

Part 10

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[0 : 0 0] Before we turn to look at the Bible for a few moments together, let's borrow heads again. As we were saying before, tonight we are looking at Psalm 15.

We're looking at the 9th Commandment, the commandment that you shall not give false testimony against your neighbour. To put it in other words, you shall not lie or to state it positively.

Be honest with other people. Tell the truth. Be a person of integrity. We're looking at that through Psalm 15. If it's your first time here, or if you've not been here that much recently, if you've been away on holiday, or if you've just not been paying attention, we've been going through the 10 Commandments together as a church.

We've been looking at how the 10 Commandments are a summary of how to love God, and then how to love your neighbour, how to love the other people around us. We have the first four explicitly about loving God, about giving Him the place of ultimate importance in our lives, having no other gods before Him, about how we speak about Him, how we speak about Him with awe and with reverence, how we worship Him appropriately, how we have a work-life balance that reflects who He is, and His importance in our lives.

And then after that we've been looking at Commandments 5 onwards about how to love our neighbour. You love your neighbour by prizing the family unit, by creating secure places for children to grow up.

[1 : 3 0] You love your neighbour by prizing the sanctity of that person's life, so you don't murder. You love your neighbour by taking a high rather than a low view of sex, and your sexuality as a human being.

You love your neighbour by giving rather than stealing. And tonight we're looking at how you love your neighbour in your attitude towards truth. Truth and integrity, that's why we have this command.

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour. And I'd like us to see something of what that means from Psalm 15, from the Psalm that we read before, and particularly from the first three verses.

Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary, who may live on your holy hill, He who's walk is blameless, and who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from his heart, and has no slander on his tongue.

This Psalm, it's a Hebrew poem, it was written thousands of years ago, in a really different social context, in a different language. Nonetheless, it has a huge deal to say to us, and it's of tremendous pressing relevance to our lives and to the world that we live in.

[2 : 4 2] The poem here, Psalm 15, begins with a question, and the question is, what kind of attitudes to truth do you find in those who know God?

That's what it's asking, and you can tell that from some of the imagery that it uses in verse 1. Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary, it's a picture of God's temple, of the place that you go to meet God.

It's this idea that in Israelite culture, in the world that this was written in, that there would be one place you could go in your worship, and you knew that the presence of God would be there, and it's in the middle of the tabernacle, way back at the beginning then, when they built a temple, it's the holy place in the middle where God's presence is.

So what kind of person is the person that you find there where you are, and then who may live on your holy hill? Again, it's this idea that there's, in this Old Testament world, that there's this one hill, Mount Zion, and that's where God's presence descends, that's where God manifests His presence.

God is there in a special way. What kind of person may not just visit, not just have a tourist visa, but what kind of person may have a citizen's card to live there?

[3 : 57] What's the person like who knows you, who lives with you in your presence, where your presence is most keenly felt? So that's the question. What kind of attitude, truth do you find in people who know God, people whose lives are lived in intimacy with Him?

And the question is answered. There's a basic summary of the character of that kind of person. He who's walk is blameless, and who does what is righteous.

What does that mean? Well, this idea again of walking, if you read the Bible much, and either the Old Testament or the New, it's a picture of a consistent lifestyle. It's not just one step, it's your ongoing walking, going on throughout your life.

This is what you do day in, day out. Walking through life like that, someone whose consistent lifestyle, as Sam says, is blameless. The things that this person does consistently are righteous.

Well, okay, that sounds nice, but that's maybe a bit abstract. What does that actually look like? You know, you've got these qualities of being blameless and doing righteous things. What does that look like in our life?

[5 : 06] And that's what this am begins to unpack. And I'd like us to see that tonight. Three points, classic three-point sermon. The first one is this, that the Gospel grows truthfulness.

The Gospel grows truthfulness. When it starts to describe what this means, someone who's walk is blameless, someone who does righteous things, he explains it first of all in this, this, who speaks the truth from his heart.

Who speaks the truth from his heart. What we have in the Ten Commandments is not just a set of moralistic rules, where, you know, be good people and do nice things, and then if you're good enough and you keep all these moral rules, then I will accept you and love you, and then you can come and know me.

