

Sermon File # 676

Scripture Text and Reading: Exodus 20:16; John 8:31-47

Sermon Title: *Commandment Nine: God's People of Truth*

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Sources cited in this manuscript are listed at the end.

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Commandment Nine: God's People of Truth

Introduction:

Open your Bibles with me to our text, as we continue our series from the Ten Commandments, the Moral Law which describes for us the life that pleases God. With each commandment we've noted that our Lord Jesus has a word for us that challenges us to live above a minimalist, negative application of these commandments. Followers of Jesus are given a higher righteousness that God requires for entrance into the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:20). We must receive the righteousness that comes through grace by faith in Christ, a right standing with God that can never be achieved by human effort alone. And having become God's children through a relationship with Christ, we are enabled by the Holy Spirit to obey the Moral Law, these Ten Commandments.

Once again we will look at the commandment as the Lord gave to the Israelites and then consider the full implications and applications of the commandment through the teaching of Jesus. In our text from John, Jesus is engaged in a debate with the

Jewish legalists who rejected his claims to be the promised Son of God, the Messiah, and the Truth who alone makes us free.

Follow as I read the 9th Commandment in **Exodus 20:16** about speaking the truth and then as I read in **John 8:31-47** what Jesus says about being God's people of truth.

We live in a time when truth seems to be in short supply. There's a general cynicism in society that's arisen from a breakdown of truth, integrity and sincerity. People have grown accustomed to exaggerated claims and un-kept promises from politicians, and have long since written off even once reliable banks and other financial institutions as deceptive and dishonest.

Of course churches and their leaders have also earned the distrust and cynicism of parishioners and the general public. Financial corruption and scandalous sexual misconduct have done irreparable damage to the credibility of church leaders, evangelical as well as Roman Catholic.

The secular, unbelieving public and media are quick to write off even the best of church leaders and preachers as just hypocrites who are out to get the money and other favors of gullible parishioners and television viewers. Truth and integrity are in crisis.

As is the case with of all the Ten Commandments, the 9th one was critical for the stability of the covenant community of the Israelites. Without the benefit that we have today of forensic evidence, such as DNA testing and surveillance cameras, the people of God in the Old Covenant depended on reliable and truthful witnesses to see that justice was done in their courts. False witnesses threatened their entire justice system, which is why strict laws and penalties were applied to false witnesses.

We the people of God today are also called to be his people of truth in an age of confusion, skepticism, cynicism and simple rejection God's truth claims. The world and society in which we live, although dismissing God's revealed truth and skeptical of all pronouncements of biblical truth claims, are literally dying to know, and dying for the lack of truth.

The challenge before us is to answer the call to be God's people of truth who, first of all...

Know the truth

The Ninth Commandment was directed against those in the Israelite community who would give false testimony against their fellow Israelite, thereby causing injustice and the breakdown in the judicial system. But this commandment also came to have a

broader application to general truthfulness (Durham, 295-7). But as we have noted with the previous commandments, the righteousness Jesus requires and enables goes beyond the legalistic, minimalist application.

In one of his confrontations with his legalistic enemies, Jesus asserted his claim to be the messianic Son of God and Son of Man, even the incarnate truth about God (John 8:12ff; 31ff). Elsewhere in this Gospel, Jesus gives one of his great I Am statements, saying “I am the way and the truth and the life” (14:6). Unlike his enemies who refused to believe in him, God’s people of truth know the truth as God’s...

Absolute truth

Jesus’ claim to be the truth (Greek *aletheia*) is a statement that he is the absolute, perfect and complete revelation of God. John wrote in his prologue that Jesus, the eternal Word of God, is full of grace and truth, the one who made God known to us perfectly (1:14-18). The written word of God also is a perfect treasure of truth (17:17). Although truth has a long history and wide range of meanings in Scripture (Piper, 713-717), God is the source of all that is true in life and thought, creation and science, and the measure of all verity, trustworthiness, dependability, integrity and reliability.

As Chuck Colson says, we in the West are living in a “post-truth society” (quoted in Ryken, 659). The postmodernist mindset rejects the notion of any absolute truth. Ironically, in the minds of many the only absolute truth is that there is no absolute truth; and to these self-contradicting pluralists, all “truth” claims are equally valid except those that claim absolute truth (and hence contradict their claims to no absolute truth!). Post-truth pundits absolutely reject claims to absolute truth!

