
The Ninth Commandment: Thou Shall Not Bear False Witness

by: Ronald L. Dart

In recent memory, we the people of the United States, have had an important lesson in civics and in the importance of the Ten Commandments at the same time. We have had the spectacle of the highest law enforcement officer in the land, going into court, putting his hand on the Bible, swearing to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth and then lying through his teeth.

Now this message is not about politics and it's not another presidential bashing diatribe. Our president has been punished for his crime and we will leave it at that.

But for a while there, people who should've known better, were playing fast and loose with one of the most fundamental principles of liberty, truth in the courts.

The Ten Commandments

Now I have said that the last six of the Ten Commandments are the basis of all civil society. Honor your father and your mother, thou shall not kill, thou shall not commit adultery, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not bear false witness against your neighbor, and thou shall not covet.

The first four commandments are the basis of all religious society. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make any graven image of the likeness of anything that is in heaven or on the earth. You shall not bow down to them nor serve them. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

Now since the last six commandments depend on the first four commandments for their authority, they are bound together in the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments.

Our Civil Liberties

Our civil liberties are based on the truth that they are granted by a Creator, as was written in the Declaration of Independence, "We do hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, and they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights."

When we have finally lost that truth, the truth that our rights flow from a Creator, we are lost as a people. Our rights, our civil liberties are based on a legal system that in turn is based on the Ten Commandments.

The commandment that our president broke is the ninth, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." Now this isn't merely talking about lying. This is talking about bearing false witness. It is talking about a legal system.

The very foundation of our legal system is truth. If people can come into court, swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth and then lie through their teeth, justice flies right out the window. No one can get judgment. No one can get justice. It's over!

The Biblical System

The Old Testament system was a little different from ours, but it was based on the same principle. Actually, I think in some ways it was a better system than we have.

Leviticus 5 verse 1 says this, "If a person sins because he does not speak up when he hears a public charge to testify, regarding something he has seen or learned about, he will be held responsible."

Now in our court system, we have to go out and find the witnesses. We have to bring them into court. We have to swear them in and question them. And they have all sorts of ways, it seems like, to avoid getting into court and being held there, to have to answer these questions.

It is at that moment of swearing, in court, you get them there, you make them stand up, raise their right-hand, swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, it is at that moment that creates the crime of perjury if they lie. Once you cross that line, you swear and then you lie, you go to jail.

Now in the Biblical system, when the public charge to testify is proclaimed, you are guilty if you know something, and fail to speak up, saying, "Well, the prosecutor didn't ask me that." That will not work in the Biblical system, nor with the careful parsing of words and phrases to avoid telling the truth, it wouldn't work in the Biblical system.

Adjuration to Tell The Truth

When it all comes down to it, if you have heard this adjuration to tell the truth and you don't come forward with the truth, you're guilty of perjury.

The literal meaning, by the way, of this phrase in Leviticus 5:1 is, "If a person sins and hears the voice of adjuration, to adjure someone is to command them solemnly, under oath, as if under an oath or penalty of a curse."

Now there is an interesting illustration of this in the New Testament. Jesus had been arrested, He had been brought before the high priest, and His accusers were there, trying to find witnesses to get Jesus put to death.

You will find this in Matthew 26 beginning in verse 59, "The chief priests, and the elders and all the Council sought false witness against Jesus to put him to death."

Now this is interesting in the way it's put, because it's not immediately clear whether they went out and said, "We want somebody to lie against Jesus" or whether they went out and said that they wanted somebody to testify against Jesus, but the only way they could find anybody to testify, is that somebody was going to have to lie,

They couldn't find any. They brought in all kinds of witnesses and they couldn't find anybody that would work. And finally, there came two liars, who said, {61} "This fellow said, "I'm able to destroy the temple of God and build it in three days." {62} And the high priest arose, and said to Jesus, "Are you not going to answer anything? What is it that these witness against you? {63} And Jesus just sat there and stared straight ahead" and said nothing.

Now up to this point, Jesus is completely within his rights in maintaining silence. But then the high priest says something that makes it all official.

The high priest says, {63} "I adjure you by the living God that you tell us whether you be the Christ, the Son of God."

Now under that law that I read to you a moment ago, Jesus could no longer keep silent. He had evidence, He had testimony, there was something He knew that was relevant to the case and He had heard the voice of adjuration. "I adjure you by the living God, tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God."

Jesus was obliged to answer, and He did, "Yes, it is as you say." Jesus never transgressed the law. He had to tell the truth, even if it meant His death.

The O.J. Simpson Murder Trial

Now the implications of this are pretty far-reaching. Let's take a look at the O.J. Simpson murder trial.

