

# TRUTH TELLERS

## EXODUS 20:16

**You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.**

George O'Leary coached football at Georgia Tech for seven seasons. He had a winning record of 52 and 33 – and he took his team to five straight bowl games.

O'Leary's successful stint at Georgia Tech seemed to put him in position for his dream job. On December, 2002 O'Leary was announced as the new head coach of the most famed college football program in the country - the Notre Dame Fighting Irish. O'Leary, himself of Irish descent, seemed the perfect fit...

But five days after he was hired, O'Leary resigned in disgrace.

It all came crashing down on George O'Leary after his first day on the job...

Notre Dame received a phone call from a reporter who had tried to interview a few of O'Leary's old teammates. Though his resume claimed O'Leary had lettered 3 years in football - as an offensive lineman and a fullback - no one who played for the University of New Hampshire remembered anything about his career.

The reporter did some digging, and uncovered documentation that showed that O'Leary himself had fudged on the facts. Years before George O'Leary applied for a coaching job at the University of Syracuse. He was handed a form that asked for his athletic achievements. His High School record wasn't as impressive as he had liked, so he decided to embellish it a bit. *O'Leary lied*. He was on the team at New Hampshire, but due to sickness and injury, he never got into a game.

As it turns out, O'Leary's resume also claimed that he had earned a masters' degree in education from New York University. And again, though he'd been a student for a time, the school confirmed he had never earned a degree.

And for 21 years these lies followed George O'Leary – to Syracuse, to Georgia Tech, to Notre Dame. I'm sure there were times he thought about correcting the falsehoods, but once you tell a lie it's easier to live with it, than clear it up...

*But what you don't clear up, eventually blows up.*

And on that fateful day in December, 2002 - what seemed like such an innocent and harmless action at the time it was committed - *just a little white lie* – suddenly turned George O'Leary's dream job into his worst nightmare.

To his credit, in the aftermath of the incident, O'Leary called what he'd done, “*a selfish and thoughtless act*”. He tried to explain his circumstances, “*I was a young married father... seeking employment*”. Evidently, he thought the responsibility of providing for a family necessitated bending the truth, and compromising integrity.

In the end though, the shortcuts, and compromises, and justifications destroyed both a successful career and a good reputation. *I felt sorry for George O'Leary.*

But what's really sad is the take O'Leary's brother had on what happened...

Rather than remorseful, the other O'Leary was indignant. He complained, “*Is anyone trying to tell me that resumes are truthful? In the America we live in, the willingness to lie on a resume is an indication of how much you want the job.*”

You would think after the O'Leary incident everyone in American would scan their resumes for inaccuracies, but apparently this is not the attitude held by most people. Philip Ryken, who refers to the George O'Leary saga in his book on the Ten Commandments, tells of a survey done on nearly 3 million job applicants...

*Nearly 50% of the applications contain one or more falsehoods.*

There was a report in an issue of USA Today that actually identified the specific falsities most common to career resumes... “71% record a false number of years on the job. 64% exaggerated accomplishments. 60% exaggerated the size of the corporation one managed. 52% turned partial college work into a full degree, and 48% reported larger past compensation than had been actually earned.”

If you're a human resource officer, who gets paid to review resumes, you need to hire an investigator... Evidently, the average resume is no longer a believable document. Resumes have gone from fact, to fiction, to maybe even fantasy.

In today's world, lying has become an epidemic. Everywhere we turn our heroes, people we respected, end up discredited by their dishonesty.

The most recent example is Major League Baseball. Just before Christmas several of baseball's top stars admitted to using illegal steroids. It heightened the suspicion that lots of players are gaining an unfair advantage and lying to cover it up. We wonder if the records being set today reflect honest play or a deception.

But lies and deception have invaded other arenas as well...

Pulitzer Prize winner, Joseph Ellis, was caught telling stories of his combat days in Vietnam, while he spent his war years teaching history at West Point.

Evidently he was so in love with history he started making up his own.

Who can forget the singing sensation, Milli Vanilli? The dance band duet sold millions of records, and won a Grammy for *Best Vocal Group of the Year*.

But they were also the first group to have to give back a Grammy when it came out that the voices on their albums were not their own. They lip synced their songs.

And of course, one of the most infamous lies of all was spoken by a former United States president, when he said, “I did not have sex with that woman.”

Lies in our modern world are becoming more and more common. And it’s not just the celebrities who manufacture fabrications – so do the common Joes...

In their book, *The Day America Told the Truth*, authors Patterson and Kim estimate that 91% of all Americans regularly embellish the truth. They comment, “We lie and don’t even think about it.” It’s as if the society has lost its love for truth.

