

THE NINTH COMMANDMENT

Exodus 20:16

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

The title of this sermon is “The Ninth Commandment.”

Today we are going to talk about the vice of deceit and the virtue of honesty.

A minister in a small church announced on a Sunday evening that his sermon was going to be on Matthew 29. He asked how many had read Matthew 29. A whole host raised their hands. “Thank you. You can put your hands down. Now I know this sermon is really relevant for you, because there is no Matthew 29, and my subject is telling the truth.¹

Is the topic of lying relevant today? Does anyone struggle with lying?

Let’s do a poll. Raise your hand if you have ever told a lie. If you raised your hand, and everyone should have, then that means you are a liar. We’re all liars.

There was book written in 1991 called *The Day America Told the Truth.*

- It found that 91% of us lie on a regular basis.
- The majority of us find it hard to get through the week without lying.
- 20% can’t make it through a single day without lying. And this is referring to conscious, premeditated lying, not mistakes.

Our country is filled with liars.

II. LIARS IN THE BIBLE

But this is nothing new. Lying has been around since the beginning. The Bible is filled with stories of liars.

¹ I heard this story from Alistair Begg.

The serpent lied to Eve in the Garden of Eden.

The first time Abraham speaks in the Bible it is to tell his wife, Sarah, to tell a lie (Gen 12:10-13).

Jacob lied to his father, Isaac, order to steal his brother's blessing.

Potiphar's wife lied when she falsely accused Joseph of attempted rape, leading to his imprisonment.

King Ahab wanted Naboth's garden for himself, so his wife, Queen Jezebel, hired several men to falsely accuse Naboth of blasphemy against God and sedition against the king, which led to Naboth's execution (1 Ki 21:1-16).

People lied about Jesus. They called him a friend of sinners, a drunkard, a glutton, and a Satan worshiper.

The chief priests and the Sanhedrin sought out false witnesses to accuse Jesus of some capital crime that would justify his execution (Mt 26:59-61; Mk 14:55-59).

Peter lied when he swore under oath that he did not know Jesus (Mt 26:74-75).

What does the Bible say about lying?

III. TEXT

Exodus 20:16 (CSB) says, "Do not give false testimony against your neighbor."

It is worded slightly different in **Deuteronomy 5:20**. "Do not give dishonest testimony against your neighbor."

The immediate context of the ninth commandment is in a court of law.

To fully understand the ninth commandment, you need to understand the ancient justice system.

Trials in Israel were conducted at the gates of the towns.

The elders of the town served as the judges.

Exodus 23:3, 6 prohibited partiality toward the rich or the poor.

If you witnessed a crime, you could be called to give testimony.

If you refused to give testimony, there were two consequences. You could be publicly cursed, and you could expect the judgment of God (Lev 5:1; Pr 29:24).

It was very important for witnesses to report what they knew for the sake of preserving justice and stability in society.

The sentence for the convicted person was immediately carried out.

There were no appeals courts.

The accused was presumed guilty until proven innocent, which the opposite of our justice system. The burden of proof was on the accused.

And the accused was presumed guilty upon the testimony of two witnesses.

This is why giving false testimony was so serious back then. It could very easily and quickly end someone's life.

So God set up safeguards to protect the innocent from false testimony.

First, He made it clear in His law that false testimony was a sin.

Second, God required two credible witnesses, rather than just one, to convict someone of a crime.

Third, if the accused is found guilty, then the accuser had to initiate the capital punishment. For example, they had to throw the first stone. It's one thing to accuse someone, but another to put someone to death.

And fourth, if it is discovered that the accuser was lying, they would receive the same punishment that the accused would have received.

Deuteronomy 19:18-19 says, “18 The judges are to make a careful investigation, and if the witness turns out to be a liar who has falsely accused his brother, 19 you must do to him as he intended to do to his brother. You must purge the evil from you.”

And so it was very important in ancient Israel to prevent false testimony as much as possible, because it could be so dangerous.

IV. NEGATIVE APPLICATION

But even though the immediate context of this commandment is lying in a court of law, that's not all it applies to.

The ninth commandment prohibits all forms of dishonesty.

The **Westminster Shorter Catechism** said, “What is forbidden in the ninth commandment? The ninth commandment forbids whatever is prejudicial to truth, or injurious to our own or our neighbour's good name.”

The **Heidelberg Catechism** says, “What is the aim of the ninth commandment? That I never give false testimony against anyone, twist no one's words, not gossip or slander, nor join in condemning anyone rashly or without a hearing. Rather, in court and everywhere else, I should avoid lying and deceit of every kind; these are the very devices the devil uses, and they would call down on me God's intense wrath.”

