

The God of Truth

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[0 : 00] So what does this command mean? What specifically is being condemned here in this command? We see that word witness, you shall not give false testimony or false witness, depending on your translation, against your neighbor.

And so there seems to be kind of a legal component here. And if you look through the case law, Dave's been calling it the case law, that follows these Ten Commandments, if you turn over a few pages to Exodus chapter 23, you'll see that same kind of theme, this idea of how we present testimony in sort of a court context.

So reading the first nine verses of Exodus 23, do not spread false reports, do not help a wicked man by being a malicious witness. Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong.

When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd. And do not show favoritism to a poor man in a lawsuit. And he goes on to kind of talk about a different context, but it does, we'll see later, play in a little bit.

If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to take it back to him. If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there. Be sure to help him with it.

[1 : 15] So it doesn't talk about words, but it does talk about how you view people. If you're going to help someone's animal and you like them, then you should help someone's animal, even if you don't like them.

The person, not the animal. So continuing on verse six, do not deny justice to poor people in their lawsuits. Have nothing to do with false charges and do not put an innocent or honest person to death, for I will not acquit the guilty.

Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the righteous. Do not oppress an alien. You yourselves know how it feels to be aliens because you are aliens in Egypt.

So when we look at these commands, we see, again, this idea of being in a court, not spreading false reports, not being a malicious witness, or giving testimony in a lawsuit.

Don't give testimony in a lawsuit when they're trying to prevent justice. And there's definitely a theme of a court case coming through in these commandments. to be fair, to be just, to not be convinced by someone's power or their money or because there's a whole bunch of people that decide in one way, even if that isn't the right way.

[2 : 27] But as you look through here, the commandment isn't just don't lie. It actually gives the reasons why you might lie. So you have this idea in verse 22, or sorry, in verse 2, about peer pressure.

Don't follow the crowd in doing wrong when you give testimony. So why might you lie in court? Because everybody else is, they want, the public opinion is swinging this way. So regardless of the truth, everybody wants you to side in this way, so you follow that way.

Or you look at verse 3. Actually, verse 3 and verse 6 are an interesting juxtaposition. Verse 3 says, and do not show favoritism to a poor man in his lawsuit. So if you go into a lawsuit and there's a poor man and a rich man and they are trying to determine what's right, don't immediately say, well, the poor man is obviously going to be correct and so you side with him.

But verse 6 says the opposite. Do not deny justice to poor people in their lawsuit. So don't be so intoxicated by serving the rich that you deny the justice of the poor person. So don't show favoritism in a lawsuit either way.

Make sure that you are seeking after the truth and not just looking at the economic status of the people who are involved. Don't judge against people just because they're poor or just because they're rich.

[3 : 43] So don't be persuaded by someone's means, someone's wealth, but use your words, and in this case your judgment, because it's concerned in bringing out the truth.

And that's true in verse 8 as well, talking about not accepting bribes because a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the righteous.

So our words can be twisted. We can be twisted because of a bribe or because of financial gain or what we have to earn in the situation that we're in. And then verse 9 is all about how we treat aliens, people who are different, people who are strangers, who's an outsider.

So don't judge people, don't speak about them differently than you would about people who are part of your group, of your tribe. So these are kind of the set of laws that apply the ninth commandment.

And they apply it directly to the courtroom. But even in doing so, they show what's behind telling the truth in the courtroom. They ask us the question, why might we lie?

[4 : 48] What drives us to be untruthful? Why might we entertain what's actually a false accusation? It's because of maybe a prejudice or because of peer pressure, because of what we have to gain or what we have to lose.

And maybe it's because of fear or pride and it's not because of what's the truth. So this is really saying two things. It's telling us to value truth.

It's also telling us to value love, a concern for people equally. And that idea comes up here and that's even raised a little bit by the first text we looked at, the actual ninth commandment.

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. So again, the commandment is not just you shall not give false testimony, but recognizing that that testimony would go against someone, against your neighbor.

