

## “The Power of Speaking the Truth” (Exodus 20:16)

We are in the series of “The Call to Undivided Intimacy,” studying the Ten Commandments. Today we will study the 9th Commandment “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.”

We will first study the meaning of this commandment in the original context, and apply it to our context. And I’ll unpack the deep desire of God, revealed in this commandment. The title of today’s message is “The Power of Speaking the Truth.”

### **1. Without Truth there is no Justice**

The primary meaning of this commandment in the original context is “You shouldn’t give false testimony in the law-court.”

The initial purpose of this commandment is to protect the communal life of Israel.<sup>1</sup> If a community cares for justice, truth telling is necessary. Justice will never be there without truth.

It seems the people of Israel also had various kinds of troubles among one another. In order to solve these problems, the judge listened to the testimonies of two or three witnesses and passed judgement on each case. By doing so, they were protecting each person’s property and their human rights. This is the wisdom God had given them.

This practice is explained in details in Deuteronomy 19.

#### Deuteronomy 19:15, 18-19, 21

One witness is not enough to convict anyone accused of any crime or offense they may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

<sup>18</sup> The judges must make a thorough investigation, and if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against a fellow Israelite, <sup>19</sup> then do to the false witness as that witness intended to do to the other party. You must purge the evil from among you.

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Mitchell, “Ten: How the Commandments Set Us Free,” Kindle, 2016, Location 1088

<sup>21</sup> Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

It required two or three witnesses, not just one. And if the judges found out that the witness told a lie, they had to receive the same punishment which the accuser was charged. The penalty was equal to the charge — life for life, eye for eye, and so on.

This is not the license to revenge. The purpose of this law is to protect you from false testimonies, and to prevent you from giving false testimonies.

So this commandment not to give false testimony prohibits false testimonies in the court. And this prevents an innocent person from being accused of a crime. Then, the community can keep justice.

What lesson can we learn here? Don't judge people without valid evidence.

You may not be called to be a witness in a court. But actually we quite often have the occasions to testify for others in our daily conversations. And God tells us not to give false testimonies in these occasions.

We give a false testimony, when we gossip, slander, libel, exaggerate, give white lies, and half-truths.<sup>2</sup>

We shouldn't tell a lie about someone. We shouldn't judge someone just by subjective impression, without really knowing the person or examining the case. To embellish a story is also to give false testimony.

It is also false testimony to go along with everyone else's story because you fear being singled out and attacked, although you know that actually what everyone is saying is wrong.

Some people intentionally start a nasty rumor in order to hurt someone or cause trouble for someone. This is also a false testimony. Those words destroy justice in a community.

We will look at one more case in the OT quickly.

### Leviticus 5:1

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 1152

If anyone sins because they do not speak up when they hear a public charge to testify regarding something they have seen or learned about, they will be held responsible.

This says, if someone has evidence of a public charge against anyone and holds back that evidence, he will be held responsible.

How can we apply this? We lie when we cover up other's failure, unfinished work. It's a lie when we pretend not to know why it happened, who did it, and so on.

When truth is replaced by a lie, deceit or dishonesty in any relationship, that relationship loses its value.<sup>3</sup> This commandment is like a safeguard for social justice. This is a great gift from God to protect our relationship.

## 2. We have a problem

This commandment basically means, "Do not lie."

A lie is "a statement of what is known to be false with intent to deceive." A lie is "any attempt to distort, shade, or misrepresent the truth."<sup>4</sup> Telling lies damages us, hurts our relationship, and destroys our community. We don't like to be told a lie.

Time magazine, on 5 October 1992, said: "Sixty-three percent [of Americans] have little or no confidence that government leaders talk straight. Seventy-five percent believe there is less honesty in government than there was a decade ago."<sup>5</sup>

According to Pew Research Center in Washington, DC, at December 14, 2017, Only 18% of Americans say they can trust the government in Washington to do what is right "just about always" (3%) or "most of the time" (15%).<sup>6</sup>

We don't like to be told a lie. And we know it's not good to tell a lie. We know it very well. Why do we hear a lie? Because someone tells a lie. So, are we telling the truth always?

