

The Ten Commandments
Lesson 21: No False Witness (Part II)
Treasuring Truth In Every Relationship And Circumstance

1. Jesus Calls Us To Live In Truth

Jesus stated, *"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life"* (**John 14:6**). Every word He spoke was true; He never lied. He prayed to His Father for His disciples, *"Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth"* (**John 17:17**). Let's look at some of the ways in which He emphasized the importance of being truthful.

- a. Jesus spoke of the perils of dishonest speech in His Sermon on the Mount. Read **Matthew 5:33-37**. We looked at this passage before in our study of the third commandment. Let's review it again, focusing on the matter of making false vows or oaths. What is the essential command that Jesus gives in this passage (verse 37)?

After warning His listeners about misusing oaths, Jesus focused on the original intent of any oath, which is to guarantee truthfulness. Thus, Jesus is calling for honest speech here, by saying that "yes" should mean yes and "no" should mean no. He meant that swearing oaths for emphasis isn't necessary if we are known for telling the truth. By following that simple guideline, we can avoid any type of lies, including exaggerations and slander.

- b. In a conversation regarding Pharisaic rules about ritual hand washing before eating, Jesus emphasized the real source of impurity in a person's life. Read Jesus' response and explanation to Peter over these matters in **Matthew 15:15-20**. What did Jesus reveal about one's words?

Jesus explained that not following certain religious rituals concerning hand washing or eating foods cannot make a person unholy. Only what comes from the heart (thoughts, actions, and words) can defile a person, making him or her spiritually unclean. When Jesus explained this to Peter, He emphasized the difference between the physical and spiritual realm. Notice that he specifically mentioned *"false witness [and] slanders"* (verse 19). To fully obey the ninth commandment, we must speak and act in a way that shows our hearts have been changed by the grace and power of Jesus Christ.

How important are our words? In a separate incident, Jesus gives clear revelation about the source and consequences of our words. After dealing with some who were maligning Him and the work of the Holy Spirit, Jesus warned of the consequences, and then He focused on the heart of the problem.

- c. Read the account in **Matthew 12:33-37**. What do you find about the words that people speak? Where do they come from?
 - i. What are the consequences each will face for what he or she has spoken, according to verses 36-37?

A good tree brings forth good fruit, just like a bad tree brings forth bad fruit. The nature of the tree determines the fruit. A viper produces a poisonous bite because of its nature. Just so, the condition of the heart is revealed in the words that are spoken, whether good and honest words or bad, deceptive, and lying words. This is more than a statement about why one says what he says. It also addresses the consequences of what we say. Every person will be held accountable for the words spoken.

The Ten Commandments: Following God Christian Living Series. Author, Rick Shepherd, AMG Publishers

From other parts of Scripture, we know that those who have spoken the truth, confessing their need of a Savior and yielding to Jesus Christ as Lord, will be justified, while those who have rejected Him will be condemned (see **John 3:16-21**; **Romans 10:1-13**).

God's inclusion of the ninth commandment emphasizes the corporate nature of the people of God. Our lives and our words impact one another. Jesus came to save sinners, yet He knew that even after they were saved, believers would still have to deal with sin and with fellow believers who sin.

- d. Read **Matthew 18:15-20**. What did Jesus say that a believer should do first to help a fellow Christian who has sinned (verse 15)?
 - i. If the person who sinned is not willing to listen to the Christian counsel of another believer, what should be done next according to verse 16? Note the place of two or three witnesses.
 - ii. What actions does Jesus say should be taken against a sinning church member who refuses to listen to any counsel (see verse 17)? How important is it that Christians acknowledge their own sin, especially when confronted about it? Note the promises Jesus gives to those dealing with such matters (verses 18-20).

If one Christian see another sinning in some way, the observer is to go to the sinning brother or sister in private and truthfully talk with him or her about the sin that was committed. This is to be done gently, in a spirit of love and humility (see **Galatians 6:1-2**). If the sinner acknowledges the sin and repents of it, the matter is ended—the sinner has been restored to Christian fellowship. If on the other hand, the sinning Christian is a fellow church member who refuses to acknowledge the sin or to turn from it, the steps listed in Matthew 18 are to be followed.

Jesus wants truth to prevail and promises that he will be at work with us in such situations. We can pray with confidence, assured of His presence and His power at work in dealing with others in the family of God.

Throughout His ministry, our Lord had to deal with those who thought that He was lying when He claimed to be the Son of God. A battle raged between those who did not believe Him (Pharisees, scribes, priests, and various Jewish leaders) and those who knew who He was and had witnessed the power of His Father working through Him. This struggle is discussed in the gospel of John.

John 5 presents Jesus' explanation of His life and mission. In facing those who opposed Him, Jesus presents the testimony of several witnesses to support His claims that he is the Son of God. Jesus presented His testimony much like a defense lawyer would use the testimony of character witnesses in court.

- e. Read **John 5:30-47**. What witnesses did Jesus present to confirm His identity?
- f. Jesus continually dealt with doubters. Read **John 8:12-20**. To what witnesses did Jesus appeal in the situation described here?
 - i. What Old Testament law did Jesus mention according to verse 17? How did He apply it (verse 18)?

- g. In this confrontational conversation in **John 8**, Jesus revealed what was at the heart of the battle over who He was. Who did He reveal being at work in this matter of truth versus lies? Read John 8:44 and record your findings.
- h. Jesus had to deal with false testimony at His trials the night before His crucifixion. Read **Matthew 26:57-66**. What did the Jewish leaders do to make sure they had the “proper” witnesses in this trial?
 - i. What do you find about their efforts in **Mark 14:55-59**?
 - ii. About what did these witnesses testify, according to **Matthew 26:60-61**?
 - iii. Of what did they finally accuse Jesus (verses 63-66)?

