



## The Deep Truth

SERIES: *The Good Life: Finding Freedom in the Ten Commandments*

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I wonder if we see how powerfully destructive, lies can be? Back in 1899 four reporters from four different Denver newspapers didn't have a story for the morning paper. So they decided to make up a story—to lie! They made up a story that the Chinese government was in talks with American businessmen bidding to take down the Great Wall of China so a roadway system could be built. The story spread from American newspapers to Europe and eventually to China. This is not fully confirmed, but it's believed that by publishing this lie, it led to the Boxer Rebellion where several thousand people died as the Chinese were concerned about Westerners coming into their country and many westerners lost their lives.

This is an extreme example. I also wonder how powerfully liberating the truth can be? In February, Alex Rodriguez admitted to taking banned substances. In a recent interview with ESPN he said: "I did take a banned substance...I do remember thinking in my bed in Arizona, it was like, What am I doing? Wake up. Stop being selfish. And you get to a point where you get tired of being stupid and selfish and not being honest with yourself...So I am sorry. I apologize to the fans...there's absolutely no excuse...It feels so good coming out and being completely honest...You take this gorilla and this monkey off your back, you realize that honesty is the only way...The truth needed to come out a long time ago, and I'm glad it's coming out today...The truth will set you free."

What's the strongest muscle in the body? The tongue! James 3:5: "...the tongue is a small member; yet it boasts of great things. How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small fire!" "Sticks and stones may may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." That's not true! Words can hurt you, especially lies. But some words, true words, can heal you and free you.

This is our 9th sermon in a series on the 10 Commandments. We've got the 9th commandment today: 10 words in English, 5 words in the original Hebrew, words that I believe the Lord wants to use today to set you free

from the lies you tell, the lies you live, and the lies you've been told.

Deuteronomy 5:20: **"And you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."**

A columnist for *Time* magazine wrote: "The injunction against bearing false witness, branded in stone and brought down by Moses from the mountaintop, has always provoked ambivalent, conflicting emotions. On the one hand, nearly everybody condemns lying. On the other hand, nearly everyone does it every day."

We have a problem with the 9th commandment. Do you break the 9th commandment every day?

This morning, I want us to interrogate the 9th commandment and as we do, let's ask the Holy Spirit to interrogate our hearts, expose the lies, and set us free. There are four questions we want to ask of this 9th commandment: What does this commandment mean? Why was it given? Why do we break it? How can we keep it?

### I. What does this commandment mean?

**"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."** What does this mean? First we need to know that the primary context of this commandment is the courtroom. Courtrooms in the ancient world were different from today. Before forensic evidence, everything hinged on the witness testimony and usually there was only one witness. After the Exodus, the Israelites improved this system, requiring at least two witnesses.

The primary context of this commandment is the courtroom because the courtroom is the place where the truth counts the most, it's the place where lying can cost the most. Lack of truth and justice in the courtroom leads to lack of truth and justice in the wider community.

But this commandment extends beyond the courtroom. It calls us to be true witnesses in all of life. Before God we are always under oath. God commands us to not lie in any context. Every day of ordinary life our hand is

on the Bible and we're commanded to tell: "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth."

What kind of lies do you tell? There are many different kinds of lies: whoppers, white lies, half-truths, fibs, gossip lies, exaggerations, misleading silences, lying on paper, lying at home, lying at work, lies that make you look better, lies that make others look bad. What kind of a liar are you? Are you a self-focused liar (tell lies to make yourself look better) or an others-focused liar (tell lies to avoid hurting others)? What this commandment means is that we're never to bear false witness, we're never to tell lies. But there are exceptions. Read the Bible story of Rahab.

## II. Why was this commandment given?

Why is this different from the other commandments? Why add to the command "against your neighbor?" Why not just say it like the other commands, "Do not steal," "Do not lie."? Your neighbor needs you to speak the truth, your neighbor needs you to be a truth-teller. We can't have healthy relationships, we can't have community without truth telling. "Why was this commandment given?" For community. Lies damage relationships and destroy community. But truth-telling, 9th-commandment-keeping, allows community to flourish.

