

The Ninth Commandment

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[0 : 00] It's great to be with you guys again this morning. I'm going to look at the ninth command today. Last year the Oxford Dictionary, they choose a word of the year each year.

And they chose the word, does anyone remember what they chose last year? It was the word post-truth. And it means, this is what they say it means, it means relating to circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.

In other words, they're saying the truth, what really happened or what corresponds to reality, is of less importance in influencing people than their own opinions and their feelings.

And so what we personally believe about a person, so what we feel about a situation or personally believe about a person, a doctrine, a circumstance, is less importance than the facts.

So my feelings, my beliefs trump the facts. And we saw this particularly in the U.S. presidential election last year.

[1 : 17] If Mr. Trump didn't like some news, he'd write it off as fake news. If he didn't like what people said about him or about some situation, he didn't like the facts.

He said, I have alternative facts. And then what happened then is the New York Times would take all these speeches and check them for facts.

And they found they were full of untruths. Now, if we are really living in a post-truth world where objective facts and objective reality, where they questioned, then we're in very serious trouble.

The whole of science is then in dispute. Engineering, I mean, our roads, our buildings, our bridges, they are built on engineering principles, on the truth about engineering, on the truth of how God has made our world.

So technology, medicine, education, all these things that we depend upon are just gone. I mean, we wouldn't have cell phones if there weren't objective scientific laws.

[2 : 32] You know, if it was just about a person's opinion of how a cell phone works or something. We wouldn't have cars. We wouldn't have nice furniture and sound system or anything. All that would go because there's no truth at all.

And if lying is acceptable, who can we believe? Who can we trust? You know, business depends on trust. You know, if you go into a restaurant, you'll get your food before you pay your money because we trust the person who comes in.

And if there's no trust, if we don't trust the banks, for instance, they're not going to loan us any money. We won't be able to buy a house or a car or anything like that. Business is built on trust, and trust is built on honesty and truth-telling.

Society couldn't function without truth and without trust. So now we're in the realm of the ninth command, which says, you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

The ninth commandment forbids testifying falsely or wrongly against your neighbor. It's against lying, and it commands truth-telling.

[3 : 44] It's a command that deals with our speech, the way we speak to each other, speaking. It's about the word and the words that we use.

And speech is part of communication. It's how we build up relationships, how we build up friendships. It's about talking and listening.

So the ninth commandment is all about speech. It's all about relationships. Because as I said, we build up our relationships, not only by, but largely by speaking and listening and talking to each other.

And speech is a central attribute of God. He speaks to us. He speaks to us through his word. And we are speaking, we are speaking, not animals, but speaking creatures.

Because we imitate God. We're in God's image. And so speech is one of the things that distinguishes ourselves and animals. Animals do have communication. Communication, sure. [4 : 51] Or at least the so-called higher animals. And if we think of God himself, the second person is called the word. The word became flesh and he died for us and for our sins.

The word created the world. God spoke or the word spoke and there was light. God spoke and plants came into being.

Trees, grasses, flowers. God spoke and birds and fishes appeared. And then animals. And finally God spoke and he made us.

So God is a speaking God. He creates by his speech and he speaks his truth to us. And we have his truth in his word.

This book is God's speaking to us. And we have to pay attention and that's why we're here. We've come this morning to hear the word of God. To sing it.

[5 : 52] To pray it. To encourage one another. And to listen to what he says to us through the preacher. So the word is actually central to who we are.

It's central to our identity as God's image bearers. It's central to our relationship and to our communication and building up community. And of course it's central to our faith and our ministry. So let's then turn to the ninth commandment. Now as I said, the ninth commandment says you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor. And as I said last week, each commandment is broad but it's said in a way that focuses on a central sin in that commandment.

At least about speaking the negative commandments. And in this one it's given thou shalt not bear false witness against our neighbor. Now why did God focus on false witnesses?

