

Word #9: Don't bear false witness

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[0:00] Let's go to him now. Let's pray for his help. Heavenly Father, I just pray that you would remove all distractions and help us to focus, help us to concentrate on what you have to say to us this morning.

As we sung earlier, Lord, we know that our hearts are prone to wonder. And so, Lord, we pray that as we hear your word preached today, that our hearts will get back in tune with you, that we might live fully aligned with your will and purposes.

We pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Now, did you know God can't do everything? Now, before you evict me from the pulpit for heresy, hear me out.

Let me show you from the Bible. For one thing, God can't tempt anyone to evil. James makes that clear. For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone.

For another, God cannot lie. Numbers 23 verse 19 tells us that God is not human, that he should lie, nor a human being, that he should change his mind.

[1:18] Indeed, Hebrews 6 verse 18 says it's impossible for God to lie. And isn't that good news? If God could lie, your forgiveness would be provisional.

Your hope of heaven could be uncertain. For you would never know if his word could really be trusted. But because there is no untruthfulness in God, or put another way, because God is faithful, he is worthy of our faith.

Now, compare God with Satan. Can Satan lie? Jesus says, absolutely.

In fact, in John chapter 8, he calls him not just a liar, but the father of lies. That's essentially who the devil is.

He cannot be trusted. His character is the exact opposite of God. But here's the thing. Jesus also says our behavior can reveal whose children we are.

[2:37] Children tend to resemble their fathers. And if lying is the devil's mother tongue, Jesus can make out the accent. So here's what God wants to ask us this morning.

Who is our father? That's where Exodus 20 verse 16 comes in. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

You see, today's commandment functions a little like a DNA test. It clarifies our paternity. For if we are God's children, we will speak with his accent.

We won't bear false witness. But here's the thing about a DNA test. Sometimes the results tell you something you would rather not hear.

They can be uncomfortable. They certainly were for me. And if the results aren't comfortable today, don't ignore them.

[3:46] But don't despair either. Because God is faithful in every way. Faithful enough to tell us the truth about ourselves.

But faithful enough to keep doing us good even when the truth hurts. So today, if this message gets a little difficult, stick with me.

But let's begin by asking, what is the ninth word all about? Is it the equivalent of what we learned back in primary one in our pendidikan moral classes?

Jangan bohong. Well, sort of. But this morning, I hope to show you that if we want to be true to the spirit of this commandment, we won't just refrain from telling blatant untruths.

We'll actually go far beyond that. To be promoters of justice, protectors of our neighbor's good name, and proclaimers of the gospel.

[4:49] So let's see how that's the case. Firstly, be promoters of justice. Now, growing up, my guess is that some of you learned this commandment as, you shall not lie.

And certainly, the Bible has plenty to say about lying. Go to the book of Proverbs, and you'll find many warnings about all kinds of dishonesty. But the ninth word is a little more precise than that. It has a particular kind of lying in view, giving false testimony against someone else. There is something especially serious about that.

If you lie about yourself, you might make yourself look a little bit better than you really are. But if you lie about your neighbor, it can change how other people see them, judge them, and treat them. In other words, it is not just truth that's at stake. It's justice. And that, in fact, is the original context of this commandment.

[6:06] In this verse, testimony refers to what you would say in a court of law. It concerns what lawyers today would call perjury.

That's when you submit false or misleading evidence against someone else. So let me paint the picture. Put yourself back into the world of ancient Israel for a moment.

As God's people, you know all the stuff that we've been hearing over the last few weeks. Honor marriage, honor others' property, indeed, honor life itself.

Don't destroy any of that. But if someone was accused of breaking words number five, six, seven, or eight, how were the leaders of the community supposed to work out what really happened?

After all, remember there was no such thing as fingerprint testing or CCTV footage at that time? No forensic expertise they could call in like on CSI?

[7:13] The most they could do was to call in witnesses. And what those witnesses said could make the difference between the person being found guilty or innocent.

So, imagine you are standing there as a witness. Someone's life, freedom, property, or reputation may depend on what you say.

The integrity of the whole judicial system depends on you telling the truth. What happens then if you give false testimony?

Well, you would be helping an innocent person be treated as guilty or helping a guilty person escape punishment. And God detests both.