And that word neighbor is kind of loaded as we look through the entirety of the commandments. This is the first time that that takes place, but anyone reading it after having received all the commandments will immediately jump to a commandment given later on.

[5 : 53] One that Jesus and many others identified as part of the two great commandments, right? The first commandment being, you shall love your God, the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and all your mind.

And the second being like it, you shall love your neighbor as yourself. So there's this idea that of truth being told, but truth in relationship, truth in love.

We are to be a people of truth in love. And what we see throughout the Bible is the Bible's picture of words. It's understanding of how to use our words really is like a plane that has two wings.

And one of the wings is truth, and the other wing is love. And if we're missing one of those wings, well, you know how a one-winged plane flies. It doesn't fly very well.

And that is an idea that's reemphasized in the New Testament, too. We can think of Ephesians 4, 15, speak truth in love. But why is that? Why are we given this commandment to talk about truth, to bring out truth, but to do it in relationship, in love?

[7 : 04] It's because it's rooted in God's character, in God's nature. Another way to ask that question is, how does this commandment help us to reflect God? Remember the purpose of the Ten Commandments?

What's the purpose? Why were we given the Ten Commandments? Why was Israel given the Ten Commandments? Well, there's kind of two reasons, but it's like one of those Russian Meshukka dolls, that one reason nests inside the other.

You get one reason, and then it's a buy one, get one offer, and you get the other reason. The reason why God gave the Ten Commandments, remember what he told Israel just before he gave them, he said, you will be my people.

He gives them basically a commissioning that they will be the people that reflect God to the rest of the world, that they will be his people. They'll be a nation of priests that mediate between God and man and show the world what God is like and draw everybody into worship of Yahweh.

So that's the first part, that we're given these commandments to reflect God. But the second part kind of is nested in that because the bonus is that because God is our creator, because God is our designer, because we're made in his image, that when we are living in a way that reflects him, that is like him, that shows him to others, we're also living in the way that's best for us.

[8 : 19] The way that humanity is made to live. The way that we are, when we live in a way that reflects God, we're also living in the way that humanity is made to live. They line up together.

And so we're called to exhibit truth and we're called to exhibit love because God's very nature is truth and God is love, right? That makes us think of, there's a very famous verse written by the Apostle John in 1 John 4, 8.

God is love. And love is so central to God's character, but so is truth. In that same letter in 1 John, actually at the beginning of it, John writes this in 1 John 1, 5.

God is light and in him there is no darkness. Light here in that context is talking about truth, that God is truth. And this is one of my favorite verses.

In English it comes across a little bit soft, but in the original, in Greek, it literally would say, God is light, in him darkness is no, not, nowhere.

[9 : 21] The Greek is *ouk, oude mia, no, not, nowhere*. That's a double negative. And in English, those would cancel each other out and it would give us a very strange interpretation of what God is like, that he isn't very truthful.

But in Greek, that double negative is an intensifier. So there's absolutely no darkness, absolutely no deception, no truth, no untruth in God. So God is love and God is truth and that's why we're called to reflect him.

I want to emphasize that these don't just mean that God is loving or that God tells the truth or that he's truthful. Certainly those things are true, but love and truth, they are actually part of God.

They're not just descriptions of his action, they're part of his nature. If we are to reflect God, then we are going to have to reflect truth and we're going to have to reflect love.

But how do we fail in this? How do we miss reflecting God in this way? I don't think that any of us are going to be brought into a courtroom to give evidence of someone's character or to say, give evidence for a crime and we're going to purposely lie.

[10 : 26] I don't think many of us are going to be in that position and certainly not take hold of it, but I hope that we can see that this again, this command like the other ones, it transcends deeper and it's not just about lying in court, it's about misrepresenting someone else and how that shows a lack of regard for the truth and a lack of love for others.

