

9th Commandment

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- [0 : 00] I wonder if you recognize this quote. Those of you who are under 30, unless you're very well read, and I'm not questioning that you may well be very well read, but may have difficulty, but I'll read it and see if you recognize it.
- If it falls to me to start a fight to cut out the cancer of bent and twisted journalism in our country with the simple sword of truth and the trusty shield of British fair play, so be it.
- I am ready for the fight. I'm trying to see if I see any glances that would suggest recognition. I see one or two who would seem to be recognizing these rather pompous words.
- Well, they are the words of former Tory minister Jonathan Aitken, words that he spoke at a press conference in 1995 as he announced his decision to sue the guardian for libel.
- Now, in the subsequent court case, which he effectively initiated, he went on to break the Ninth Commandment on numerous occasions, and consequently he was then subsequently jailed for perjury.
- [1 : 24] He broke the commandment that is our concern. This morning we read in Exodus chapter 20 and verse 16, you shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.
- A memorable guardian headline reporting the events ran something along these lines. He lied and lied and lied and lied.
- And the words were so simple that even the guardian was able to have that headline without a single spelling mistake. He lied and lied and lied. Now, I want to consider this commandment.
- You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor by asking two questions of it. The first question is, why should I not break this commandment?
- Why not? If we paraphrase the commandment, we'll notice in a moment why God uses this particular wording, or in any case we'll suggest why He does, but if we were to paraphrase it in simple language, we could say the commandment is, you shall not lie.
- [2 : 44] Why not? Why not? Why shouldn't I lie? Why should I not break this commandment? That's the first question. And we'll give three reasons in answer to that question.
- The second question is, how can I break this commandment? In what way can I, or in what way would I be guilty of breaking this commandment?
- So let's consider the first question. Why should I not break this commandment? Three reasons. The first one is as follows.
- Because of what God is like. Remember, if you do, when we first began considering the commandments probably a few months ago, and we had an introductory sermon on the commandments and highlighted some purposes that we could identify for the commandments, we noticed that one of the purposes of the commandments, certainly one of the effects of the commandments, is that they reveal truth about the author.
- In the commandments, we learn about God and what He is like. The rules that God lays down, the commandments that He establishes, tell us what He is like.

[4 : 07] We can discern what He is like from the rules that He lays down. Now, we know that's true in other circumstances. I don't know if any of you have had opportunity to see one of these reality shows, the world's strictest parents.

And, you know, rebellious teenagers from the UK are sent to Africa or America and are placed in this home for a couple of weeks. And often it begins with the parents handing out a list of the rules of the house.

Now, if I had that list of rules, and I read those rules, even if I'd never met the parents, never had occasion to converse with them, but I had that list of rules, I could have a pretty good idea of what they were like.

Now, obviously, there's a problem with men and women, human beings, because often we're hypocrites. So we might have a fine or grand list of rules that we don't live up to. But nonetheless, in a measure, those list of rules would give me a good indication of the author and what the author was like.

Well, how much more with God who is altogether truthful? And when we read the commandments, one of the things that it enables us to do, and this is going over old ground, is that it teaches us what God is like in a measure, in considerable measure.

[5 : 27] In this command, this ninth commandment, which is our concern this morning, in this command, we learn a very big truth about God. And it is simply this, that He loves the truth.

He loves the truth. We have just sung in Psalm 31 how the psalmist addresses God as the God of truth. Redeem me, O Lord, the God of truth.

The psalmist describes Him in that way. He addresses Him in this way. You are the God of truth. It's not simply that you're partial to the truth. It's not simply that you like the truth. It's not simply that you commend the truth.

The psalmist says, you are the God of truth. Truth is essential to the very being of God. And that being so, there flows from this necessary consequences.

One necessary and reasonable consequence is that all that God says is true. God Himself makes that claim for Himself.

[6 : 30] In the book of the prophet Isaiah, and in chapter 45 and verse 19, and we could find multiple examples of this, but limiting ourselves to this one occasion, what does God say?

I, the Lord, speak the truth. And of course, it must be so. He is the God of truth. And so, consequently, all that He says is true. Another consequence of this is that He desires truth in us.

