

LOVING
YOUR
NEIGHBOUR

"TELLING THE TRUTH"

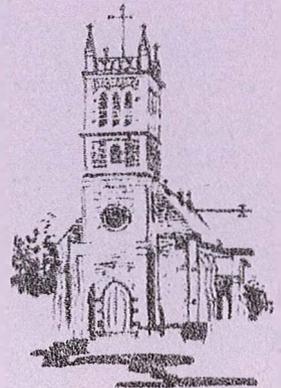
COMMANDMENT IX

"Thou shalt not bear false witness
against thy neighbour"

by

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COMMANDMENT IX .. "TELLING THE TRUTH"

The Reverend Lance Shilton

"Telling the truth" at any time is difficult for some.

In this series on the Ten Commandments, the direction given in the 9th Commandment is clear and simple: "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour" Exodus 20:16 (R.S.V.).

The fact that the Decalogue was uttered by the voice of God Himself without any intermediary as a witness enforces for us its authority and enduring validity. This is further emphasised by the fact that the Commandments were twice written by God, and on stone tablets (Ex. 31:18; 32:15,16; 34:1,28). The first pair were shattered by Moses to symbolize the effect of Israel's apostasy (32:19); the second pair were placed in the ark (25:16; cf. Deut. 10:5) (I.V.F. Bible Commentary).

The Ten Commandments, although found in the Old Testament, are an essential part of New Testament teaching. That is why in the Church of England, according to the canons, the Ten Commandments should be clearly shown on the walls of the sanctuary.

A village carpenter in England was once engaged to do some restoration and painting work in an ancient village church. In due course the account was received by the treasurer of the Parish Council, which read:

"To repairing the Lord's Prayer:	10/-
To making a completely new Creed:	17/6
To polishing up the Commandments:	11/4"

And there was a stained glass window to be cleaned -

"To wiping Judas' nose:	2/3".
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God did not give us these Ten Commandments to make us miserable, but to make us happy. In other words, God said to Moses: "Moses, I'm going to give you ten rules for living. I want you to teach the people these rules. If they live by them, I promise they will be happy, but I warn you; if they break them they will inevitably suffer the consequences. And one thing more, Moses - these are the rules of living for all people at all times. They will never go out of date; they will never be repealed or changed."

We are now looking specifically at the 9th Commandment: "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour." This prohibits false witness, particularly in a court of law. Ex. 23:1 - "You shall not utter a false report. You shall not join hands with a wicked man, to be a malicious witness;" but only there; defamation of character is forbidden. The penalties are given in Deuteronomy 19:16-21.

Have you ever noticed how the importance of one's neighbour is emphasised in this 9th and the 10th Commandment? You are not to give false evidence against your neighbour. You are not to covet your neighbour's house, or his wife, or his employees, or his possessions, or anything that belongs to your neighbour. Of course, the same thought of right relationships with our neighbours is brought out in Commandments 5, 6, 7 and 8 - honour to parents, no killing of your neighbour, no adultery with your neighbour, no stealing from your neighbour.

Yet constantly today people are saying that they are free to please themselves what they do.

No one has the right to please himself in a way that would either directly or indirectly limit the legitimate freedom of others. Either he accepts the consequent restrictions for himself in self-discipline, or he will need to have them imposed upon him by others. As no man is an island, he is not free to harm himself through self-indulgence. Others in some way are inevitably affected by his undisciplined behaviour.

The Commandment is clear for all: "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour."

It is so easy for a person today to be caught up in his environment of false witness. I remember that at a particular time when engaged in a controversial public issue, someone said to me, "We know what your public opinion is; what is your private opinion?" I was puzzled by the question until it was explained that it was thought I may have had special reasons for saying things in public, but that privately I wouldn't necessarily believe them. I read recently of a journalist who wrote an opinion about a certain controversial question, stating it was his own opinion, but in actual fact he personally believed something quite different. In my view to pretend in public to believe a certain thing, while in private to believe something quite different, is breaking the 9th Commandment and bearing

false witness to one's neighbour.

There are false witnesses in the entertainment world. What are you to believe about the film "The Last Tango in Paris", recently passed uncut by Commonwealth censorship. A British film critic (Ian Christie) sees it as "the victim of its own sensational publicity. That in turn is dictated by the public's current taste for erotic promise. Left to itself, the film would have been accepted as an examination of a tiny corner of life which, no matter how foreign to oneself, is nevertheless revealing." Mary Armitage emphasises the falsity of the critics' witness. She said in "The Advertiser" recently: "Honest, British Ian Christie's criticism leaves me with one personal problem: how to square it with honest American Jay Cocks's appalling 3-page 'Tango' spread in 'Time'."

There are false witnesses in the pornography push. We in this city know only too well how facts are distorted; how evil is called good and good is called evil. We know how much publicity the pornographers get for themselves. We know the indifference of great numbers of people. We know the lack of appropriate action in time by those charged with responsibility in government. We know how some are out deliberately to distort the issue so that those who stand for common decency are made to appear old-fashioned, puritanical and killjoys. In the midst of the "Oh! Calcutta!" controversy, there was a small group of pathetic protesters marching up and down outside our church. Although there were many young people of the church with their 'with-it' clothes on, the television cameras concentrated upon the elderly folk so as to give a certain false impression to the viewers.