In a chapter on the 9<sup>th</sup> Commandment, Philip Ryken also quotes a columnist from Time magazine, who writes, “The injunction against bearing false witness, branded in stone and brought down by Moses from the mountaintop, has always provoked ambivalent, conflicting emotions. On the one hand, nearly everybody condemns lying. On the other, nearly everyone does it every day.”

Friday night Kathy and I put our heads together and composed a Top Ten list.

Here are the Top 10 most common lies told every day... Actually Kathy and I came up with most of the lies on this list. I had to add a few later to get to ten...

- 10) I’m sorry I’m late, but I got caught in traffic.
- 9) Honey, I didn’t hear you say that...
- 8) Officer, this is my first time speeding.
- 7) I’ll turn 39 years old this year.
- 6) I never watch television except for the history channel.
- 5) But we can still be good friends.
- 4) I didn’t gain a pound over the holidays.
- 3) This is my real hair color.
- 2) Sorry, we can’t come to the phone right now.
- 1) Honey, I’m sorry, but I’ve got a headache tonight.

This past week I read of company called “*Alibi Agency*” that specializes in helping you fabricate a lie. They’ll provide the needed paper trail to cover up your actual activities... dummy invitations to business and social events - ticket stubs to the sporting event you were suppose to have attended... They even have a phony switchboard to that provides verbal evidence that you’re where you said you’d be.

An advertisement claims, “*We can tailor make an alibi to your specifications.*”

Charles Colson calls us, “*A post-truth society*”. We live in a day of situational ethics - where the end justifies the means. People say, “*If a lie helps, more than harms... go ahead and lie.*” We don’t like to admit there’s a price to be paid later...

We forget the warning in Proverbs 19:9, “*A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who speaks lies shall perish.*” There’s always a price to pay when we lie.

Hey, today university professors and even High School teachers tell our young people that truth doesn’t exist – that there’s really no such thing as truth... so why do we act surprised when those same students don’t tell the truth to their parents, or employer, or friends, or police... And later in life, they lie to their spouse.

If you’re a Christian God has called you to tell the truth – to be a *truth teller*.

John 1 tells us that “*the Law came through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.*” Jesus Himself said that He is “*the way, the truth, and the life.*” You can’t love Jesus without being a lover and upholder of the truth.

Nor can you be filled with the Holy Spirit without a desire for the truth. Jesus calls Him “*the Spirit of truth.*” And when the Spirit fills and overflows your life you stop playing fast and loose with the truth. You start to take truth-telling seriously.

Hey, God wants us to decide in advance that we're going to be truthful and honest in our interactions with people. Truth and integrity need to be trademarks of every Christian's character. A commitment to the truth should be a non-negotiable.

How important is it to you to be known as a person who keeps his word?

The 9<sup>th</sup> Commandment, "**You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor**" is strategic to the formation and continuation of a peaceful society.

Every society and nation is held together by honest communication. If I can't trust what you say, then it's impossible for us to have a meaningful relationship. Business breaks down. Marriage is mute. The courts become dysfunctional.

When a person's word is no longer his bond... when contracts aren't worth the paper they're printed on... when the judicial system is allowed to be circumvented by skilled lawyers who twist the truth to win the case... when crooked politicians say anything to get elected... when the phrase "*politic promise*" is considered an oxymoron... when truth-telling is no longer practiced trust breaks down, and healthy social and commercial interaction become a near impossibility.

Hey, an honest society is built on honest people.

The immediate context of the 9<sup>th</sup> commandment has to do with truth-telling in a court of law. The commandment forbids *perjury* – *lying under oath*. And it implies to every member of the legal system... A **judge** should be fair and impartial.

The **prosecutor** should have no ulterior motive other than a desire for justice.

The **defense** should seek fair and lawful treatment.

And the **witness** should tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

In other words, everyone involved in the legal process should *put truth first*.

*Not bearing false witness* was particularly vital in ancient times. Before the development of rules for evidence, and the days of forensic science a person's testimony was all important. Often the trial swung on the word on a witness. And since many of the crimes carried a death sentence a false witness could be lethal.

This is why God told His people in Deuteronomy 19:15, "One witness shall not rise against a man concerning any iniquity or any sin that he commits; by the mouth of two or three witnesses the matter shall be established." In other words, took more than one witness to convict. It required some corroborative testimony.

And if a man was found to be a false witness, verse 19, "then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother..." The perjurer serves the same sentence he tried to pin on his enemy... *What goes around comes around*.

It was a serious crime to bear false witness.