Again, we think of the psalmist. We think of David in Psalm 51, a psalm familiar to us, as he would confess his sin before God. And as he addresses God, he addresses Him with these words, Surely you desire truth in the inner parts.

You who are the God of truth, you desire truth in me. And not simply lip service to truth, but in the inner parts. That is the kind of God you are.

You are a God of truth, and you desire truth in your people. There follows also what we were thinking about with the children. This God of truth hates lies.

[7 : 41] We don't need to repeat the passage that we read there in Proverbs chapter 6. Those things that God hates, those things that God detests, lying lips. He who lies, that he would harm his neighbor, detestable to God.

Why should I not break this commandment? Why should I not lie? Why should I not bear false witness?

Because the God I serve is a God of truth. He is a God who loves truth, a God who desires truth, a God who hates falsehood.

This should be a fundamental motivation for keeping this commandment. Not simply, well, that's the rule, and so I've got to keep it. But because of who God is.

But another way of answering the question, why should I keep this commandment, or why should I not break this commandment, is the following answer. because of what God would have us to be.

[8 : 51] And I'm thinking here of God's purposes for us. And we can think of God's purposes for us in creation and also in redemption. First of all, in creation, we are created, all of us, without exception, regardless of whether we are Christians or not, we have all been created in the image and likeness of God.

And whatever that means, and it means a great deal, it certainly means this, that God, in creating us, intends us to be like Him, in some sense, in some very important sense.

It is God's intention that we be like Him. And of course, in this matter, this matter that is our concern this morning, this matter of truthfulness, God would have us be like Him.

We are to be truthful. We are to be honest. We are to be lovers of truth and speakers of truth. We are to be, indeed, haters of lies and falsehood.

That is God's purpose for us, even in creation, a purpose that extends to all, without exception. But let's consider His purpose in redemption.

[10 : 05] We are redeemed. We are saved, by grace and through faith in Jesus Christ. But why? Well, we can certainly say this, that we might be remade in the image of Jesus.

That we might be remade in the image of the one who said of Himself, I am the way, the truth, and the life. The one of whom the prophet Isaiah could prophesy.

And we know these familiar words, spoken of Jesus. He was assigned a grave with the wicked and with the rich in His death, though He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth.

And we have been saved that we might be remade like Him, like Jesus, like the one in whom no deceit was found. We know how His enemies sought every opportunity to identify of only one example of deceit, but they could find nothing.

And so consequently, at His trial, they had to retort to lies and falsehood, for they could find none in Him. We are saved. You are saved. If indeed, you have put your trust in Jesus as your Savior, you are saved to be like Him.

[11 : 23] We read in Colossians chapter 3, words that express it much more eloquently than anything that has been said thus far this morning. And let's just remind ourselves what Paul says in writing to the Colossians.

Colossians chapter 3 and verses 9 and 10. We read as follows. Do not lie to each other.

The very matter that we are considering this morning. Do not lie to each other. Why? That's the question we've begun with. Why? Do not lie to each other since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self.

And then, listen very carefully. Which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. This very point. Why should I not lie? Why should I not give false testimony?

Because of God's purposes for me. Very particularly here in redemption. Why should I not lie?

[12 : 29] Why should you not lie? Why should you not give false testimony? Because of who you are. Because of who God created you to be. Because of who God saved you to be.

To lie is beneath you. It's beneath you as a Christian. It should be abhorrent and repugnant to you. You have risen above that.

You are a child of the King. You are a son of the God of truth. It's not for you to lie. Don't go back into the gutter from whence you came. Lying is beneath you.

It's beneath you. It denies who you are. Maybe almost at a slight tangent, if I could just say a word to parents and I include myself, there is no greater gift that you can give your children than a love for truth.

Be very careful as you bring up your children that truth should be understood by them to be a precious thing. That they would indeed hate lying. That they would love truth.

[13 : 36] That they would see that to lie is a serious and a grave matter. You do them a great service. Why should I keep this commandment?

Because of who God is. God, the God of truth. Because of who God intends me to be. As He has created me and as He has redeemed me through the work of His Son, Jesus Christ.