I mean, he could have said don't lie. He could have said tell the truth. But he focuses on false witness. And I'll tell you why he says it. You need to understand the background against this commandment.

[7 : 04] The ancient near eastern background. And if you, and particularly you need to look at the justice system in the ancient near east. You know, two, three thousand years ago or then about four thousand years ago.

And in those, in those days people didn't have a lot of protection and lawyers and human rights or things like that at all. And so they could be innocent of some crime and people could say look, John did that or Adrian did that.

And, and they would accept one witness in those days. And it was very difficult. And you were presumed guilty until you were proved innocent.

So it was a very unjust system. And you could say something about me and spread some rumor and people would believe it. I mean, people do that today as well. Well, so, and many, there were many crimes that bore a death penalty.

So you could say something about me. You say, I stole something. I stole your sheep or something like that. And people would believe it and they'd put you to death for that.

[8 : 11] And so it was very dangerous to be alive. If someone didn't like you, they would, they would take you out. But not by getting a knife or throwing acid or something. They would just say something that was untrue and the courts would come and convict you.

And so, and they would convict on the basis of one witness. And so what God did in his word, in Deuteronomy it says there, you have to, there must be at least two or three witnesses before anyone is found guilty at all.

And God said, if you bear false witness against someone and you, and that false witness is proved, you will bear the same penalty as the person would have had.

So if you said something about me that would cause me to be put to death if, if the judges agreed and it was a lie and found out to be a lie, you would be put to death as a false witness.

So it was a very, um, yeah, so that put off the false witnesses. So what you can see here is that the sort of most extreme, the worst sort of crime you can do with your speech is to say something that's untrue about another person that could possibly lead to his house being demolished, his goods taken away, him putting slavery or put to death.

[9 : 36] And so God focuses on that most extreme thing. The same as I said last week, if in a marriage, it's, you know, marriage, the seventh commandment is all about, you know, marriage, um, and sex and things like that.

And so adultery is the sort of worst thing in a marriage because it destroys a marriage and so God focuses on that thing. But it speaks a lot more than just that.

So God restrains false witnessing. And of course the other thing, false witnessing is actually legal language, a false testimony against something.

So the whole, there's a whole sort of legal setting behind this, um, this ninth commandment. The very word witness is, is, is, is a legal word.

There's an accused, there are judges, there's judgment and condemnation, judgment and punishment, or there's justification and the person is free. And so that's why God chooses this particular focus of the false witness.

[10:42] and so what we see from that is that the ninth commandment isn't a trivial commandment because we actually normally think of it as pretty trivial.

Oh, well, what's a lie? We all lie. You know, psychologists say that every human being lies. We lie every day and we twist the truth and things like that. And so we normally see that the ninth commandment is something trivial.

but when it focuses on the false, on false testimony and the legal setting and judgment, we realize that this is not a, a lightweight commandment at all, something trivial that we can pass, you know, kids lying to each other on the playing field or something like that.

This commandment is deadly serious. It's about justice in the first instance here. It's this commandment is the foundation of justice because it focuses on speaking the truth and speaking the truth in a court.

And justice is central to the character of God. And justice is central to the rule of God. He rules justly. Justice is central to the fall.

[11:51] Adam and Eve turned away from God and they fell and brought us all into sin and spoiled the whole world. And justice is central to our salvation.

It is because Jesus died for our sins. We were under the judgment of God and because he paid for our sins on the cross. Justice is central to our salvation.

It's central to the cross. It's central to the gospel. It's central to justification where we are declared guilty. And justice is central to the last judgment.

We are all going to stand before the Lord Jesus Christ and he's going to judge us. He's also going to justify us because he's paid for our sins. But he's also going to judge and those who haven't turned to him will be punished.

And so justice is no little thing. It's central to the Christian faith. And justice is founded on speaking the truth and doing the truth. It's founded on truth-telling.

