
The 9th Law of Life - part 1 of 2

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor" (Ex. 20:16).

If we were to attempt to enumerate and discuss all the ways in which this commandment may be and is broken, a whole volume of the PRESENT TRUTH would not be sufficient. But that is not necessary. We do not need to know all the ways of error, in order to keep in the right way. The man who is in search of treasure does not care to know the roads that lead away from it; all that he desires is to know the one road that will bring him to the right place. There are many wrong ways, but only one right way; and if we spend our time exploring all the devious paths of error, we shall never know the way of truth.

Yet in the present condition of things, it is really necessary to call attention sharply to some particular sins, while preventing the commandment of truth; because many people are so fixed in a wrong course that scarcely anything less than an earthquake will move them. They will listen to the commandment which forbids what they are doing, and will think that it commends their actions. One must put his finger upon the particular act, and say, "That is sin," before they will have any sense of wrong-doing. Thousands of people read the fourth commandment every week, and honestly think that they are obeying it in keeping Sunday; and many people take the name of the Lord in vain in various ways, without any consciousness of so doing.

Polite Lying

Custom lies at the foundation of a large amount of the violation of the commandments, the ninth no less than the others. What "everybody does" is supposed to be justifiable. The custom of the people is responsible for a great deal of what is known as "polite lying." God forbid that any of us should be any less courteous than we are; we certainly do not need to cultivate rudeness; but there is a false standard of politeness, and it is the one too often followed. The sort of politeness that depends upon falsehood is evidently not true courtesy; for "no lie is of the truth," and truth cannot come from lying. The same Scriptures that command us not to bear false witness, also tell us to "be tenderhearted, be courteous" (1 Peter 3:8); therefore we know that the most perfect courtesy is compatible with perfect truthfulness, and cannot exist without it.

Laziness and cowardice are at the bottom of a great deal of this "polite lying." It comes so easy for even Christians themselves to follow the universal custom of saying things to please people, and lightly to make promises that they do not expect ever to perform. The customer wishes the goods delivered immediately, and the professed Christian

tradesman will promise to send them, well knowing that he cannot do so for hours; yet he will not think that he has lied. He did not do so deliberately, but it was so easy to please the customer by making the promise, and then trust to some excuse to pacify him if he afterwards complained.

“The Accuser of Our Brethren”

Satan, who is a liar and the father of it, is also called “the accuser of our brethren” (Rev. 12:10). He accuses them before God day and night. Now Satan would know better than to try to make the Lord believe that a person has committed a sin of which he is not guilty. He well knows that no act escapes the eye of the Lord, and that it is useless to try to make Him believe that He has overlooked some fault. Therefore it follows that *in accusing the brethren before God, Satan confines himself to the things that they have actually done*. Where then is the wrong? Just here: “It is God that justifies,” and whoever lays anything to the charge of God’s elect brings false witness against God as well as against the brethren. When God has forgiven a man, it is a grievous sin to accuse the man of sin. Whoever brings up that fault and talks about it to the man’s detriment, is doing the devil’s work. There is no meaner way of serving the devil than to charge against a person the sin that he has confessed. As soon as a person confesses his sin, God calls him righteous; to call him guilty then is to bear false witness against both man and God.

Losing Confidence

How many there are who cruelly suspect a person, and always treat him as untrustworthy, because of some sin or sins in the past. It matters not that he has confessed his fault, he is still held under suspicion. Some will say, “We know that he has fallen once, and he may again.” Yes; and so may the critic. Just as though no man in this world is guilty, except the one whose sin has become public property! The fact that a man has fallen into any kind of sin is no evidence whatever in itself that he will do the same thing again. On the contrary if he has, under the influence of the Spirit of God, confessed his sin (and no one ever confesses a fault unless he is prompted by the Spirit), that is the best possible evidence that he will be on his guard. If a man has lied to me, and of his own free will comes to me and confesses it, I can have more confidence in him than ever before. When a sin has been confessed, we must beware of bearing false witness by our condemnation. It is a terrible thing to condemn where God justifies.

