

The Commands of Christ

The Ninth Commandment-A

Exodus 20:16
Part Twenty-One

With Study Questions

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Exodus 20:16

**You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor
(Exodus 20:16).**

I. Useless Religion

Let's begin with one of the most disquieting verses in the Bible.

**If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not
bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's
religion is useless (James 1:26).**

The word "religious" used by James here (the adjective *threskos*) speaks of the divinely ascribed duties of outward service to God; in other words, your religious behavior. The second word "religion" (the noun *threskeia*) is James' description of the useless religion that results from useless or vain religious behavior.

The behavior which reveals this is the lack of willingness to bridle (or properly guide) our tongues, which James equates with self-deception. It is this unbridled tongue which James uses as an example of the person who is a hearer of the word but not a doer of the word; the self-deceiver (James 1:22).

James hammers this home in chapter three.

**Indeed, we put bits in horses' mouths that they may obey us,
and we turn their whole body. Look also at ships: although
they are so large and are driven by fierce winds, they are
turned by a very small rudder wherever the pilot desires.
Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things.
See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is
a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our
members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the
course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. For every kind
of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed
and has been tamed by mankind. But no man can tame the
tongue. It is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. With it we
bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who**

have been made in the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceed blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be so. Does a spring send forth fresh water and bitter from the same opening? Can a fig tree, my brethren, bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Thus no spring yields both salt water and fresh (James 3:3-12).

It would appear there was a major problem among the Jewish Christians (James 1:1—the “twelve tribes...scattered”) when it came to the taming of the tongue.

Most Common Sin

Although there is a great proclivity in both the world and the church to violate all the commandments of God, there is very little doubt in my mind that the violation of the Ninth Commandment (although there is a general theoretical agreement in the church that improper talking is sin) is the most common grievous sin invading the church.

The inability to know, or lack of willingness to care about, when the conversation has moved into the realm of ungodliness is a very common transgression among Christians.

A Tale from Two Women

Years ago I was having a conversation with a church member who began saying some pretty negative things about a mutual friend. I remember her speaking to me in such a way as to give the impression that she was merely musing on her own. The criticism was something I knew to be false and I sought to clear up the misconception.

Less than two weeks later I heard another lady (the first lady’s friend) make the same criticism about the same person. It appeared that these women had spoken to each about the third party. This common sin causes great damage in the household of Christ.

Collecting Feathers

There is an old story about a man who had been telling rumors, rumors he thought to be true about a certain pastor. It finally came to his attention that what he was saying was false. Filled with remorse he found the pastor and apologized for the things he had said, and asked if there was anything he could do to make it up to him. The pastor asked him to meet at the top of the church tower the next afternoon.

The man met him and the pastor handed him a feather pillow, asked him to cut it open, and throw the feathers from the tower. The man complied. The pastor then asked the man to meet him there the following night. At this meeting the pastor asked the man to collect the feathers he had released the night before. Of course this was impossible. The man then realized how words cannot be retrieved. He realized how damaging it is to speak falsehoods.

II. Preserving Truth

If inappropriate language does damage to human relationships, how much more critical is its effect upon man's relationship with God.

The duty involved in this commandment is the duty of preserving truth. I shall not speak in detail about truth. Suffice it to say that Christ referred to Himself as truth (John 14:6). The word of God is truth (John 17:17). Truth, like law liberates, i.e., sets us free (John 8:32). Truth accounts for much more than we can ever imagine. Charles Hodge states,

Truth is, so to speak, the very substratum of Deity...So it is the foundation of the physical and moral order of the universe.¹

The Necessity of Truth

From the laws of nature and order to the laws of ethics, logic and thought, truth is essential. Truth is an extension of the character and nature of God. If God did not extend His truth into the natural order, that which is food today might be poison tomorrow. Truth is the essence of humanity. A man who violates the truth, sins against the moral foundation of his very being. As a false god is no god so a false man is no man. Jesus taught that the Devil is the father of lies (John 8:44).

Truth, logic, epistemology (the theory of knowledge), call it what you will—when we lose these things we lose everything. That products, policies, politicians, religion, etc. are often presented by emotive appeal rather than reasonable appeal should be a matter of great concern.

The First Sin

The first sin of man was based upon the falsehood of Satan.

¹ Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol III*, (Eerdmans, reprinted 1989), p. 437.

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" (Genesis 3:1).

The serpent questioned the integrity of God's truth and his lies began.
The search for truth will always lead to the true God.

And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart (Jeremiah 29:13).

Men are apt to bear false witness. But the truth of Christ has the undeniable witness of the Triune God. Jesus taught that if he bore witness of Himself, His witness is not true (John 5:31). That's not to say that Jesus was lying but that God Himself confirms His truth by His threefold witness:

I am One who bears witness of Myself, and __the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me (John 8:18).

This is He who came __by water and blood—Jesus Christ; not only by water, but by water and blood. _And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth (1 John 5:6).

So we see the Father, Son and Spirit all bearing the most truthful of testimonies to the human heart. Whatever truth any of us have of right, wrong, life, death, heaven, hell, salvation, damnation, reprobation or redemption, we owe it all to the true testimony of God working in our bitterly reluctant hearts.

As an apologist (one who gives defense for the faith) I must know that the testimony of God through the preaching of Christ and Him crucified and risen, is the means by which God's illuminating Spirit gives life. Not that there is nothing to be said by man and man's testimonies and evidences, but they are subordinate to the certain knowledge of Christ and His word.

John says it this way:

If we receive __the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; __for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son. ⁻¹⁰⁻ He who believes in the Son of God _has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God __has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. ⁻¹¹⁻ And this is the

testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. ⁻¹²⁻ _He who has the Son has _life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have _life. ⁻¹³⁻ These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, __and that you may *continue to believe* in the name of the Son of God (1 John 5:9-13).

We are presented here with the notion of calling someone a liar. He who denies the testimony given by God in His word (1 John 4:6), has chosen to call God a liar (something we see men emboldened to do these days).

We must be wary of those who would downplay truth in the name of love. Love is dependant upon truth for its very definition. When Paul writes that those who have not love are “**sounding brass or a clanging cymbal**” (1 Corinthians 13:1), he doesn’t leave us to our own definition of love. The entire remainder of the “love chapter” is a treatise on the truth about love.

And if we are going to know of God’s love for us, the truth must be protected, cherished and contended for.

Next week we’ll discuss what the Ninth Commandment protects; If lies are ever permissible; can the truth be slanderous; and what our lips tell us about ourselves.

Questions for Study and Meditation

1. Have you found that improper talking is common in the church? Why do you suppose this is (pages 2, 3)?
2. Discuss the damaging effects of gossip (pages 3, 4).
3. Why is truth so important (pages 4, 5)?
4. What is meant by the statement, “As a false god is no god, so a false

man is no man." Do you agree (page 4)?

5. How was mankind set up for the fall (page 4, 5)?

6. What is the witness of God (pages 5, 6)?