

9th Commandment

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 February 2016

Preacher: Rev. Thomas Davis

[0 : 0 0] Well as you know we are working through a study in the Ten Commandments and as we've been doing so we've been following a very simple pattern where we're asking three questions of each commandment. You know the routine by now, we first of all ask what is each commandment saying, we then ask how is each commandment put into practice and we finally ask perhaps the most important question of all, why is God giving this commandment? And tonight we have come to the ninth commandment which is found in Deuteronomy chapter 5 verse 20, you shall not bear false witness against your neighbour. Now one of the wonderful things about the Ten Commandments is that they are all very simple and clear and when you ask the question what is this command saying, the answer arises immediately from what the statement is making in the command itself. The ninth commandment like the ones that preceded is straightforward, you shall not bear false witness against your neighbour. And the immediate emphasis of this commandment is on the law court. God is prohibiting the act whereby somebody would give false witness against their neighbour in a court of law. In other words, perjury is being outlawed.

If you are giving evidence in a case of judgment, you must speak. The truth, God says you must not bear false witness. And of course that is very very logical because a robust judicial system is essential for a well functioning society. That was through in the Old Testament and still through today. In order for society to be healthy, in order for things to be coherent, for laws to be kept, you need to have a reliable and an effective justice system. But a judicial system is entirely dependent on the truth of the evidence that it hears. If you imagine a court case, even today, you have a judge or a jury and they are trying to make a decision as to whether or not an individual or individuals are innocent or guilty. And in order to come to a decision, they hear evidence and they base their decision on that evidence. And if that evidence is wrong, then it's going to make the decision wrong as well. The best judge in the world can make the wrong decision if he is given false evidence that he thinks is true. And so the application of this commandment is obvious but it is also incredibly important. False witness bearing has devastating consequences. And it's very interesting to notice that the word false in this commandment is actually the very same word that we find in the third commandment where it says you shall not take the Lord's name in vain. The word vain and the word false is the same word in Hebrew. And if you remember all the way back to when we studied the third commandment, this word vain basically means emptiness. It's the idea in the third commandment, do not use God's name if behind it lies emptiness. And the same emphasis applies to the ninth commandment. We must not give a testimony which has got nothing behind it. False witness bearing is basically words that are based on emptiness. There's no substance to them. So the immediate context is in the law court but of course the implications of this commandment are much more wide ranging. And the basic principle that lies behind this commandment is that everything that we say and indeed everything that we do must be true. Our speech must be true. And like the other commandments this has positive and negative implications, positively we must maintain the truth, we must promote the truth and negatively we must make sure that we don't tell lies. And very often the ninth commandment is summarised in the words don't tell lies. And again the catechism sums it up really really well, the positive and negative implications. What is required in the ninth commandment in shorter catecheson 77, the ninth commandment requires the maintaining and promoting of truth between man and man and of our own and our neighbour's good name especially in witness bearing. What is forbidden in the ninth commandment? The ninth commandment forbid what so ever is prejudicial to truth or injurious to our own or our neighbour's good name. So the what of this commandment is really quite straightforward but how is it to be kept? That's our second question. How should this commandment be put into practice? Well as we said this command is setting forth the principle that

we must speak the truth.

When we talk we should be speaking words that are true and it's very interesting if you look in the Old Testament you'll see that there are various examples given of how this is applied in real life and we can say three things in particular as to how God expects us to implement this commandment both in terms of how it was applied in the Old Testament and of course it's still completely and totally relevant for us today. So we'll say three things under this heading.