Lewis Smedes said: "Truthfulness is an invisible fiber that holds people together in humane community. When we cannot assume that people communicating with us are truthful, we cannot live with them and trust that they will respect our right to the freedom to respond to reality. And if we cannot trust each other with respect to this basic right we've lost our chance to be human together in God's manner. Speak the truth, be the truth, for your truth sets others free."

Truth: the "invisible fiber" that holds people together in community. The "why," the fiber, behind this commandment might be more important for us to understand today than in any other time in human history for two reasons: 1. Our culture doesn't value truth (Postmodernism). It's so much easier to break the 9th commandment in a culture that is fuzzy about the truth. 2. Most people don't have community. Dr. John J. Ratey, in *Spark*, wrote, "in modern life, people tend to have fewer friends and less support, because there's no tribe. Being alone is not good..."

How many of you don't have any family here on the

Peninsula? That's unique in human history. No tribe. This commandment is so much more important to keep in a fuzzy-truth, no-tribe culture like ours. Wherever and whenever lies have been told, community has been damaged.

What's one of the largest lies you've ever told? Think about it. What did that lie do to other people/community? This is why the Bible repeatedly tells us to be careful what we say. The Bible is big on truth because the Bible is big on people. Ephesians 4:25: **"Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another."** When we keep the 9th commandment we reflect what God is like: Father, Son, and Spirit. When we live as truth-tellers, we reflect God and we bring a little bit of heaven to earth. And the opposite is true. When we lie, when we break community, we pour fuel on the fires of hell. Hell is a place where nobody tells the truth. Hell is a place where nobody can be trusted, where community can't find any truth to stand on.

## III. Why do we break it?

Next question: why do we break it? It's clear to us that this commandment is given to us for our own good, yet we break it. Why do we do that? Think about a lie you told this week, any size lie. Why did you tell it? It seems to me that we lie when we're afraid of something. Deep down, somewhere in the dark caverns of our heart, there's this control panel of fear that we have built and that motivates us to tell lies.

Pretty much all of our lies have this in common: we lie because we're afraid, afraid of losing something—losing approval or losing face. Your lies speak volumes about you. Your lies say something. Your lies reveal what you're most afraid of.

What do your lies say about you? What are you so afraid of? Is it losing somebody's approval, love, respect? Are you afraid of losing certain comforts and securities? Are you afraid of losing control? Are you afraid of people discovering the lie that most of us live: that the person you pretend to be on the outside is not who you really are on the inside?

Why do you lie? Why do we break this commandment? Because we're afraid.

But I think there's an even deeper reason. Ultimately, we don't tell the truth because we don't believe

the truth. Do you know why the Son of God came to earth? Do you know why Jesus died? Jesus died to tell the truth about you. Even though at his trial the people bore false witness against him, Jesus kept the 9th commandment to hell and back, he bled to bear true witness about you. And if you and I really believed this truth, we wouldn't be so afraid any more. We'd quit living lies and we'd start telling the truth. You are so flawed and full of lies that Jesus had to die for you, and you are so loved and accepted that Jesus was glad to die for you.

Here's the truth about me and this sermon series. I'm guilty of breaking all of these commandments: "You shall have no other gods before me"... "You shall not covet"... "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor"... The deep truth is setting me free. I'm more sinful than I ever dared imagine, but because of Jesus I'm far more loved and accepted than I ever dared dream.

Christianity is much more realistic and much more radical than other religions. Only Christianity tells you the truth about who you are. Only Christianity tells you that you are deeply flawed and deeply loved at the same time. Other religions ask you to clean up your flaws in order to be approved. Only Christianity gives you a God who knows "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth" about who you are and everything you've ever done and yet he still calls you his "neighbor" and promises to never stop loving you and caring for you.

Why don't we keep the 9th commandment? We don't tell the truth because we don't really believe the truth/gospel/Jesus. We just don't have a category for believing that we can be this messed up and still be so loved and accepted.