This applies when the sinner is ourselves, just as much as when it is somebody else. When we have confessed our sin to the Lord, He has forgiven it, and we have no right to go on condemning ourselves. We are not our own; we belong to the Lord: and,

leaving ourselves out of the question, we must not dare think that He has not forgiven, when He says that He has. How many there are who would place the most implicit trust in the word of a neighbor, but who do not regard it as a sin to contradict the Word of God, thus charging Him falsely.

Taking the Risk of Lying

If we ever repeat any story about anybody, we are never safe from the possibility of having lied. In the first place, there is always the possibility of being mistaken: our informant may not have known all the facts, and it may be that the person talked about has done nothing amiss. And in the second place, even if he were guilty, he may have confessed it to God, and been forgiven, before the story reached the ears of any other person. We may say that we certainly would not repeat anything against a person, if we knew that that person had repented; but as long as we do not know that he has not we are assuming all the risk of lying, both against God and man, when we take up a reproach against our neighbor.

Tale Bearing

Many people seem to think that any amount of gossip is justified, provided one does not tell willful lies. But the Bible says that the one who shall abide in the holy hill of the Lord is "he who does not backbite with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor does he take up a reproach against his friend" (Ps. 15:3). That is as much as to say that he who has taken up a reproach against his friend, will not dwell in the tabernacle of God. Aside from any other reason, it is a fact that it is next to impossible, if not quite, to talk about another's doings or sayings, and speak the exact truth. If we go so far as to tell his sentiments, or to judge his motives, then it is absolutely certain that we will be guilty of falsehood; for nobody can state another person's belief, or tell what somebody else thinks. We shall at least tell that which we do not certainly know; and whoever does that is to all intents and purposes a liar. If we tell the truth on any such occasion, it is only by accident. The love of making an accusation is so strong that we are often willing to run the risk of telling an untruth, rather than miss the chance of being the first to tell the news.

If we were called upon to testify in court, we should not be allowed to repeat what we had only heard. We must confine ourselves to what has come under our own observation. Even then it is difficult enough to tell the exact truth. Shall we dare be any less particular as God's witnesses than we are required to be as witnesses for the State?

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Unnecessary Words

There is a thing spoken of in the fifth chapter of Matthew, which is not usually understood as coming under the head of the ninth commandment, but is commonly referred to the third. Jesus says, "you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.' But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. But let your "Yes' be "Yes,' and your "No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one" (Matt. 5:33–37).

This refers to ordinary conversation, and not to the giving of testimony in a court of law. The Savior Himself gave testimony under oath, before the Jewish Council. The man who always tells the truth, and speaks nothing else can take a judicial oath without any fear. So the injunction, "Swear not at all," does not refer to this, any more than it refers to the taking of the name of the Lord in vain. The reference is to the strong assertions and pledges with which people are apt to back up their statements, in order to give them weight.

One will say, "If this is not so, you may have my head for a football." Now his head is not his own to give away, and he has no right to pawn his life in support of anything he may say. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof," therefore we have no right to pledge anything in heaven or earth in substantiation of our assertions.

Some people seem unable to make a simple statement of fact, unaccompanied by something to make it emphatic. In this they show a lack of confidence in their own word, and unconsciously proclaim that their unsupported word is not to be believed. Unfortunately that which they rely on to substantiate it adds no force to it whatever. **The Bible rule is to tell the simple, unvarnished truth, and let the matter rest there.** Thinking people will attach more weight to that than to anything else. They will understand that the person so speaking is accustomed to being believed, and that is the same as saying that he is accustomed to telling the truth. Anything more than the simplest statement of fact is of evil.

Practical Joking

Who has not heard people seek to justify themselves for some false statement made to some unsuspecting individual, by saying, "Oh, I was only in fun"? They wished to see how credulous the person was, and to make sport of his innocence. Then if any inconvenience or calamity results from taking the joke as a serious matter, the joker coolly throws the blame upon the deceived one, saying, "He ought to have known that I was only joking." That is to say, he ought to have known that you were lying; he ought to have been so well informed as to your reputation, that he would not suppose you to be telling the truth, unless he was especially assured of the fact. How lightly the practical joker holds his character and reputation!