But the 9<sup>th</sup> commandment applies to far more than just a court of law. "You shall not bear false witness..." sticks its nose into every corner of our *business*.

Truth-telling should be a Christian's modus operandi in every area of life – in marriage, in the workplace, in the marketplace, in the home, in the church, at the ballpark, in our dealings with friends... *always be an advocate for truth*.

In Hosea 4:2 the prophet leveled his accusations against the nation Israel. He said, "There is no truth or mercy or knowledge of God in the land. By swearing and lying, killing and stealing and committing adultery, they break all restraint..." Notice Hosea goes down God's Top Ten list, "lying, killing, stealing, committing adultery."

It's interesting though that what's rendered "bearing false witness" in Exodus 20 is mentioned by Hosea as simply "lying". Rather than use the technical legal term for perjury, Hosea used a general word that refers to all sorts of lying.

Bearing false witness involves anything we might do to fabricate a falsehood.

You can lie, and tell **an untruth** about someone else... Or you can tell **a half-truth**. The truth sprinkled with a lie... Or you can **water down the truth**.

Or even **exaggerate the truth**. This is what husbands and wives do when they use the terms "**never**" and "**always**". "**He never does...**" "**She always does...**" Those are usually lies. Nobody's that consistent to be never and always...

Hey you can also bear false witness by making a completely truthful statement, yet say it with an incriminating tone of voice - or repeat it out of context...

It reminds me of the man who encountered a traffic accident one night. He bravely pried an injured woman from her mangled car, picked her up in his arms, and carried her to a hospital. Later, a woman who saw the incident said to the man's wife, "**Last night I saw your husband walking down the street with another woman in his arms.**" Technically, her comment was true, but it wasn't truthful.

Guys, there are all kinds of ways to fib. There are occasions when just sitting in silence is the worse kind of lie. When another person is being maligned and you know the statements aren't true - *you need to speak up*. Set the record straight.

We need to understand that God hates lying...

In Proverbs 6:16 we're told, "**These six things the LORD hates, yes, seven are an abomination to Him: a proud look, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans,**

feet that are swift in running to evil, a false witness who speaks lies, and one who sows discord among brethren.”

Notice that at least two of these seven sins have to do with bearing false witness. God hates “a lying tongue”, or “a false witness who speaks lies”.

If you ever doubt God’s hatred for lying remember the story in Acts 5. Chapter 5 of Acts is *a killer of a Bible study – a drop dead passage – a knock’em over chapter... Ananias and Sapphira were just dying to get into the Bible.*

Here was the All-American couple... Ananias was a former quarterback and Sapphira an ex-cheerleader. They were leaders in the community - models of success. Now they both had embraced Jesus and joined the church.

God never commanded anyone to sell their land and pool their resources. It was just a practice the church members had adopted... but Ananias and Sapphira didn’t want to be left out - *or look bad*. To this carnal couple image was everything! They wanted to appear as spiritual and sacrificial and generous as everyone else.

So they sold a parcel of property and said they were giving all of the proceeds to the church. *But they lied*. They kept back part of the payment for themselves.

When Peter calls them out, he says, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself?”

Peter calls this couple on the carpet – and they never get up. Ananias is first, then Sapphira... Both drop dead for their deception and hypocrisy and lies.

We all should be thankful God doesn’t see fit to treat all liars in the church the same way. Apparently though, He decided to use Ananias and Sapphira as an example. God wanted to show us what He thinks of bearing false witness.

It's interesting though the statement Peter makes to Ananias. He says to him, "Why, has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit..." Peter notices that it was Satan who prompted Ananias to lie. *And this should come as no surprise.*

In John 8:44 Jesus is speaking to the legalistic Jews when He says, "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it." Jesus calls Satan *a murderer and the father of lies...*

And I want you to see the connection between the two sins...

The 9<sup>th</sup> command is closely related to the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment, "You shall not murder." Bearing false witness is murder without bloodshed and physical violence. It's assassination of character - murder of a reputation. It's a shot from a silencer.

Alan Redpath writes of this, "Slander is a lie invented and spread with the intent to do harm. That is the worst form of injury a person can do to another. Compared to one who does this, a gangster is a gentleman, and a murderer is kind, because he ends life in a moment with a stroke and little pain. But the man guilty of slander ruins a reputation which may never be regained, and causes lifelong suffering."

Notice the progression of the last few commandments...

**Murder** robs us of life itself. **Adultery** destroys marriage - the institution that propagates life. **Stealing** takes away resources used to sustain life. And **slander** robs us of the rewards of a truly successful life. It destroys a good reputation.