So ninth commandment is not just about a court of law. We are to avoid dishonesty of every kind.

V. POSITIVE APPLICATION

Now that is the negative application of the ninth commandment. What is the positive application?

We are to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

The Westminster Shorter Catechism says, “What is required in the ninth commandment? The ninth commandment requires the maintaining and promoting of truth between man and man, and of our own and our neighbour's good name, especially in witness-bearing.”

The **Heidelberg Catechism** said, “What is the aim of the ninth commandment? I should love the truth, speak it candidly, and openly acknowledge it. And I should do what I can to guard and advance my neighbor’s good name.”

I like how **Phil Johnson** put it. “Do everything we can to preserve truth in our dealings with men; to guard the reputation of our neighbor’s name; to uphold justice in our interactions with one another; and to use our tongues for speaking the truth in general.”

Al Mohler said, “We have an absolute moral obligation to speak the truth in all our private conversations and in every communication.”

VI. CONTROL YOUR TONGUE

But the ninth commandment has an even broader application than simply avoiding dishonesty and telling the truth.

The ninth commandment is about our tongue.

It is about verbal holiness.

It is about oral ethics.

And so the ninth commandment deals with probably the toughest subject of all – controlling our tongue.

James warns us about the tongue. **James 3:6** says, “And the tongue is a fire. The tongue, a world of unrighteousness, is placed among our members. It stains the whole body, sets the course of life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.” **James 3:8** says, “but no one can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.”

Alistair Begg said, “How do we tell lies? With a wink; silence; a nod of the head. Most commonly with what physicians say is a two-ounce slab of membrane. The slab of membrane encloses a complex array of muscles and nerves; it enables us to chew, and taste, and talk. Without a tongue no mother can soothe her baby to sleep, or shout, “Tidy up your room”. No teacher can communicate with pupils; no ambassador can adequately represent our nation; no attorney can represent truth in court; our world is reduced to unintelligible shrugs and grunts. Our tongues are vital and vicious. Take a saw, and the more you use it the more blunt it becomes. But the more you use your tongue to cut, the sharper it becomes. A scorpion has all of its venom in its tail; a human has all its venom in its tongue.”

I like that. Our tongues are vital and vicious.

With our tongues we share the gospel and lead people to heaven, and with our tongues we push people away from Christ and send them to hell.

William Edward Norris said,
“If you your lips would keep from slips,
Five things observe with care;
To whom you speak, of whom you speak
And how, and when, and where.”

There's a poem by an **unknown author** that says,

If all that we say in a single day with never a word left out
were written each night in clear black and white it would make strange
reading no doubt.
And then just suppose there our eyes should close we would read the
whole record through,
and wouldn't we cry and wouldn't we try a great deal less talking to do.
And I more than half think that many a kink would be smoother in life's
tangled thread
if half that we say in a single day were to be left forever unsaid.

Think of all the pain and trouble in your life that you could have regretted if you had controlled your tongue.

And that is what the ninth commandment is about. It is about controlling our most dangerous weapon.

God gives to each person a double-barreled shotgun at birth call the tongue, and the ninth commandment is about using it for good and not for evil.

Thomas Watson said, "God has set two natural fences to keep in the tongue, the teeth and the lips; and this commandment is a third fence set about it, that it should not break fort into evil."

John Calvin said that as the eighth commandment, "You shall not steal," tied his hands, so the Ninth Commandment tied his tongue.²

VII. 10 COMMON WAY PEOPLE BREAK THE NINTH COMMANDMENT

1. Lying.

Plain old lying.

² Al Mohler

Thomas Watson wrote, “To lie is to speak that which one knows to be an untruth.”

Any time you lie, you break the ninth commandment.

And there are many ways to lie.

There is lying to get out of trouble. “My dog ate my homework.” “I’m late because I ran into some really bad traffic.” “I didn’t know you wanted me to do that project right away.”

There is lying on your taxes. That’s not only breaking the ninth commandment, but also a violation of the eighth commandment, Do not steal.

There is plagiarism – when you copy someone else’s words and claim that they are your own.

There is falsifying reports at work; fudging the numbers.

There is lying on a resume or a job application. According to a survey of nearly 3 million job applicants, nearly 50 percent of American resumes contain one or more falsehoods.³

Some of you may remember the story of George O’Leary, hired as head coach of the Notre Dame football team. In December 2001 he was hired, and then at the end of the first day on his job, a scandal broke out. O’Leary had lied on his resume, claiming to play football for the University of New Hampshire. When it was discovered, he was quickly fired. He lost his job, and his reputation. He will forever be known as a liar; a man who cannot be trusted.⁴

Ephesians 4:25 says, “Therefore, putting away lying, speak the truth, each one to his neighbor, because we are members of one another.”

