

# Nine!

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] In Exodus chapter 20, we come to the second last of the commandments. We are looking at commandment number 9.

This evening, you shall not give false testimony against your neighbour. Exodus chapter 20 and verse 16. These last commandments are quite short, quite sharp and really quite simple.

We know for all of us life can be at some points quite frightening for one reason or another. And it can be that some of us feel good, don't feel ill in any way, don't feel unwell.

And yet for some reason we are called to the doctor and the doctor sends us for a scan. And the scan reveals some hidden and unfelt cancer which is devastating to us because we feel fine.

And often when we come to Scripture and the commands of God, it's a bit like that spiritually. Sometimes we just feel fine and we don't think there's anything wrong in our lives.

[ 1 : 1 7 ] Partly because we're not opening ourselves to the Word. The Bible is closed in our lives. When the Bible is closed to us, when God's Word is closed, we're closing off conversation with God.

We're not educating our conscience. We're not living with a listening ear to the way that He wants us to live. And so we might feel great about ourselves, but it will be an unhealthy well-being.

It will be a deceptive well-being and ultimately we'll catch up with us spiritually in our lives. It's really important for us to be honest and open enough to allow the great surgeon to use his scalpel in our hearts.

To allow him to scour our inner being and say, look, these things need dealt with. These are the issues that you need to face up to in your life. It's not enough just to scan the surface of what you're doing, but it must be that you allow my Word to expose some cancer that's there, spiritual cancer, because I have the power of healing. God says that unless we see and expose our sins, then we're not going to be healed.

And the commands are very, very powerful in that way. They expose things. As we've seen with all of them, they're kind of umbrella commands that deal with a lot bigger areas than just the mere expression of the command itself.

[ 2 : 5 3 ] And they're like, it's like God's eyes that scan our heart and expose what we really like and why we need to come to him for renewal and for cleansing and for transformation.

If your life's not being transformed, if you're not at some point uncomfortable tonight, and if you're not uncomfortable when you open scripture, then I think there's something wrong with your spiritual life and there's something wrong with mine, because he wants us to be uncomfortable if it will drive us to his grace and his forgiveness and his healing.

And sometimes what we do is I think we just submerge him. We just close him off. We just close the doors. We say, no, I'm not going to deal with this.

I'm not going to let his light shine into the darkness of my heart. I'm quite content just to have an outward show of religion. I'm quite content just to live outwardly for him, but don't touch my heart.

Don't get near to me. I'm going to look at everyone else, but don't come near to me. And we often say that with God, isn't it? Because let's be honest this evening, it is uncomfortable.

[ 4 : 18 ] And sometimes it's hard. And sometimes we feel like the Samist when he says, well, look, is God interested in my life? And what I'm doing? Yes, absolutely. He's the great physician.

And the commands are all like that. And this command is no different. And it's a command that speaks about truthfulness. And if there's something, if there's anything that's important in a Christian community, it's honesty and truthfulness, truthfulness with God and truthfulness with one another.

It's very easy for Christian communities to be absolutely soaked in hypocrisy, to be soaked in a kind of, I'm okay, Jack Howard, you.

And I kind of all as well with my soul, but I can find plenty of things wrong with everybody else. And so we find that grace brings us to a place of truthfulness, loving, humble, patient, compassionate truthfulness.

And this command is about the significance of one another. And the significance not like the previous command of protecting our property, but the importance of protecting our name and our character and our well being.

[ 5 : 52 ] It's the right to justice and to truth, both in a community setting and also, I guess, in a legal setting, and the importance of defending truth and of being truthful with one another and of being honest.

Now, this is a hugely practical, everyday commandment. As we'll see, what we read from James was all about the tongue.

We've all got tongues. We will all speak a lot. We'll all speak a lot after the service. We'll speak a lot tomorrow. We'll speak a lot about people. And this commandment is a challenge to the way we speak about people.

And the way we speak about one another. And the way we speak about and understand God. And it's, as with all the commandments, it's a revelation of God's own character.

It's a reflection of who God is. He says, you know, you shall not bear false witness against your neighbour, against anybody else. It's reminding us that he is truth.