You probably remember the O.J. Simpson murder trial, don't you? That case turned on a presumption in the juries' mind, that a policeman had planted false evidence at Simpson's home. The famous bloody glove and it is of course possible for the police to do that sort of thing, whether they really do or not is another matter, but what if they do? What if the policemen being absolutely certain they have the murderer, but they just don't have the evidence, plant evidence to

convict the murderer. Are you happy with that? Are you comfortable with that? What if the police, to make their job easier, plant evidence to get a conviction?

The Biblical System

Now in the Biblical system there is a law about that. Well there is law in our system too. But here's what the Bible says about it. Deuteronomy 19 verse 15. "One witness shall not rise up against a man for any iniquity, or for any sin and any sin that he sins." So, if we go to the court and we only have one witness against a man of what he has supposedly done, in the Biblical system, you can't take him to trial.

"You can do it for any sin that he sins, at the mouth of two witnesses or at the mouth of three witnesses shall the matter be established." Then there is this important consideration, {16} "If a false witness rises up against any man to testify against him that is wrong, {17} Then both men, between whom is the controversy shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges, which shall be in those days, {18} And the judges shall make diligent inquisition."

Now, a lot of time has gone by since these laws were established and since they were enforced, and I think we've lost touch with a lot of them, but in effect, this was the grand jury system of ancient Israel. Citizens, judges, maybe priests, maybe elders in the community, were formed to do something very much like a grand jury and they made diligent inquisition into a matter.

False Testimony

Our system today grows directly out of the Biblical kind of a system and we have to be responsible, as citizens for involving ourselves in this process. So, you get a grand jury together. The grand jury makes diligent inquisition and behold, {18} "If the witness be found to be a false witness and has testified falsely against his brother."

We don't care if he is a police officer or anybody else. If he has brought false testimony into this trial. {19} "Then shall you do to him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother, so you shall put the evil away from among you."

Yes, it's going to be harder to get a conviction. But I will tell you something. I really don't think I would care to spend one night in jail to make the police officer's job easier for him. The laws are designed, not to protect the criminal, but to protect the innocent from unjust prosecution and if we have to let a criminal or two go free in order to maintain the freedoms of all the rest of us, then so be it.

But for that to work in a society you really have to be tough on false witnesses. If the police officer in ancient Israel could be found to have planted false evidence that would have convicted a man of murder, he himself would have assumed the penalty due for the other man. In this case, if the penalty was death, the police officer would die.

Don't Feel Sorry for A Liar

You know, I really think that expression, "So shall you put the evil away from among you" is pretty accurate. If you're tough on liars in court, you will not have many of them.

It goes on to say in Deuteronomy 19 verse 20, "Those that remain shall hear and fear and shall henceforth commit no more evil among you." It is deterrence. You have to be tough. It goes on to say {21} "Your eye shall not pity, life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot."

However, you take that, what it means is this, don't feel sorry for a liar in court. Hold his feet to the fire. If you don't, your entire legal system will collapse out from under you.

There have been times when people in this country have been truly worried about where our legal system is going.

Tell the Truth

There is an interesting law in Exodus 23 beginning in verse one, "Do not spread false reports. Do not help a wicked man by being a malicious witness." In other words, don't try to cover up for this guy. If you're called into court, don't hedge, don't hem and haw, just tell the truth. {2} "Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong."

What he is basically telling you is this, don't pay any attention to the newspapers, don't worry about what the public says, when you're a witness or you're on the jury and you are called to adjudicate a matter like this. Deal with the truth. Don't pay any attention to false reports. Don't help a wicked man, don't follow the crowd in this situation.

When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd. This is precisely how the N.I.V. translates Exodus 23 verses one through three. {1} "Do not spread false reports. Do not help a wicked man by being a malicious witness. {2} Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd, {3} And do not show favoritism to a poor man in his lawsuit."

Now that is really interesting and what it is talking about here is honesty in the courts, a devotion to the truth and a commitment to justice.

A Real Life Example

My wife served on a jury a few years ago, where a woman had been rear-ended in an automobile accident. There were actually four cars involved in the lawsuit. She had been sitting at a traffic light. There was a car behind her and a car behind that and a fourth car came along and hit the third car, ran the third car into the second car. The second car ran into her car. The fourth car, the one that caused the accident, left the scene of the accident and was never found. So, the woman who had been hit by all this, sued the drivers of the second and third cars. Well, the jury sat and heard this case. There was quite a bit of dishonesty on the part of the woman who brought the suit. A lot of the facts about her medical treatment were wrong and had been falsified and it went on and on and around and around. They sat there in the jury room and what was becoming very

evident to my wife in this process, was that the jury wanted to give the woman something for her trouble because she was poor.

Now the problem in this case was that the law really was pretty clear in the matter. Neither the second or the third car had been the cause of the accident. The fourth car that disappeared was the cause of the accident, but because there was an insurance company sitting in the background and even though it was never admitted in court, the jury knew that this was the case. They felt that they could give this poor woman some of the insurance company's money, and that it would be a nice thing to do for her.