And we can demonstrate this in a whole bunch of ways and in every instance when we misrepresent others, when we lie, when we don't hold to the truth, it's destructive.

Think of something even small like a polite lie or a petty lie, even exaggerations or embellishments. You know what I'm talking about? Like those polite lies.

Polite lies are when you, that lie isn't just socially acceptable, it's almost socially warranted. You need to lie because to tell the truth is not polite.

So someone comes up and they invite me to a party and I say, oh, I would love to go. Yeah, I really want to go, but you said it's the 14th of January?

[11 : 39] Yeah, I just booked something yesterday on the 14th of January, so I can't go. I'd love to go. Next time, invite me, but I can't go. So just a, that's a small deal, right?

There's a, that's just a polite lie and it, or you have exaggerations or things like that. And we're constantly embellishing the truth or we're sensationalizing it.

But the effect of that is, well, do you remember the football in the cartoon? The effect of that is that our view of people and our trust in what they're saying, it slowly shrivels away until we can't deal with it anymore.

We can't interact with them in a regular way. And that trust ball, it wasn't deflated because of one gigantic lie or even necessarily an outright lie, but it, it gets deflated by a whole, a whole series of embellishments of small, small lies of mistruths.

And in the face of that, we begin to become cynical about what people say. This is what we tell our kids all the time. I don't know if other parents have difficulty with their kids not always telling them the truth, but this is what we say to our kids when they lie is that they're breaking our trust.

[12 : 48] And now every time they say something to us, whether it's true or not, we doubt it. And we have to spend time there beginning to interrogate them and say, is this, did this happen?

And we need to, to try and verify the truth of what they say because we can't trust what they say. And that happens to us even when we, if we make a habit of even these small lies, these polite lies.

And here's the thing, is that it begins to hurt others and it begins to shape us as well. The, if we had time, we'd spend a bunch of time in the book of James that talks about how we deal with our tongue, how we deal with the words that we speak.

And it, James gives us this great image of our tongue is like a rudder on a huge ship. And that little piece of wood, it manages to direct the entire rest of that ship.

In the same way, our tongue directs who we are. And so even if we're engaging in, in small deception, in little things like polite lies and embellishments, and that becomes part of our character, it shapes us and it changes who we are like a rudder changes the direction that a ship is going.

[13 : 55] So as we begin, even in small ways to devalue trust and devalue truth, it shapes us into people who aren't truthful. This is what's happening when we separate love and truth from each other.

I actually heard a good example of this. I was listening to a podcast, not a Christian podcast, but just, well, trying to do some unpacking and thing, a podcast of people having a conversation and they were asking themselves the question, is it ever okay to lie?

And they, like I think most of us, started with the natural reaction of, well, yeah, I mean, there's small lies, those little things, those polite lies, those embellishments, those are okay, those are fine. And then it was interesting to listen to them as they begin to discuss times that they have, have done that and began to see that the intended consequence of what they're trying to, to do, to just be polite, how it backfired so many times.

And that so many times they'd be caught in that little lie and it would be far worse for them and for the other people involved than if they just told the outright truth to begin with. I'll give you an example of what I'm talking about.

And again, this is just kind of a frivolous thing, but it points to the larger point. And it was interesting that more often than not, when they tried to be polite and give a lie out of maybe a concern for someone else's feelings or something like that, that they would end up hurting that person more.

[15 : 13] So one of the examples was one of the hosts, she was saying that she was a camp counselor at a summer camp in Maine, I believe, and they had a bat get into the cabin and for three nights they couldn't get the bat out.

And when they finally did, the nurse came to them and they said, well, you know what, bats in this state, they can carry rabies and because the bat was there at night, you don't know what you've been exposed to.

So it would be a good idea for you and all the girls in the cabin, I think they're 10, 11-year-olds, to go and get a rabies shot. And of course, these 10 and 11-year-olds, they're afraid. And the camp counselor, she has a concern for them, she has a compassion for them and she wants to settle their nerves.

