

**COMMANDMENTS 9 &10**  
**The Ten Commandments**  
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Tonight is the last in the series of five messages from the Ten Commandments. We've taken two commandments each evening. These are found in Exodus 20. Tonight we look at the last two. "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor." And "You shall not covet. You shall not covet your neighbor's house or his wife nor manservant, not maidservant, ox or donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

We have spent the last several weeks realizing that the Ten Commandments are divided into two parts. The first four commandments speak of our relationship to God. And the second part, the last six, speak of our relationship to one another.

The second part of the Ten Commandments guarantee to us certain foundational human rights. The right to social security – honor your father and mother. I don't know of any social security that comes than the security of a family that cares for its moms and dads as they move into old age. The commandment is not simply an admonition to young children. It was from both the Old and New Testament point of view understood to refer to the responsibility of adult children to their senior parents.

The sixth commandment guarantees life itself. It protects our life against violence and murder.

The seventh commandment protects the family. Protecting the family against the brokenness of adultery.

The eighth commandment protects a persons goods and property. What is legitimately acquired or earned or inherited. The right of that person to possess. Therefore his sole rights to dispose. The state does not have power to confiscate it without just cause nor do other individuals have the right of taking it from him or her.

The ninth commandment is the commandment which protects honor. It's saying to us that God is concerned that we have the fundamental right to our reputation. That someone does not have the right to take that reputation from us. Therefore the emphasis is upon not giving false testimony. It's primary focus in the Old Testament setting had to do with matters which would come before a court of law.

We have understood and taken this ninth commandment to have broader ramifications. Calling it you shall not lie. Therefore understanding that the spirit of the scripture is given that all of human communication might have certain safeguards and protection. If we're to communicate well to one another then we must have the safe guard that when communication is given it is being given in truth. And if we do not have this guarantee it makes all communication between persons difficult if not impossible.

One of the problems nations have in the east-west block between communicating with one another. The other does not believe that the one is telling the truth. There's a problem with trust. When untruthfulness or half truthfulness begins to poison our communication process it therefore breeds distrust and makes healing and reconciling work impossible.

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As we look at the Old Testament and the application of the ninth commandment. Prohibition against lying or bringing false testimony there's certain applications that the Old Testament setting has.

The primary setting for the ninth commandment had to do with courtroom proceedings and especially the matter of perjury. Deuteronomy 19:15-21. When there are charges against a person in a court of law that a single witness was no sufficient to convict that persons. The idea being that the witness of a single person cannot be sufficiently reliable. It must be corroborated. The witness may be telling the truth but maybe there was something wrong in his visual perception or his perception all together of the event that happened. Therefore in the Old Testament setting a person could not be convicted on the basis of one witness.

However two witnesses could get together and perhaps manufacture a story and convict a person. In that event the Old Testament, Deuteronomy 19, gave instructions that if a false witness were proven to have given false witness and premeditatively given that witness he will incur the penalty which he sought to bring upon the other person. If it was a murder case and through a false witness the witness perjured himself then the death penalty would be visited upon him if he was found to be the one who gave perjury. We know that even in the courts today obviously perjury is a very serious charge. There was no pity to be exercised against a person who gave a false witness.

We know that when we're appearing in court on a matter we are sworn to tell the truth. This holds for us as believers as well as any society where there is to be justice upheld there must be truthfulness.

Most of us do not face the matter of perjury because we're not found witnessing in court room setting. Let's talk about a more delicious application of the ninth commandment. That has to do with gossip.

Gossip is also a way of bearing false witness against someone. It is passing on information about a person that we may not have reliable information concerning. That is we're passing on hearsay evidence. Potentially damaging the person's reputation.

Most gossip is negative in orientation. We do not gossip good things about people as a rule. We gossip about their negative qualities. Therefore to pass information along about another person without having ascertained that that is reliable information finds us in a position of breaking the ninth commandment.

If we pass on communication of which we are not sure that can damage reputation.

A number of instructions on gossip in the Old Testament – Leviticus 19:16, Psalm 101:5, Proverbs 26:22. There are times I wish I could call back some very unkind things I've said. I can't think of anytime I wish I could call back a kind word.