³ Phil Ryken, *Written in Stone*, 186.

⁴ *Ibid.*

2. Perjury.

Perjury is a particularly serious form of dishonesty. It involves lying under oath.

For example, when you are in a court of law, and swear on the Bible to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God, and then you lie.

An oath is a promise to man and God. So when you lie under oath, you lie not only to man, but to God Himself.

Zechariah 8:16-17 says, “16 These are the things you must do: Speak truth to one another; make true and sound decisions within your city gates. 17 Do not plot evil in your hearts against your neighbor, and do not love perjury, for I hate all this’— this is the Lord’s declaration.”

3. Flattery.

One person defined flattery as “insincere and excessive praise intended to manipulate.”

Flattery is when you dishonestly compliment someone, or when you dishonestly agree with someone, or you dishonestly laugh at someone’s joke in order to manipulate them to reward you in some way.

I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but the more powerful you are, the richer you are, the more interesting are your stories, and the funnier are your jokes. It’s because people are flattering you.

One author said, “The flattery gives testimony to that which is not true about someone. And the motive of flattery is always self-promotion. It is a form of deceit.”

Flattery is a very common form of lying. It comes so naturally.

We have all kinds of names for people who flatter: Kiss-ups; brownnosers; teacher's pets; suck-ups.

We even have metaphors for flattery. To flatter someone is to butter them up. But flattery is dishonesty. It is wrong.

Proverbs 26:28b says, "A flattering mouth causes ruin."

Psalm 12:3 says, "May the LORD cut off all flattering lips and the tongue that speaks boastfully."

Sir Walter Raleigh said, "Flatterers are the worst kind of traitors, for they will strengthen thy imperfections, encourage thee in all evils, correct thee in nothing."

4. Not telling the whole truth.

Pastor Mark Driscoll was called by a lady in the church who said that her husband had become physical with her; he grabbed her and restrained her. So they were called into the pastor's office. That's when he learned the whole story. They were eating dinner, and she got angry, grabbed his plate and slammed it in his head and cut him open; big gash. Then she grabbed a steak knife and was going to stab him in the face, and so he grabbed her wrist. The woman didn't tell the whole truth; she left out some important details. She was going to murder him, and he grabbed her wrist to save his life.

Another way that people avoid the whole truth is twisting the truth.

I'll give you an example from the life of Christ.

When Jesus was arrested and tried by the Sanhedrin, they looked for false witnesses. One false witness said in **Matthew 26:61**, "This man said, 'I can destroy the temple of God and rebuild it in three days.'" Did Jesus say that? Yes. But He wasn't talking about Herod's temple, He was talking about His body.

Remember, the point of the ninth commandment is to speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

5. Hypocrisy.

What is hypocrisy? The Greek word is *hypokrites* (hoop-ok-ree-tace'). It means hypocrite; pretender; actor; a person who pretends to be something they are not.

A hypocrite is a person who acts holy and religious in front of some people, but they act sinful when they are in the company of a different group of people;

a person who does good deeds not out of genuine love, but for personal benefit;

a person who lies about their relationship with God. They claim to attend church regularly, but in reality they only attend a few times a year. They claim to read the Bible, but they only read it when they attend church a few times a year. They claim to believe in the power of prayer, but they rarely spend extended time alone with God in prayer.

They claim to care about poverty, but they donate very little of their time and money to actually doing something about.

They claim that they are holy, but they have a secret sin life that nobody knows about. Hypocrisy is a form of dishonesty.

Romans 12:9 says, “Love must be without hypocrisy.” In other words, don’t just pretend to love God and others; really love them.

6. Exaggeration.

Exaggeration is another common form of lying.

I’m very tempted to exaggerate when people ask about the church. How big is your church? Huge! How many people attend? Only about 1,000, but that’s including the kids.

We tend to exaggerate in job interviews. “I’m always on time. I’m very easy to get along with. Probably my biggest weakness is I work too hard.”

We also tend to exaggerate when get in arguments. “You always say that. I never act like that. You do it every time. You are rude everywhere we go. You belittle me any time I open my mouth.”

Always and never are God-words, because they are only used accurately when you are describing Him. God is always faithful; God never sins.

Ephesians 4:15 says, “But speaking the truth in love, let us grow in every way into him who is the head—Christ.”

7. Lying to get a compliment.

Another way that people lie is when they are fishing for a compliment.

People will speak lowly about themselves, even though they don’t mean it and don’t believe it, to manipulate you into correcting them with a compliment.