What you have in the Ten Commandments is to retell the story of Exodus, from chapter one to chapter 20, where we find the Ten Commandments. It's a story about deliverance, about salvation.

It's a Gospel story. You have the Israelite people, and again, this is thousands of years ago, but there's slaves in Egypt under a tyrant, under the Pharaoh, and he makes their lives harsh and cruel and bitter with really hard labor.

[6 : 22] He treats them as slaves, he tries to wipe out their children, and they're not in a position to save themselves from Egypt. There's nothing that they can do to save themselves. So God steps in, God liberates them, he shows them grace, he shows them favor, and he frees them from their tyranny.

He liberates them completely, and then after having saved them, when he makes them free people, then he gives them these commandments, which begin with, what we read at the beginning, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

So I freed you, and now, here in these commandments, here's the way to live out that salvation. Here's the way to gratefully use your life to say thank you to me.

Not as slaves, not out of a guilt trip mindset, but because you're free. Here's how to show gratitude. It's not just a set of moralistic commands.

It's all about the Gospel, the Ten Commandments. It's all about the good news of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. Because this Old Testament story in Exodus is, in New Testament terms, a much bigger story of what God has done to save us from sin through Jesus, because we could not save ourselves.

[7 : 38] And if you believe that message, if you believe the Gospel, that God is the Lord your Savior Jesus Christ, who freed you from sin, who brought you out of, to use Old Testament language, the land of slavery, if you believe that, the more and more that you start to bring your life in line with it, the more and more truthfulness as a character trait, as a default mode, the more and more that will grow.

But what are we talking about when we describe truth? When he speaks here about this person, the person who knows God, speaks the truth from his heart. It's not speaking about propositional truth.

It's not speaking about a load of technically correct facts. Propositional truth. Edinburgh is the capital of Scotland. Propositional truth. The moon orbits the earth. It's just facts that technically are correct.

That's not the kind of truth that it's speaking about here. What it's speaking about is a constancy of character. It's speaking about integrity as the default setting of your heart.

Actually, the word for truth here is the same kind of word in Hebrew, in the language this was written in as the word solid. It's the same word, just applied in different contexts.

[9 : 05] And it's something that the Bible constantly uses to describe God. When it speaks about God as full of grace and truth, it's speaking about how God's character is constant, how God always maintains his integrity, how God is always truthful to the things he says and that he does.

And you find the same description of Jesus as well, full of grace and truthfulness. He is solid. His character is just rock solid like that.

What this emphasizes is that, when it's used about God, is that God is trustworthy, that God will not fail. In his own character, he has this completely reliable solidity.

You know when you're dealing with God, that you're dealing with a God whose actions and whose character are always consistent, who always sides on the side of justice.

And what he's saying here is, he's applying the same thing to a Christian, that a Christian is someone whose life is solid, because the life is built on God himself.

[10 : 15] And it's through restoring our relationship with God through the Gospel that this kind of constancy of character, this change internally in the heart, starts to grow and starts to take place.

Why is it important though to grasp that, that the Gospel grows truthfulness? This is our starting point in looking at how the Gospel relates to truth. What's really important, because some Christians have got this completely wrong, they've misunderstood the emphasis here in terms of truth and what truth is, to be just about technically correct facts.

So the Christian aspires, this is our first great aspiration, to be someone who can always give answers that are technically, factually, literally correct.

That's the end of the process, that's all that we're aiming for. And you get Christians who believe, for example, that drama and acting are sinful, because you're acting as someone you are effectively lying, because you're saying you're someone that you're actually not.

And that's really misunderstanding, the starting point here in this Sam. Incidentally, acting as someone else in a play isn't actually trying to mislead someone, to think that you're actually hamlet.

[11 : 36] The opening and closing credits tend to make that quite clear. But the ninth commandment here is not calling us to an imaginationless world, where we put an end to dishonesty by having placards that say, down with acting and this sort of thing, if only it was that easy to put an end to dishonesty in our own hearts and in the world.

Putting an end to dishonesty is far harder than that. Instead, the Bible begins by directing us to the heart of the matter, which is really a matter of the heart, what's in here for me and for you, that this is where the renewal needs to begin, in order for the things that I say to be truthful.