Application: The witness of Jesus is true. Have you received the testimony of who Jesus is and what He has done? Have you received Him into your life as your Lord and Savior? The apostle John said he wrote his account “that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God and that believing you might have life in His name” (John 20:31). If you have received Him, look for opportunities to be a witness of that truth. Tell others so that they, too, can know the truth and ask Jesus to be their Lord and Savior.

Next, we will look at further applications of knowing and telling the truth while avoiding lying and deception.

2. The New Testament Call To Living And Speaking The Truth

The apostles understood the importance of living and telling the truth—telling the truth about who Jesus is and why he came, speaking the truth in every relationship, and living with honesty and integrity in every area of life. God wants each of His children living an honest, truthful life and speaking the truth in all situations.

Jesus promised His disciples they would be empowered by the Holy Spirit to be His witnesses, telling others who He was, what He had done, and what He had commanded (see **Acts 1:8**). How did the early church witness of Christ?

- a. Read the account given in Acts 3:1-26. According to Acts 3:13-15, what did Peter and John say they had witnessed?
- b. Read **Acts 4:1-4**. Peter and John were soon arrested for preaching about Jesus’ resurrection. Accounts of their trial are presented in **Acts 4:5-22**. What did these disciples say about what they had seen and heard (verse 20)?
- c. In spite of the testimony of the early church in the community, opposition to the testimony of those who knew and loved Jesus did not stop. Read **Acts 6:8-15**. What did some of those who heard Stephen do to him according to verses 11-14?
- d. Stephen gave his testimony before the council as recorded in **Acts 7:1-53**. What happened next according to Acts 7:58? How did these Jews disobey the ninth commandment?

- e. In the letters of Paul, we find clear instructions about how to walk and talk honestly. First, what did Paul reveal about truth in a person's relationship with Christ? Read Ephesians **4:20-25**. How did Paul characterize the new life in Christ? What did he say about the truth? Where is truth found according to verse 21?
 - i. What marks the "old self" according to verse 22?
 - ii. What is distinct about the "new self" according to verse 24? How does Paul describe the truth in that verse?
 - iii. Based on Paul's teaching concerning the new life in Christ, what did he instruct believers to do according to **Ephesians 4:25**?
- f. What additional insights are given in **Colossians 3:8-10**?
- g. Words of truth are meant to be beneficial in many ways. In talking about a life marked by obedience to the Spirit of God in Ephesians 4, Paul had further commands for how one should speak to others. What should mark and what should not mark the speech of a believer according to **Ephesians 4:29**?

Sometimes a person may tell the truth, yet do so ungraciously, even maliciously. Paul made sure the believers in Ephesus understood the importance of words filled with grace. Grace and truth go together. He first cautioned and commanded them to speak "no unwholesome word" (4:29) using the Greek word *sapros*, which refers to rotten food or garbage (anything rank, putrid, or foul). We are to speak no worthless words. Instead, we are to seek to build others up, saying the right thing at the right time. As Christians, we should endeavor to make everything we say a reflection of God's grace in us. God wants us to walk in truth, speaking truth in every situation and in every relationship, treasuring truth as He treasures it.

3. For Me To Follow God

In looking at the ninth commandment, we have seen several ways in which it can be applied. First, as we have seen, it can be applied to situations in which two or three eyewitnesses are called to testify about someone's guilt or innocence in a crime. Of course, it is vital that the truth be told in such cases, so that justice may be served, with an innocent person being set free or a guilty person paying for the crime. Second, this command also applies to the matter of being honest in all of our dealings—not only in legal matters, but in relationships as well. A third application touches speaking the truth to God and to one another, not lying, slandering, or speaking deceitfully. A fourth application focuses on being a true witness, telling others what it means to know and follow Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Apply: First, let's look at dealing with the heart of each person. Scripture has shown us that the source of our words is the heart, the inner person, the seat of our attitudes and choices (see **Matthew 12:34; 15:18-19**). God has given a "new heart" marked by the presence of His Spirit to all those who place faith in Christ. The Scriptures show us how those with new hearts are to act and how the saving knowledge of Christ should affect our words. Look at each of the passages below. Summarize what we are responsible to do and then, in your own words, jot down God's intended result.

- **Ephesians 5:18-20**
- **Colossians 3:14-17**
- **1 Peter 3:8-10**

Apply: Considering what we have seen about the ninth commandment and the various exhortations and prohibitions that compliment that command, look at each of the application statements given below and prayerfully evaluate where we are in our spiritual journey. Make the necessary corrections the Holy Spirit convicts us to make. Obey promptly and fully, trusting Him to lead and empower us every step of the way.

- **At Home?** Do we speak truth with our family? Do we avoid critical remarks, gossip, or slander?
- **At School?** Do we speak truth with teachers, professors, fellow students? Are we being honest on tests, pop-quizzes, research papers, book reports, and so forth? Do we slander or lie about teachers or fellow students
- **At Work?** Do we speak truth with our employers, fellow employees, supervisors, foremen, office managers, etc.? Are we honest in our words? Are we honest on our resumes? In required reports and the like? Do we hedge on the truth in dealing with customers and clients?
- **At Church?** Are we dealing honestly with church leaders or with fellow believers? Are we speaking words of truth to encourage and build up? Are we helping others honestly deal with sin when necessary? Do we speak critically of others at church or pass on half-truths?
- **In Business or Financial Dealings?** Are we speaking truthfully in business and financial matters (selling, trading, or buying)? Are we honest on our income tax returns?

Homework: Read **Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21, 7:25-26; Proverbs 22:9, 23:4-8**

Lesson Topics: **The Age-Old Practice of Coveting and Viewing Coveting The Way God Views it**