

# Love the Truth

Exodus 20:16

How important is the truth? Is there such a thing as truth? Michael Foucault believed that truth-claims are really just power plays. But if this is true, then it isn't, and what power was Foucault after? Postmodern philosophers don't subject themselves to their own critiques. The idea that no truth is absolute is self-refuting. As Chesterton said, "There is a thought that stops thought. That is the only thought that ought to be stopped." Christianity contends that truth is a person: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (Jn. 14:6). If Jesus is the truth, then all truth derives from Him. We must not bear false witness because we love Him.

NOTES:

## Bearing False Witness

The ninth commandment is directly about testimony in the courtroom: "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (v16). The classic example of breaking this command is Ahab's covetousness working toward theft accompanied by murder and hatched by lying, the handiwork of Jezebel to get Naboth's vineyard: "She wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast, and seat Naboth with high honor among the people; and seat two men, scoundrels, before him to bear witness against him, saying, 'You have blasphemed God and the king.' Then take him out, and stone him, that he may die" (1 Kgs. 21:9-10). The ninth commandment forbids perjury. The law says every matter must be established by two or three witnesses, and false witnesses would be punished according to their lie: "And the judges shall make careful inquiry, and indeed, if the witness is a false witness, who has testified falsely against his brother, then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother; so you shall put away the evil from among you" (Deut. 19:18-19). Like other commandments, the ninth addresses high-level sin in summary of all the sins implicated beneath it. No stealing rules out cheating on your taxes, no adultery forbids flirting, and no false testimony means we may not lie.

## Kinds of Lies

Not all deception is sinful. Augustine (354-430 A.D.) describes out four kinds of lies:

1. Playful: games, jokes, stories and plays.
2. Obliging: to protect the innocent.
3. Military: deception in battle.
4. Destructive: breaking the ninth commandment.

The first kind is agreed-upon fun—jokes, plays, surprise parties, hidden things that come to light for laughter and blessing. The second and third kinds of deception are both types of faithful deception. Back in Exodus 1 the midwives lie to Pharaoh about the Hebrew mothers because they fear God and will not murder baby boys (v17). The Lord blesses them for lying and multiplies the people as a result (v20). The fourth deception is unlawful, destructive deceit against your neighbor. We rely on one another for basic honesty and no human community—state, city, neighborhood, church, family, or friendship—can function without it. Where there's no trust we can't live together, and lying destroys it: "A man who bears false witness against his neighbor is like a club, a sword, and a sharp arrow" (Prov. 25:18). All the commandments prohibit sins that

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deface the image of God and prevent us from living in harmony with one another, but the ninth commandment emphasizes false witness *against your neighbor* to make us understand. A lie is not a victimless sin. Since the person opposite you in court probably doesn't live next door, we wonder "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus teaches it's the person right in front of you that you may not see, or see and avoid because he is spiritually, economically, culturally, or racially foreign to you (Lk. 10:25-37). It's not the case that lying matters in court or was a bigger issue in the Old Testament, but now things are more gray: "But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God" (Acts 5:3-4). Ananias and Sapphira were not guilty of stealing but of lying, and it cost them their lives. How do we lie?

- Slander: malicious, false reports meant to injure and defame. This is borne out of bitterness, envy, or resentment.
- Gossip: unhelpful, negative talk about someone that is not relevant or part of any solution. Notice this can strictly be true, but it is still spoken by false lips. The self-deception of busybodies is to think something is their business.
- Flattery: excessive, insincere, untrue, or inappropriate praise.
- Giving Ear to Any of These: "The words of a talebearer are like tasty trifles, And they go down into the inmost body" (Prov. 26:22); "Take heed what you hear" (Mk. 4:24). False and unhelpful things about others taste good and go deep. Learn to say "That's none of my business", "I'd rather not hear it", and "No."

We lie by omission, exaggeration, minimization, denial and outright fabrication. The most effectively lies are mostly true, or made to sound that way: "Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?" (Gen. 3:1; cf. Acts 6:13-14). The liar always has an angle—to look better, feel better, do better. Somewhere along the way we forget the One who knows.

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Lies reveal our insecurity or lust. God forgives these sins and meets our needs. We are not justified by honesty, but honesty flows from being justified—loved and forgiven for all of our sins including the lies we've told and believed through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The truth liberates: "Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (Jn. 8:31-32). Jesus frees us from lying to get things or to make people believe certain things. Instead, we speak the truth in love: "Therefore, putting away lying, 'Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor,' for we are members of one another" (Eph. 4:25).