Do you wish to know how the Scriptures regard the sort of "fun" that consists in deceiving an unsuspecting person? Read this: "Like a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death, is the man who deceives his neighbor, And says, "I was only joking!" (Prov. 26:18, 19).

Would you think it a light matter if a man should throw a lot of live coals into a crowded room? or if he should begin shooting on the street? or if he should scatter poison in the fields, or in the springs of water? Nothing more terrible can be thought of; yet that is just the character of the practical joker. The man who lies in earnest has at least some hoped-for object to gain; but the man who lies in sport proclaims himself a fool. There are no more dangerous pests in the world.

The Root of the Matter

But let us now come to the very heart of the subject. **If there is truth in the inward parts, there will be no outward manifestation of falsehood.** Christ is the Truth; therefore when Christ dwells in the heart by faith, none of the errors to which we have referred will be seen in the life; for He came to bear witness to the truth. (John 18:37). He is called "the Faithful and True Witness" (Rev. 3:14). To us is given the high honor of being classed with him; for God says: "You are My witnesses," says the Lord, "and My servant whom I have chosen" (Isa. 43:10). Further on we read: "This people I have formed for Myself; they shall declare My praise" (v. 21). God made man, just as He made everything else, to be a revelation of Himself. "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

The inanimate creation is true to its calling, witnessing for God. (See Acts 14:17). The everlasting power and Divinity of God have from the creation of the world until now has been clearly revealed in the things that He has made. Only man has proved false to his trust, defacing the image of God, and repressing the truth in unrighteousness. Yet even

in fallen humanity God's faithfulness and truth are to be seen; for every sinner is an unconscious witness to the long-suffering of God. The man who blasphemes the name of God, and even denies His existence, is a monument of His tender mercy. It is a fact that "all men are liars;" for while they were made in the image of God, to reveal His character, they exhibit the opposite.

Yet "we can do nothing against the truth but for the truth," no matter how much we try to, for God makes even the wrath of man to praise Him, and so the truth of God more abounds through our lie unto His glory. (Rom. 3:7). That is to say, God will see to it that His will is done, even in spite of man; and He will make them the agents of it; but they will have none of the benefit of it, because it is done against their will.

Strife and Falsehood

The commandments are all linked together; no one can break one of them without violating the whole. We have read that whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and in like manner we find that he is a liar as well. The Apostle James says, "if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth" (James 3:14). Christ is the truth, and He is meek and lowly in heart; now it is a fact that He is come in the flesh, so that *every man who cherishes or exhibits bitterness or wrath denies the presence of Christ in the flesh. He holds down the truth in unrighteousness.*

The Ultimate Test: Confessing or Denying Christ

In 1 John 2:22, we have the whole case summed up in a single question "Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ?" The one who denies that Jesus is the Christ, is a liar, and according to this question, nobody else is a liar. Now we have traced falsehood to its lair, and can identify it in its very beginning. If a man has not denied that Jesus is the Christ, he is not a liar; but if he has denied this truth, he is a liar though he never speaks. If you wish to stop lying, you must go to the root of the matter. You may tear off a limb here, and pluck out an evil habit there; but until Jesus is fully recognized and acknowledged as the Christ of God, the lying disposition exists.

Peter at one time denied the Lord, but he did nothing more than every man has done. "By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God" (1 John 4:2, 3). Moreover, "whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God;" and "whoever is born of God does not sin" (1 John 5:1, 18). By putting these statements together, and thinking carefully over them, *we see that every sin that we commit is a denial that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh,—a denial that He is the Son of God,—and therefore that it marks us as liars.*

We are told, "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (Rom. 10:8). Christ is the Word, and it is by His presence that even sinners live. So we read further: "if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (v. 9).

We can confess only that which already is so, it is a truth, therefore, that *Christ is come in the flesh of every man, and that whoever will confess His presence has salvation*. But to confess Christ,—to confess that He is come in the flesh,—is to say from the heart what the Apostle Paul wrote in Gal 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

To confess Jesus, therefore, is to be just as He was—to allow Him to dwell in us, and to speak and act through us. If this be the case, we cannot help telling the truth, since He is the truth; and if this be not the case, our whole life will be a lie. The man who has not Christ abiding in him cannot help being a liar.