So she says, oh, it's fine. I've had a rabies shot before. It's no big deal. We'll all go together and I'll go first and you can come in and see and watch and see that it's no big deal.

Well, to make a long story short, she hadn't had a rabies shot before. She was just trying to calm the nerves of these kids and it became painfully obvious that she'd never had a rabies shot before.

[16 : 14] For one, the shot doesn't go in your arm. So the kids knew immediately that she probably wouldn't have invited them in if she knew where you actually get the rabies shot. And she also passed out when she was getting it.

So now she told this, it's just a small deception in order, and it was motivated by compassion for these girls so that they wouldn't feel afraid. What ended up happening was they saw this traumatic experience.

They were much more afraid to get their rabies shot, but they still had to go and sit through it. So it backfired. And again, that's a small and a frivolous example, but it illustrates the point that when we try and separate love and truth, and even if we're saying, well, I'm telling, it's just such a small lie, and it's motivated out of a concern, out of a politeness for others, that's fine, and we realize that you can't separate truth and love.

You can't sacrifice one at the altar of the other, no matter how small that altar is. But we do the opposite thing too, don't we? We say that we want to be people of truth, and so we're going to stand for truth no matter what, but we don't do it motivated out of love.

We don't do it out of a compassion for others. And there's a religious way to do this, and there's a secular way to do this. So the religious way, we say, oh, we're Christians, and Christians tell the truth.

[17 : 39] You know, you better tell the truth, because if you don't tell the truth, you're going to hell. Some of you might not even know a song. Revelation 21.8. Has anyone seen this? Okay, I'm not going to finish it.

Point being, it tells the truth about where lying takes us, but it does it in the most selfish way possible.

And so we say that we better not, we can't lie, we better not lie, because then we're going to go to hell. Or we say, you look around, don't lie because other people lie.

Non-Christians lie, but we're Christians. You don't lie. If you lie, people are, they might think that you're not a Christian, or they might think badly of you. Or we can take that same kind of attitude and put it in a completely non-religious environment, maybe like a secular business environment, and they're going to say something similar.

They're going to say, don't lie. Like, don't lie in business. Think back to Enron. I mean, that was quite a while ago. Some of you might not even know what I'm talking about, but the smartest guys in the room, and they cooked the books, and they knew that they, or they thought no one would be able to catch them.

[18 : 50] And they lied, and they were going to turn a profit, but they got caught, and they were finished. Like, their careers were ended, and they lost everything, and obviously everyone working for them lost everything.

And so we say, don't lie, because you're going to get caught. You know, it's eventually going to catch up with you, and then you're going to be finished. Then you're going to be done. So you better not lie, because they're going to get you.

Or you can say, you know, we're truth tellers. Other people are liars. Maybe your parents said this to you. They said, you're radborns. You know, you're not radborns.

At least I don't think any of you are, but I'm a radborn, so maybe my dad would have said this to me. You're radborns. Other people, they lie, but not radborns. Radborns tell the truth. But what's the problem with that is that we are motivating our truth telling not out of love, but out of pride.

We're radborns, or we're Christians. Or out of fear, you're going to go to hell, or you're going to get caught. Now, the problem with that is that why do we lie to begin with? We lie because we're caught in a situation, and if we tell the truth, it's going to end badly for us.

[20 : 00] So we lie out of fear. Or we lie because it helps to embellish our character, helps us to look better. Or it helps to put someone else down so that in comparison we look better.

So we lie out of fear or pride. But if you're telling the truth out of fear and pride, that's going to turn on you because what you're serving is not truth.

You're serving fear and pride, and telling the truth happens to be the best way for you to accomplish that right now. But that's going to turn. Star Wars fans, that's like the Republic building their army and the clone troopers, and they eventually turn on them, and then they become these storm troopers.

That wasn't the right, this is not the right crowd for that analogy. That was an 11 p.m. edition last night as I was reading through my sermon.

