human lifetime

But some professing Christians claim that the law is done away – that the Ten Commandments are obsolete! What about it? Is the ninth commandment obsolete? Was it just meant for the Old Testament era? Was it Jewish and therefore not applicable beyond Old Testament physical Israel? What about the transitional time between the Old and New Testament eras? What about during the time of Jesus' human lifetime and ministry? What did Jesus say about the ninth commandment?

Matthew 19:16-18:

Now behold, one came and said to Him, "Good teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?" So He said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but one, that is, God. But if you want to enter into life, keep the Commandments." He said to Him, "Which ones?" Jesus said, "'You shall not murder,' 'You shall not commit adultery,' 'You shall not steal,' 'You shall not bear false witness,'

Jesus was crystal clear on this. He quoted samples of *His* Ten Commandments, and He included the ninth. Also please notice that He chose to omit the "against thy neighbour" clause! Here is another clear warning against lying:

John 8:44:

You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

Satan is the father of lies, and of liars! Do you and I want to have Satan as our father? Do we want to be children of Satan? If we are spiritual children, whose children do we want to be? And whose side should we want to "play" on? Satan's? Or God's? God's people should be striving to emulate the ways of our Elder Brother – *not* those of His hated adversary!

Jesus said these things when He still walked the earth as a human being – technically before our New Testament era had started. So what about when the New Testament era *had* started?

New Testament warnings

Were the Ten Commandments nailed to the cross? I will not use my own words to answer this question; but I will let God's holy Word – from the New Testament era – answer for me:

I Corinthians 7:19:

Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing, but keeping the commandments of God is what matters.

I John 2:3-4:

Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

I John 3:24:

Now he who keeps His commandments abides in Him, and He in him. And by this we know that He abides in us, by the Spirit whom He has given us.

I John 5:2-3:

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.

II John 1:6:

This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.

Revelation 12:17:

And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Revelation 14:12:

Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.

Revelation 22:14:

Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city.

What about the ninth commandment specifically? Was it nailed to the cross? What did the early Church of God leaders say?

Romans 13:9:

For this, you shall not commit adultery, you shall not kill, you shall not steal, you shall not bear false witness.

No arguments here! New Testament Paul agrees with Moses and the LORD (YHVH) of the Old Testament era. Notice that Paul, too, omits the “against thy neighbour” clause. Let’s read some more from Paul’s letters:

II Thessalonians 2:8-12:

And then shall that wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the Spirit of His mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of His coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

This warning has already been partially fulfilled in the recent apostasy of the 1990’s. But we must apply it personally and individually – to ourselves! God tells us here that if we don’t repent of this sin of lying, a day is coming when our lies will be “revealed” – exposed to the world! Worse still, if we do not love the truth, or if we try to fool others – trying to deceive them into believing our lies – God will give us a taste of our own medicine! He will send a “strong delusion” on the liars among us; and they will begin believing their own lies themselves!_

Yet even worse – the very worst! – God will purposely cause them to be led off track – to drift even further away from His truth to which He once enlightened them – and eventually to judgment, condemnation – or let’s “call a spade a spade” by using the terrifying K J V term “damnation”!

As we have already seen, the ninth commandment is often falsely considered the one most acceptable to break. But the scriptures we have read in this article expose this idea as a very dangerous fallacy.

If any of us has a problem with bearing false witness – and we all have done to a lesser or greater extent – we *must* repent of it!

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