But then, there is a third answer to this first question. Why should I not break this commandment? And it brings us to the very language of the commandment. And the third answer is this. Because of who my neighbor is.

Because of who my neighbor is. We were commenting just in the passing a few moments ago that the commandment is not, as we might have expected, simply, you shall not lie.

When you think of some of the other commandments, they are eloquent in the manner in which they are so concise. You shall not steal. You shall not commit adultery.

[14 : 38] You shall not murder. And then we come to this commandment and it's a little more wordy. Not very wordy, but it's certainly a little more wordy. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

And we might say, why didn't God just say you shall not lie? Would that not have been simpler? Would that not have been clearer? Would that not have been more inclusive in terms of covering all manner of lying and deceit?

Why has God phrased this commandment in this particular way? You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. I don't know for sure the answer to that question, but I wonder if there is not in God's intent in phrasing and designing the commandment in this way or with these words, is there not the intention of reminding us of the importance of our neighbor?

The commandment in the manner that it is framed reminds us of the importance of others in God's priorities. The commandment helps us to realize what attitude God would have us hold to our neighbor.

Our neighbor is important. It's not just about me and God. The Christian life isn't just about me and God, me pleasing God and God satisfying me.

[16 : 02] Remember, I don't know if it still exists, but it comes to mind Scripture Union Bible reading notes for teenagers some years ago. And I should stress that I commend Scripture Union for the work they do in producing Bible reading notes.

But this particular example that they had for teenagers was called JAM, Jesus and Me. And even that title for some reason always grated me somewhat.

Jesus and Me. It's all about Jesus and Me, me and Jesus. But that's not what it's all about. It's not just about me and Jesus. It's about my neighbor and how I relate to my neighbor and that is important to God.

And that is stressed in this commandment. It's not just don't lie, but don't harm your neighbor in your lying. Your lying has consequences. It hurts people and very particularly it hurts your neighbor.

And God says, I don't want my people to be about hurting their neighbors. Our neighbor, your neighbor is precious to God.

[17 : 06] Your neighbor is also made in the image of likeness of God. He may be hostile to the gospel. He may be an atheist. He may be a thoroughly objectionable character, but he is made in the image and likeness of God.

And he is not to be harmed by us. Rather, we are to seek his good. We know how Jesus himself broached this subject on more than one occasion.

Not originally, but really reminding his haters of what had already been taught by God in the Old Testament. Remember how he exhorted the rich young man to love your neighbor as yourself.

Remember how in his dialogue with an expert in the law in Luke's gospel when the expert in the law, thinking himself very clever, posed the question, and who is my neighbor?

Well, we know the answer that Jesus gave as he related the parable of the good Samaritan. Who is my neighbor? All those who surround me, those whom God places in my path.

[18 : 09] Some I may like, while others I may be repulsed by. But all are my neighbors, and I must seek their good, not their harm. So again, I ask the question, why should I not lie?

Why should I not bear false witness or give false testimony against my neighbor? Because my neighbor is precious to God, and my obligation is to love him and to do him good.

That in response to the first question that we posed concerning why I ought not to break this commandment.

But there is another question that I want to pose. And the next question that I suggested at the very beginning or mentioned at the very beginning was, how can I break this commandment?

How can I break this commandment? Now, the first way in which we can break the commandment is clearly stated for us there in the commandment itself.

[19 : 25] You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. The context there is very clear. The language is very clear.

The context is a judicial one. And the command, the prohibition, is that in that judicial context when you are called as a witness in a formal setting, you are not to tell a lie.

You are not to bear false testimony in a manner that would prejudice your neighbor. We know that in supplementary instruction, legislation on this matter, God makes it clear how serious a matter it is to give false testimony.

Indeed, within the Mosaic legislation, if you were found guilty of perjury, of giving false testimony in a court of law, the punishment that you were due is the punishment that would have been given to the one who would have been prejudiced by your false testimony.

To explain that, if it was a case of murder and the one accused of murder would have lost his life had he been found guilty and you give false testimony, then when that is discovered, the punishment that you would be due would be the death penalty.

[20 : 44] That gives a flavor of just how serious a matter it is, of how serious a matter God considers this matter of false testimony to be.