So we'll strike that one out for next time. Point being that when we build our truth not on love, but on fear or pride, it's going to fall, and we're going to find ourselves lying and saying, why am I lying?

[21 : 04] I was raised to not lie, but you were raised to be fearful. And to be proud. And now lying serves that better than telling the truth does. So when we try to separate love and truth, we end up destroying both of them.

Because when we motivate our truth-telling, not by love, but out of fear and pride, we end up getting ourselves in a position where the exact thing we have built our honesty on then leads us to dishonesty.

So what do we do about that? How are we supposed to be people of truth? Now we already touched on this to a degree, but the only way that we can be led to truth is to be led through love.

And what kind of love? If we're really going to be truthful, we need to grow a love for truth. We need to grow a love for others, and we need to grow a love for God who exemplifies, who in his very character is truth and love.

And so we need to push towards truth. Even to have a desire to push towards truth, we need to push ourselves towards love. We need to grow in love.

[22 : 21] And it's not creating these in isolation. It's not growing in love for God in isolation. But a love for God will drive a love for truth, and a love for God will drive a love for others.

And that love for God has to be stronger than whatever it is that's going to push us into dishonesty. It has to be stronger than that fear or stronger than that pride. And the only way to build that is from a word from the outside.

Remember, words shape us. So if our words can shape us into dishonesty, a word from God can shape us towards the truth. And we need a word of truth from the outside.

Because here's the thing. If we don't look at our lives and we don't see our dishonesty, we don't see the way that it shapes us, we might be able to point to a few places where we lie, but we don't see the depth to it.

We don't see how much it's shaping us, how much it's hurting us, and how much it's hurting others. We won't see the power of our deceit and the power of our lies and how it affects us.

[23 : 21] We don't see its destruction, and we don't believe that we need God's truth to overcome it. We don't see how much our lies shape us and how much it negatively affects us.

Because here's something that's generally true about sin. Generally speaking with sin, at first it affects others and it affects our relationship with God. But in the long term, it ends up affecting us.

It ends up shaping us. It ends up hurting us more than anything else. And if we're going to become people of truth, we need to see that. We need to see where we're being deceptive, not just with our words, but with our lives and with our heart.

The truth from God, we need a word from the outside. We need a word from God that we are deceptive people. We need to see where we do that. And it amazes me as I read through the New Testament, people we would hold up as righteous people who are continually talking about where they sin.

Paul's saying something like, Jesus Christ came to save sinners of whom I am the worst. And the path to righteousness, the path to honesty, is recognizing our dishonesty.

[24 : 37] And we need God to show us that. We need to say, God, show me my deception. Show me where my life doesn't line up with your truth. I need to see the depth of the way that I'm dishonest.

I need to see the depth of where I'm dishonest with what I say. I need to see the depth of dishonesty within my heart, even things that I don't say. Now, I know that this particular way that I've done this is completely impractical to you, but the best way to see your dishonesty is to wake up on Monday morning and say, I'm preaching a sermon on truth on Sunday.

And then think of that throughout the week. And every time you open your mouth, you're like, oh, I shouldn't say that because I'm preaching a sermon on truth on Sunday. And you realize how much you can be dishonest in what you say, even jokingly, even small lies.

And you just see a pattern of dishonesty in your life. And again, that's impractical for you. And not many of you are going to end up speaking on Sunday morning. But remember the point, the reason that we are given the Ten Commandments is because we are preaching a message.

We are preaching with our lives and with our words to those around us. And not just those who live far from us, but those who are close to us and they see our lives and they see us in those moments.

[25 : 58] And we're saying we follow Jesus and Jesus is truth and then we're supposed to be showing people what God is like. Does our life line up? And that's the problem is that we hold ourselves to a low standard of truthfulness because we don't always see what we're called to.

These commandments are talking about we're called to be holy because God is holy. We're called to be truthful because God is truth. We're called to be identified with him.