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Horton, "The Law of Perfect Freedom," Kindle, 2004, Location 3500

<sup>4</sup> Mark Mitchell, 1071

<sup>5</sup> Michael Horton, 3459, 3649

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.people-press.org/2017/12/14/public-trust-in-government-1958-2017/>

“When we grow up, sometimes we need to lie. If you want to survive in the adult world, you can’t tell the truth always. Who wants to be told the truth all the time?”

Can you see? Here we have a huge problem. We don’t like to be told lies. But we think we need to lie sometimes. That’s why we hear lies sometimes.

What is this commandment speaking to us? This Commandment makes us to be able to experience true freedom as God’s covenant community.<sup>7</sup>

Truth is not some abstract ideas, or idealistic concept; but it’s an attribute of God.<sup>8</sup> It’s who God is. Jesus said, “I’m the truth. (John 14:6)” “God in His essence is truth.”<sup>9</sup>

This commandment reflects the character and nature of God. And it must be ours too because we, all humans are created in His image.

God created us in His image, he shares His ability to communicate the truth. As God’s redeemed people, in God’s covenant community, we speak the truth because we are members of one another. Through this commandment God keeps us from treating our friends, fellows or neighbors in a vain, empty and superficial way or bearing false witness against them.<sup>10</sup>

We can be set free from a vain, empty and superficial way of living. And we can live in the truth, and we can live out the truth. We demonstrate the truth, and people will see who God is in us, among us, through us.

### 3. Telling a lie

“We tell stories to show we’re victims. We tell stories to convert people to our opinions — especially our opinions about the people we don’t like. We tell stories to make people like us more than they like anyone else.”<sup>11</sup>

We see a story of Joseph in Genesis. He had ten older brothers. His brothers were jealous of him and hated him. They sold him to the Ishmaelites.

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<sup>7</sup> Mark Mitchell, 1090

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 1167

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 1106

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 1196, 1169

<sup>11</sup> Christina Hergenrader, “Love Rules: A Study of the Ten Commandments,” Kindle, 2016, p150

But they made it look as if Joseph was devoured by some ferocious animal. And Jacob, their father believed their lie.

Joseph was taken to Egypt. And Potiphar bought him from the Ishmaelites. Potiphar's wife took notice of Joseph. She was obsessed with Joseph and wanted to control him. But he refused. When Joseph wouldn't do what she wanted, she told lies about him to her husband, Potiphar. "That Hebrew slave tried to make a fool of me. I was saved only by my screams. He ran out, leaving his shirt behind! See this is his shirt." And he believed her lie. Joseph was put into prison.

We tell lies to control people, to manipulate their mind. By telling lies we are trying to make the world a convenient place for us. We may feel more comfortable, easier, happier. But the fact is, they are not real, but vain, empty and superficial. Like you are living in a day-dream, a make-up story.

And once you start to live in lies, you are bound by lies. You have to make other lies to cover up your first lie. And this is endless. I know it very well because I have done this.

It is said there are two kinds of lies.<sup>12</sup> One is "self-centered lie," we lie in order to make ourselves look better to others.

We tell something blatantly dishonest so that people may see we are good. We can easily find those on Facebook, Blog, Instagram. Or we designed to make someone look bad. We talk something to reduce another person down to our narrative.

The other is "other-centered lie," we lie in order to avoid hurting someone else's feelings.

Jeremiah 6, "From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit. <sup>14</sup> They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, Peace,' they say, when there is no peace." (Jeremiah 6:13-14; 8:10-11).