Three gates: if you are tempted to reveal a tale to you someone has told about another make it pass before you speak three gates of gold. Three narrow gates. Is it true? Is it needful? If your mind gives truthful answers and the next is last and narrowest, Is it kind? If to reach your lips at

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last it passes these three gateways then you may tell the tale with no fear of what result the speech may be.

Is it true, is it needful, is it kind?

Another form of bearing false witness is giving a false impression or innuendo. Body language. The Proverbs describe in this way. 6:12-15 “A worthless person, a wicked man goes but with crooked speech, winks with his eye, scrapes with his feet, points with his finger, with perverted heart devises evil.” In other words he’s using body language. He may not speak the wrong thing but by facial gesture, shrug of his shoulder, creates a totally false impression.

Silence may also be a form of being false witness. If you have information in a courtroom proceeding or in a matter that will clear a person and you withhold information, then at that point you become a false witness. Leviticus 5:1.

There are times we recognize that to be silent is to be totally wrong. James Watt in his speech to the general council prayer breakfast made a powerful speech on the Villages that Lived Nearby. He talked about the smoke from the smokestacks from the incineration of Jews under Hitler. He said, The villages nearby raised not a voice of wonderment or question of what is that smoke from the stacks nearby? There were the villages next door but they failed to raise a question and before any of us ever fault those villages we need to ask if sometimes we do not keep silent when we should be speaking about issues. Silence.

If you have information about a matter that will clear another person and you withhold it you are bearing false witness.

Another form of false witness is flattery. Psalm 12:2-3. There’s a difference between flattery and praise. It helps obviously to recognize the difference. We ought to be quick in giving praise to persons. The difference is flattery is built upon thin air not having any concrete evidence of its reliability and its intention is to ingratiate you into somebody’s good favor. The praise is not sincere. It’s done with a manipulative purpose.

Christians are to rejoice however when false witness is made against them. When that happens to you, Jesus said, “Rejoice and be exceedingly glad for great is your reward in heaven.” He knew that the world would speak falsely against his own.

Kind of a personal prayer to pray in regard to our speech, “Let the words of my mouth be acceptable in thy sight.” Psalm 141:3, “Set a watch before my mouth, keep the door of my lips.” And Jesus says to us let our yes be yes and our no be no.

We know the importance of testimony from the New Testament where we see that Jesus trained a group of people to whom he was going to entrust the responsibility to be witnesses of his resurrection through all the world. It is on the credibility of the witness and the reliability of his people that the whole message of the gospel rises or falls. Either his disciples tell a lie or bear witness to the truth. Either they break the ninth commandment or they uphold it.

When therefore we read Acts 5 and find the early church gathered and Ananias and Saphira are smitten dead in a church service because they’ve told a half truth, an innuendo that they were

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giving all the proceeds of the sale of their property to the Lord's work, when in fact they had held back part for themselves, we are impressed with the severity of that judgment. But we ought to recognize that the reason why that severity was passed that in the early days God was in the presence of the Holy Spirit helping the church establish its credibility as true witnesses in the world. If the Holy Spirit would not allow in those early days any kind of incredibility or half truth to exist in regard to so small a matter as withholding something we can only guess how displeased God would have been if the disciples were saying Jesus had risen from the dead when in fact they knew they were bearing false witness.

That story in Acts 5 is a great comfort to us when we look at the reliability of the followers of Jesus. They bore witness to the truth and God severely judged those who attempted to bear his name who were not telling the truth.

When it comes to the matter of the ninth commandment we do have certain ethical problems in relating that commandment and touching base with it in our lives and contemporary culture.

One of the areas we struggle is how honest should you be with a person when you disagree with them or when you want to correct them. When you are writing a letter to a person, for example. We need to speak the truth we ought to keep in mind the scriptural admonition of speak the truth in love.

I use as a model the beautiful letter of Paul to Philemon. Paul needed to set forth some very plain facts to Philemon about how he should treat the runaway slave Onesimus who had become a believer. But rather than head oning him with the truth – and there are some people who take great delight and pride in the fact that they're brutally honest. There is a higher law than being brutally honest and that is being honest with love. One of the means of speech that God has given to us that whenever we need to correct somebody or break bad news to them we need to remember the apostolic pattern that whenever there is something to correct we need to first find, if possible, something to commend. It is on the basis of commending a person that we can then proceed to share with them what is wrong and to not share it in ways that absolutely destroy and tear down the person. When it is corrective speech our desire when we get done is to see the person restored and put upon a proper course and rightful course. There are some ways we have of being brutally frank that are not helpful in accomplishing the aims of truth. Truth in communication is really designed to facilitate relationships between people.