I need a new heart, one that's full of truth and reliability, and a new rock-solid integrity. It's also really important that we grasp this, that the Gospel is the thing that grows truthfulness in our hearts, because God himself is not concerned with technical truth.

What I said was factually correct on a technicality, therefore it's okay. You can very often give a technically correct answer. Technically that was true, and yet still be completely unjust and slimy.

Think of the example that springs to mind for me, is the efforts of Bill Clinton to deny that he had sexual relations with Monica Lewinsky. Trying to get out of it on a technicality.

[13 : 09] I did not have sexual relations with that woman, and then I wasn't clear on what we meant by the terms. Sometimes you can get away with it. You can say things that are technically right, and yet you're still wrong in the eyes of God.

The Ten Commandments are not just calling us to be good people who don't tell fibs. They're not calling us to be people that maybe factually are right, and yet are still morally in the wrong.

They're calling us primarily to a new relationship with God as our Saviour. The first verse there before the First Commandment, I'm the Lord your God your Saviour, which in turn makes us new people in here.

It gives us new hearts, which have a fundamentally new disposition from which we relate to God in the First Four Commandments, and then how we relate to other people.

The Gospel itself is the thing that calls us to find a truthfulness, a consistency, a solidity of character in here as the starting point from which change flows into the rest of our lives.

[14 : 18] And we're going to see that as we go on in terms of how to get that internal change. So the Psalm is establishing that at the beginning. First, that there's a new heart, which means that we're new people.

Truth begins in here in terms of how to become a truthful person, how to grow truthfulness. The Bible first tackles the issue of who and what we are before going on to what we do.

So that's number one. The Gospel grows truthfulness. Point number two, the Gospel changes how we speak about and to other people.

Slightly long point, but the Gospel changes how we speak about and to other people. Look at what comes next. Verse three, and has no slander on his tongue, who does his neighbour no wrong and casts no slur on his fellow man.

And I want us to focus on these two things, on having no slander on his tongue and casting no slur on his fellow man. Words about others have a very powerful effect, either for good or for bad.

[15 : 28] If you want to build up another person, you can do it with words often. With words alone, they're so powerful. If you want to destroy another person, again, you can do it just with words.

In the things that we say to others about them, you can destroy someone else in slandering their reputation. And in the things that you say directly to another person, you can crush them by insulting them directly.

On the other hand, you can do both of those things for good and how you speak about other people. You can really build them up, or you can speak to them directly to encourage them, to build them up. I want to try and give an example of this from the programme The Apprentice.

From the current series of The Apprentice in particular. If you haven't seen the programme, it's a reality TV game show where you have, at the beginning, I think, 10 or 12 people.

The programme tells you these are the brightest young business people in the UK competing for a job. I think with that, well, if they were really bright, they'd probably already have jobs.

[16 : 38] But that's not really the point. But they're all competing for one job. So they're all in it for themselves, all in it for number one. And they're competing for this job where they work for Sir Alan Sugar.

Lord Alan Sugar now, the businesses are. And it's a job with a six-figure salary. So there's really a big incentive for them. They're all in the game for their own interests, which means that all of these other people are competitors.

They're stopping them from getting the one thing that they want. That six-figure salary, this chance to work for Sir Alan. And in each round, the competitors are divided into two teams. And in each round, they're given a business task.

You have to rebrand the town of Margate. You have to brand a new kind of chocolate and sell it to people. And then they have to work together in these teams. And then the team that makes the most money wins that round.

And you have someone that leads the team on each task. And then afterwards, when they've shown who won and who lost, Sir Alan chooses the winning team. And then the losing team have to analyse where things went wrong.

[17 : 43] And Sir Alan will ask them, what do you think of the team leader? How did she do? And then after they squabble for a bit, Sir Alan chooses someone from the losing team and gives them that great line, you're fired, and then they go off.

And all their dreams are just broken, and they're not going to get that, but they haven't got that job. And this goes on throughout all the rounds until at the end, there are no two competitors against each other.

Think of how often, if you watch the series, the losing people out of their own interests would slander each other. They've lost, one of them has to go.

And Sir Alan says to them, was she a good team leader? And then all of a sudden you have them slandering each other, because this is their chance to really stitch up the team leader and say it was her fault, so she should be fired, not us.

