

Whatever is True

7th in a series on The Ten Commandments

Leaders Guide

1. Read Exodus 20:16 and paraphrase the ninth of the ten commandments.

Don't tell lies.

2. Given the wording of verse 16, to what kind of a setting does this commandment seem to be referring? Why might that be important?

A legal proceeding of some kind. Some translations talk about "false testimony", while others use "false witness". In either case, it sounds like something from a court room. Our legal system depends on honesty and openness, so that makes sense. In fact, we insist both that what people say be the truth, but also that they reveal all the facts when asked.

3. In Pastor Steve's sermon, he pointed out that the Jews have two options for how they would approach telling the truth. What were they?

a) The truth is more important than people, so we should just tell it like it is and let the chips fall where they may. One is not tempted to lie or tell a half-truth in this approach.

b) Determine the truth and then find a more graceful way to say it. In this approach, the dignity and worth of the recipient is weighed in the balance. The truth should be presented in such a way that it edifies the receiver.

4. Does one of these two seem more in line with the Ten Commandments than the other?

Both have possible good and bad aspects. The first is honest and open, but may be very hurtful, while not being beneficial. The second can end up being watered down and misunderstood. As always, it is critical that we seek God's guidance through the leading of the Holy Spirit in everything we do and say. If our goal is to reach out to our fellow man as God would want us to act within a Christian community, we will be given the words to say when the time comes.

5. Pastor Steve used Ephesians 4:25 – 5:2 as the primary Bible passage for the sermon. Let's start with Eph. 4:25. Read it and try to figure out why telling the truth is so important.

Not telling the truth disrupts unity, undermines trust, and destroys relationships. If our goal is to live together in community, then we must have a mutual trust that is built upon a history of integrity in everything that we do and say.

6. Eph. 4:26-27. When is anger a good thing?

When it is an appropriate response to an inappropriate situation, such as witnessing obvious child abuse and informing the authorities. If your anger causes you to go into action and to right a wrong on God's behalf, then it is a good attribute.

7. Eph. 4:28-32. What do these verses have to do with no bearing false witness? Don't these verses go well beyond our topic of not bearing false witness?

If we call ourselves "Christians", but live in a way that is not reflective of the Bible, then we are living a lie for everyone to see. We are being dishonest with ourselves and with those around us. Our daily actions should reflect our relationship with God

8. Eph. 5:1-2. How are these two verses related to what we just said about the preceding five verses?

This underscores what we just said. We should be imitating Christ – loving others as he has loved us.

9. Once again, we need to look at this commandment from three different aspects. First, how do we read the ninth commandment as "Law".

Don't tell lies about someone or to someone. Tell the truth and represent things fairly. Do not swear falsely to your neighbor or oppress them by saying untrue things. Do not falsely manipulate people by misleading them.

10. How does it change as we look at the ninth commandment as a "Vow"?

We are to be a people of integrity, seen as trustworthy. There must be a sanctity to what we say (see Matt. 5:33 – 37. Let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no.). Lying divides us, but God wants us whole and living as community. If we are a disciple of Christ, there is never a time we are not a disciple of Christ. Thus, we must be truthful in all things, so that we honor the name of Christ as Christians.

11. Paul then takes the concept up to the third level – "Nature". How would you describe this implementation of the ninth commandment?

The Holy Spirit should possess us, including our tongues, so that we will be useful to God. Thus, we will want to build people up with everything that we say. It is not enough to say things that are accurate, you must use your speech to edify those in need: encourage them, listen to them, linger, interpret what they have said, touch them appropriately, and then encourage them with words that God will give you. Don't tell the truth for truth's sake, but use words to build up another.

12. Pastor Steve observed that when a culture is a "false witness" culture, people will believe the accuser, especially if the accusations are sensational, and not listen to the accused as they try to defend themselves. Does that ring true to you? Can you give examples where that has happened? How do we approach that as Christians?

In our society of tabloids, 24-hour news shows, and blogs on the Internet, the more bizarre and exaggerated the story, the bigger the audience. Your group should be able to present lots of stories about actors, athletes, and other personalities who have convicted by insinuation, only to be exonerated later (with much less fanfare). We need to put ourselves in the predicament of those in the situation and be more considerate and loving of all involved. To spread lies is as bad as to initiate them in the first place.