

Christ is Truth (Exodus 20:16)

I As with other Commandments, the Ninth Commandment forbids more than its words indicate. (The word *witness* refers to something we see or hear firsthand, rather than by a report from someone else. A *false witness* then is to say that we saw or heard something that we did not see or hear. It is the part about *against your neighbor* which distinguishes the Ninth Commandment prohibition of dishonesty from other kinds of dishonesty. Now dishonesty is certainly a bad thing, and no child of God should ever be guilty of it; but the Ninth Commandment forbids the variety of dishonesty which victimizes someone else, not the so-called *victimless* crime of bearing false witness to one's own conduct. That sin is forbidden by the implications of several other Commandments, especially the Eighth and Tenth.

Today we concern ourselves mostly with what the Ninth Commandment means to us.)

A We must consider motives, and victims, to understand this prohibition. (We may begin with the question of whether a *victimless* crime, or sin, is really so bad. What harm is done, after all, if one reports that his neighbor did a good thing for someone if in fact he did not? And if we change *neighbor* to *self* and create the impression that *we* have done better than the facts can attest, then what is the real harm? For this we should remember that God is Light and Truth, and that Jesus living in us is also Light and Truth; so if there are any shadows of deception at all, then these come from our human nature, and do not manifest the Glory of our Heavenly Father, who redeemed us from *all* iniquity by the Death of Christ. So we may conclude that in any so-called victimless sin, the Spirit of God is offended nonetheless; and we are cautioned in Ephesians 4:30 not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God, *whereby we are sealed unto the Day of Redemption*. For a child of God to grieve the Holy Spirit by dishonest words or deed risks breaking that seal.)

B A lie about oneself is not addressed by the Ninth Commandment. (It is not excused, either. The Eighth Commandment tells us not to steal anything. We saw last week how academic dishonesty can steal integrity from honest students, and how socialistic governments can steal prosperity from working people with a progressive income tax. Any misrepresentations that facilitate dishonest gain are forbidden by implication by the Eighth Commandment. Any desire to have that which someone else has is called covetousness, and the expression of covetousness is called greed, and perhaps even theft. The Tenth Commandment forbids covetousness; and we shall address that next week. In each case, pride is both the most likely and best concealed culprit in the motive for any theft or dishonesty, and for covetousness too. Regardless of subject pride is the motive for dishonesty.)

II Believers should never be guilty of defamation or of slander. (These are the two most common sins that are committed by a false witness. Defamation is when the words of one person damage the character of another person; slander is when words damage someone's reputation. We might note as well that the words that cause the problem are *sometimes* spoken; sometimes they are only implied, and sometimes the exact words of rumors and gossips are not even important because of the positive omission of facts that would either justify or exonerate the victim. That which concerns us—as a church—is the perniciousness of gossipers and their rumors, intended mostly to justify someone else's errors rather than to damage us. For this, we can forgive troublemakers, because as things have turned out, Truth and Integrity have exposed their malice.)

A We must not say that someone did something if they did not. (It should not matter if the deed we report was good or bad, we must not say that someone did anything that they did not do. Obviously, blaming someone falsely for a bad action is wrong; but what follows the false report of a good action? The most likely result is unjustifiably high expectations that good actions be repeated, and embarrassment

that invariably accompanies the inability of the person to perform as expected. If we create such an unrealistic expectation with by inflating a reputation, it is as if we *set someone up to fail*, and how could the motive of that be virtuous? It would be better to report the other person's actions truthfully, and to allow a normal flow of events to proceed.)