The Bible says, "Don't do that! Do not show favoritism to a poor man in his lawsuit." You would have expected the law to say, don't show favoritism to rich man, wouldn't you? Because you would think that that would be the tendency. Probably in jury trials it's not. In a lawsuit like this, the favoritism is shown to the poor.

Look at what these poor people had to go through. Look at all the suffering. Look at the pain, look at the discomfort, look at how little they have and look at how much this big old insurance company has. And here we sit in his position of power and we can play Robin Hood, we can rob the rich and give to the poor, but to do so is to corrupt the system.

If you're ever on a jury, don't do that! Don't show favoritism. Justice is supposed to be blind! We weigh the facts. Look at the truth. We decide on the basis of law, not on the basis of feeling sorry for somebody.

Proverbs chapter 29 verse 24, "The accomplice of a thief is his own enemy, he is put under oath and dare not testify. {25} Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe."

Don't Become an Accomplice

You know, when you actually go into court and are not willing to testify about the thief, you actually do become an accomplice. Failure to come forward with evidence of a crime makes you an accomplice. The failure to do this, in fact, is killing the Roman Catholic Church because of their failure to turn the pedophile priests over to the authorities. These men have committed a crime, according to the laws of the state. Their superiors in the church, their bishops, know that they have done so, and instead of dealing with it, turn them over to the authorities, they have covered it up. They did what they had to do to try to preserve what they saw is the integrity of the church. In the process this has undermined the legal system in this country that grants them the freedom of worship that they enjoy.

Had the bishops gotten on this case from the start, a lot of mischief could've been avoided. If they had taken the first pedophile priest, the first priest that broke the law of the land in getting involved with a little boy and turned him over to the police, it would've sent a shiver of fear throughout the priesthood and it might not happen many more times after that. A lot of mischief could've been avoided.

Don't Lie About It

King Solomon said, "Two things I have required of you," Proverbs 30 verse 7, "deny them not to me before I die. {8} Remove far from me vanity and lies, give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with food convenient for me, {9} Lest I be full, and deny you. and say, "Who is the LORD?" or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of the LORD my God in vain."

Now what is interesting about that last line, what does taking the name of God in vain have to do stealing? "Lest I be poor," he said, "and steal and take the name of my God in vain." You see, if you steal, you are going to end up lying about it. If you commit adultery you going to end up lying about it. It was surreal, when the impeachment hearings to hear people defend one of our past president's lies on the basis of his adulteries. "Well, yes, he lied, but you have to realize that adultery always leads to lying and philandering is something that happens in our society. It's a bad thing, he shouldn't have done it, but it's not disqualifying him as the president of the United States. Lying just kind of grew naturally out of the adultery. As though somehow, adultery justifies lying, under oath, in court and so it goes.

One sin leads to another and when it comes right down to it, lying seems to always stand at the end of the road in order to try to protect ourselves. It's one thing, when you're lying in your ordinary business relationships, that's bad, but when you come into court and lie, that's something very different.

Amend Your Ways

We have developed a kind of a dangerous sense of invulnerability in this country. We have the world's oldest democracy, we have the world's strongest economy, and the world's strongest military. We are the big dog on this planet, and yet there are some very worrisome things ahead in our future.

There are two prophecies in particular that worry me. One of them is found in Jeremiah chapter 7, "The word of the Lord came to Jeremiah saying, {2} "Stand in the gate of the LORD's house and proclaim there this word and say, "Hear the word of the LORD, all you of Judah, who enter in at these gates to worship the LORD."

We are right at the center of the country, right at the core of the political and religious worship of God.

Verse 3, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, "Amend your ways and your doings (actions), and I will cause you to dwell in this place."" In other words, if you live right, I'm going to preserve you as a people, {4} "But don't trust in lying words, saying, "The temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the Lord are these.""

What is he talking about? What he is saying is, "There's a tendency on people's part to say, "This is the temple of LORD, nothing bad can ever happen here." The temptation is to look around our country in the United States, and say "Look how strong we are, look how powerful we are. Look at what God has created here, nothing bad could ever happened to us."

Here is what God says to us in Jeremiah chapter 7, verse 5, "If you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings, if you thoroughly execute judgment between a man and his neighbor."

One of the core elements of our society as a people, just like it was for Judah of old, is exercising judgment between a man and his neighbor, and that means you have to have truth in the courts.

Verse 6, "If you oppress not the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, and don't walk after other gods to your own hurt, {7} Then I will cause you to dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, forever and ever."

This kingdom, this nation, can go on and on. If you will just amend your ways and your doings, but the problem you have is, {8} "You are trusting in lying words that cannot profit."

You think that just because you're in the right place, you are right here next to God's Temple, we are God's people, that everything is going to be all right.