And this is why Satan loves lies – it's because he hates people. If he can't annihilate your life he'll do his best to wipe out whatever good you've done.

This is why he's always stirring up lies and gossip and slander.

The old Puritan pastor, Thomas Watson, once wrote, “He that raises a slander, carries the devil in his tongue, and he that receives it, carries the devil in his ear.”

Satan wants to ruin lives. Behind every tidbit of gossip is a satanic plot to assassinate a character and ruin a man’s influence and usefulness.

As Jesus said, “Satan is the father of lies...” He is the originator of all lies and slander. Hey, when you find yourself sharing a bit of gossip with a friend, listen carefully, and you’ll hear Satan whisper in your ear... “Who’s your daddy?”

Did you know that the Greek word for devil is “*diabolos*”. It’s a compound word, “*bolos*” means to throw or cast... “*dia*” means crosswise, or *diagonally*. In other words it means to cast out an idea, but in a crooked or contorted manner.

This is what Satan does... His lies are rarely whoppers. He prefers to twist the truth – to start with the truth but give it a meaning God never intended. Satan is a spin manager. He’s always putting his own spin or twist on the truth.

Whereas, Jesus spoke in “*parabolos*”, or *parables*. Again, “*bolos*” means to throw or cast... but “*para*” means alongside, or in parallel with the truth. Jesus wants to give insight into the truth. Satan’s goal is to confuse and distort it.

Satan loves for you to tell a lie because when you tell the first lie, the probability of telling another one increases exponentially. Tell the second lie - and the third lie is inevitable. And when you tell the third lie - a fourth lie is a foregone conclusion.

Once you start lying you fall into a vicious cycle of cover up and deception.

*And lying is extremely stressful.* You can never relax. You’re always dodging questions, and covering your tracks, and trying not to forget what lies you’ve told.

This is why eventually every lie gets uncovered. A liar tells so many lies trying to hide his previous lie he finally forgets what's true and not true. A liar ends up stumbling over his trail of falsehood and gets caught in his own deceitfulness.

This is why the old saying is still true, "[Honesty is always the best policy.](#)"

There are a myriad of reasons why we lie... Satan is certainly the father of lies, but our own weaknesses and selfishness also cause us to resort to deception...

**Fear of consequences** – fear of punishment – will cause us to lie.

We tell a bill collector the check is in the mail – or a police the speedometer was broken – or a teacher our dog ate the homework – because we fear a penalty.

We lie to our spouse, or our parents, because we don't want them to be disappointed with us. But when that lie gets uncovered a trust is broken – and a relationship gets injured. In the end the lie causes a far greater disappointment

We lie **to get back at people**. For some people trash talking is an art. Gossip is also deadly. People resort to lies as a means of revenge and retribution.

People lie because of feelings of **insecurity**. They can't stand to look foolish or come across inadequate in the eyes of their peers, so they doctor up the truth.

They drop names, or embellish their stories, or lie on their resume, or brag about their past achievements. Lots of people will try to spruce up the truth to enhance their image, and make themselves look better than they really are.

Sheer **laziness and irresponsibility** are also reasons people lie.

It's why they sign their name to a test, knowing the answers they've put down don't belong to them – they've cheated. They were too lazy or negligent to study.

And perhaps the most common reason people lie is to accommodate their own **selfishness**. They lie to get what they want. They lie to manipulate situations their way. If a lie will win the contract, or close the deal, and put more money in their pocket they'll sell out their integrity in a heartbeat. This is a sad way to live.

*Let me suggest that ultimately the reason we lie is **a lack of faith...***

If we believe in God's mercies we won't fear what man can do to us.

If we believe vengeance belongs to the Lord - that in the end God will settle every score, and humble every foe - there's no need for us to seek revenge.

If we believe that God loves us and has exalted us in Christ Jesus – that we're now God's kids - there's no reason to be in bondage to other people's opinions.

If we believe in the power of the Holy Spirit we'll rise above our laziness and inertia - and take responsibility for our God-given callings and commitments.

And if I believe in Jesus – *that He is my Lord* - I'll repent of my selfish living, and surrender my life to His will. I'll live for His glory and for His purposes.

This is why I say, the key to truth telling is to *believe* in the truth – *trust* in the Spirit of truth – and have *faith* in Jesus, who is the way, the truth, and the life.

The 9<sup>th</sup> commandment is not just a prohibition against lying and bearing false witness. Moses says, **"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."**

All forms of lying are evil... When we try to **lie to God** we show our ignorance, and forfeit His help. When we **lie to ourselves** we lose our peace of mind, and become detached from reality. We fall into strange and destructive behaviors.