At the time of Jeremiah, Jerusalem was the city to be punished, for she is wicked through and through. She pours out evil like a fountain! Her streets echo with the sounds of violence and destruction (Jeremiah 6:6-7). So Prophets were supposed to say "O Jerusalem, cleanse your hearts that you may be saved. How

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<sup>12</sup> Mark Mitchell, 1121

long will you harbor your evil thoughts? (Jeremiah 4:13)” But instead, they said “Peace, Peace.”

Sometimes we lie because we’re afraid. We fear not only the truth but also the consequences that come with the truth.<sup>13</sup>

By saying “Peace, Peace,” they tried to avoid facing reality. They tried to forget the fact that God’s judgement was coming near. If they had told the truth, probably many people would have been upset. They would have been hated, and people may have attacked them.

If “other-centered lies” are accepted, there will always be the danger that our words contain lies. We should always question whether what a person is saying to us is his real intention or an “other-centered lie”. Even if it’s their intention to smooth the relationship, do lies really make our human relationships smooth?

“Other-centered lies” destroy our relationships. It will make us lose trust in one another. It will hurt others, and make them feel uneasy. So God says “Don’t tell a lie.”

#### **4. Breaking your word**

This is the story Michael Horton shared in his book, “The Law of Perfect Freedom.”

At the age of ten, his neighbor, Mr. Hanson asked him to work for him. The job is to clear rubbish in his yard and stack wood moving from one corner to the other. And he took the job. On the first day, Mr. Hanson watched his work, every move and told him not to do that way and do this way. He was very frustrated. He walked off the job on the second day. “If you don’t like what I’m doing, Mr. Hanson, you can find someone else to do it!” He said directly.

He returned home, expecting to find some sympathy for his situation. But he was told to go back, apologize to Mr. Hanson, and finish the job. “You don’t have a right to walk off the job like that,” his father said sternly. “You made a deal and he has already paid you for your work.” “I’ll give him the money back,” he replied, but his father was set on this “a deal’s a deal” thing and said, “Son, it doesn’t matter how difficult he is— you’re responsible for your work, not for his

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 1130

attitude.” Reluctantly, he returned. Mr. Hanson was as difficult as ever, but he finished the job and was rewarded with a sense of having done the right thing.

He learned the priceless lesson. This is what God requires of us: to fulfill our deal, to be faithful to our work, and to honor our word.<sup>14</sup> Don’t break your words. Don’t lie.

## 5. Speaking the truth in love

Why is speaking the truth so important? Why does it matter if we lie? It matters, because it affects our relationships. Without truth there is no justice. And justice matters for our relationships.

It is not until we know for sure the person always tells the truth that we can truly listen to them. It is not until we know for sure the person always tells the truth that we can truly have a relationship of mutual trust. Only if we know for sure the person always tells the truth can we be with the person in peace always.

However, speaking the truth is not a license to say whatever is in our mind. It is possible to speak the truth in a sinful and arrogant way.

The truth can damage relationships when we say something that is true and honest to a neighbor but at the wrong time or in the wrong context or with the wrong attitude. The truth must be spoken in love.

“Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ” (Ephesians 4:15).

How can we speak the truth in love? One way to do this is to speak it in the love that God has for us. When someone comes to know the truth, this can be a painful and sorrowful experience. We can come along side the person as they experience this, carrying this burden together. We can speak the truth with this kind of consideration.

Another way to do this is to speak what is helpful for building others up, speak words that may benefit those who listen. Sometimes we need to say something difficult to say. But we can say this in a way that builds the person up, instead of blaming him or her. We can speak in a way that helps the person to grow in character.

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<sup>14</sup> Michael Horton, 3199

Fundamentally speaking the truth in love is not the matter of mastering technique. It is not something you learn in the course “How to make a good speech.”

The matter is what you have in your heart. Matthew 12:34 says, “The mouth speaks what the heart is full of.” If we want to speak the truth in love, first we must remain in love, God’s perfect, infinite, unconditional love. And we ourselves must live in the truth, walk in the light of God, not in the darkness. When we are in love and live in the truth, we can speak the truth in love.