Mary Whitehouse has been subjected to ridicule and abuse in Great Britain because of her stand against pornography. She has written a book, "Who Does She Think She Is?". Read what she says as she challenges the false witness of the promoters of pornography:

"Public opinion long ago condemned and outlawed the exploitation of child labour by nineteenth century industrialists. Yet, today, our society ruthlessly exploits the minds and emotions of young people for financial and political capital. Children are fodder, not for industry, but for ideas. They are no longer sent up chimneys but they're pressurised into alien patterns of behaviour to line the pockets of unscrupulous publishers, and to further the cause of revolution by stealth."

"A nation's youth is its greatest asset. We are poor guardians if we do not ensure their inalienable right to childhood, to mystery, to dreams, to tenderness and to love; if we do not realise that by ceasing to provide authority we may also cease to care; if we do not conscientiously maintain the foundations without which the young cannot build anew; if we do not tell them that there is a third way, neither reactionary nor libertarian, which still waits to be explored; and if we do not offer them the riches of our Christian heritage."

There are false witnesses in the advertising world. It has been necessary for Governments to consider ways by which this dishonesty can be effectively dealt with. Vance Packard in his most enlightening book "The Hidden Persuaders" exposes "the use of mass psychoanalysis to guide campaigns of persuasion" and claims that it has become the basis of a multi-million dollar industry. Professional persuaders have seized upon it in their groping for more effective ways to sell us their wares - whether products, ideas, attitudes, candidates, goals or states of mind. An advertising executive commented to colleagues in print on the fact that women pay two dollars and a half for skin cream, but no more than 25 cents for a cake of soap. Why? Soap, he explained, only promises to make them clean. The cream promises to make them beautiful. The executive added, "The women are buying a promise." Then he went on to say, "The cosmetic manufacturers are not selling lanolin, they are selling hope ... We no longer buy oranges; we buy vitality. We do not buy just a car; we buy prestige.

Packard comments: "These depth manipulations are, in their operations, beneath the surface of the conscious life, starting to acquire a power of persuasion that is becoming a matter of justifiable public scrutiny and concern.

There are the false witnesses in the political arenas. Thank God for some Christian politicians who are people of integrity, who are honestly endeavouring to do what is best for the community and fulfil their solemn responsibilities with selfless service. But there are others who are too concerned about political advantage, who give false evidence not so much in what they say (which is always carefully worded in evasive phrases), but in what they don't say, and what they don't do. The Bible is full of warning for those who govern to measure up to their obligations.

There are false witnesses in ordinary conversation. Will Rogers said, "So live that you would not be ashamed to sell the family parrot to the town gossip." How easy it is for us to gossip - our pretended sympathy may take an inverted form: "Isn't it awful about so-and-so. I feel so sorry for them."

We need to remember the old saying:

"There's so much good in the worst of us
And so much bad in the best of us
That it ill behoves the best of us
To talk about the rest of us."

A modern translation of Jesus' words in Matt. 7:5 is: "You hypocrite; first cast out the two-by-four out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to cast out the splinter out of your brother's eye."

The writer of Proverbs 24:28 said, "Be not a witness against thy neighbour without cause."

There are false witnesses in Christian profession.

If Peter, in the heat of the moment, had been faced with a challenge, he may have steeled himself to face such opposition (as he did in the Garden), but when it was a matter of meeting a chance remark by a little slave girl he saw no need to take a strong line.

Definite opposition at a particular time we may prepare for, but when something subtle, slow and casual comes, it is much more difficult to resist.

Peter's denial became open "before them all". His lie was repeated. The first denial had elicited from him a lie, but the second led him to perjure himself.

At first his denial was implicit:- "I don't know what you are talking about"; then it became explicit:- "I do not know the man."

We ought not to sit in judgment of Peter, as though we were immune from his kind of failing. Dr. Leon Morris said three things may be noted. First, that failure in a small thing commonly leads to failure in a larger; Secondly, failure comes from reliance upon one's own strength and one's own feelings; Thirdly, we cannot escape by telling a lie. Lies have a habit of coming not as a single enemy, but as a battalion.

There are false witnesses to personal need. Deep down each one of us becomes aware of his need of Christ. We may easily become like the false witnesses who, when Christ was on trial before Pilate, failed to testify to what they knew about Him, but falsely accused Him. Their neighbour was Christ, but they bore false witness against Him.

Our neighbour, Christ, stands beside us reminding us of our need of Him. But before He can supply that need, we are required honestly to state our true position.

Joy Davidman has remarked, "The only way to get rid of a sin is to admit it. Without honesty, repentance and forgiveness and grace are not possible. Nowadays the conviction of sin is widely misunderstood - secularists pity Christians, whom they picture as men bowed to the ground under an enormous burden of self-condemnation, men who go around all the time feeling guilty. Actually, of course, as anyone who has experienced conversion knows, the Christian is the only man who does not go around all the time feeling guilty. For him, sin is a burden he can lay down; he can admit, repent, and be forgiven. It is the unfortunate creature who denies the existence of sin in general, or his own in particular, who must go on carrying it forever."

"You shall bear true witness to your neighbour." Tell Christ that you come to Him in repentance and faith, and allow Him to give you His forgiveness, His victory and His peace. Then bear true witness to your salvation.

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