B We must not falsify another person's words, either. (In this regard, the job of a translator is critically important in church work. Your pastor, who cannot speak Korean, Tagalog, or Bengali, nevertheless has a message from God for those who do: it is "*REPENT! You cannot be born again into the Kingdom of God until you do.*" Yet the person who needs to repent frequently hides behind a language barrier as if it were his castle wall, and he invokes cultural traditions in defense of his attitudes as if they were his private army. The translator is like the gate-keeper on that castle wall. The Word of God can make that impenitent sinner repent, whether it is preached by someone who speaks his language or not. *For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart* (Hebrews 4:12). Surely God wants Korean, Filipino, and Bangladeshi pastors to preach the same message? Yet God has seen fit to put me here with that message, so we must ask whether Korean pastors also preach it faithfully. We also observe that the translator will be the first victim of the two-edged sword, if the translations are inaccurate or incomplete. Translation work notwithstanding, it is far too easy to misquote someone, or even invent speeches for them, to their detriment. People who do such things in the service of gossip and rumor have absolutely no right to claim to be evangelists for the Christian faith. Believers, on the other hand, are compelled by the Spirit of Truth both to withdraw from them, and to challenge them in righteousness and love. Jesus said that we would be either acquitted or condemned by our words. His Word makes a very compelling case for honesty, especially for those who claim to serve Him.)

C We must not judge someone, or join in condemning them, without giving them a fair chance to speak for themselves. (It seems to us to be only fair, especially if our own words or deeds are in question. That is the point at which the children of God and the children of the devil show us whose they really are. The child of God accepts responsibility for his words and deeds and will be accountable for them; the child of the devil will attempt to justify himself, even falsifying his motives, if he must, to save his face and protect his ego. So let us be patient, and give one another an opportunity to make explanations, and hear one another out in humility rather than in condescension. Believers must be humble; humility makes us honest with ourselves, and one another. If we are listening to a contrite confession of sin, truth will matter a lot, just then. And here's the truth for us all: we are all either sinners saved by the grace of God, or we are sinners not saved by anything. Un-repent sin is bad enough to condemn unbelievers to Hell if they don't repent. No one needs to make any sin seem to be worse than it really is. And the truth is that God forgives sin when we repent and forsake sin. God will forgive you or me when we say or do something wrong just as quickly as He will forgive anyone else. So we ought to focus on the Grace of God for the forgiveness of sins, not on judging our brother or sister for whether they are guilty, or for whether they truly repented. If repentance is genuine, it will be obvious to every believer; if it is not, the misery of the sinner will be equally obvious. There are plenty of sins for sinners to repent; no one needs to invent more sins to accuse them of. Rather, *while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.* We need to focus on preaching the Gospel of Salvation by Grace, through faith in Jesus. That means challenging sinners to repent sin, not justifying ourselves for our own impenitence or accepting someone else's excuses for theirs. To deny our own guilt and attempt to make someone else look a little guiltier is dishonest, and it should never be part of the life of a child of God.)

III Every kind of deceit is the work of the devil. (Jesus said that the devil was a liar from the beginning and the father of lies. Now that part about from the beginning is an interesting observation. The Bible tells us that *in the beginning God created the Heaven and Earth*. If the devil had been a liar *from the beginning* then he would have had to start lying as soon as God created the Heaven and the earth. Yet the devil himself was a created being. His name was Lucifer, the arch-angel of light. Now God did all His creating by means of His Word (which we know from the New Testament to be His only Begotten Son, Jesus); and the first thing He created was light. God created light on the first day, and He created the sources for light (the sun, moon, and stars) on the fourth day. So what was the light-source, on the first day? When God said, *Let there be light*, that was the creation of Lucifer, the angel of light. So what was the lie? Isaiah tells us (14:12-14) that he intended to *ascend to Heaven and raise his throne above the stars of God, and sit enthroned on the mount of assembly, on the utmost heights of the sacred mountain*. The first lie, then, was when Lucifer lied to himself about his own importance. God cast the devil down, out of Heaven, and he became (in the words of II Corinthians 4:4) *the god of this world* and the prince and power of the air *who now works in the children of disobedience* (Ephesians 2:2). The Hebrew word for the devil is Satan, which means “opposer” or “adversary”. The devil opposes all that is truth because the Creator is supreme over the creation. To replace the Creator with the creature is the philosophy of humanism, and to give our moral allegiance to a created thing instead of to our Creator is rebelliousness. Rebelliousness against the Command of God is the motive for every temptation to commit sin, beginning with the Original Sin.)

