



*Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.* (Ex 20:16)

Bearing testimony in truth and love is a powerful force for good, but the contrary act of bearing false testimony is so devastatingly evil that it has, and will often result in the destruction of its innocent victim. It is an insidiously sinister expression of hate. It is a terrible sin whose guilt very often goes unnoticed by its perpetrator for it has become more a matter of habit than of conscious intention. The conscience of an habitual liar has been seared as with a hot iron so that he feels no guilt.

Like all other of the Commandments, the ninth would be quite easy to obey if we really kept the first. If we love God, we will love His creation and take all due care to avoid harming any living creature therein but, especially, our neighbor. All Commandments of the Second Table of the Law owe their obedience to that First Great Commandment.

The Ninth Commandment does require the speaker to distinguish in judgment of others. If asked his opinion of another's character in a matter of great importance, it behooves the respondent to render a fair and accurate appraisal of the man's character without casting a false light on it. A false testimony is any that we give which we do not KNOW to be true. Even an accurate guess is false witness.

This Commandment has bearing on social, professional, familial, and governmental areas of concern. Please consider deeply the following questions before reading the remainder of this devotion:

1. How does the Ninth Commandment compare with the very first Commandment?
2. How does this Commandment compare with the Sixth Commandment?
3. How may we compare the Ninth to the Seventh Commandment, or the Eighth, or the Tenth?

There is an amazing coherence and correlation that exists throughout the Ten Commandments. Christ well summarized them from Old Testament verses: Master, which is the great commandment in the law? Jesus said unto him, **Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment.** (see Deuteronomy 6:4-5) **And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.** (Lev 19:18) **On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.** (Matt 22:36-40) Jesus is not revealing a new summary of the Law, but simply reminding the questioners of that which God has already revealed.

It is important to note the last sentence of the response of Christ in this summary: **“On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”** This is precisely true, but remember that the second summary of the Table of the Law is subordinate to the first. Therefore, not just the first four or five Commandments are hung upon the first, but all

of the remainder as well. If we truly love God with all of our hearts, we will love all that He commands us to do; otherwise, it will be impossible to please God for we would be faithless people. We cannot slander or libel another whom God has created in His own image if we love God above all else, can we? If a great Landowner were to come into a country in which we were vassals and serfs, purchased all of the land from those who had controlled our lives harshly, treated us with utmost kindness – even as His own children – and sent His own Son at peril of death to defend our homes and families, could we go out and spread horrible gossip about the Landowner, or His Son, or any of His people? It is in this way that the Ninth commandment falls snugly beneath the First. Have we considered that words have the power to kill? It was the words of a known devil and traitor (Judas) that resulted in the crucifixion of our Lord. God used the wicked heart of Judas to perform His will in the same way that He used the heard heart of Pharaoh and of Augustus Caesar. But words are the medium by which our thoughts and resultant actions occur. Words are the pictures of the thoughts of the mind. False testimony in courts of law has resulted in innocent men being sent to the gallows. Malicious lies and gossip has resulted in the tragic suicide of many young people who are not yet mature enough to cope with such oppression. If our hearts are evil, then that evil is formulated into words which emerge from our sin-laced mouths. Lying (or false witness) can be a murderer. It is in this way that the Ninth is so closely related to the Sixth Commandment. Hopefully, we are not of that “generation of vipers” that Jesus attributed to the Scribes and Pharisees and Rulers of Israel: **O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.** (Matt 12:34-37)

This last verse above carries an ominous warning to all who carelessly drop false claims and accusations about others. In my own experience, I have witnessed multiple times that men have been found wantonly guilty of the same offense which they have accused others, but usually with more severe results to them. We are condemned by the Words of our own mouths! It is in this way that the Ninth is related to the Sixth Commandment.

Adultery is an egregious sin because it is a sin against one’s own body and against the person of at least two others. Adultery has traditionally REQUIRED that its commission must lie and bear false witness to his or her spouse with whom he has taken vows of fidelity forever. There are very few occasions in which adultery is begun by public announcement of the occasion. When you professed your firm faith and belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, was that a false witness. Did your behavior and character later expose your duplicity? In committing spiritual Idolatry, you also, being a part of the Bride of Christ (the Church) committed adultery against God Almighty for you have played the harlot. This is the manner in which the Ninth Commandment is like unto the Seventh.

False professions of faith are probably the most common example of false witness in the world today. There was a time when men and women were willing to go to the fiery stake rather than offend against the Word of God, but no more! Allow me to relate a summary from the Martyrs Mirror of Hans Bret who was burned at the stake in January 1577:

After eight months in jail, the torture became more severe, but Hans Bret did not recant his beliefs. Finally he was brought before the court for a hearing. Hans testified boldly to his faith. A sentence was pronounced: Hans Bret would be burned at the stake.

Early in the morning of the day set for the burning, Saturday, 4 January, the executioner came to Hans' cell. The executioner ordered him to put out his tongue. Over it he placed an iron clamp, then screwed it tight with a vice-screw over the tongue. This done, he burned the end of Hans' tongue with a hot iron so that the tongue would swell and could not be withdrawn from the clamp. This tongue screw was to prevent Hans from speaking to the people when he was taken to the stake.

Then Hans was placed in a wagon and hauled through the streets still cluttered with the debris from the Spaniards' burning of the city. Stepping from the wagon at the marketplace where the stake was, Hans knelt to pray, his face toward heaven. Seeing this, the beadles jerked him toward the stake, wrapped his body to the stake with chains, stacked wood around him, and straw next to it to make the wood catch more quickly.

As Hans Bret was being chained to the stake, his pastor and friend, Hans de Ries stepped out of the crowd and as near to his friend as he dared. The fire blazed up, and Hans Bret's body went limp. After the body was burned to ashes and the fire cooled, Hans Ries retrieved from the ashes a memento—the tongue screw used to silence Hans Bret.

Hans was a mere teenage boy who had the courage of a Joshua or a David. He forfeited his life rather than make a false testimony. Are you willing so to do? Your correct response would be to say, "I do not know." Charles Spurgeon was asked if he had the grace to die for his Lord to which he responded, "No, I do not have." The inquirer replied, "Dr. Spurgeon, you are the most well-known preacher in all of England, and you say you do not have the grace to die for the Lord?" "No, I do not have, but I trust that when the time comes that I am required to die for the Lord, He will, at that time, give me the grace to do so." I believe that shoe fits each of us.

False witness has often resulted in the embezzlement of great treasure from the rightful owner. Ponzi schemes and pyramid programs, gambling with weighted dice, and forgeries are a form of false witness that steals all of the owners possessions oftentimes. What of the modern practice of identity theft. Is this not stealing taken to its zenith in false witnessing? This is how the Ninth is related to the Eighth Commandment.

By the way, remaining silent in the face of false testimony when we know the truth is also lying by default.

The breach of the Tenth Commandment (coveting) is often facilitated by bearing false Witness. There are many immensely wealthy men who are deprived of any pleasure from their wealth for they cannot sit still while others have any. They burn the midnight oil scheming and plotting as to how they may acquire that pittance that some other fellow has. Their appetites for wealth become insatiable and feed upon itself. Is there great wrong in wealth? Not at all, but there is great sin in making of wealth an idol that seeks wealth above all else and, particularly, above the God of Heaven. It is by means of the false witness, false bookkeeping, and false advertising that covetousness is related to the Ninth Commandment. But the Tenth will remain for discussion until the next devotion.

Have you engaged in any false witnessing lately?