No wonder God says, Don't you dare twist the truth. Don't exaggerate. Don't leave out what matters. Don't say something you know isn't true simply because it will help your side.

[8:25] In doing so, God is protecting something absolutely fundamental to a just society. The telling of the truth.

So, the ninth word isn't just don't tell lies. Rather, it's saying don't use your words to corrupt justice. Use them instead to help the truth come to light. You see, as some proverbs puts it, your words can either be a sharp arrow piercing your neighbor or it can save his life.

So, the question is, which one are you? A killer or a rescuer? Do you resemble God or Satan?

And because the stakes are this cosmic, God doesn't leave truth-telling to human goodwill alone.

Indeed, he builds concrete legal protections into Israel's courts.

[9:35] Look at Deuteronomy 17 verse 6 with me. On the testimony of two or three witnesses, a person is to be put to death, but no one is to be put to death on the testimony of only one witness.

So, think about that. God knows that one person with one grudge, standing in the right place at the right time, can end someone's life.

So, he demands corroboration. He makes sure that one mouth alone is not enough to condemn a neighbor. But then look at the very next verse, verse 7.

The hands of the witnesses must be the first in putting that person to death, and then the hands of all the people. Did you catch that?

If your testimony sends a man to his death, you don't get to walk away and let someone else do the hard part. You throw the first stone.

[10:42] God will not let a witness hide behind his words. He makes them feel the wake of them. And that's not all.

I'll turn over to Deuteronomy 19 verses 18 and 19. The judges must make a thorough investigation, and if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against a fellow Israelite, then do to the false witness as that witness intended to do to the other party.

You must purge the evil from among you. In other words, if you are found breaking the ninth word, you receive whatever you were trying to get done to your neighbor.

So, trying to have him fined, you pay the fine. Trying to have him stoned, you take his place. That reveals how seriously God takes false testimony.

Words are never just words. Words have consequences. Words destroy. So, take seriously what you say about others.

[12:01] Now, I am pretty sure none of us here set out to be false witnesses. But false testimony isn't always as obvious as lying under oath in a courtroom.

And if we turn to Exodus 23 verses 1 to 3, it helpfully exposes three subtle ways it creeps into our lives. The first way it does that is when we collude with the guilty.

Verse 1 says, Do not spread false reports. Do not help a guilty person by being a malicious witness. Now, actually, that second line there is even stronger in the original Hebrew.

Literally, it says something like, Do not join your hand with a wicked man to be a witness of violence. God is giving us a clear warning.

If you know someone has clearly done wrong, don't become their partner in crime. Don't lie on their behalf.

[13:13] Not even if they are a close friend. And notice, you can collude with a lie simply by being its messenger. That means you don't have to invent the lie yourself to be guilty.

You just have to pass it on. Isn't that how so often it works today? You didn't make up the rumor. You just forwarded it. You didn't start the story about why that family left the church. You just passed it on. You didn't say, Oh, I know this is true.

You just said, Oh, I heard this about them. Never mind that you haven't verified anything. But verse 1 shows us, Oh, I was only sharing what I received.

It's an excuse God will not accept. This leads us to the second way. When we conform to the crowd.

[14:19] Verse 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.

God's message here is simple. Don't yield to peer pressure. Don't buy into a misrepresentation just because everyone else is doing it.

So picture this. Your workplace group chat is blowing up over a major mistake. Nobody says it directly, but the consensus forms instantly.

Oh, it was Sarah's fault. But you happen to know the full story. You know that Sarah was only doing what she was told to do.

Now, nobody is asking you to lie. All you have to do is nothing. Because speaking up means being the one who makes things awkward.

[15:26] But if you stay silent, Sarah gets thrown to the wolves. And because this is Kuching, where everyone knows somebody, soon it will spread outside the workplace as well.

So what do you do? Exodus 23 tells us clearly, do not side with the crowd.

When you know the truth, and you have the standing to say it, silence isn't neutral. It's a quiet way of letting the lie stand.

In fact, Leviticus 5 verse 1 gives us a related warning. If anyone sins because they do not speak up when they hear a public charge to testify regarding something they have seen or learned about, they will be held responsible.

God holds us accountable, not only for the lies we speak, but also for the moments when we ought to say something, but don't.