Firstly we must not create false reports about someone. In other words we must not be the source or the starting point of a false report about somebody else. The Bible makes a clear prohibition against slander. Slander is basically what we mean by making a false or a malicious statement designed to injure the reputation of somebody else. That's the kind of thing that the Catechism there is referring to injuring somebody else's good name. God tells us that we must not be slanderers. Both the Old and the New Testament refer to this Leviticus 19:16 you shall not go about as a slanderer among your people. 1 Peter 2, 1 Peter 3, all malice, all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. And we know that people are very often capable of producing false reports about people in order to harm them and that was why we read 1 Kings chapter 21 because the account of Naboth's vineyard is a very clear example of the ninth commandment being broken. As we read

[7 : 28] Ahab saw this vineyard and he wanted it and Naboth said to him, no I can't sell this, this is my family's vineyard and we would feel exactly the same. If somebody came and said I want your house, you'd say no it's my family's house, it's my family home. But Ahab went home and sulked but Jezebel went even further and we read what she did that she said Arise I'll get that vineyard for you.

So she wrote letters in Ahab's name and sealed them with his seal and she sent the letters to the elders and the leaders who lived with Naboth in his city and she wrote in the letters proclaim her fast and said Naboth at the head of the people and said two worthless men opposite him and let them bring a charge against him saying you have cursed God and the king then take him out and stone him to death. It seems almost unbelievable that that the woman who did so much to lead the people away from God used God as a kind of as a false allegation against Naboth. He's cursed God.

I don't think anybody cursed God more than Jezebel but yet that was what she did. And so it's a clear example of what this commandment is prohibiting and of course when you go to the New Testament you see that Jesus himself was a victim of this as well. When he cast out demons the Pharisees said it's only by Beelzebel the prince of demons that this man casts out demons and when he was put on trial by the chief priests they were seeking testimony against Jesus as Mark 14:55 tells us to put him to death but they found none for many bore false witness against him but their testimonies did not agree. Jesus was a victim of the breaking of the ninth commandment and it's actually perhaps even more interesting to go right back to the beginning and think about the fall of man because the fall of humanity in Genesis 3 began with a slanderous lie. The devil is a slanderer and when he went to Eve he said did God actually say you shall not eat of any tree in the garden?

The woman said yes we made it the tree in the garden but not that one but the serpent said to the woman you will not surely die for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God knowing good and evil. The devil was slandered in God and the results were devastating and it's always wise to remember that the fall of humanity was initiated by speaking. Words can be devastating. It all began with the devil's voice. So we must not create false reports about people but secondly we must not circulate a false report about somebody. We may never create a false story but the Bible says neither should we be involved in the circulation of it. Scripture again makes this very clear. Exodus 23 verse 1 you shall not spread a false report and of course this is referring us to the incredibly easy but yet incredibly dangerous sin of gossip. We might not be the source of slander but we can easily be the means whereby it's spread. I can probably maybe hold up my hands and say I've never been the source of slander but I can never say I've never been the one to spread it and I'm sure we are all the same and so the Bible is warning us against it. Paul's the same in the New Testament.

[11 : 46] I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish and that you may not find me as you wish that perhaps they may be quarreling jealousy anger hostility slander again gossip conceit and disorder. It's very interesting to note that the Hebrew word for slander which we had in Leviticus 19:16 which was one of the earlier verses that we read the Hebrew word for slander is

based on the same word that is a word that means to go about as a merchant. Hebrew is a fascinating language because all the words are in little families which have a sort of related meaning and so the word for slanderer and the word for going about as a merchant are in the same family they're basically the same root word and so when you think of a merchant you imagine somebody going about to different places trying to sell their product going around offering people this item and doing their best to have as many sales as possible and isn't that a clear picture of what we are like when we are gossiping we've got this product this news this this scandal that we want to distribute and we go around it like a merchant spreading it as far as we can it's a very powerful image I think of of just what we are like when we do it and you can see where the two words are related and of course this is very difficult for us because we are living in a world that loves to spread this kind of news our world is often very slow to check whether something is true or false but we are never slow to spread a bit of interesting news and sometimes it can be just seems so tragic that the more debased and scandalous the news the more interested the public seems to be and of course as God's people we are to be different always remember that the the 10 commandments were given to the Israelites when they were just about to go into the promised land and they were warning the people of Israel that they were about to go into a land where everybody is breaking these commandments and you are given these commandments to be different and we have these commandments for exactly the same reason to stand out and to be different from the world around us gossip is something that we should never do now that doesn't mean when I say gossip I don't mean just talking about what's happening we always talk about other people and that's absolutely fine if it's done in the right way by gossip I mean spreading information that the person would not want spread spreading information that we don't know if it's true or not and the Bible tells us in Exodus 23:7 keep far from a false charge if we hear people talking about a potentially false charge we should keep well away we can change the subject we can pretend to look at our phones we can go somewhere else we should keep far away from it and of course we should also remember that sometimes we might hear something that is not actually false but that doesn't mean that it should be spread sometimes information might actually be true but it's still not something that we should distribute so we should