Verse 8, "You trust in lying words that cannot profit, {9} Are you going to steal, murder, commit adultery and swear falsely?"

What He means by this is to come into court, put your hand on a Bible, swear to tell the truth and then lie.

Go to Shiloh

Verse 9 of Jeremiah 7, "You burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you don't know. {10} Then come and stand before me in this house, called by my name, and say, "We were delivered to do all these detestable things." {11} "Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Look, I have seen it," says the LORD. {12} "I will tell you what, you go now to my place, which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at the first, and see what I did to it, for the wickedness of my people Israel."

I was driving north out of Jerusalem, in a little Volkswagen one day, and I came to a sign that said 'Shiloh' with an arrow off to the right, and I remembered the Scripture that said, "Go now to my place, which was in Shiloh" (Jeremiah 7:12). I said, "Oh, Shiloh," so I slammed on the brakes, hung a right and went bouncing down a little dirt road, over a couple hills, out in what I guess was Shiloh and I found there, nothing! Just bare ground, and that seems to be the point.

"Take a look at this," the LORD says, {13} "Now because you have done all these works, and I spoke to you rising up early and speaking to you, but you wouldn't listen. I called you and you wouldn't answer. {14} I'm going to do to this house, which is called by my name, wherein you trust, to the place I gave to you and your father just like I did to Shiloh."

Now why is all of this going to happen? It's going to happen because you have corrupted yourself, you sworn falsely, you have turned your back on the law, you ruined your courts, you have done away with justice. "I will do to this house and to this place what I have done to Shiloh." There won't be anything here.

Let's continue in verse 15, "I'll cast you out of my sight just like I cast out all of your brethren, even the whole seed of Ephraim, {16} Therefore pray not for this people, don't lift up a cry nor a prayer for them, don't bother making intercession to me, for I will not hear you." says God.

Your Iniquities Separates You from God

I still pray for my country, but it's getting harder to feel confident that I'm being heard. There is a passage in Isaiah that haunts me. It speaks straight to us, right where we are, right now.

Isaiah 59 and verse 1, "Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, his ear isn't heavy that it cannot hear. {2} But your iniquities have separated you from your God and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear. {3} Your hands are defiled with blood, your fingers with iniquity, your lips have spoken lies, your tongue has muttered perverseness."

Now wait a minute, how can my hands be defiled with blood? I haven't killed anybody. No? You do know, don't you, that this is a government of the people, by the people and for the people, and we the people have allowed a climate of violence to pervade our society. It is not the freedoms we have that have brought the violence. It's the lies!

Isaiah continues in verse 4, "Nobody calls for justice, nobody pleads for the truth. They trust in vanity and they speak lies." They will not stick with the truth. Justice and the truth go together. "They conceive mischief and bring forth iniquity." Verse seven, "Their feet run do evil, they make haste to shed innocent blood, their thoughts are thoughts of iniquity. Wasting and destruction are in their paths. {8} The way of peace they don't know, and there is no judgment in their goings, they have made them crooked paths. {9} Therefore, judgment is far from us, neither does justice overtake us. We wait for light and behold obscurity. We wait for brightness and we walk in darkness. {10} We grope for the wall like the blind. We grope as if we have no eyes. We stumble at noon as in the night. We are in desolate places like dead men. {11} We look for judgment, but there is none. We look for salvation and it is a long way off."

Protect the Truth

Why is there no judgment? Why can't we find judgment? Why are we wandering around in the dark? Because we have not protected the truth in our legal system.

Isaiah 59 verse 15, "Truth fails and he that departs from evil makes himself a prey. God looked at this and it displeased him, that there was no judgment. {16} He saw that there was no man and wondered that there was no intercessor."

Think about what it means when the chief law enforcement officer in the nation, the president, is the one who is breaking the law and lying about it.

"You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." When the time comes for someone to stand in the gap, I hope you will be there, and will stand for the truth.

The late Ronald L. Dart was a Christian evangelist whose teachings still inspire thousands of people around the world. His legacy spans decades. For more information about the teachings of Ronald L. Dart, visit RLDEA.com where you will find booklets, articles, sermons, Bible studies, and books by Mr. Dart.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you find it interesting that God only needed four commandments to tell us how to worship Him, but He needs six to tell us how to treat each other?
2. Have you ever been guilty of breaking the ninth commandment, maybe not in a court of a law, but as in participating in untruth gossip?
3. Have you ever been a victim of someone bearing false witness?
4. What do you think about Leviticus 5: 1, where it is clear that we commit a sin if we do not speak up when we know something?
5. Does keeping silent when you know something make you an accomplice to the crime?
6. How wonderful would it be for our court systems if everyone kept the 9th Commandment?
7. How harmful is false testimony?
8. Why is it sometimes hard to tell the truth?
9. In what ways has the breaking of this commandment hurt society?
10. What steps does one need to do to make sure that they do not break this commandment in any way?