[16:32] Simply because it's costly. Don't conform to the crowd. Speak up when justice demands it.

And finally, there is a third way. When we show compromise, compassion, verse 3.

Do not show favoritism to a poor person in a lawsuit. Is that what you expected the Bible to say? Most of us could have guessed verses 1 and 2.

Don't collude. Don't conform to the crowd. Fine. But verse 3, it feels like it's forbidding something that feels like kindness.

Somebody is struggling. They're in a dispute. So you kind of bend your testimony their way because you feel for them. And God says, no.

[17:38] Now let me be clear about what this is not saying. God is not telling us to stop caring about the poor. Read on three verses to verse 6. Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits.

So notice how the same passage guards both sides. Don't bend the truth for them and don't bend the truth against them. Why?

Because in a court of law, justice must be blind in order to be justice. An innocent person must be protected.

And a guilty person held accountable regardless of how much money is in their bank account. So brothers and sisters, be promoters of justice.

Let your words be just and true when you are at home talking with your spouse about the teachers at school or even the people at church.

[18:47] Don't bear false witness. Let your words be just and true when you are on campus and a lecturer is asking about a conflict involving a friend who is partially at fault.

Don't bear false witness. Let your words be just and true when you are in the workplace giving a reference to HR about someone whom you don't click with socially but is otherwise competent.

Don't bear false witness. That pleases our Heavenly Father. But all this doesn't exhaust the full meaning of the ninth word.

You see, you can not only be a promoter of justice but you can secondly be protectors of our neighbor's good name.

While the original setting of this command is legal, its reach extends far beyond. To quote Jen Wilkin, though you may never be called to testify in a court of law, the testimony you bear about your neighbors in everyday moments will shape your life and dears for good or for ill.

[20:19] Indeed, that's the direction Jesus takes. Look at what he says in Matthew 12 verse 36. But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken.

Do you see what Jesus has done? He hasn't abolished the courtroom. He's enlarged it. Every single day, we live in the presence of a judge who is listening and keeping the record.

Every time you open your mouth about another person, you are giving testimony. So the question is no longer am I a witness?

The question is what kind of witness am I? A true one or a false one? Doesn't that sober you up? It certainly sobers me up. Because it is far easier than we think to destroy a person's good name without technically telling a single lie.

[21:33] let me show you what I mean. There was once a first mate on a ship who occasionally drank too much. One day the sober captain wrote in the log book, the mate was drunk today.

The mate begged him not to record it but the captain said it's a fact and he goes into the log. log. A few days later it was the mate's turn to fill out the log book.

He wrote a single sentence. The captain was sober today. Was it true? Yes, the captain was sober every day.

But was he actually bearing true witness? No. because by recording that single truth, the first mate made anyone reading the log assume the captain was usually a drunkard.

And that church is one of the most common ways we break the ninth commandment. Not by making up lies but by arranging true facts so that people will draw the wrong conclusion about our neighbour.

[22:58] It is the half-said phrase, the raised eyebrow, the convenient detail left out, the tone of voice that communicates what your words weren't.

When we do all that, we are doing the opposite of protecting our neighbour's good name. And the Bible speaks strongly about this.

Turn with me to Leviticus 19, verse 16. Do not go about spreading slander among your people. Do not do anything that endangers your neighbour's life.

I am the Lord. Now, notice how the verse is arranged. Notice what sits right alongside slander in that verse. do not do anything that endangers your neighbour's life.

Now, doesn't that sound familiar? A few minutes ago, we were standing in an ancient courtroom where a false witness was called a witness of violence, a person whose words puts a stone in someone else's hands.

[24:15] And here, God says the exact same thing about casual conversations over coffee. Because a reputation is not a small thing.

Your reputation is about how you are able to live in community. It affects whether your business gets referred, whether your children get spoken well of, whether the aunties and uncles greet you warmly at a wedding or find somewhere else to look.

And that's why we have the ninth word. The sixth commandment protects a person's life. The seventh protects his marriage.

The eighth protects his property. But the ninth commandment protects his name. And whenever you take a person's good name and tarnish it, you have stolen something that is hard to gain back. Now some of us might be thinking, well, I don't slander anyone. You know, slander sounds so harsh, so malicious.