#### IV. How do we keep it?

So, our final question, how do we keep it? Three very simple ways... yet hard.

First, tell the truth to yourself. You're never going to be able to tell the truth to your neighbor until you can tell the truth to yourself. Most of us spend most of our day listening to and believing lies without even knowing it: lies other people tell us, lies we tell ourselves, lies Satan whispers in our ear. Some of the lies are: "There is no hope." "Things will never get better." "I am worthless." "My life doesn't make any difference." "Nobody really knows me or

loves me or cares about me." "I'm alone." "I could never be forgiven." "God is not in control."

John 8:44 says that Satan is a liar, the father of lies. And Satan would love for you to believe these lies. What lies has Satan told you about yourself or other people? You must stop listening to the lies. You've got to cross examine your lies. You must look at your lies in the eye and say to them: "Lies, what have you ever done for me? When have you helped me, when have you loved me, when have you given to me so that I might be better off?" You'll see that you must never listen to them again.

Do you know how you overcome the power of a lie? With the truth. The Bible is a book that bears true witness about who you are and this life you're living. Romans 8 speaks all the truth you'll ever need to silence the lies. Let your lies shrivel under the hot sunshine of Romans 8:

**"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!"...the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us...we know that for those who love God all things work together for good...What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?... No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."**

Years ago George Orwell wrote, "In a time of universal deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act." This first application point is simple: tell the truth to

yourself, but it's revolutionary because most of us don't do it. Be revolutionary. Develop the revolutionary habit of silencing the lies in your head by telling yourself the truth that's in your Bible. Maybe camp out in Romans 8 for awhile.

The second, simple way to keep this commandment: tell the truth to your neighbor through the power of the pause. Most of us would do a lot better at keeping the 9th commandment if we simply learned to pause for a moment before speaking. Let's look at this in a few contexts.

**a. Truth-telling without love.** The spirit behind this commandment is love, not punishment. There are some people and some churches that speak lots of truth, but no love. Pause before you speak truth to your neighbor and check yourself: "am I speaking this truth to love or to punish?" Sometimes you need to tell the truth with a tough love that costs you. Honesty: a best policy that costs sometimes.

**b. Gossip.** Gossip is easy to do, it doesn't always feel like lying, but most of the time it is. It certainly isn't bearing true and loving witness. Gossip is destructive. "Gossip kills three: the one who speaks it, the one who listens to it, and the one about whom it is spoken." At a potential gossip moment pause and ask yourself: "Would I say this about Mark Mitchell if he were standing right here?"

**c. Your work.** Whatever lies people tell in your line of work, your responsibility is to tell the truth in your work: advertising, education, biomedical research, finance, politics, homemaking, construction, job searching. It's easy to lie at work because everybody else does it. Don't do it. At work, start pausing before and ask yourself whether or not you're being a truth-teller.

Use the power of the pause so that you can better tell the truth to your neighbor. Most of the time, you simply need to pause and remember that you have nothing to prove by telling lies. Jack Miller said: "You don't have anything to prove, to us or the world. The work is finished at Calvary, and that work has unlimited meaning and value. Keep your focus there." When you're tempted to lie, you're forgetting Calvary. You're trying to prove yourself rather than remembering that Jesus proved himself for you on the cross. Pause. Refocus on Calvary. And speak the truth in love to your neighbor.

**d. Forgiveness.** For some of you, recently or a long time ago, someone bore false witness against you and it rocked you. You're not alone. Jesus knows. Others of you in this room need to ask for forgiveness. It's time you come clean and ask for forgiveness. And some of you here this morning don't need the forgiveness of a human. For the first time in your life you need to ask for God's forgiveness. You don't have a relationship with God. You've turned your back on him, you've denied him, you've been living a lie. Is there hope for you? Can Jesus forgive you, can he accept you and be in relationship with you after all you've done to him?

Christ comes to you. Will you ask for forgiveness? Will you believe the truth? Will you follow him?

*This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.*