American pollster George Barna reported to *USA Today* that “people say, ‘I believe in God. I believe the Bible is a good book. And then I believe whatever I want.’” He notes that only seven percent of those surveyed say they believe in seven essential doctrines, as listed in the National Association of Evangelicals’ Statement of Faith. Barna says that America may become a nation of 310 million people with 310 million religions, as we continue to depart from “the faith once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3). We are certainly to be tolerant of one another and respectful of divergent beliefs, but as people of God we believe the truth of God as revealed in the person of Jesus Christ and through the trustworthy Word of God, the Scriptures (Colson, 1).

We believe in the absolute truth of the Gospel, of the reality of the Triune God, and that Christ Jesus, the Son of God, came into the world to die for and to save sinners (1 Timothy 1:15). We believe that Christ is the incarnate God-man, who is all he claimed to be, including his astounding claim to be the way, the truth and the life (John 14:6).

CS Lewis noted the absurdity of believing that Jesus was a great moral teacher but not accepting his claim to be God: “A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman and something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that option open to us. He did not intend to” (Lewis, 56).

As he claimed, Christ is the way to God, the truth about God and through him we receive the life of God. As the truth, we find in him all we need to know about God. As we see his perfect love and holiness, we’re made aware of our sin and unworthiness. But also “we find our true self” in a personal faith relationship with Jesus (Blanch, 111f). This Jesus is the truth about God and about us and also the truth about the only way to eternal life, which is through faith in him.

As God’s people of truth we also believe that God has given us his written revelation the Scriptures, which are absolutely reliable and true in everything they affirm, even though we continue to struggle to accurately interpret and understand them. As the Apostle Peter wrote, they are absolutely clear, however, on everything we need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1:3). In the very next verse (4), he notes that through these “great and precious promises” we are enabled to “participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

The absolute truth about God and the truth that is in Christ Jesus are thus...

Transforming truth

In his High Priestly Prayer, Jesus asserted the sanctifying power of God’s word of truth: “Sanctify (‘make them holy,’ *NLT*) them by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). We who know the truth of God through faith in Christ are called to live by the truth of God’s written word, which, through the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit, transforms our character into the likeness of Christ himself.

God’s written word, the Scriptures, tells us the truth about what we are as sinners and our absolute dependence on God’s grace to transform us into the likeness of Christ. We abide in Christ by hearing, believing and obeying the Scriptures, as a branch abides in the vine (John 15:1-17). We then produce the fruit of Christlikeness, what Paul calls the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22f).

Jesus’ enemies opposed and hated him, not only because of his claims as the Son of God, but also because he knew their true character. Jesus said they were not the true children of Abraham as they claimed, but rather were the children of the devil and were carrying out his deadly desires (John 8:44). They were children of “the liar

and father of lies,” which is the meaning of “devil,” “diabolos,” lit. slanderer (Barclay, 189).

Apart from a personal, faith and life-changing relationship with Christ we are blinded to the real truth about God, ourselves and our world. As Jesus said, only by knowing the truth are we set free from Satan’s bondage, and the blinds are lifted from our eyes to enable us to see the truth for the first time (John 8:32). When we by faith, in response to God’s grace and Spirit, are convicted of our sin, God’s perfect righteousness and his judgment upon our sin (John 16:7-11), we then see the truth of salvation through Christ. As Paul says, “whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil (the blindfold) is taken away” (2 Corinthians 3:16). The truth really makes us free to become God’s being transformed people of the truth.

As we grow in Christ, we learn to live by his truth and walk/live according to the truth of his word, which is a lamp to our feet and a light to our path (Psalm 119:105). We find in Scriptures a reliable guide for the life that pleases and glorifies him, as summarized in the Great Commandment (Mark 12:28-34) and the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19f). In this bewildering, pluralistic world when everyone believes and does what is right in his own eyes (Judges 17:6; 21:25), we have the absolute truth and direction from God’s word written, which portrays for us the life of the living and eternal Word of God, Jesus.

In 1875, 51 nations formed a treaty agreement, to establish an international bureau of weights and measures in order to assure uniformity of weights, measures and the correct time of day.

(http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_Bureau_of_Weights_and_Measures).

Imagine the chaos and the impossibility of trade and commerce if each nation had different standards, based on opinion and personal preference! Our faith, conduct and hope all rest in God’s perfect truth and standard for faith and living. God’s people of the truth don’t conform to popular opinions, which are uncertain at best and destructive at worst.