## **6. The Power of Speaking the Truth**

The words we speak have power. If we use them correctly, we can build trust, we can benefit those who listen, we can build others up, we can bring righteousness and love into the society. If we use them wrongly, we may destroy relationships, lose trust, hurt others and make them feel uneasy.

How can we start it? We start it by being honest, being true to ourselves, and true about ourselves. We can practice honesty in a simple way. It’s to say, “I made a mistake. I was wrong. I’m sorry.”

If we are honest, we see the fact that we’re all guilty of some form of lying.

God illuminates our heart with the light of truth. The Holy Spirit convicts us of righteousness, sin and judgement (John 16:8). He points out what we don’t want to look at about ourselves, the part which used to be hidden in the darkness will be revealed. This is because God is telling the truth in love. God is not pointing out your sin in order to trip you up, or bully you.

The Holy Spirit is guiding us into all the truth (John 16:13).

What is the truth then? Jesus is the truth (John 14:6).

Jesus died on the cross in order to save us, who are sinners. Jesus received all our pain on the cross, the pain which we feel when we come to know we are sinners. Jesus carried our suffering on the cross on our behalf, the suffering in which we struggle.

The Holy Spirit leads us to Jesus. He connects us to Jesus. He helps us to experience the resurrected life of Jesus. He heals you, recovers you, brings you up. He transforms you into the Christ-likeness with ever-increasing glory.

Speaking the truth in love comes from living under His grace.

His grace will not only forgive us, but His grace will also make us love the truth and transform us into truth-tellers in love, in whatever we do.<sup>15</sup>

In the power of speaking the truth, God led us to his grace, forgave us, and He has been transforming us. “Experiencing the Life, Changing Lives.”

With the power of speaking the truth, we lead people to his grace. We care for each other. We love each other. With the power of speaking the truth, we can make a new culture, which overflows with love, joy, justice, hope, healing and peace.

Jesus is the truth. And your story with Jesus reveals the truth. The truth will be unpacked each time you share your experience of Jesus.

God’s story is the one we all need to hear. When a friend starts complaining, gossiping, sharing their anxiety, fear, anger, this is the reminder for us that they need to know the truth.

The first thing we do is to listen to them, not to speak, not to condemn. Let them speak their true thoughts, their real life. By listening, we show our love. And lead them to the truth, Jesus, by sharing your story, your experience of his mercy, his forgiveness, his transforming power. Speak the truth, how God is working in your life, how God is transforming you.

The power of speaking the truth will heal their veins of pain and bring peace greater than our understanding. “Experiencing the Life, Changing Lives.”

We must remember this truth always: We belong to God. You belong to God. He loves you. Let our stories show this sacred identity, I’m a child of God. I’m loved by him. He cares for me. He is pleased by me always. Let us tell the world the greatest story ever, “God loves me, and God loves you.” And we will see the power of speaking the truth.

Today we studied the 9th Commandment “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.”

This is the invitation to live a truthful life. God hates lies because He knows telling lies damages us, hurts our relationships, and destroys our community. Without truth, there is no justice.

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<sup>15</sup> Mark Mitchell, 1211

In the power of speaking the truth, God led us to his grace, forgave us, and He has been transforming us. With the power of speaking the truth, we lead people to his grace. We can make new culture, which overflows with love, joy, justice, hope, healing, and peace.

It's the call to undivided intimacy.

**For LifeNet groups and Personal reflections:**

1. What kind of power do our words have?
2. Have you ever experienced finding out that what someone told you about himself turned out to be a lie? How did it affect your relationship with the person?
3. Have you ever had someone come along side you, and tell you the truth in love, though it was something difficult for you to hear? Or have you ever had someone told you the truth to build you up?
4. Why is it difficult to be honest before God sometimes? What is our heart condition like when we can't be honest before God? Read Psalm 32:3-5.
5. Tell your story about God's truth, mercy, comfort and encouragement.