[12:54] Now we must go a bit further here and understand just the text here. You know, I gave you two big principles last week. And the third one is the last week I said it's a broad commandment and I said the negative, it's framed, usually framed, eight of the ten commandments are framed in the negative and it also implies the positive.

But another thing is you've got to look at the context and we've been doing that, the ancient context. And look at the context in the verse. It says, you know, the other ones would don't steal.

But this one, and don't commit adultery, but this one says basically, don't bear false witness against your neighbour. And that's very important. It's referring to your neighbour, it's referring to the covenant community, God's people there.

But the neighbour we learn from Jesus is not only those who round about you live there or the people of Israel or the church. It also includes the Samaritan, the outsider, the enemy, love your enemies.

And so what we see here, when you talk about your neighbour, we're talking about relationships again. The ninth commandment is relational.

[14:10] You don't speak untruth against your neighbour. You speak truth with your neighbour. And so this commandment is very personal because it's dealing with you and your neighbour and your friends and your family.

And what false witness does, it destroys relationships. It may not, in our context, necessarily put us in jail or the death centre, but it's about relationships.

And false witness destroys relationships, it destroys community, it destroys families, it splits up churches. It can be very dangerous indeed. And churches also gossip.

It's a great church when you don't have all sorts of factions. And I think I found the Church of England or East South Africa pretty good in that respect. Because sometimes you go into these churches and you've got at least two factions and maybe more than that.

And that is important. You know, if we go back a bit, some of you are quite young here, but if you're a little bit middle-aged we remember communism.

[15 : 17] Do you remember communism? Remember how their societies, there were these, not the SS, that's going back even further, but the KGB and all these, they were full of spies.

And you couldn't even be safe in your own household because children would report their parents and your neighbour would report you and everyone was scared. And they don't talk to each other. Just look at North Korea now. It's dangerous because, and it wasn't reporting crimes so much, you know, he killed her, stole my money.

It was reporting un-Marxist behaviour, not holding to Marxism or communism. Something like reading books that come from the West, seeing movies that come from the West and things like that.

It was stuff that was against the state. And it was fearful to live in a society like that. Or someone would report on you and you would, and then they would take you away in the night and you'd never know what happened to the person.

[16 : 19] Or they'd put you in jail or they'd put you in Siberia and you were cold and didn't get much food and things like that. It was, it was a society and no one trusted each other. And you can't build great societies in that way.

I mean, just look at North Korea today. It's the worst society in the whole world and the worst place for Christians to live as well. There's no joy in that country. Okay, you just look at their faces if you see pictures.

Now, there is actually a law there that when you're in public you have to smile. You have to pretend you're living in this communist paradise when you actually live, it's a living hell there.

And people are frightened of each other and if they can get across the border, they do. But then what they do is they kill the rest of your family or they put them in prison if you escape. So, so what we've done so far, just in the introduction, we've explained and expounded the ninth commandment as it is stated, bearing false witness against your neighbor and giving the background there.

It's sitting there. Okay, but now I want to live, to look at this commandment a little bit more broadly. Okay, and to deal with it how we commonly think of it.

[17 : 30] We commonly see this command as about not speaking the truth about lying and it is about that and I'm not going to, no, it certainly is about that.

And so, we think of all sorts of untruth, lying, deceiving, half-truth, gossiping, ruining men and women's reputations through falsifications, through libel and slander and spin and silence in the face of injustice or wrongdoing.

and so, it has a very broad range in scripture. Okay, so I want to comment on that, what we commonly understand about this commandment.

Okay, it's about lying. Okay, so, in its actual form and in terms of the Hebrew word here for lying, it's basically a lie, it's translated most carefully or accurately as a lying witness.

But, but, but it's much broader than just a lying witness and bearing false witness as I said. Hosea 4 says, uses a general word for lying. Okay, accuses the, the Israelites for swearing, lying, murder and so on there in that text.

[18 : 48] And lying includes big lies, little lies, white lies, fabrications, making up stories against people, dishonest speech, half-truths, deliberate ambiguity.