[25 : 27] I would never do that. But we have a friendlier, softer word for it, don't we? We call it gossip.

gossip. Now what exactly is gossip? At its core, gossip is sharing someone else's private faults, secrets, or embarrassing moments with people who have no business knowing them.

Not to help that particular person, but simply because we enjoy the high of being in the know. And notice something crucial here. Gossip is not limited to lies.

Something can be 100% factually true, but if you weaponize that truth to tear someone down or ruin their reputation, you are still bearing false witness.

Truth delivered with a malicious heart is still a violation of the ninth word. So why do we do it? Why is it so addictive?

[26 : 44] Proverbs 18 verse 8 tells us, the words of a gossip are like choice morsels. They go down to the inmost parts. In other words, gossip feels tasty.

That's why we indulge in it. Sometimes we're just bored, so we treat the drama of other people's lives like cheap entertainment. Sometimes we just like the quiet thrill of having the inside scoop, or of discovering that the person who seems better than us isn't so great after all.

After all, this costs me nothing. I just have to talk. That's our fallen nature at work. But those choice morsels are poison.

sin. As Proverbs 18 says, they go down to the inmost parts. They do far more damage than we realize, and never in a good way.

As Proverbs 16, verse 28 puts it, a perverse person stirs up conflict, and a gossip separates close friends. So if we want to live by the ninth word, don't gossip.

[28 : 00] But this commandment isn't just about what we refuse to say. We're not merely called to avoid damaging our neighbor's reputation. We are called to actively lift it up.

One of the great historical guides to the Christian faith, the Westminster Larger Catechism, puts this beautifully. It says that our duty under this commandment includes preserving and promoting the truth between people, and carefully protecting and advancing our neighbor's good name.

So that means more than simply avoiding slander. Instead, we should freely acknowledge their gifts and graces, praising the ways God has made them talented, and celebrating the ways the Holy Spirit is making them more like Jesus.

In short, we genuinely rejoice when good things are said about them. So let me ask you a question. When someone else is praised in front of you, how do you actually feel inside?

When someone says in your presence, oh, you know, so-and-so did such a fantastic job, or they have grown so much, or what a gift they are to our church. Is there genuine joy in your heart?

[29 : 27] Or does a little story instantly pop into your mind? A true detail that you could drop right into a conversation just to bring them down a pack or two? Too often, that is me.

This commandment exposes my heart, and perhaps it exposes yours too. But think also about how refreshing it is to be around someone who truly keeps this commandment.

They want you to flourish. They celebrate your good news. When your name comes up in a room that you are not in, but they are, your reputation is safer, not less safe.

then imagine if everyone in our church is like this. Wouldn't that make our experience of church a foretaste of heaven? Now, before we move on, I just need to make sure I am not being misunderstood here.

Protecting a neighbor's good name is not the same as covering up wrong doing. Remember, we are still to be promoters of justice.

[30 : 45] So, if somebody brings you a credible concern about abuse or wrongdoing and you brush it off, I'm sure it's nothing, you are not keeping the ninth commandment, you are breaking it.

Indeed, the Westminster larger catechism says as much. True justice never protects a name by concealing an offense. So, protect your neighbor's good name, promote it, rejoice in it, and that too pleases our heavenly father.

But, there's one more thing. Thirdly, we proclaim us of the gospel. You know, as you've been listening to this sermon, I wonder if you've had the same experience I had studying it. Because, for me, if the ninth word is a DNA test, then, honestly, I don't want to see the results. I know I have forwarded things, I never bothered to check. I've kept quiet when I should have spoken up. I've told the story in a way that makes me look better and make someone else look worse.

[32:10] And Romans 1 says that this is who we are by nature. People who suppress the truth. The ninth word has made me see a little more clearly just how true that is.

And frankly, it makes me even more amazed at Jesus. Because do you remember what happened to him? it is late at night in Jerusalem.

Jesus has been arrested and dragged before the highest court in the land. And Mark tells us exactly what that court was doing. Mark 14 verse 55.

The chief priest and the host and hedrin were looking for evidence against Jesus so that they could put him to death. But they did not find any. do you see?

They couldn't find a single valid witness against Jesus because there was nothing to accuse him of. The only true testimony about this man had already been given three years earlier at a river by a voice from heaven.