God’s people of truth also...

Speak the truth

The 9th Commandment was another commandment that was vital to relationships in the covenant community of Israel (Oswalt, 447). So too, we who are God’s people of truth are called to guard the truth of the Gospel but also to be careful to speak the truth to and also...

About one another

Witnesses were crucial to the Old Covenant judicial system. At least two or three witnesses were required and a false witness was given the same sentence of the

accused (Deuteronomy 19:15-21). In capital cases, the witness against the condemned was required to cast the first stone (Deuteronomy 17:6f). Verity in giving witness was and still is “the cement that holds society together” (Wiersbe, 131).

As God’s people of truth we are, as Paul said, to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). Some take this as a license to be brutally frank, even saying hurtful things in the name of being honest. But that’s not speaking in love, which is always kind and considerate (1 Corinthians 13:4). Godly people seek always to speak words that are not only truthful, but also build up and encourage others (Ephesians 4:25, 29).

God’s people of truth also rejoice in the good they hear about others and are reluctant to hear and are saddened by news of someone’s misfortune or moral failure (1 Corinthians 13: 6; Philippians 4:8). This means we hate rumor and gossip about another believer. Gossip separates close friends (Proverbs 16:28). The fact that gossip is “like choice morsels” (Proverbs 18:8) is evidence of our sinful, fallen nature.

As God’s people of truth, we must love the truth and hate “a lying tongue,” which is one of the seven things God hates (Proverbs 6:16ff). This means we must be careful to speak only what is truthful about others as well as ourselves. Sometimes a “white lie” might be necessary to ward off evil, such as lying to an armed thief to protect yourself or others. But even a “little white lie” must be “guided by charity and common sense” (Davidman, 109).

In some cases, we’re guilty of giving false witness, not just by a flagrant lie about someone, but by failing to stand up in someone’s defense when we know the truth. We are guilty of false witnessing also when we becloud the truth or tell only the partial truth that leaves a false impression about someone or something. It’s the impression we give and not just the precise words we say. We are guilty through falsification, fabrication, and prevarication (Ryken, 656), which is intentional deception.

Slander is a serious sin that violates also the 6th Commandment against murder. Slander and false witness against someone can damage his or her reputation as well as the spirit of another for whom Christ died. James “hits the nail on the head” when we describes the tongue as the most dangerous part of the body, as “a fire...a world of evil” that “corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell” (3:5f). Thus James warns us to keep our tongues, our speech, under careful control.

It’s also possible to spread gossip and slander a fellow believer under the cover of pseudo-spirituality. For example, Sister Snoopy can get on the phone and begin calling all of her fellow church members and ask them to “Please pray for our dear sister Sally, whom I saw leaving the Mac So-and-So’s house the other evening, that God might protect her marriage from any unfaithfulness. You know how I so *love*

Sally, and would hate to see her fall into sin,” Miss Snoopy drones on in her saccharine tones.

This 9th Commandment also applies to our speaking the truth...

About ourselves

We can use deceptive speech and writing to create a false impression about ourselves. Of three million job applicants in the US, nearly 50% of their résumés contained one or more falsehoods (Ryken, 653). In fact, in a former church I served, we discovered that one of the assistant ministers had falsified his educational credentials. He claimed to have a master’s degree from a school that has never existed!

Besides giving wrong information, we can also create the wrong impression about ourselves, which is the lie of hypocrisy. Jesus pronounced woes of judgment against hypocrites who put on appearances of piety but were really “sons of hell,” intent on making others like themselves, “sons of hell” (Matthew 23:15). Jesus called these false “professors of faith” whitewashed tombs, who looked pious on the outside, but were in fact “full of dead men’s bones” and “hypocrisy and wickedness” (verses 27-28).

Nothing has done more damage to the cause of the Gospel than hypocrisy, not only by child-molesting priests, but also by evangelical preachers who are charlatans and frauds, profiteering from and fleecing their followers. Living secret lives of luxury at the expense of the gullible and certainly not practicing what they teach and preach (Matthew 23:3).