And you have them slandering each other, she wasn't a good team leader, she really agitates people, oh, she's so annoying. She's not competent, she does not have a clue what she's doing.

[18 : 45] So they try really hard to use their speech in the way they talk about other people, to get someone else fired, by dragging them through the mud, so they can protect their own interests and stay in the job game themselves.

And then usually the slandering each other then turns, indirectly turns into direct insulting. So they end up, how could you say that about me? I was a great team leader, I've got my business instincts, and then it turns into, no, you don't, Lorraine, you're clueless, you don't know what you're doing.

I'm not the idiot, you're the waster, and they're really just laying on directly to each other, dragging each other down, trying to break each other. But what was really interesting, as the series went on, to the final round of the competition, when Sir Allen had whittled it down to the last two competitors, so everyone else has been fired, and you only had two people from the original 12, or however many who were in it.

Sir Allen then, in the last round, brought back all of the previously fired competitors, and he brought them in to help the two finalists.

What was really interesting was that the failed competitors were now no longer in the game to win it for themselves. They could not win. You know, they'd already heard you're fired, there's no way that you can possibly win this, but I want you to come in and help them.

[20 : 11] Once they were in the game to help someone else do well, once they were back in the game, not for their own interests, they completely changed in the way that they spoke about and to each other.

At the end, when Sir Allen asked the two teams, was your leader good? It was really positive. Yes, Sir Allen, she was great. She's got really good people skills. She motivated us.

She saw what we were good at. She picked it out. She had creative ideas. She had good business instincts. She showed good leadership. They used the way that they spoke about each other to build each other up, to help someone do well.

And then, having changed how they spoke about each other, there was this natural change in how they spoke to each other. You know, the women that lost it, the really robotic one, you know, didn't show any emotion throughout the series at all because she's in this hard business world where everyone's trying to crush you.

And then, at the end, the last round, she's got these people saying, she did really well. You know, she looked out for what we were good at. She led us well, looked out for our interests. Then, when they start saying nice things to her like this, genuinely nice things, you actually saw some emotion in her.

[21 : 24] It was incredible. You know, thanks, guys. That means a lot to me. It changed everything. Why am I giving this example? Why this illustration?

I'm giving it because it's like that, quite like that with the Gospel, with how the Gospel changes us in here. We're in the game of life, if we believe the Gospel, for a new reason, for a really different reason to how we lived before we were Christians.

Because now, we know who we are in Christ. We have a secure, eternal identity in Him. So the way that we live from day to day, the motivations we have, the reason that we relate to other people is not the same as it used to be.

We're not in life any more for ruthless personal advancement because we're already accepted in the most important relationship. We already know God by His grace alone.

We're like the guys in the final round of the apprentice who are brought back into the game, except that they were losers, and spiritually we've won. That's why we're not in the game any more.

[22 : 33] We've already got the prize. We're now here, brought back into the game to help others, to benefit others, rather than just see what use we can make of everyone else to advance our own personal goals.

And what's apparent is that the gospel changes how we relate to other people. Remember Jesus said, someone asked them, how do you summarize the whole of the law and the Ten Commandments?

And He said two points, you love God and you love your neighbour. As we're going through the Ten Commandments, the last two before this one are about sex and about money, and how you can use them to either love God or love your neighbour.

You can use sex for good or for evil. You can use it to love someone else, or you can use it to exploit people. You can use sex to control them.

You can use it to abuse them. You can use it to get what you want for completely selfish ends. Or you can follow the Seventh Commandment and use sex to love one particular neighbour exclusively.

[23 : 36] One other person. Money is the same. You can use money to love or to hate your neighbour. You can use money to exploit someone. You can use it to control someone. You can use it to make money, the God that you live to serve.

You can use it to make people's lives miserable by not paying them fair wages. You can, on the other hand, use your money to love people radically by giving generously.

To help people, to fund worthy causes. You can use money to love your neighbour. So what about our speech? What about what this commandment is focusing on?

What about the way we speak to and about other people? Well, it's clear that if we slander other people, if we use speech to talk to other people about them, to drag them down, to destroy their characters, we are not loving our neighbour.