A Some lies are conceived for self-defense. (The child who expects his parents or teachers to scold him or punish him or both denies his guilt almost instinctively, and attempts to shift blame to someone else if he can. If there is no one else to blame and his own guilt is obvious, he either tries to justify himself, or to plead

ignorance. Parents and teachers soon notice that it is easier to elicit truth from a child if there is no threat of rebuke or punishment. It is also a lot more difficult to modify bad behavior and bad attitudes *without* rebuke or punishment, so the parent or teacher frequently must resolve a dilemma in their own spirit too, because we don't want to teach children to lie, but we don't want to encourage bad behavior either. Back to the point of the Ninth Commandment, then, adults also seek to misbehave with impunity. Adults blame others for the consequences of their bad attitudes and actions if they can too, which this Commandment positively forbids. And like the child, the adult wants to be praised even if he deserves criticism, so if there is no one else to blame for his words or deeds, he attempts to justify himself, or to plead ignorance. We note again that the children of God and the children of the devil show us plainly whose they are by this conduct. That child of the devil who tries to mask his or her treachery by blaming misconduct on the demands of some anonymous superior authority, or to excuse it (and their anonymous authority) by saying that God already forgave all their sins, past, present, and future, are equally dishonest. (Should I conclude that the Grace of God gives them permission them to lie to me?) Let us re-read Revelation 21:8, which tells us that all liars will burn in Hell.)

B Some lies are conceived to facilitate dishonest gains. (These are the lies that do not necessarily damage the reputation or character of another person, but instead are intended to inflate the liar's reputation, or to create the perception that his own character is nobler than it really is. The light of truth is not always extinguished by such a deception, but the deception creates shadows which dim the light of truth a little bit. The result is confusion. *God is not the author of confusion* (I Corinthians 14:33). The person seeking truth finds just enough of it to understand that there is deception, and then he accustoms his vision to the available light. If that happens, the deceiver has successfully distracted our moral allegiance from the Light of Truth, and subjected us to the tyranny of dishonesty. The next lie will invariably be

there is nothing we can do about it anyway, so we should just get used to things as they are— but there *is* something we can do! We can speak the truth to one another, and to the deceiver, and if deceptions persist, move to a place with better light. If we surrender to their logic, then while we are getting used to the dimness, the Great Deceiver will deprive us of even more light (by limiting our reading and hearing of the Word of God). Then he will deprive us of it altogether, as is the case in churches where the only reason for meeting is social activism masquerading as Christian responsibility. All comers are welcome in such a meeting, which means any music, or clothing or lack of clothing, or any lifestyle, is just as good as anything else, and the only people who are not welcome are we who challenge them to repent their worldliness and live a holy life in front of God and men. For this, Jesus said, *Light is come into the world but men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. He that doeth evil hateth the light neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd, but he that doeth truth cometh to the light that his deeds should be made manifest, that they are wrought in God* (John 3:19-21). The liar opposes truth because truth is the light that will expose his deception; and deprived of his deceptions, the deceiver has nowhere to hide from moral accountability. So he creates an artificial place in which his humanistic spirit can live and thrive in the darkness of un-repent'd sins, opposing anyone (including Jesus) who presumes to challenge him. This was why many people deserted us in 2009.)

C Complete honesty requires complete humility. (Most people are not humble enough to be entirely honest, either about themselves or about others. Complete honesty about ourselves means that we both recognize our sinful condition and confess it to God and to others. We have no righteousness of our own, to balance against our sin, and we cannot manufacture it by pretending that, for example, fruits and vegetables are a satisfactory substitution for the blood of animals, as Cain did, or by pretending that a song-and-dance routine of a nightclub is a suitable modicum

for worshipping God, as in the contemporary churches, or that altruistic social activism will bring the Kingdom of God to earth without repenting sin and being born again by the Spirit of God. Lying about motives, and justifying impenitence, cannot manufacture righteousness any more than blaming *Little Brother* for spilling the milk if he is innocent can exonerate us if we are guilty. But believers must be humble. Christ is our model for this. When King Herod's Temple soldiers came for Him in the Garden of Gethsemane, He knew that He would be crucified the next day. Yet He did not run away, or try to pretend that He was someone else, or even that He had not done the things of which He was accused. He knew His part in the Will of God, and told them plainly, *I am He*. We, too, need to know our parts in the Will of God, and then rise to every occasion with grace and truth and dignity; say what we must say and do what we must do, and then leave the results to God.)