The Puritan **Ezekiel Hopkins** said, “Sometimes men detract from themselves out of a lying and dissembled humanity, making this kind of detraction only bait for commendation. They know that the ball will rebound back the farther to them the harder they strike it from them. This is usually an artifice of proud and arrogant persons, and those who cannot endure to be contradicted in anything else would be very loathe you should yield them in this.”

8. Slander.

Phil Johnson said slander means “to report any lie or exaggerated testimony against someone; the imputation of evil against someone who is not guilty.”

It’s when you lie about someone to get an advantage over them, or to hurt them.

I already mentioned how Christ was slandered. He was accused of being a friend of sinners (and not in an evangelistic way), a glutton, a drunkard, and a Satan worshiper.

The great nineteenth century Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon was a victim of slander. He was hired as pastor at the age of eighteen, and his church exploded – 5,000-6,000 in attendance. In the early years he was single. The local newspaper attacked him. They reported that he was a ladies man, a player who took advantage of young women. They said that the young women would show up early to hear him preach, and they would get all dressed up and show up early and sit in the front row and fawn over the pastor. The rumor was that they would go up to the platform, like Cinderella, and they would take one shoe off and leave it on the platform in the hopes that he would come to their house, and it would fit their foot, and they would live happily ever after. It was very scandalous in that day, and it never happened. No shoes were left. He had no inappropriate relationships. But the slander was devastating to his reputation. He struggled with depression his whole life; he said it was like fighting the mist. The story was reported in the London newspaper, and then picked up by the international news wire. So the story was printed in hundreds of thousands of newspapers all over the world. He followed up with the press in London, and they eventually retracted the story, but the damage was done. The international newswire never picked up the retraction. And so all over the world people believed that he was a playboy who took advantage of young women, and it haunted him his entire life. Any time he would travel and do media interviews they would ask him about the incident. “Why did you take advantage of young women?”⁵

Slander is a very harmful form of lying.

Thomas Watson said, “The slanderer wounds three at once: he wounds him that is slandered; he wounds him to whom he reports the slander, by causing uncharitable thoughts to arise up in his mind against the party slandered; and he wounds his own soul, by reporting of another what is false.”

⁵ I heard this story from Mark Driscoll.

Thomas Watson went on, “You may kill a man in his name as well as in his person. Some are loath to take away their neighbor’s goods – conscience would fly in their face; but better take away their corn out of their field, their wares out of their shop, than take away their good name. This is a sin for which no reparation can be made; a blot in a man’s name, being like a blot on white paper, which will never be got out.”

Ephesians 4:31 says, “Let all bitterness, anger and wrath, shouting and slander be removed from you, along with all malice.”

9. Gossip.

Another form of lying is gossip.

Phil Johnson defines gossip as “The sin of spreading negative information unnecessarily about your neighbor, even if it is true.”

This is when we air our neighbor’s dirty laundry. It may be true, but if it is unnecessary, or if it will hurt their reputation, then it is a violation of the ninth commandment.

Because ultimately what the ninth commandment is about is protecting our neighbor’s reputation; it is about loving our neighbor. And so gossip violates that.

Philip Ryken said, “When the Bible condemns gossip, it means something more than just casual talk about other people’s business. Gossip is talking about people in a way that damages their reputation with others. Reputations are important.... The victims of gossip never get to defend themselves. They never have a chance to explain their circumstances, clarify their motives, or correct the misconceptions people have about them. Instead they are charged, tried, and convicted in the court of public opinion.”

The gossip is the one who complains about others to others.

Instead of going in person, in private to discuss the matter with the offender, the gossip goes to other people.

The gossip is guilty of triangulation. Instead of keeping the offense between the two of you, you involved a third party, or even more.

The gossip is a hypocrite because they go around sharing negative information about someone, and every time they tell the person to keep it a secret.

It's a person who can't keep secrets telling others to keep the secrets that he doesn't keep.

2 Corinthians 12:20 puts gossip in a list of vices with quarreling, jealousy, angry outbursts, selfish ambitions, slander, arrogance, and disorder. Romans 1:29 puts gossip in a vice list along with unrighteousness, evil, Greek, wickedness, envy, murder, quarrels, deceit, malice, slander, God-haters, arrogance, pride, boastful, inventors of evil, and disobedience to parents.

There are several good questions we should ask ourselves before we talk about someone else. Is what I am about to say true? If so, does it really need to be said to this person in this conversation? Would I put it this way if the person I'm talking about were here to listen?⁶

Mark Driscoll adds this question: Does this exact info need to be communicated by me to these people at these time with this motive and with this medium?