So the only way any man can keep the ninth commandment is to give himself wholly to the Lord, to be used by Him according to His good pleasure. "It is the Spirit who bears witness, because the Spirit is truth" (1 John 5:6). Christ said: "you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me" (Acts 1:8). *Only as one has the Spirit of truth, can one be capable of telling the truth.*

Witnesses to the Truth

Jesus said, "For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth" (John 18:37). Again, "As My Father has sent Me, even so I send you." A great mistake that many people make is to suppose that they cannot witness for the truth unless they do a great deal of talking. Just as it is possible for a person to act a lie, so may one act the truth. *Often our testimony is a great deal stronger if we keep our mouth shut.* It is not necessary for us to be always in an attitude of "defense." We are not obliged, as witnesses to the truth, to answer every objection that cavilers bring. The Lord says, "Who is blind but My servant, or deaf as My messenger whom I send? Who is blind as he who is perfect, and blind as the Lord's servant? Seeing many things, but you do not observe; opening the ears, but he does not hear" (Isa. 42:19, 20). Jesus is the Truth and the Life. His life was sufficient witness to the truth; then *when He spoke, His words were faithful testimony, because He spoke just what He was.*

Receiving the Truth

It is a common thing to hear that such an one has received the truth. What is it to accept the truth?—It is to accept the Lord Jesus Christ as one's own personal Savior. No matter how correct anybody's belief is as to form, *he has not the truth unless he has Christ within*. Unless a man knows the Lord, he does not even know what the truth is; how then can he tell the truth? To accept the truth, therefore, is no light thing. It is not merely to assent to it, but to be transformed by it.

Believing for Another is Disbelieving God

This is an impossibility. We often here a man say, "I can believe for others, but I cannot believe for myself. I can believe that God forgives and saves my brother, but I cannot believe that He saves me." This is the worst sort of deception. It is real nonsense. One cannot play fast and loose with the truth in that way. *Whoever really believes the Lord, believes Him all the time*. The Lord does not change, and He does not display partiality. Therefore if He can be believed at all, He must be believed all the time. "He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son" (1 John 5:10, 11). Whoever disbelieves God to the slightest extent, makes Him out to be a liar. But God is not a liar. He "cannot lie." Therefore whoever charges God with lying is himself a liar. And whoever does not believe does this; therefore every person who does not believe that God has given eternal life, everlasting salvation, to him personally, is a liar of the worst sort.

Let no one persuade himself that he thinks well of God, unless he believes with absolute certainty that God saves him. Don't talk about believing that He will save somebody else, but not you. If God is true, you can believe Him all the time, when He speaks to you as well as when He speaks to somebody else. What would you think if a man should say to you, "I can believe everything you say, when I hear you talking to somebody else; but as soon as you begin to talk to me I lose all confidence in you, and think that you are lying." Would you think that he had a very high opinion of you? Yet that is the way many people regard the Lord, and they are not ashamed to talk such feelings out right before His face.

Saved from Lying

You say, "Well, then, I am lost, for I have lied all my life." No; you are not lost, for Christ has given Himself to you, and since He is the truth He saves you from all untruth. All His commandments are promises; so when He says that we shall not bear false witness against our neighbor, He means that He will see to it that we witness to the truth, if we but receive Him. Christ died for the ungodly, for all the ungodly; therefore the sum of all

lying, in fact, the only lie we can really tell, is to neglect this great salvation. It is the same as saying either that Christ has not died, or else that His death is not sufficient ransom. But, on the other hand, as soon as we accept salvation, our whole life of lying ceases.

It is not enough to be on our guard against falsehood; we must submit to the truth. We must by yielding bear witness to the fact that God is abundantly able to do all that He has undertaken. His word is true from the beginning, and is settled forever in heaven; therefore we may depend upon it. It will not fail us. God Himself has such confidence in it that He says to every one who takes Him at His word, "You shall not bear false witness." "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31, 32).

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