So that is clear, that is one obvious example of how we can break this commandment. But we can go further and give other examples.

Often what we do with the commandments is precisely this, we identify perhaps what is clearly up front, what is forbidden, but then we can by good and necessary consequence derive other examples or other applications of the commandment.

And we can legitimately do that in this occasion as well concerning this matter of not lying or of not bating false testimony. Let me just suggest one or two other ways.

This is an answer to the question or continuing to answer the question, how can we break this commandment? By false testimony in a court of law, but also in other ways, other ways that approximate to that that are under the same general umbrella, some of which, indeed the ones we'll mention are explicitly mentioned to us in the Bible.

[22 : 07] Another way that we can break the commandment is by slander or by false reports against our neighbor. That might not be in a court of law, it might not have legal consequences, but it will be something that damages or harms our neighbor.

If we can just mention or briefly read a couple of verses that speak of that, and I don't want to have you jumping from verse to verse, you can simply listen if you wish to one or two verses that I read in this regard.

In Leviticus chapter 19 and verse 16, what do we read? Do not go about spreading slander among my people.

Do not go about spreading slander among your people. In Exodus itself, just a chapter or so following the chapter where we have the commandments, in the first verse of chapter 23, do not spread false reports.

To speak or to spread consciously and deliberately a lie about somebody with the intention, the result, of doing them harm, this is slander.

[23 : 15] Notice how we can be guilty of spreading a false report. So you may not be the author of that false report, but you are equally guilty as you would spread what you have heard from others.

Of course, there, there is a duty of investigation, we might say. You may hear something about somebody and you are duty-bound before you repeat it.

Indeed, you may determine that even if it's true, it's not helpful or a blessing to repeat, but you certainly at the very least have a duty to investigate whether what you have been told is true.

And if you carelessly repeat what you hear from another, on the basis, well, I was told that it was true, you are guilty of slandering somebody or may well be guilty of slandering somebody.

So slander is another way very much related to this commandment or prohibited by this commandment. Perhaps another way is in the area of gossip.

[24 : 23] This maybe hits home a little more because when we think of the obvious or immediate prohibition of perjury in a court of law, perhaps most of us, perhaps all of us are able to comfortably sit back and say, well, that's got nothing to do with me.

I've never done that. Maybe even when we think of slander we might be able to sit back and say, well, I really don't think I've ever been guilty of that, of deliberately with the purpose of harming somebody, made something up and lied about somebody else.

No, not guilty. But moving on to this other very related manner or area where we can be guilty of breaking this commandment.

And again, the Bible speaks eloquently and often on this matter. Unlike slander, gossip may be true. I think slander by its very nature is not true.

What is being said about the person simply isn't true. But gossip, what you say, may be true but harmful. And it must be because of our fallen nature, we do have, and I think if we were honest, I think we'd all recognize that we do have a perverse fascination for gossip.

[25 : 37] As I say, the Bible speaks often on the matter. Perhaps the book that speaks most repeatedly would be in the book of Proverbs. And if I just share with you, I suppose, a medley of verses from the book of Proverbs that will give us a flavor of the Bible's opinion on this matter of gossip.

And beginning with this strange fascination that we have for it. What does the author of the book of Proverbs say in chapter 18 and verse 8? The words of a gossip are like choice morsels.

They go down to a man's inmost parts. It speaks of the delight that we have in hearing and of treasuring gossip and of course so often of repeating it.

And when we do, when we are guilty, when we are guilty of gossip and of breaking the commandment that we have before us in this particular way, the consequences are very serious and grave.

It involves betraying a confidence. It involves breaking trust that we have with others. Again, if we just notice how Proverbs speaks on this matter. Chapter 11 and verse 13, a gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret.

[26 : 58] Gossip and gossiping destroys friendship. Again, chapter 16 and verse 28 of the book of Proverbs, a perverse man stirs up dissension and a gossip separates close friends.

friends. Gossiping fuels conflict and quarrels among brothers, among friends, among Christians. Chapter 26 and verse 20, what does the writer to the Proverbs say there?

Without wood, a fire goes out. Without gossip, a quarrel dies down. In this matter of gossip, one author has coined a rather memorable phrase concerning gossip.