[ 7 : 03 ] Now, we saw that last week we talked about and spoke about God as being the truth. And it is hugely significant to remember that.

That he is just and that he is truth and he is good. And that he has never lied. Now, every day we'll accuse God of lying.

Because he's not doing what we think he should do. And he's not giving us what we think we should have. And he's not answering the promises that he has made to us. And so sometimes we can maybe, not consciously, but subconsciously in our lives, we accuse him of untruth.

And yet the whole significance that we can come to worship tonight is that we worship a person who is astonishingly rich in character and absolutely trustworthy and true.

Otherwise we live and trust in someone who is forcing us into a hellish instability.

[ 8 : 15 ] Because he can't be trusted. If you're seriously, or if I'm seriously sitting here this evening and saying that God can't be trusted, then there is nothing worth living for in this world.

I am the way, the truth and the life. His character is one of truth. And it's by faith that we need to grasp that because the unbelieving world around us doesn't believe that.

Argue that God is not trustworthy and is not good and is not true. But we recognize, don't we, from the very beginning that that is what welled up in opposition to God.

It was the father of lies. It was Satan who came in and stood against the truth. So this is a revelation of God's character and how his character should influence primarily the Christian community.

The world of course, and wouldn't that be great? But primarily the covenant community. The commands given to the covenant people. And we are the covenant people of God.

[ 9 : 29 ] And these are the commands that will not enable us to satisfy God's justice or righteousness. But because of what Jesus has done, we are enabled in grace and in gratitude to have these commands as our ethical standards.

Do we take salvation from our hearts? Do we apply it to our feet? But also do we apply it to our tongue? To how we speak?

Because that is what will set us apart as Christians in the world in which we live, probably more than anything that we do. It will be how we speak.

Because this command reveals God's pattern for community. It is a pattern where he wants truth to be significantly important in that community.

Where the reputations of individuals are to be valued and protected. Where integrity and impartiality are hugely significant.

[ 10 : 39 ] And we seek the truth in our relationships and in our interactions with one another. And in our conversations with one another.

As you remember, all these latter commands are commands that deal with our interpersonal, horizontal relationships.

The early ones deal with our relationship with God. Oh, I know you're my father and mother, you murder, you shan't commit adultery, you shan't steal. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour.

Who is your neighbour? Well, Jesus answered that, isn't he? Your neighbour primarily is whoever we are in contact with, whoever happens to be in our path.

And also, obviously, the community of God's people. And the commandment, as with all the other commandments, reveals something important about salvation.

[ 11 : 39 ] It reminds us that we need to be saved because we have spoiled this in our relationships with one another. Right from the very beginning, and it's brought separation and destruction.

We see it, don't we, from the very beginning. That immediately Adam and Eve stop trusting one another and start putting one another in a bad light. Ah, the woman, you gave me, she was the one who did it.

And so on. And there's immediately making other people look bad so that we can look good. And then they blame Satan. And then there's Cain and Abel.

And then there's the ongoing rolling out of a society and people who cease to be truthful and who become destructive and dangerous.

And salvation is the recognition that we know our life is a lie without Christ.

[ 12 : 51 ] And that our sin impunes God's truthful character. And that's a solemn reality for us. That we are guilty when we don't see the need for salvation.

If you're here this evening and you don't see the need for salvation. If you don't think you need a savior, if you don't feel particularly bad or sinful or wrong, then you're impugning God's character and you're telling him that he's a liar.

And you're saying, you know, I know you're the God of the universe, but actually you're a liar. Because I don't need your salvation. I was decent of you to go all the way to the crowd. But I don't need that.

I'm okay. And so the whole reality of sin is a breaking of this command and a breaking of our ongoing daily need for Jesus Christ in our lives. If as Christians we come to God and say, I don't need you today.

I'm good enough today. I don't need prayer. I don't need your word. I don't need your wisdom. I'm not sure if I need your guidance.