Also, if we speak to others in insulting ways, in patronising ways, in ways that belittle them and remove their dignity, as people who are God's image, if we do that, whether it's name calling in the playground when you're five years old, or whether it's snide comments in the business place, in the workplace, whether it's not being able to speak constructively and just swearing at each other and insulting each other, again, we're hating rather than loving our neighbour in the way that we use speech.

[25 : 09] But what the Gospel grows in us consistently, if we are brought close to God, if we dwell in His sanctuary, if we live on His holy hill, it makes us consistently people who don't trash other people's reputations, who don't try and destroy them person to person.

So the Gospel does that. So we speak to and about other people. Third point, the Gospel makes us honest with ourselves.

The Gospel makes us honest with ourselves. Look at what comes next. In verse 4, who despises a vile man but honours those who fear the Lord.

And then at the end here, who keeps his oath even when it hurts, who keeps his oath even when it hurts, who keeps his oath even when it hurts. This kind of value here is completely counter-cultural in the society we live in.

With us, promises are good only in so far as they help us personally. In other words, I make my promises to benefit myself. And once I think the promise is no longer making me feel good or having a directly good outcome for me, the promise is worthless and I can move on from it.

[26 : 31] I think about it, a footballer signs a contract to play for a team. Let's say he's put his name on paper saying, I will be here for five years, two years on. He's had a couple of good seasons and some big team come in for him.

You know, the old firm come in offering far more money, European football. All of a sudden, the contract isn't worth the paper it's written on. This guy is going, he'll move.

Think of a married couple who have promised to be together until death parts them. But after a couple of years, a third party appears, it's more exciting, or one of the spouses just gets bored.

This isn't what I want from my life, you're holding me back. You're not letting me be the person I want to be. Marriage doesn't suit. So again, the marriage certificate is not worth the paper it's written on.

That's the world that we live in where promises are only to be kept while they benefit ourselves and our self-interest. But the Bible presents, like, it gives promise a completely different value, much more, much higher, where I make promises not primarily for my own benefit, but for the benefit of others.

[27 : 48] And even if keeping my promise and being a person of integrity hurts me, this David who wrote this is saying, he will do it.

He will do what he has said for your benefit, even when it hurts. And that's personal hurt rather than hurt to anyone else. And the application of this is if we're taking this commandment seriously, if we want the way that we speak to other people to be consistent with what we believe about the Gospel, what God has done for us in Jesus, we should be people who are careful about the things that we say we will do, about the promises we make in the workplace.

If you sign a contract, honour it. If you promise your boss or your uni supervisor, yes, I'll have the essay in for Monday. Have it in for Monday.

If you want to be successful in life and in your relationships, in your job, I know this, when I was writing this I thought this sounds so prosperity gospel, but it's really not.

It's just wisdom from the Bible. If you want to be successful in life, the only thing that we can do is become people of total integrity. Think of the handful of MPs, for example, who escaped the expenses scandal unscathed.

[29 : 13] With the expenses scandal, there were no minor lapses of integrity. It's all or nothing. These people are either trustworthy or they're not.

And those who had integrity consistently kept their jobs, they proved their reliability. I would trust them. Would you trust the other ones who didn't, who were ripping us off, they were taking our tax money and spending it on second homes, five minutes away from the homes they already have, that they never visit, that they rent out to their siblings.

You won't trust them. Have you ever worked for or worked with someone whose character you just don't trust, someone that you can't rely on?

It's an awful situation to be in. Would you rather work for a boss who clearly has his agendas, whose character you don't really trust and see as consistent, who has all the employees just as pawns in his or her game and agenda, or would you rather have a boss who is fair, maybe hard but fair and consistent, someone who you know you can rely on, who will tell you the truth, and whose own character you basically find consistent and trustworthy?

Which kind of person would you rather be surrounded by? Which kind of person would you rather be? It's the question that this is asking us. The Gospel is something that makes us honest with ourselves.

[30 : 44] If we value the Gospel, we have no choice if we want to live consistently with it, but to be people who will commit to this, to keep our oaths even when it hurts us, to do the things that we've said we'll do.

We also have to become honest, most importantly by admitting our dishonesty. That sounds contradictory, but say it again and we'll explain it.