[33:26] you are my son whom I love. And yet Mark chapter 14 again many testified falsely against him but their statements did not agree.

Now do you see what's happening? They are not weighing the evidence they are shopping for it. They wanted a verdict and they were looking for whatever words might get them there.

But the witnesses couldn't even get their story straight. And remember Deuteronomy 17 what did God require? Two or three witnesses whose testimony agreed.

No agreement no conviction. Now every safeguard God had put in place was working exactly as it was supposed to. And they convicted him anyway.

brothers and sisters this is the ninth commandment turned completely upside down. The son of God is condemned by false testimony in a court that could not produce a truthful witness against him.

[34:42] Today if you ever had someone say something about you that was untrue and you couldn't do anything about it notice Jesus knows what it's like to be in your shoes.

But then comes the extraordinary part. The high priest asked Jesus directly are you the Messiah the son of the blessed one?

And Jesus could have stayed silent. He could have protected himself. He could have given them an answer that left room for doubt. But he doesn't.

Instead he tells the truth about himself knowing exactly what that truth will cause him. He replies I am.

That is Jesus. We twist the truth to ourselves. tells the truth and gives himself up.

[35:54] We hide what is true when the truth costs us. Jesus speaks the truth when that truth will cause him everything.

We are so often unfaithful witnesses. Jesus is the faithful witness. witness. That's exactly what Revelation 1 calls him.

The faithful witness. This is who Jesus is. He's the only human being who ever kept the nine commandment perfectly not just in a courtroom but with every word he ever spoke.

He truly is the son of God the one who carries all authority just as he said. And yet the man who never bore false witness was condemned by false witnesses all so that he could take our place.

You see my friends if you are trusting Christ this morning God is not bearing false witness when he calls you his child. Not because our tongues are so clean they are not but because of Christ what the father said over Jesus at that river he now can say over you you are my child whom I love and children speak like their father so they tell the truth including the truth about his son indeed that's what God always intended his people to be if you turn to Isaiah 43 you will find God declaring to Israel you are my witnesses Israel kept failing giving false testimony about her God but now the faithful witness has come and listen to what he says to his disciples just before he leaves them

[38:03] Acts 1 verse 8 but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth that's our job today just as it was for Israel in the past and notice that is a promise before it is a command you will be the courage Jesus had that night before the Sanhedrin is the courage his spirit gives to us so let

me press this home remember Leviticus 5 verse 1 we looked at it earlier if you know the true story and you keep quiet God holds you responsible for your silence well guess what we know the true story we know there is a judge we know there is a substitute we know that guilty people can go free without justice being cheated that is the best news any human being will ever hear and we have an opportunity to bear witness to give true testimony to that incredible news so today to live by this ninth word is actually to refuse to be silent but to witness to

Jesus to testify to him that's why we run Christianity Explore not just for the sake of running a program but because that is one wonderful opportunity you can use to live by this word today and we bear witness to Jesus not just by evangelizing directly but in our speech more generally listen to how Paul puts it in Ephesians 4 verse 25 therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully!

to your neighbor for we are all members of one body this is really the ninth word in New Testament form but notice the reason Paul gives he doesn't say because it's the law rather he says because we are members of one body we don't lie about each other because when we do so we are simply hurting ourselves instead we should do this verse 29 do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouth but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs that it may benefit those who listen that's what it truly means to keep the ninth commandment that's what it truly means to speak with our father's accent so brothers and sisters let's live by that word today let's promote justice let's protect our neighbor's good name and let's proclaim the gospel because we know who is our father and we know what pleases him let's pray heavenly father as we approach you now we approach you knowing that many times we have used our words carelessly we have perhaps used even our words in a malicious way in a way that does harm to others and lord if that is as we want to repent of that if we are guilty of having misrepresented others trying to gain an injustice against them again forgive us thank you that

Jesus Christ is the faithful witness thank you that he not only spoke the truth but is the truth that he reveals the truth about ourselves but thank you that he does not weaponize the truth against us but instead reveals himself also to be the way and the life that we might approach you and that we might become your children and so Lord if we call you our father help us to speak with your accent help us to speak words that bring life to others we pray all this in the name of Jesus Christ Amen