[ 14 : 00 ] I'm okay today. Then we're, we're in reality, we're telling God that he's a liar because he tells us that we're to pray without ceasing, that we are to look to him for our daily bread, we're to pray for him on a daily basis, we're to recognize him as our Father, we're to go to him.

And so it's very easy for us to recognize where we fall short and how much we need him. What is it that this exposes? Well, it really exposes in our hearts and in our conversations, deceitfulness and hatred and our wrong attitude towards ourselves, towards God and towards others.

In many ways, this ninth commandment could be taken as the commandment that personifies Satan. It's evil personified in many ways, this commandment.

The adversary, Satan, the accuser, the source of evil. From the beginning, he's been known as the breaker of this commandment along with others.

Now that sounds like there's a mortar bite going over the roof of the church. That isn't possible, but it does sound like it.

[ 15 : 24 ] We do need to get work done in the church, make that roof more secure. Anyway, it's evil personified in many ways, this commandment.

From the beginning, what was Satan? Satan was the hater of truth, wasn't he? The hater of God, but the hater of truth.

He's a false witness and he was out always to destroy God and truth. Now that is really important and solemn for us.

John 8, Jesus says, you belong to your father the devil and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning.

Okay, so he's also the breaker of the other commandment, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. Do you listen to Satan? Do you enjoy Satan?

[ 16 : 22 ] And sin, then it's a recognition. This is why John Lau is not in church, because it's something to do with the organization he works with.

That's why we wouldn't be able to get parked in Johnson Terrace. Just forget it, try and forget it. It's a Satan enemy.

For there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language.

He speaks his native language. That is a wonderful illustration of Satan. He speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. Now when we have truth and lies in the balance, remember who Satan is.

And remember that he is the father of lies. And in many ways this commandment is evil personified in him. He is the one who from the beginning has stood against God and from him emanates lies, not truth.

[ 17 : 30 ] God is truth, Satan is not. There is no truth. There is no truth and there is nothing that is truthful in him. And that also is a revelation of our sinful hearts.

That's one of the great things about that book *Dangerous Calling*. It's very, very honest. As I say, and I'm sure Neil would be the same on others, I wish we'd had it a long time ago.

Because it does away with any kind of fancy idea that we're great in our own strength. And we've got fantastic talents that we can change the world with unless we recognise that we can only do that if God will turn our hearts upside down and change them.

Because our sinful hearts were born in darkness and were in the influence of our rotten, corrupt nature. And we naturally struggle with God's word. We'll read anything and we'll listen to anything, but we'll struggle with God's word because it's truth.

And very often our characters will reveal this disease. And what God prohibits here is, let's be honest, it's commonplace in our lives and commonplace in the society in which we live and maybe not even recognised as wrongful.

[ 18 : 57 ] So it exposes our sinful hearts and our need for a saviour to change what we're like from the inside. And it speaks against bearing false witness in a judicial way, in a legal sense, committing perjury or making false accusation either in a societal setup or one to one.

Silence, not speaking against injustice. Leviticus 5 speaks about that. Public slander, private slander, defending the guilty, condemning the innocent, destroying the reputation of others unjustifiably, bearing false witness, lying about people.

In that public way. But it also means just generally in a broader way because all the commands have broader implications from the Bible, indeed as we read from James 3, where we choose to ignore the truth.

Or when we choose not to dig for the truth and we're content to reject the truth and express a lie, either for revenge or to be accepted or in a job for our ambition to escape trouble, to escape guilt, we lie.

As unbelievers, when we reject salvation, because we are not being honest with ourselves or with God, as Christians we lie when we don't witness.

[ 20 : 59 ] We lie by our silence, by our concealing of the truth. There's both sides to that, isn't there? There's not only that we don't tell lies but also that we do tell the truth. And what I would also just briefly want to focus on is something I think probably that is the most practical application of this commandment is slander.

Probably the most common, probably the most acceptable in our own society and often yet the worst. A wild and destructive tongue.

Jeremiah 18, let's attack him with our tongues and pay no attention to anything he says. Where we listen and we spread slander about people.

Leviticus 19, do not go about spreading slander among your people. Think of the number of conversations you've had over the last fortnight.