We're called to be able to demonstrate him to others, to those around us. And we need to see his purity. We need to see his truth. We need to see that in him, darkness is not nowhere.

Uk, udemia, not nowhere. We need a message of truth from the outside. We need to see God's truth and let it penetrate us and show us where we aren't truthful.

And you know what? If we do that, it will kill our pride. It will kill one of those main reasons why we lie to begin with. But we also need a message from the outside of love. We need a word of truth and we need a word of love because here's the thing.

[27 : 05] Here's the message we get from Jesus. The message we get from Jesus is that if we are Christians, if we are in Jesus, what happens to him happens to us.

Okay, the scriptures say that we're baptized and when we're baptized, we're baptized into the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. We become identified with God. We become identified with Jesus.

So we are in him. Paul in Colossians chapter 3 says that if we've died with Christ, we'll also be raised with him. And it says that our lives are hidden with Christ in God.

So we become mixed in with him. We are part of him. So the idea is that when the Father looks at us, he looks at Jesus. Paul continues in Colossians 3, therefore, when Christ is revealed, you also, when Christ is revealed, he who is your life, you will also be revealed with him in glory.

So that we are identified with him and Christ is our life. We're saying that, that all we have is Christ. And so we become identified with Jesus and that is who we are. That's the word of love that we become identified with him.

[28 : 11] And what happens to him happens to us that we're mixed in with him. And that's why Jesus became baptized. Baptism is for the forgiveness of sins. It's a demonstration of the cleansing of sins.

Jesus didn't have sins to be cleansed. So why did he, why was he baptized? He was baptized in order to identify with him. With us, sorry. So when he was baptized, we became baptized.

When he was baptized, we, and we're, pause that again. When we're baptized, we become identified with him and that's why he was baptized. So that in that action, we could be shown to be with him.

So when he's baptized, he's modeling what we do. He's modeling what we do to become united with him. And what happened when he came out of that waters of baptism? This is the word from the outside that we need to hear.

When Jesus came out of the water, the spirit descended like a dove and the heavens split and the father said, this is my son in whom I am well pleased.

[29 : 11] So if what happens to Jesus happens to us, then in that moment, what's happening is the father is saying to us, this is my son. This is my daughter in whom I am well pleased.

Do we hear that? Do we hear that message of love from the outside? If we're in Jesus, those words are spoken to us. This is my son.

This is my daughter in whom I am well pleased. That's the truth. Doesn't it seem like a lie to us? If we've heard that word from the outside of truth and we've seen our deception and we've seen where we fail, that message of this is my son, this is my daughter and of whom I am well pleased feels like a lie.

How can we get it? How can we have that message from God? If we see the fullness and how much we fall short of the standard that's exemplified by God, how can he then say, this is my son, this is my daughter in whom I am well pleased?

Isn't God lying? No. There's no darkness in him, not nowhere. He's telling the truth and he's telling the truth because of the cross. In the cross, truth and love, they come together.

[30 : 25] It took the cross to bring them together because Jesus took that deceptiveness, he took that untruth, he took that fallenness of ours, he took that distance of ours from God and he eradicated it in love so that now God the Father can look at us in the same way that he looks at Jesus.

This is my son, this is my daughter in whom I am well pleased. He gives us a new identity, he gives us a new story. And because Jesus has eliminated that gap between us, that's now who we are, that's who we're called to be.

It eliminates that fear that we have, it eliminates that other reason why we lie because now we know our future, now we know a new identity and so what's our response? Our response now is that we have that word of truth, we see who we were but we also have that word of love, we see who we are and who we're meant to be.

That honesty doesn't have to be driven by fear, it doesn't have to be driven by pride, it can be driven by love, it can be driven by that message from the outside, that message from the Father and we can live that out and we can love others and be motivated to tell them truth because we see the love that God has for us and we can love God because we see what he has done for us and we can love truth because we can see truth rooted in who God is.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.