not create a false report about someone nor should we circulate a false report about someone but the Bible gives us a third way as to how this command should be implemented and this is really interesting because I hadn't really thought of it before and it arises from a very interesting verse in Leviticus chapter 5 verse 1 if anyone sins in that he hears a public adoration to testify and though he is a witness whether he has seen or come to know the matter yet does not speak he shall bear his penalty in other words it is saying if you hear about something that is being said in reference to a person and you know it's not true you must speak up and that's emphasizing that there is no place in the Christian life for a sort of well that's not my problem attitude sometimes we can easily fall into that trap and people are maybe the victim of being mistreated in this sort of regard and we can easily think oh well that's not my problem I'm just going to keep out of it the Bible is telling us that God does not want us to be like that in fact God wants us to be the kind of people who will stick up for somebody who is falsely accused we should be ready to say that's not actually true or that's not fair or that's inaccurate or I think we should be careful until we know all the facts we must not allow a false rumor to spread by our words or by our silence we mustn't let it spread by our silence and that of course is something that I'm sure challenges us all and me just as much so the Bible is spending is presenting a wide-ranging expectation as to how this command should be kept and the 10 commandments are all in many ways that they're all very broad and they apply to so many parts of life we must never start a false report we must never circulate a false report and we must take every opportunity that we have to stop a false report from circulating and all of this is highlighting one of the most important things that we can ever learn as Christians one of the number one rules for you and for me as God's people is that we must be men and women of absolute integrity integrity is one of our top priorities in our lives Jesus speaks about this in the Sermon of the Mount Matthew chapter 5 you've heard that it was said to those of old you shall not swear falsely but shall perform to the Lord what you've sworn but I say to you do not take an oath at all either by heaven for it is God's throne or for by the earth for it is footstool it is his footstool or by Jerusalem for it is the city of the great king and do not take an oath by your head for you cannot make one hair white or black let what you say be simply yes or no anything more than this comes from the devil and verse 37 is particularly important but the ESV version is not quite as good a translation as it could be the NIV

and the authorized version are actually better but it says simply let your yes be yes and your no no anything beyond this comes from the evil one and it's basically saying that as Christians we must be men and women of integrity

in other words what we say must be backed up by our actions if we say yes we must mean yes and if we say no it must be a genuine no and if that's the case people will be able to look at us and see that we are trustworthy that we are honest and we are truthful Jesus says you don't need to swear by heaven or by earth or by Jerusalem because we should not have to we shouldn't have to persuade people that our yes is a yes we shouldn't have to use big flowery language or great oaths or swears or anything like that to make our yes a yes or a no a no our no a no our yes should simply always mean yes and our no should always mean no and then people will trust us people will respect us and people will listen to us if we say yes when we really mean no then our credibility is greatly undermined and of course this is a reminder that our conduct is such an important witness we're all going to go back to our routines tomorrow whatever our different routines are some of you will go to work some of you will be looking after your homes some of you may just be involved in other activities or organizations whatever you're doing tomorrow you might not and there's probably a very strong chance that you won't get the chance to speak about the gospel with somebody these opportunities don't come about very often and tomorrow you may very well not have one of those opportunities but I guarantee that tomorrow and the next day and the next day and every day you will have numerous opportunities to show that you are a man or a woman of integrity and that's a powerful witness integrity is immensely important because it's so interesting a slanderer or a gossip is very often trying to hurt the reputation of other people but in the end the only reputation that is ruined is their own if people know that we are gossips or slanderers or if we say yes and mean no or say no and mean yes then it's our reputation that will be damaged and we will be wise to always pray that we will be men and women of absolute integrity so as you can see there's a lot of practical application in terms of how this commandment is implemented but that's wonderful because it means that that the Bible is giving us real life advice and things that we can put into practice tomorrow and the next day and I'm sure every one of us can look at ourselves and see mistakes that we've made but tomorrow is a new day and we can go into it on the strength of God's spirit and with his leading and guiding we have opportunities to live in a way that pleases him and that brings glory to his name so finally we come to our third question why would God give us this commandment well again there's three things that I would like to say here the first is a point that we have made with all of the commandments so far and it's a point that I want to emphasize again and again and again that here is a commandment like all the other of the 10 commandments that is crucial for preventing suffering always see the 10 commandments as a means whereby suffering can be prevented because