Or how many conversations you've listened to over the last fortnight. How many of them have been abusive? How many of them have judged other people on half truths and condemned them because of that?

[ 22 : 29 ] How many of them have been at the expense of their characters or their persons? How many of our conversations have ignored our own weaknesses and our own faults?

How often have we damned people on gossip that we've heard about them with no thought whatsoever about whether what we've heard is true or not? How often have we gone with the crowd just because the crowd were saying something Exodus 23? How often are we quick to hear bad things about people and very quick to spread it?

How many of us have been at the expense of other people? How quick have we been to remember the weaknesses and faults of others and pass them on even if we don't know they're true and being very quick to forget our own?

How much jealousy or envy or lack of trust or hatred have we experienced in our lives and in our conversations in the last few days and weeks?

It's true that we struggle so often with slander. The old statement used to be, wasn't it, sticks and stones will break my bones but names will never hurt me.

[ 23 : 58 ] It sounds nice but I don't think in any way it's true. Most of us will not have been beaten up but most of us will have been beaten up verbally and found that hugely painful and hurtful especially in the Christian community.

Sometimes we get used to it in the world in which we live and we may be expected but when we find that lack of trust, that lack of honesty, that lack of forgiveness, that lack of truthfulness, that lack of openness within the Christian community then that is truly damaging and hurtful for us.

So slander, lying, bearing false witness lies from the evil one. It's what this command exposes and encourages us to come to Christ for forgiveness and for new life and for transformation so that we can begin to be at core level, at foundational level, people of the truth.

People of the book, whatever you want to call it, people, because what it expects from us is this great love, you know, love one another. That's the summation of the commands, love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, sentiment and your neighbour as yourself and these commands are the outworking of loving your neighbour as yourself.

So the way of love is the way of truth, it's the way of protection. We protect one another's character. We seek the best of one another. We seek to in love and humility expose the weaknesses of one another in relationship so that they may be building up and there may be encouragement.

[ 25 : 49 ] We confess our sin to one another. We speak against injustice that we see. We control our tongues. James 3 is a hugely significant exposition of the ninth commandment in the way it tells us to control our tongue.

With our tongue we praise our Lord the Father and with it we curse men who have been made in God's likeness. Very easy to be duplicitous and double standard in our life as Christians.

Let's be slow to judge, slow to speak and godly and gracious, watching how we speak about one another, watching what we say to one another and what we say about one another and reminding ourselves of truth and of applying truth into our relationships so that we know each other well enough so that we can bring truth into relationships in a way that is loving and gracious and that is the way of humble dependence upon God.

Our hearts, my heart is simply too black to do it on my own. It's impossible. I find only hypocrisy there. I need a new heart. I need a new reliance on God's grace.

I need a new dependence on the Holy Spirit to stop me putting myself first and making myself look good by breaking down other people and by making them lesser.

[ 27 : 30 ] We need to quell the evils motives that still remain in our hearts by throwing ourselves onto Christ and into his practical power so that we live out our lives as a Christian community outworking this command.

Which is that we do not speak falsely against one another. We don't think the worst. We don't look for the worst but we look to be honest and truthful and gracious and kind and trusting in God and pointing others to trust in God and to trust in God who does not lie and who is not a liar and who can be trusted and who is worthy of our whole hearted devotion.

Father God, help us to live for you and help us to understand the amazing light of the great surgeon.

The powerful exposing light of God into our hearts which is there to expose but also to bring healing and forgiveness and transformation and renewal.

May that be what we do and may we not look back at our Christian lives and think, well I became a Christian 20 years ago and been the same ever since.

[ 29 : 15 ] We are like you and that involves how we speak and our attitude to the truth. It involves not accusing you of being a liar which is tantamount to blasphemy.

being aware of Satan's deception and his accusations and his methodology. So Lord, help us we pray. Help us to understand who you are and help us to be truthful and loving and gracious with one another, supportive and courageous and compassionate and committed and good. And Lord bless us as we sing and praise you and may it come from our hearts as we do so in Jesus' name. Amen.