Not that we’re required to “hang out our dirty linen” and publically confess our every sinful thought and action, but we are to be honest in confessing our sinful nature and need for God’s daily grace and forgiveness (1 John 1:9). We are to admit our weakness and identify ourselves as fellow strugglers in the life and battles of faith and true righteousness. As your pastor, I confess my weakness and need for God’s forgiveness and ask God always for his grace and protection against the attacks of the world, the flesh and the devil. Only God’s grace enables me to maintain a ministry of integrity.

I think this 9th Commandment also includes our being God’s people of truth who speak the truth...

About the Good News

We as God’s people are called to be witnesses of the truth of the message of Christ and his saving grace. We are people under the Great Commission to be witnesses for Christ in our sphere of influence (Acts 1:8).

When the city of Samaria was under siege by the army of Aram and King Ben-Hadad, the situation of famine became desperate, even to the point of cannibalism in an effort to survive. Due to an army-like noise that the Lord caused, the Aramean army fled their camp and left behind an abundance of food, clothing, gold and silver, enough for the besieged city of Samaria. Four men with leprosy, who were forced to live outside the city wall, went into the deserted camp and discovered a camp full of food and valuables. They first indulged themselves, but then concluded, "We're not doing right. This is a day of good news and we are keeping it to ourselves. If we wait until daylight, punishment will overtake us. Let us go at once and report this to the royal palace" (2 Kings 7:9). And so the city was saved by their good news.

We have the Good News, the saving message of Christ, which the world around us desperately needs. Wherever God sends us, and with the opportunities he gives us, we're obligated to share the message that leads to eternal life.

DT Niles (1908-1970), Sri Lankan evangelist, ecumenical leader and hymn writer, poignantly defined evangelism as "one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread."

The word "witness" is the Greek "marturia," and now we use the word "martyr" to refer to one who gives his or her life as the ultimate price for faithfulness in proclaiming allegiance to Christ. We may not be called to witness at the cost of our lives, but we are all called to tell the truth about Christ. Instead of giving false witness, we are privileged to give a life-changing, destining-reversing witness for Christ to those without hope and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12).

Conclusion:

One of the most sobering verses in Scripture was spoken by our Lord Jesus:

"But I tell you that men (and women) will have to give an account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned" (Matthew 12:36f).

Jesus had just denounced his enemies who accused Jesus of being in collusion with the devil in his healing a demon possessed man, and was warning them against becoming unpardonable sinners who can no longer discern between good and evil and truth and falsehood. He warned them to get a new heart, because our evil speech, that will condemn us, comes from an evil, sinful heart (22-37).

We've all been guilty of sinful speech and hypocrisy and also, as God's witnesses, of our guilty silence (Stott). Our need today is to ask God to give us a new heart, one that believes the truth in Christ and that is committed to speaking the truth to and about each other, living the truth with integrity and sharing the truth with those who are outside of Christ. Only Christ has perfectly obeyed and fulfilled all of God's

Moral Law, and we receive his righteousness by grace through faith in him. God accepts us as righteous and justified through his righteousness. And then, now that we are justified by grace through faith, we are empowered to live righteously the way Jesus is righteous.

Someone here today may be in need of the freedom Jesus gives through knowing him as the truth of God's holiness, love and way to eternal life. To come to Christ in repentance and faith is to receive a new heart. Out of your new heart, you will know the Truth as your Savior and be able to speak the truth and speak forth the truth to those who need to know the truth of God's deliverance.

Perhaps others of us need to repent of falsehood, deception, hypocrisy and/or slander against a brother or sister in Christ. Or maybe we've spoken the truth but not in love. Remember, even the devil quotes Scripture but he can't love. Only God's people of truth who know the truth can live by the truth and always speak the truth in love.

May God give us grace to be his people of truth!

Thoughts and questions for personal reflection and/or group discussion:

1. Do you agree with Chuck Colson that we in the West live in a "post-truth society"? Give reasons for your answer.
2. What do you think Jesus means by saying that he is "the truth" (John 14:6)?
3. How does knowing the truth set us free (John 8:31f)?
4. How do the truth about Christ and the truth of God's Word transform us?
5. What do you think is meant by speaking the truth in love? (Ephesians 5:15)
6. What are some ways we can disobey this 9th Commandment by remaining silent when we know the truth about someone who is falsely accused? Give a current and personal example, if possible.
7. Is it possible to slander someone under the pretext of "sharing a prayer concern"? If so, give an example.

8. How is hypocrisy a violation of this commandment? What are some ways you could be guilty of the sin of hypocrisy, among fellow believers or among unbelievers?

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