Another difficult matter in telling the truth is when you are very ill. Or maybe a member of your family is very ill. You do not know if they should be told what is their situation when they ask how ill am I. What should your response be?

We faced this with my wife's father who had cancer and it proved to be terminal. The girls had made the determination that he just wasn't strong enough to hear the news that this was a life threatening, a life taking situation. In looking back on that year everybody in the family has felt that if they had it to do over again they would have found a way to speak the truth in love. It kept people that whole year talking on surface levels rather than having opportunities for more deep and authentic communication. I think people in dying stages are a lot stronger than we give them credit for in most occasions.

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I don't say that because there is scriptural guidance for it. The scriptures do not deal with how to speak to persons who may be terminally ill. I've ministered to enough dying people who have gone out claiming their healing and are unable to communicate authentically to their family during that time to respect both the healing process and the dying process.

One other sticky area I see an application of the ninth commandment is the ethical question of what if you are hiding somebody and the totalitarian government comes seeking them and you've got them in your attic. Like Corrie ten Boom and the Jews she hid. Should you tell the authorities? Should you say no or tell the truth and for certain have their life forfeited. You may not know what you'll say until that time would arrive. I think when we face that issue obviously we are facing two commandments that are in collision. This is by the way, where justice comes in. When you're deciding a matter of law sometimes you have to competing legal theories that are at work which make it necessary for one to give some kind of a judgment as to where the scales of justice should be tipped.

The issue of telling the truth if somebody comes and says is so and so here and you know if you tell them yes that the life of that person is going to be taken from them. You obviously have competing with one another the sixth commandment and the ninth commandment. The sixth commandment guarantees life and the ninth calls us to truth.

What if in those rare instances these ethical principles are in collision with one another. That to tell the truth you forfeit a life. Or to gain a life you forfeit the truth. Where do you take your stand? On the truth or on life.

Interestingly enough scripture gives us an insight into that and surprises us and may tread on situational ethics in doing so. Scripture comes down heavy on the side of life in that instance. I'd point you to the book of Joshua the story of Rahab. Joshua 2. Spies come from Joshua, she hides them on her room under some stalks of flax and then proceeds to tell those who come searching for them that they have already gone. In the book of Hebrews she is commended for being a woman of faith.

On the other hand when the disciples faced the prospect of telling the truth of their faith in Christ and forfeiting their life or gaining their life they took their stand on the truth. The truth of I belong to Jesus Christ. I cannot deny my faith. The Lord himself had promised us in Mark 8 that if anyone would come after him we must deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow him. If we deny him before men he would deny us before the Father in heaven. So when the question comes will I deny my faith in order to save my life then the answer is the faith is greater than my life. God is greater so I give honor to the greater principle. If it's a matter of shall I in a totalitarian kind of situation seek to spare the life of another and deny that they're hiding out in my home, I think there is safe room in coming down on the side of life.

The tenth commandment, shall not covet. And there are seven things we're not to covet. Your neighbor's house, your neighbor's wife, manservant, maidservant, ox, donkey or anything that is your neighbors.

When you look at the Ten Commandments as a whole you'll discover that eight of the ten are stated negatively – thou shalt not. Only the fourth and fifth commandment are stated positively. We must remember that these commandments are coming to people that are out of their way out

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of bondage and into freedom. Part of preserving that freedom is to be given a list of negatives. I think that still holds true today. If we're to experience freedom we must recognize that there are certain kinds of things which if we violate will bring us into bondage. A permissive society will always fall of its own weight. Because it has no safeguards to protect fundamental human values, fundamental human rights. That is for example in our society why the issue of life in terms of abortion and euthanasia is so important. If we surrender the vital principle of life at either end of the spectrum either at birth or at death we negate the ability to move across the whole broad sweep of that issue. We begin to sacrifice the inviolate right to human life. And when you sacrifice that life then behind it come all the other rights – the right to family sanctity, the right to property, the right to bear true witness and the like.