10. Reporting the truth with the intent to harm.

Let me mention one more form of lying. This one might surprise you. Reporting the truth with the intent to harm.

There's an example of this from the life of David in 1 Samuel 22. David is on the run from Saul; he is not yet king. So David stop in the city of Nob, and the priest

⁶ Philip Ryken, Written in Stone.

Ahimelech helped him. A few days later, one of Saul's men, Doeg the Edomite, told Saul that he saw David in Nob, and Ahimelech helped him. So Saul treated Ahimelech as a traitor. He summoned Ahimelech and 85 other priests, and ordered Doeg to kill them. And then Doeg went to the city of Nob and killed everyone there – men, women, children, babies, and even the animals.

So David wrote about this incident in Psalm 52, and he called Doeg a liar.

He said in **Psalm 52:3**, “You love evil instead of good, lying instead of speaking truthfully. Selah.” Doeg did not lie, but he reported truth with the intent to harm, and David calls it lying, because remember, the ultimate motive of the ninth commandment is love for our neighbor. So if you lie to hurt your neighbor, or tell the truth in order to hurt your neighbor unjustly, then both are a violation of the ninth commandment.

Psalm 24:8 says, “Don't testify against your neighbor without cause. Don't deceive with your lips.”

VIII. 6 REASONS LYING IS SINFUL

Now why is lying wrong? Why is it sinful?

We all know that lying is wrong, even those who deny the existence of truth and of objective morality.

If I call you a liar, you will feel deeply insulted. If I lie about you, you will feel deeply betrayed. If I lie to you, you will feel deeply violated.

It doesn't matter what your religion is. We all know that lying is wrong.

But let's look at six Biblical reasons that lying is sinful.

1. It is forbidden by God.

It is against God's will.

Leviticus 19:11-12 says, “11 Do not steal. Do not act deceptively or lie to one another. 12 Do not swear falsely by my name, profaning the name of your God; I am the Lord.” As Christians we must avoid anything that is against God’s will.

2. It is detestable to God.

Proverbs 6:16-19 says, “16 The Lord hates six things; in fact, seven are detestable to him: 17 arrogant eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, 18 a heart that plots wicked schemes, feet eager to run to evil, 19 a lying witness who gives false testimony, and one who stirs up trouble among brothers.”

Proverbs 12:22 says, “Lying lips are detestable to the Lord, but faithful people are his delight.” As Christians we must hate what God hates and love what God loves.

3. It is contrary to God.

We are called to glorify God by imitating His moral nature, and God is not a liar.

In fact, the Bible describes all three members of the Trinity as truthful.

Numbers 23:19 says, “God is not a man, that he might lie, or a son of man, that he might change his mind. Does he speak and not act, or promise and not fulfill?” In

John 14:6 “Jesus told him, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”

John 15:26 describes the Holy Spirit. “When the Counselor comes, the one I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father—he will testify about me.”

4. It is punished by God.

Proverbs 19:9 says, “A false witness will not go unpunished, and one who utters lies perishes.”

Revelation 21:8 says, “But the cowards, faithless, detestable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars—their share will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

5. It is hateful toward my neighbor.

The Bible commands us to love your neighbor as yourself.

Lying is not loving; it is hateful.

Proverbs 25:18 says, “A person giving false testimony against his neighbor is like a club, a sword, or a sharp arrow.”

Why is lying so harmful to your neighbor? Ultimately because it hurts our neighbor’s reputation, and your reputation, your name, is the most valuable thing you have.

Proverbs 22:1 says, “A good name is to be chosen over great wealth; favor is better than silver and gold.”

6. It is harmful to myself.

If it is wrong to hurt your neighbor, then it is wrong to hurt yourself. Just as your neighbor belongs to God and loved by God, so are you. So just as it is immoral to hurt your neighbor’s reputation, it is immoral to hurt your reputation.

And that’s what lying does. Lying hurts your reputation. It destroys your credibility.

Most importantly, God created you to be His witness, but nobody will want to hear what you have to say about God if you have the reputation of a liar.

IX. THE CURE FOR LYING

Let's finish with one more thing today. What is the cure for lying?

To find the cure, you must understand the cause.

Why do we lie in the first place?

When we lie we are taking matters into our own hands; we are going outside the will of God to meet our needs.

So the cure for lying is to trust in God to meet your needs in the best way, at the best time.

You don't need to lie in order to get your needs met. God will take better care of you than you can. But you need to trust Him.

You have to believe **Philippians 4:19**. "And my God will supply all your needs according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."

And **Matthew 6:33**. "But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you."

And **Proverbs 3:5-6**. "5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding; 6 in all your ways know him, and he will make your paths straight."