

The Ten Commandments

Commandment 9: You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour

Leonard Sweet, in his *Soul Cafe* newsletter, included this list of “Top 10 Liars’ Lies”:

10. We’ll stay only five minutes. 9. This will be a short meeting. 8. I’ll respect you in the morning. 7. The check is in the mail. 6. I’m from the government, and I’m here to help you. 5. This hurts me more than it hurts you. 4. Your money will be cheerfully refunded. 3. We service what we sell. 2. Your table will be ready in just a minute. 1. I’ll start exercising (dieting, forgiving, ...) tomorrow.

Exodus 20: 16 You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour

Not only false oaths, to deprive a man of his life or of his right, are here prohibited, but all whispering, tale-bearing, slander, and calumny; in a word, whatever is deposed as a truth, which is false in fact, and tends to injure another in his goods, person, or character, is against the spirit and letter of this law. Suppressing the truth when known, by which a person may be defrauded of his property or his good name, or lie under injuries or disabilities which a discovery of the truth would have prevented, is also a crime against this law. He who bears a false testimony against or belies even the devil himself, comes under the curse of this law, because his testimony is false. By the term neighbor any human being is intended, whether he rank among our enemies or friends.

Adam Clarke’s commentary

The terminology indicates the main focus is on formal slander and libel and is concerned primarily with the legal setting. The maintenance of justice was dependent on the reliability of the witness. Nevertheless, character assassination in any of its forms, legal or casual, would constitute false witness and would be a violation of this commandment.

IVP Bible commentary

1) The gravity of a false testimony

- We need to bear in mind the second New Covenant law here of “Love your neighbour as yourself”.
 - The question is “Does false testimony truly harmful to the person that it is against?”
 - Some might argue that these are just words and aren’t the same as stealing, murder or adultery which are actions.
 - We must never underestimate the power of our words and the harm that can be done through them. Lives are destroyed through false testimony and slander as much as through stealing, murder and adultery.
 - In fact more people are prone to destroy lives through what they say than by any other means.
 - James 3: 7 – 8 “All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and creatures of the sea are being tamed and have been tamed by man, but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.”
- Giving false testimony is saying what is not true against someone in what they did - their actions – or in who they are – their character.
- People in the Bible who were falsely accused
 - Joseph was a man of integrity but was falsely accused by Potiphar’s wife of trying to sleep with her when he didn’t give in to her advances on him. This resulted in him being imprisoned for some years. (Genesis 39)
 - Daniel was thrown to the lions when the other administrators plotted false accusations against him. (Daniel 6)
 - Haman bore false testimony against the Jews to King Xerxes which nearly led to their extermination. (Esther 3)
 - False witnesses accused Jesus

- Matthew 26: 59 – 60 “The chief priests and the whole Sanhedrin were looking for false evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. But they did not find any, though many false witnesses came forward.”
- If godly lives could be affected so drastically due to giving false testimony of them how will it affect the lives of those we falsely accuse.
 - We need to ask ourselves the question: “How will I feel if someone gives false testimony of me in any way?”

2) The motives for giving false testimony

- It is in the heart of man to do so
 - Matthew 15: 19 “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.”
- To hide our own sinfulness (As with Joseph and Potophar’s wife)
- Jealousy (As with Daniel and the administrators)
- Maliciousness and hatred (As with the Jews and Haman)
- Disagreement of belief, philosophy or action (As with Jesus and the Pharisees)

3) People of the Light or people of lies

- The devil is the father of lies (John 8: 44)
- But we don’t belong to the devil as we have been saved from the kingdom of darkness (where lies reign) and now live in the kingdom of light (where truth reigns). (Colossians 1: 12)
- Ephesians 4: 25 – 27 Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body. "In your anger do not sin": Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold
 - We bear false testimony and slander because that is what we were in the kingdom of darkness. But we have been saved – we are not that any more – we have been set free from the lies of the devil so we can put off what once had us bound.
 - We can speak truthfully to and about our neighbour because Jesus is the Truth. He lives in us
 - The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth and if we have been born of the Spirit then we have the Spirit of Truth within and where He is truth abounds.
- Lies can only flourish in darkness but we are people of the Light. If we are still bearing false testimony against others then we need to question ourselves whether we are really living in the Light.