IV God is Love and the Light of Truth; so ought His children to be. (When we receive Jesus as our Savior, He gives us the power to become children of God. We have that power, but we do not yet have that result. The Holy Spirit of God plants the seed of Christ in us, and that seed is alive and fertile because Jesus is alive! He was dead on the Cross, but He came back to life three days later, and our belief in His Resurrection is the very foundation of the Christian religion. So the Spirit of God plants that living seed of Jesus in our soul, and it sprouts and starts to grow. What does it grow into? It is the seed of Christ, so it produces Christ, just as surely as the seed of corn produces corn. The life of Jesus starts growing in us, displacing and replacing our human spirit with His Holy Spirit. That Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ, Who is God, and so the result will be Christ living in us, and the Holy Spirit shall conform us to His image. So everything that God is: holy, love, light, perfect—and everything that Jesus is (alive forever, amen!)—everything that Jesus is, we are, although not perfectly yet, because we are still in these bodies of flesh. As I John 3:2 puts it, *Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear*

what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. Now before we get distracted by some doctrinal tangent about positive affirmations, let us get back to the point of the Ninth Commandment: we are forbidden to bear a false witness against our neighbor. We must not bear a false witness about Jesus, either. So if Jesus is Light, and if we are in Jesus, then we are light too; if we claim to be in Jesus and we are still deceived by dishonesty, and attempting to deceive others with our own dishonesty, then in the same instant we both bear a false witness about Jesus (by making Him appear to be a partaker in our dishonesty) and we take the name of the Lord in vain (by pretending that dishonest words and deeds are acceptable to our High and Holy God). Now believers know that Jesus is not a part of any fraud, and that our most Holy God does not accept words and deeds that are corrupted by dishonesty and misrepresentation— God would not be Holy if He did. So whatever God is, we must become, because Jesus is what God is, and Jesus lives in us. That means that we must be the love of God and the light of truth too, because Jesus is these things, and if we are His, then the Holy Spirit is changing us until we are perfect replicas of the Son of God.)

A Perfect love casteth out fear (I John 4:18). (The Resurrection of Christ freed us from fear of death and hell and the grave. *O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?* (I Corinthians 15:55). Jesus came into our world and died the sinner's death on the Cross, because of the love of God for humanity. This is what the life and death and Resurrection of Christ did for us. God removed the threat of eternal damnation from us by delivering death to Jesus, and then God imputed all the righteousness of Christ to our own souls: *He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him* (II Corinthians 5:21). Now we need to love *God* too. After all, this was the First Commandment. God's love for us was perfect: He sacrificed His own Son to make atonement for our sins; and now, if our love for God is perfect, we trust Him to forgive our sins

because of the sacrificial atonement in the death of Jesus. That perfect love, going both ways now, removes fear. If we remove fear of rebuke and punishment then we remove the first reason for lying. The second reason for lying, which is to make ourselves look good either by shifting blame to another, or justifying our words and deeds, or by feigning ignorance, will disappear too, when we repent sin and receive new life from God in Christ. None of our reasons for dishonesty can live in the new Creation in Christ; they all died along with the old creation, when we were born again by our faith in the Grace of God through Jesus Christ.)

B The Light of Christ exposes the shadows of deception. (In the Light of the Glory of God, we will see that the shadows which created the darkness in which sin thrived were caused by the deceptions of Satan. Now the Bible tells us that the devil always appears as an *angel of light* (II Corinthians 11:14), so we rarely perceive that he is the deceiver. We think that people who are not yet Children of the Light, like we are, are the deceivers, and sometimes they are. Of course *their* attempts to shift blame and to justify their words and deeds only make the darkness a little darker, and obscure our vision a little more completely. So let us not be distracted by ungodly people, even if they go to church every Sunday: their deceptions serve only to increase the power of the devil as he imprisons people in the darkness of sin. We, believers, look forward to the Day when things *spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops* (Luke 12:3). The Light of Truth will destroy all deceptions, and with nothing left to create shadows, the Light of the Glory of God will shine all the more brightly. That is where believers, Children of Light, shall be, and amen.)