In many theological confessions, they don't want to state, they want to keep unity in the church and so they, they put the truth in ambiguous form so the people, this group, can say yes to the confession and that group can say yes but they mean completely different things because it's deliberately ambiguous.

deceiving with words is also forbidden, flattery, overstating what you've done, you know, if you have a CV, exaggerating all your accomplishments, that's also falsehood, that's also wrong and breaking this commandment.

You know, so lying is the failure to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. and we lie, the reason many of us lie is when we are confronted with something that we've done and so we lie about it.

We lie to the police or we lie in the court, we lie so that we don't lose any money or whatever it is like that. We protect ourselves by covering it up with lies and so on. We don't want to be shamed and lying in God's world has consequences.

[20 : 25] God's commands do have consequences if you're caught out. I'll give you one example. You may have said one example in our context where I teach at George Whitfield is plagiarism.

In fact, the other day I was marking this week the essays on it was about violence should Christians renounce violence instead of being and this one guy wrote and it was like he was a real scholar I couldn't believe this was him and his English wasn't his native language either so I was suspicious so I took the essay but fortunately he didn't deliberately plagiarize in the sense that he gave his references and so I went to the books he looked at and I found out he used some dictionaries who were large about 80-90% of the essay and he wrote out stuff word for word even all the references in the text from some Bible dictionaries and a dictionary of biblical imagination didn't even change it paraphrase it he wrote the exact words or he got his wife to type it I don't know who did it like that and I said this is and it's a guy I've got a high respect for and I love and he does this you know I don't know but plagiarism no doubt he was pushed for time and so he got stuff and just wrote it up that is breaking the ninth commandment it's plagiarism it's pretending that you're writing that when all he's copying somebody else's work and another example I can give you remember Volkswagen big story a year or two ago where there's strict laws in the US and in other countries about gas emissions diesel emissions okay so they've got these laws and people were suspicious about Volkswagen it seemed to give out a lot of these diesel emissions and but every time they tested they couldn't catch these guys because they passed the test until some students who were doing a master's degree in

California and so they tested they did their own test they took the engines not taking it into the laboratory and they measured this and they found they were about 18 times or something over the limit and then they were caught and they said why are they passing in the lab and what they found out in the lab is they had a software program and the software program I don't know it twisted all the data I don't know the details and so they were caught out and they lost their reputation they lost billions of dollars because they were cheating and cheating very badly and so it has real world consequences but going on further here in the ninth commandment I don't know what time the time is here okay and it doesn't just focus upon ourselves it focuses by talking about the neighbor on the neighbor because when we lie okay we can do it in false witness in the court or something like that but when we lie about a neighbor we so often destroy his or her reputation we say something about well John did that or Mary did that or your pastor did that and then it spreads around the congregation and meanwhile

Nick didn't do anything wrong but someone had it in for him and said something wrong and the rumor goes around and you destroy men and women's reputations and sometimes when you destroy a person's reputation they can never get a job again destroys them financially destroys their families and we hold wrong opinions about it so breaking the ninth commandment has very serious repercussions and a person's reputation is very important next to our belief in God next to our family I think the most precious thing that we have is our reputation that we have good standing and particularly in many cultures in the world your standing your reputation is vitally important and it's shameful to do something wrong because it ruins your reputation another thing we do in the ninth commandment is we gossip and that's quite similar to what I've said about destroying reputations lies about people something is not true and it goes around and it ruins them so we've got to be careful of gossip and repeating stuff that we don't need to know and that other person doesn't need to know even if it's true you know it may be true that you've done something you've had an abortion for instance and that's very serious killing a child and then you you gossip about it some of those things you know don't need to be told if a pastor counsels you and you share your heart or how you're struggling with this sin you don't tell your as the pastor you tell your wife and then she tells [25 : 47] Mrs. Smith and Mrs. Smith tells Jane and so is it's truth that you keep to yourself and you see that in the movies as well the psychologist or the counselor you may not tell others and even before a court of law and this is some special reason and so what we see here is the immense power of speech it's the power and we see this I mean our power to destroy people through speech but we also see the immense power of speech is that God uses his word to create the world and we use our word as I said to destroy things but we also see the power of the gospel the gospel is good news from God and the gospel has the power to change you to bring you into relationship with