Become honest by admitting our dishonesty. What the Ninth Commandment touches on in telling us to be honest people is a worldwide problem that's universal wherever you have human beings.

Something that we are all plagued by is dishonesty. None of us are completely truthful all the time. And you see it from the really grand scale of nations, which in statements, in their official policies, deny truth.

Then moving down slightly of politicians, again plagued by dishonesty. Think of our expense, the scandal recently, then you moved into the level of companies with basic dishonesty and spin and jargon.

[32 : 01] Going back 50 years, smoking is good for you. Buy our cigarettes. To modern day, we have had an unparalleled, unexpected transformation in revenue this year.

What they're really saying is we lost all of our money. We've had huge losses. That kind of spin and jargon that we find in companies. Then moving down to the level of individuals, even the workplace, how many people lie on their CVs, how many of us present ourselves very carefully, but not always honestly.

Think of even things like social networking online, how we present ourselves on Facebook, on Bebo, on Myspace, how we present a really careful selection of things about us.

But it's not really the whole picture. We're not honest. Then moving down to small children, if you've raised them, you don't go out of your way to teach them not to tell the truth.

And yet somehow, even when they're tiny, there's that problem there in their hearts of dishonesty. And it all goes back to Adam and Eve, who set the trend that the whole world follows by accepting falsehoods in the place of truth.

[33 : 21] If you eat this fruit, surely you will become like God. Literally, the whole world is caught up in dishonesty. And what we find in Christianity in the Ninth Commandment is something that is refreshingly different in a commandment about honesty in a call to a new way of life in relation to truth, where because we believe the gospel, truth is something that we're committed to.

It's not something that we're economical with in order to benefit ourselves. And the only way to get to that, the starting point is to do the most honest thing that we ever can, which is to admit that we're really at the core dishonest people, that we struggle with dishonesty.

That's the most honest thing that we can do. And it's only when we become honest with ourselves, which is something that the gospel produces, and with God about our own failings, and find that, because we're honest with God about our failings, that God has already dealt with them on the cross through Jesus, that's when we can find what David was talking about at the end of this psalm, when he says, he who does these things will never be shaken.

That's where you can find that solidity, that truthfulness, that unshakableness of hearts and of character. And actually, in the next Psalm, Psalm 16, which David wrote as well, he really wrote them as a unit.

He speaks about where he finds that unshakableness. It's in verse 8, I have set the Lord always before me, because He is at my right hand.

[35 : 07] I shall not be shaken. That's where you find this, going back to the very beginning, the gospel of growing truthfulness, growing unshakableness in your character and in your heart.

It comes from setting God always before you, it comes from having Him knowing that He is solid, that His character is impeccable. That's where we find this solidity, and that's where this whole process of transformation comes from and is powered by as it goes along.

And that's what the ninth commandment has to teach us. We're really scratching the tip of the iceberg on this. There's so much more that we could say, maybe that we could discuss later on, but we'll stop at that and we'll pray together.

Lord our gods, we thank you that you are unshakable. We thank you that your character is solid, that it's perfectly consistent, that you are truthful, that you are honest, and that you are fully in touch with yourself and with reality.

And we thank you that also you know us in truth, and that you know everything about us, and that through your Son Jesus Christ, through His life and His death on the cross, that you have dealt with our dishonesty.

[36 : 30] So Lord, we praise you for this, and we pray that you would help us through the gospel to become honest people, to become honest with ourselves, about ourselves, about our failings, about how much we, like the whole world around us, struggle with dishonesty.

And we pray that you would help us to find grace and restoration through Jesus Christ. And we pray that because of that, that you would, through renewing our hearts, that you would help us to speak truth, to be truthful, and full of faithfulness and consistency, and full of integrity from our hearts stemming outwards.

And Lord, we pray that you would help us to speak differently about and to other people. We pray for you to forgive us for where we engage in gossip, for where we slander other people, and where we try and drag them down so that we can elevate ourselves.

And we also pray for your forgiveness for how we so often speak, not constructively, to other people, and where we are insulting and patronizing.

Lord, we repent of these sins, and we pray for you to deal with them, and for you to change us. Help us through your spirit and by your grace to be doers of the ninth commandment we pray.

[37 : 51] We ask for this in Jesus' name. Amen.