we all know that the damage of a false accusation can be devastating and the pain associated with that kind of situation would be awful the Bible wants us to be gossip stoppers instead of gossip spreaders and would it not be wonderful if we were all like that there are so many benefits to be received from that and there is so much suffering that can be prevented and this is a really really clear example of why we should listen to the principle whereby Jesus that Jesus set out when he said whatever you wish that others would do to you do also to them for this is the law and the prophets I don't need to convince you that the human race has a love for gossip the human race loves it there's a huge appetite for it in our media in our communities even in in work in our own local concept context everyone wants to have the gossip but no one wants to be the gossip no one wants to be it and if a false rumor was being spread about me I would desperately desperately want there to be people out there stopping it and you and I can be the people who stop false accusations and false witness and damaging gossip it prevents a huge amount of suffering and it is well well worth keeping to this commandment as much as we possibly can it's something that that we will all all benefit from so the first point in terms of why is that like the others commandments it will prevent suffering but the second point and really the second and the third point are related because instead of being to do with us they are to do with God and this commandment like the others is a clear reminder of who God is this command like the others is based on the character of God one of the many things that the Bible teaches us about God is that he is a God of truth God is a God of truth he who blesses himself in the land shall bless himself by the God of truth in Zachariah 8 16 17 describes the implications of that these are the things that you shall do speak the truth to one another render in your judgments that are true and make for peace do not devise even your hearts against one another and love no false oath for all these things I hate declare the Lord that's strong

language and it's right to be strong because God is a God of truth and he hates anything that is false and we see that Jesus himself backs this up Jesus describes himself as the way the truth and the life truth is at the heart of who Jesus is as well as God's son he is utterly true utterly loyal to his father and to all the commandments and like his father he has a hatred for all that is false and the Holy Spirit is exactly the same that's why it's called the spirit of truth John 16 13 is one of the references that uses that title for the Holy

Spirit at the very core of the being of God father son and spirit is truth at the heart of God is truth it's really interesting to think about this because human beings are really strange if you look at the world if we look at the world if we try and examine the world around us just now human beings are really quite extraordinary in in the strangeness of the way we think because at a superficial level we are quite comfortable with lies we love news and we're not necessarily that interested if something is true or not and you only need to pick up a newspaper or anything like that to see any number of stories that are created and they turn out not to be true and we have an appetite for that and and even I mean I I'm no different I love hearing the transfer rumours in football you hear that somebody is going to go somewhere so-and-so is going to be bought by so-and-so and there may be absolutely no basis to it whatsoever but we love hearing potential news and at a sort of superficial level we seem comfortable and we almost seem to take pleasure in things that are not true but when it comes to anything serious when it comes to something that really matters every single human being has an inbuilt craving for truth you go to a court case the people there want the truth if there's a political scandal we want the truth if there's a massive event in terms of the news or in terms of our country or even on a global scale we want the truth we call for inquests we call for investigations because we want the truth and when people aren't satisfied with what we've they've been told all sorts of conspiracy theories can arise because people want the truth and this is fascinating because experts will say that we live in an in an age that has a low regard for truth this is what is described as a post-modern world when people say that the world is post-modern I don't understand it that well but the basic idea of it is that that truth is something that's relative there's no overarching story no overarching meta narrative is what they say like a big principle that that that covers everything they've dismissed that and what matters now is their own individual stories what matters is what's true for me and that doesn't have to necessarily be true for you and that's why we've seen in recent years that many things that were seen for generations as absolute moral standards have now been changed and abandoned and we see that in things like marriage and even in terms of things like like gender what's true for one individual is what matters and we seem to have a a low regard for anything that could be described as absolute truth that's the world that we're living in but the fascinating thing is is that you will not find an ounce of point post-modernism in a court of law when a family goes to a trial of somebody accused of murdering their child or a parent or somebody dear to them you will never hear a family member say I don't believe in absolute