Laws are given so that we might indeed have freedom.

This tenth commandment calls unlike the other commandments for an inner action. The second part of the commandments are clearly definable. You commit murder you're judged. You commit adultery. You tell a lie. But coveting is a matter of the heart and its not always a cut and dried case at all. You cannot convict a person for coveting. But this tenth commandment sort of wraps up the commandments. It says that the other negative actions toward persons springs from a coveting kind of attitude.

When you look at the tenth commandment you realize that breaking the tenth commandment is the tipping of the dominoes which inevitably involves the breaking of other commandments. If you're going to covet, other commandments in the second part of the Decalogue are going to fall.

1 Kings 21, the incident of Ahab and Jezebel wanting the vineyard of Naboth whose vineyard was next door to them. They wanted to tear up his vineyard and plant a vegetable garden. They coveted his land. What happened as the result of breaking the tenth commandment they set up two false witnesses who perjured themselves against Naboth so the breaking of the tenth commandment tripped the ninth commandment. Because there was perjury against Naboth he was executed which broke the sixth commandment. The end result was that they broke the eighth commandment – they stole his vineyard from his descendants. The tenth commandment caused to be broken other commandments.

Same thing happened with David in 2 Samuel. He breaks the tenth commandment of coveting Uriah's wife Bathsheba. That unleashed the breaking of the seventh commandment, the adultery. Which in turn triggered the breaking of the eighth commandment, stealing what was another's. Which brought about the breaking of the ninth commandment, when through innuendo David did the whole charade with Uriah and then sent him with a letter to seal his own death. The breaking of commandments on adultery, stealing, lying necessitated the death of Uriah which broke the sixth commandment.

What this tenth commandment is telling us is what Jesus tells us in Matthew 5 that we ought always to give attention to the matters within our heart. What the tenth commandment is doing in summing up all the other commandments is saying live within yourself. Live within your means. Accept where you are. Accept who you are. Accept what you are. Accept yourself. Do not seek to find fulfillment in that which is legitimately not yours. Property not yours, other person's relationships that are not yours. Other persons means of income, transportation,

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anything that is not yours. Do not seek outside of yourself but begin to see what God has done within you and accept where you are.

Paul is able to say in Acts 20:33 as he sums up his ministry “I coveted no man’s silver or gold or apparel.” That’s the same man who in Romans 7 said he was doing all right in the law until he came across the commandment “Thou shalt not covet.” And it slayed him.

But by the time he is done with his ministry he is able to say at the close, “I coveted no man’s silver or gold or apparel.”

He’s able to write the beautiful letter to the Philippians from the prison cell which describes this covet free kind of life. Joy in the place I am, joy in the people I’m with, joy in the circumstances I am in and joy in the person I am. To be able to arrive at a state of rest and contentedness in those spheres is tremendous.

What place are you in? Coveting the place someone else is in? The gospel through Christ can put a peace in our life that makes it possible for us to be joyous and contented in the place we are. Joy in the people I’m with. Working within the relationships God has appointed to us in life. Joy in the circumstances. How many of us wouldn’t change our circumstances if we had the chance. Joy. I have learned in whatever state I am to be content joy in the person I am. Joy in the person God made me and why God made me and how he caused me to be what I am. Joy in Christ. Contentment. Obviously contentment is the antidote to coveting. If we have the presence of the Lord in our lives and begin to realize he has placed us on this earth for a purpose and that God is working all things for the good in our lives we can see ourselves shaking free from desires of acquisition which disturb so many people’s lives.

Too many persons are looking for happiness rather than joy and contentment. When I define the word “happiness” I recognize it comes from an old English word “hap”. It was a verb. That’s how we got the word “happened.” Therefore person was *happy* when something *happed* to them. When something happened to them. Happiness was based upon the occurrence of favorable outward circumstances. Happiness based upon outward circumstances whether it’s health or wealth or any other kind of thing must always be transitory. When something negative happens to us then our happiness is gone.

But there is something deeper than happiness. That is the joy of knowing who we are, in whom we live, being content with the place we are, the circumstance we are in and having that we have all.

May God bless these words to our heart. I hope they stimulated your life spiritually and every other way.

[end of tape]