I don't know if you've ever heard this before, but I leave it with you. The jawbone of an ass was a killer in Samson's time, and it still is.

So, you might want to just ponder on that one and on the truth and the wisdom of that. Simply don't do it. It is so damaging and hurtful, and it is a manner in which we break this particular commandment.

[28 : 09] We could go further, and I think legitimately when we think of how we can break this commandment, we could go further and state that all lying, all deceit in its many different forms, and of course it has multiple forms, and it would be little value in going and giving example after example, but simply to make the point that all lying is a manner in which we are guilty of breaking this commandment.

The commandment, as we stated a moment ago, by good and necessary consequence, forbids all kinds of lying and deceit however we dress it up. We speak of little white lies in the political world.

We're familiar with the language that people use of being economical with the truth. We hear of dodgy dossiers. I think it was Churchill who spoke of terminological inexactitude.

That's quite difficult to say, but again, just clever and pretty ways of dressing up what is forbidden by God. These are a few ways that we can break this commandment.

As we draw things to a close, we thought briefly about why we should not break this commandment. Because of who God is, because of who God intends us to be, because of who our neighbor is and how precious our neighbor is in God's sight.

[29 : 43] We thought very briefly about manners in which we can break the commandment by perjury, by slander, by gossip, by lying in all its many and varied forms.

But as we do draw things to a close, if we are to take this commandment seriously, if we are to determine not to be guilty of breaking this commandment, if we are to stop lying, what are we to do?

Well, Paul gives instructions to the believers in Colossae. We've already read the verses in the first part of chapter 3 of Colossians. And there we noticed a few moments ago how Paul exhorts the believers there, do not lie to each other.

But he doesn't leave it there. As he would continue to give instructions for holy living, he then goes on to say a few verses later, let your conversation be always full of grace.

So what Paul is saying is leave a sign from your conversation, lying and deceit, all that would be harmful to others. Leave that aside and in its place let your conversation be always full of grace.

[31 : 00] This is the God-given alternative to lying. I'm reminded of a wee framed earthy proverb I saw in a house in Peru.

Roughly translated, the proverb, if that's the word for it, was as follows, if what you are about to say is not to bless, then just shut up.

It seems like sound advice. If what you're going to say is not to bless, then better just to shut up. But we can't leave it there. We must say one more thing.

The law, as it is intended to do, condemns us. This commandment condemns us. The law makes sinners of us all because we are guilty.

I am guilty and you are guilty. We limited ourselves a great deal in terms of giving different examples because I think it's unnecessary. We all are able to identify different ways in which we are guilty of lying, of deceit, of one kind or another.

[32 : 06] We are all guilty. We have all broken this commandment. We break it constantly. What to do? What to do as lawbreakers? What to do as those who stand condemned under this commandment?

Well, it brings us back to where we began. It brings us back to our friend Jonathan Aitken. You may remember a couple of months ago I was preaching at King's College Chapel here at the university.

The following week there was another guest preacher. Who was the guest preacher the following week? Well, it was this self-same Jonathan Aitken. Now, you might say, well, what's going on?

Is this man a terrible hypocrite? Guilty of perjury. He lied and he lied and he lied and now here he is in pulpits preaching and exhorting others. Is this not the kind of hypocrisy we rightly are repulsed by?

Well, no, it's not. And it's not for this simple reason that Jonathan Aitken is a forgiven lawbreaker. Yes, he broke the law. Yes, he was guilty of breaking this law in a very heinous and serious way.

[33 : 16] But he recognized his guilt. He confessed his guilt. He sought forgiveness for his guilt. He was granted forgiveness for his sin. He is a lawbreaker like you and me but a forgiven lawbreaker.

And so, that too is what we must do. We who consider and in all honesty before God can only say guilty as charged.

Stand condemned under the weight of this commandment. What can we do? Well, we too and you too must recognize your sin and seek forgiveness for it in the only place that you can do so.

In the person of Jesus Christ who died for sinners, who paid the punishment for our lawbreaking. Come to him. put your trust in him. Be forgiven by him and enjoy the forgiveness that only he can give.

Let us pray.