[31 : 48] truth and I'm not here to find absolute truth you will never hear them say that because they will say I want the truth I want the truth when we are faced with life and death and when we think about the things that really matter we all whatever your beliefs are we all want truth and the only place where you will really find the truth the absolute reliable truth of this world of life and of death and of all that matters the only place where you will find absolute truth is in the god of the bible the god of truth and that's why this god is the god that our world desperately desperately needs so this commandment arises from who god is but finally this command also points to what god does and in particular what god does for us if we trust in him remember we said at the start that the immediate context and emphasis of the ninth commandment is the court of law and the law court is an image that runs right through the bible a lot of key theological terms are based on a judicial language like justification and even adoption is a judicial term as well and when it comes to standing in the law court of god when it comes to you standing in the dock we are all facing accusation that's what the devil is he's an accuser and revelation 12:10 describes him as the accuser of her brother and the devil's goal is to see you and me condemned and he may accuse falsely or he may accuse us of things that we have actually done but his goal and his desire is to accuse us again and again and again revelation says that the devil is the one who accuses them day and night before god if you imagine yourself in that situation the amazing promise that the bible is giving you is that in the face of that kind of accusation god himself will be your defense god himself will be your defense that's why it says that Jesus is our advocate if anyone sins we have an advocate with the father Jesus Christ the righteous that's first john 2 verse 1 and the holy spirit is in

the witness box giving testimony on our behalf roman's 816 the spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of god and if you put your trust in jesus christ if you are a christian or if you become a christian tonight which you can do then there is no accusation whatsoever that can ever threaten you jesus has acted on your behalf by dying for your sins and now he is defending you on the basis of that work and on the fact that by faith we are united to him and all of this means that if you trust in jesus he will never stop speaking up for you jesus will never stop speaking up for you that's why

our salvation is to the uttermost that was what we read in hebrus chapter seven at the very beginning he's able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to god through him since he always lives to make intercession for them intercession means speaking on behalf jesus has risen again and lives forever so that he can stick up for you for all eternity jesus is the truest and most faithful and most credible witness that has ever stood in a court of law and he is speaking on your behalf he is speaking in your defense and you imagine the courtroom scene imagine standing there and jesus is in the witness box and he is told that he must tell the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth and jesus will stand in that witness box and if you trust in him he will point to you and as he says the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth he will say they are mine you are mine you are one of mine there is nothing worse than having somebody speak against you words can be the most painful thing and the most horrible thing but if you trust in jesus you will have someone who will speak up for you forever and ever jesus does the exact opposite of the ninth commandment for all of his people he bears a true witness on your behalf and he will defend you forever jesus will speak up for you if you put your trust in him and that's a reminder of why we we don't come to jesus because we're good enough we don't can't become a christian because because we've reached a certain standard that is not how it works we simply rely on what jesus has done and we say lord please be my defense please speak up for me that's what jesus wants to do for you and that is what you need more urgently than anything else and even right now if you bow your head or even just in your heart ask the lord to be your defender and to be your savior he will say of course of course and may god grant that we all do that let us pray