But the 9<sup>th</sup> commandment isn't just about lying to God or ourselves... More specifically, it states we shouldn't "**bear false witness against our neighbor.**"

God is concerned about us doing harm to each other with our words.

As truth tellers we need to be totally accurate when we make comments about another person. Which means - if we don't have all the *information* there should be no *communication*. It's sad to count up how many people have had a good reputation destroyed because another person made an idle comment.

Remember, *gossip is nothing less than character assassination.*

Gossip has been defined as, "**Hearing something you like about someone you don't.**" It's been said, "**A tongue three inches long can kill a man six feet tall.**"

*Oh, the trouble that's caused by the human tongue.* Hey, the tongue is the only body part that has its own cage. You can keep it in your mouth, and shut the door.

James 3:6 tells us, "**The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell.**" As kids we had an expression, "**Liar, liar pants on fire.**" That's what James is saying about the tongue – it's on fire.

It's like the tiny match that torches thousands of acres of forest. And the arson is the devil. As James says, the wagging, gossipy tongue "**is set on fire by hell.**"

The famous Greek poet, Homer, once wrote, "**The tongue of man is a twisty thing...**" Homer also once said, "**That ball is way back... it's outta here!**"

It reminds me of the woman who got mad at her pastor. She spread vicious rumors all around town. Her gossip severely damaged his reputation. After several years the Lord convicted her of her sin. She went back to the pastor to apologize.

The pastor told her, "I'll be happy to forgive you, but first go throughout the town and place a feather on the doorstep of every house." She agreed.

When she returned the pastor asked her, "Now go and retrieve the feathers."

The woman shook her head, "It's impossible. By now the wind has blown the feathers everywhere." The pastor said, "That's right, and I forgive you, but make sure you realize you can never undo the damage your untrue words have done."

I've got a little acrostic you can use the next time you're tempted to speak about a person, or their motives, without really knowing all the facts...

It's the word "*THINK*"...

First, think "*T*", *is it true*.

Second, think "*H*", *is it helpful*. It may be true, but does it resolve the situation.

Third, think "*I*", *is it inspiring*. Does it offer encouragement.

Fourth, think "*N*", *is it necessary*. Is there a legitimate reason it should be said.

And fifth, think "*K*", *is it kind*. Is this a loving, caring comment to make about another person... Guys, *think* before you speak, and you might just save a life.

Let me close by coming back to a point I mentioned earlier. If you have a problem with the 9<sup>th</sup> commandment – if you're not the truth teller you should be then I have a suggestion... You'll never be truthful in your comments about the people around you until you become truthful with God, and truthful with yourself.

*Stop lying to yourself – stop lying to God – and you’ll stop lying about others.*

When I come clean before God, and confess my sins, my weaknesses, my fears, my hang-ups – when I confess everything there is about me – I eliminate the barriers that have kept me from receiving His love and His blessing.

And when I receive from God, I can come clean with myself. If I know I’m loved regardless – that I stand in God’s grace - I can admit I’m not the person I should be, and I can go to work on the real changes in my life I need to make.

And when I begin to see myself as a child of God, and change in meaningful ways, I’ll discover the love of God bubbling up in my heart for others. I’ll become sensitive to the remarks I make, and I’ll have the power to speak the truth in love.

Once there were three pastors in a boat. They were fishing when one of the men commented, “I’ve got something that’s really been bothering me. It’s been eating me up and I need to confess... I keep a little wine in my office, and every now and then I take a nip... Actually I get drunk. I need to stop. Pray for me.”

A few minutes later one of the other pastors he confessed, “I’ve got a problem too. Every now and then when I walk by a magazine rack I pick up a pornographic magazine. It’s terrible. I know I shouldn’t do it, and I need your prayers.”

The third pastor just sat there in complete silence.

Finally his buddies turned to him and said sarcastically, “*Well, I suppose you’re perfect. You’ve got no problems.*” The pastor responded, “No, that’s not true at all. As a matter of fact, I’m a terrible gossip, and I can’t wait until I get back to town.”

Guys, if we want to be the church God has called us to be in this coming year – then from the pastor to every person – we need to

be truth-tellers. Love the truth. Uphold the truth. Always speak the truth. Let's be men and women of integrity.

And if you've told a specific lie ask God to forgive you. If you've injured another person with a untruth, or an exaggeration, or a half-truth – ask them to forgive you.

Let me close with Ephesians 4:25. It sums it up, “Therefore, putting away lying, “Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor...” Let's all be *truth tellers*.