C The only solution to rumor and gossip is truth. (A few minutes ago we said that there is one point at which violations of the Ninth Commandment have touched us, as a Church. We say again, and with emphasis, that we forgive them who have wronged us for their slanders and defamations. There is no vindictive spirit amongst

us; there are no vengeful words in our message. We will point out only that those who claim to be evangelists for a church should be challenging unbelievers to repent sin and convert to faith in Jesus, not starting or spreading rumors about *our* motives, or gossiping about our absence from among them. One would think that responsible leaders of all churches should *want* to know where their problems lie so that they can solve them; to say *I don't know about problems* is at once an evasion of responsibility and a de facto surrender to the darkness of deceptions. We bear them no malice; we shall simply leave them to wallow in the adverse publicity they have attracted, and move on, to walk in the uprightness and integrity of our own service to God. Our Church will stand or fall by the strength of our own testimony, and with or without the respect, or permission, of other, institutional churches.)

V The Ninth Commandment concerns *false witness against thy neighbor*. (There are, as we have seen, several ways to lie that depend upon the motives of the liar and the subject of the lie, rather than on whether what we say about another person is true or not. All lies are bad, and all liars will burn in Hell if they don't repent. As we have seen, lies that are designed to improve one's position or possessions are more properly called *cheating* than *false witness*, and they are condemned under the Eighth Commandment rather than the Ninth. Similarly, lies one tells about himself for the purpose of inflating his own reputation by boasting or bragging arise from a false sense of *pride* in positions or possessions. The desire to improve these can be more properly addressed by the 10th Commandment prohibition of covetousness, than by the Ninth Commandment prohibition of providing false testimony against a neighbor. The Ninth Commandment primarily forbids the defamation of character, and slander of words and deeds, and gossiping, and spreading rumors. Let us be sure that none of us is guilty of these, with or without justification. Malice is the pro-active form of bitterness; but believers must love and forgive those who wrong us.)

A Inflation of one's own reputation has a different motive. (A brag and a boast are different, in that one brags about actual words or deeds, and one boasts about intangible things, like intentions and future results. Taken as a class of speech, the purpose of bragging is to inflate a reputation, or to intimidate a potential adversary with a pseudo-reputation. The boast, on the other hand, has no basis in historical fact and no substance in present potential. Both bragging and boasting arise from human pride, which we have shown is likely to be both the most culpable and best concealed villain in the drama of human interaction. Pride is especially offensive to God, because it stands in sharp contrast against humility, which is the only correct result of an honest evaluation of our condition in the eyes of God. *All we like sheep have gone astray; and all our righteousness is as filthy rags;* and to pretend that this is not so is only self-deception. Attempting to deceive ourselves or others is foolish, because God will reveal all truth in Christ. Attempts to deceive God are dangerous.)

B Believers are more often the victims of deception, than the perpetrators of it. (We point this out because of both the historical facts of the Christian religion, and because of personal experience. Everyone seems to know how Christians should love everyone and forgive every offence. Even the most unlovable offenders think that they are safe from retribution by a true believer. That should be true; the extent to which the historical church has failed to be meek is one of the strongest sources of criticism against us. Yet meekness and humility need not make us into moral chameleons, who sacrifice the integrity of our character on the altars of moral relativism. The failure of the *humanist*, to elicit that sacrifice from us, is the greatest source of the rest of our tribulations. That being said let us leave it so. Jesus said, (Matthew 18:7) *it must needs be that offences come, but woe unto him by whom the offence cometh!* The dishonesty of unbelievers will surely offend us, as it rightly should offend the Body of Christ; but as surely as Christ is Truth, we must never offend against truth, and try to be a Christian, at the same time.)