Christ to change your behavior your thinking and so on so it is very powerful the word the tongue is very powerful as well

James speaks about the small member can set something on fire and have tremendous consequences we saw what a fire did in Neisner however it was caused or whatever destroyed something like 360 homes and families and things like that we see the tremendous power of the tongue you just go back if you hear any of Hitler's speeches and how he got the whole of virtually the whole of Germany behind him and he got people who were highly cultured had at least a formal Christian background he got these people who were educated they weren't people from the bush or anything like this and he got people who were doctors and lawyers and things who got into the army and joined the SS and they would go and hunt the Jews and would kill them he did terrible things and that's the power of speech and we could give you contemporary examples of how powerful speech is

I mean on the good side was Churchill rallying the British who were not ready for war or anything and they you know we shall fight them in the beaches and wherever it was there's a Churchill movie on at the moment as I've seen he had tremendous power and we have that and preachers have power and preachers use the power of the tongue and the word to build our great congregations and we like to listen to good preachers the tongue is very powerful so all this comes under the ninth commandment but I'd like to conclude by just looking at that second passage reading today because I had a look at it this morning because I had some stuff in here and I just went through it and it's amazing how much Paul speaks about truth in chapters 4 and 5 of Ephesians I'll just go through it very briefly here he speaks in 4:11 about apostles prophets evangelists pastors and teachers they equip the saints so here are men with a word ministry who are equipping the saints who are the Christians and equipping them for their role their job the work of ministry they do not my work but your work of ministry to build out the body ok and he starts now we don't have apostles and prophets now and but if you go back to chapter 3 you don't need to turn there Paul says that you can perceive my insight into the mystery of Christ which was not made known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to the holy apostles and prophets by the spirit and so the mystery of Christ is revealed to the apostles and the prophets we don't have them in our church some churches believe they're still around but those apostles and prophets wrote the new testament they spoke of Christ which was written down and so what we have although we don't have we don't call Nick a prophet or apostle he is speaking the words of the apostle and prophets which are written down he's speaking the gospel he's speaking new testament truth and those words build up the congregation and so we are called through the evangelist the evangelist preaches the gospel and you and I believe that and we become Christians and then we taught by pastor teachers and that's built up and we are built up the body is built up until we all attain the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the son of God to mature manhood to become mature and then he goes on and says that word that is spoken to us by the pastor teachers builds us up and prevents us being tossed to and throw in the waves like a cork bobbing in the waves and blown about by every wind of doctrine so that word of truth that is spoken here in this church and in your connect groups or bible studies whatever you call them helps you to be established in the truth and so when people bring false gospels here prosperity teaching whatever underlining the deity of christ whatever it is you are grounded in the truth and you can resist false teaching which would tear you away from christ then it goes on here i think i'll just follow here i've written it all out but okay and then he says that we are what in verse 15 he says here rather than being tossed around by false doctrine we are to speak the truth in love we are to grow up in every way into christ and so what happens in the ministers and others are speaking the truth but we are to speak the truth to one another and build each other up and encourage each other up and then we jump to about verse 21 and it's pauses there the truth is in jesus okay so that's the focus it focuses on jesus and so the result of that we are to put off the old self and all the sort of corruption that we had in our desires and speaking and be renewed in the spirit of our minds and put on the new self created of the likeness of god in righteousness and holiness okay so we we focus on the truth as it is in jesus put off the old life and we put on the new self which is characterized by righteousness and holiness and then he says therefore having put away falsehood false speech each of each one of you are to speak the truth with his neighbor for members one another so that's what we have to do we have to speak the truth with each other and build each other and encourage each other and then he says let note verse 29 let no corrupting talk come out

of your mouths but only such as is good for the occasion is good for building up as fits the occasion that it may give grace to those who hear so the negative side we have to put aside all the corrupting talk and we use our tongues to build one another up not to tear each other down not to say I'm better than you to build each other up very important people need encouragement exhortation and we to give and we to speak graciously give speak that it may fit well first it fits the occasion that we must look around when we speak to people you know someone may be hugely depressed or something like that we must sort of focus and pick up the vibes and things that we speak in the right occasion if we're at a funeral or something we don't make lots of jokes and things if we're speaking about

[34 : 16] God's judgment we don't laugh and things like that our speech must match circumstances and where people are and we and it says speak that we may give grace to those who hear we don't do that sort of thing and we corrupt in our speech then we grieve the Holy Spirit Paul says here he says let all bitterness and wrath and anger and slander be put away from you our speech can be bitter it can destroy people it can bring them down we must not use our speech in that way at all then just jump into chapter 5 Paul says in a context there of impurity and sexual immorality he says let there be no filthiness or foolish talk nor crude joking no dirty jokes so often men demean women in their jokes that must not be part of Christian speech at all we must build up women we must respect them they are wives our mothers our grandmothers they should be respected they bear children the future generation they do much work in many societies far more work than men and sexual harassment is often verbal in the office jokes about women point parts of their body and spoken about either good or bad or whatever it is it's a huge problem in our society and so we must watch what we do with our speech and then it ends in positively we go on here

Paul says we must not be drunk with wine but be filled by the spirit or with the spirit addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs singing and making melody to the Lord with our heart our speech must be full of the word the psalms spiritual songs hymns and things like that which uplift us and uplift others and it's quite interesting here he says we must speak to one another because we often just think if we're singing or something like that we're singing to God and he says we are doing that because he says singing and making melody to the Lord with all your heart but we are also addressing one another and that's why we sing in church because it does uplift each other it teaches us the faith it teaches us how to pray if we're singing psalms or addressing each other psalms we learn how to pray we learn how to praise God and so and then he says right at the end here giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we must have a spirit of thankfulness because God has given us everything he's given us salvation he's given us a husband or wife he's given us children a mother father grandmother there's so much to be thankful you don't have to be rich to be thankful often the rich are the most miserable not always but we have so much to be thankful so a spirit of thankfulness is what characterizes a Christian and so we must be thankful for little or much that we have and we must be thankful to the Lord he is our savior and then just finally we must also use our words to speak of our savior to speak the gospel to others to bring them the knowledge of Christ and so we must proclaim the gospel in situation Jesus did that all the time he spoke the truth depending on the occasion and we must speak

God's word as befits and as those of us who are parents still or have children and I see a lot of kids in the church we as parents are obligated we must tell the gospel ourselves to the children we must read bible stories to them we must lead them in prayer before they go to bed or around breakfast or supper or whatever you're doing it they need to know the truth it's not for them to suddenly they're 15 now you must discover the truth for yourself from little we are to tell them the truth and to give them the content of the bible the stories of the bible and pray and show them our dependence upon God and bring them as you do to church themselves and so we are to speak the truth in love we are to build each other up and encourage each other speak grace to one another and always rejoicing in God and Saviour always giving thanks to him for he's given us so much and above all he's given us the Lord

Jesus Christ father we just thank you that you've given us tongues you've given us language that we could know you that we can speak to each other and build each other up and and that and lord particularly we just focus here on the children lord bless our children and use us to bless our children by loving them and by speaking the truth the gospel and your word to them that we may see another generation in st.

[39 : 53] Mark's of strong Christians and bless Nick and his ministry and the elders and deacons the leaders in this congregation bless them as they minister your word as well in Jesus name amen