

NO FALSE WITNESSING! Part 9

Scripture Reading. Exodus 20:16

Ex. 20:16. "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."

Introduction: I had to do little rearranging before I could preach this ninth commandment, "Thou shall not bear false witness against your neighbor!" I had to preach about coveting before this sermon because coveting topic connects well with the root causes for stealing and murder. There are three important stories about false witnessing in the Bible. One is about Jezebel and Naboth story, and the other one is concerning our Lord Jesus Christ Himself! The third one is about Stephen who was stoned to death because of false witnessing. In modern political arena also we periodically come across false witnessing, which is called perjury! First, Let us go through some of the Scriptures to understand this law. Besides Exodus 20:16, we have other related verses also.

Exo. 23:1,2. 1 "You shall not bear a false report; do not join your hand with a wicked man to be a malicious witness. 2 "You shall not follow the masses in doing evil, nor shall you testify in a dispute so as to turn aside after a multitude in order to pervert justice;

The advice in this verse is precious! Do not join hand with a wicked man to be a malicious witness! Don't follow masses in doing evil! Do not pervert justice in order to turn aside the public's view. Very relevant verse for modern political arena!

Every aspect of this law was broken concerning the trial of Jesus. They tried to charge Jesus through false witnessing, They did join hands with wicked chief priests in accusing our Lord. Then they did instigate the masses to crucify Jesus.

Deuteronomy 19:15-21. 15 "A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed. 16 "If a malicious witness rises up against a man to accuse him of wrongdoing, 17 then both the men who have the dispute shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who will be in office in those days. 18 "The judges shall investigate thoroughly, and if the witness is a false witness and he has accused his brother falsely, 19 then you shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you. 20 "The rest will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such an evil thing among you. 21 "Thus you shall not show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

This verse clearly says that we cannot convict someone with just one witness! There has to be more than one witness. Also if the witness testifies falsely, he should be judged by the priests, and the judges thoroughly. If they prove that he is a false witness, he should go through the exact same punishment just he had intended to do to his brother! We should not sympathize a false witness and pardon him.

At Athens the false witness was liable to a heavy fine, and if thrice convicted lost all his civil rights. At Rome, by a law of the Twelve Tables, he was hurled headlong from the Tarpeian rock. In Egypt, false witness was punished by amputation of the nose and ears (**Records of the Past**, vol. 8. p. 65).

But this law brings fear in our heart. At the mouth of two or three false witnesses, one can be put to death! It is too easy to frame a person for murder! The following story illustrates such vulnerability.

1 Kings 21:8-13. 8So she wrote letters in Ahab's name and sealed them with his seal, and sent letters to the elders and to the nobles who were living with Naboth in his city. 9Now she wrote in the letters, saying, "Proclaim a fast and seat Naboth at the head of the people; 10and seat two worthless men before him, and let them testify against him, saying, 'You cursed God and the king.' Then take him out and stone him to death."

We came across this story last week. Ahab wanted to purchase Naboth's vineyard but Naboth refused. Ahab was very sad. But Jezebel had a plan to kill Naboth. All she needed was two false witnesses.

11So the men of his city, the elders and the nobles who lived in his city, did as Jezebel had sent word to them, just as it was written in the letters which she had sent them.

Where can you turn for justice if the judges themselves pervert justice! These perversions of justice is going on even today. Money, and power corrupts justice!

David cries out against these false accusers.

*Psalms 27:12. 12Do not deliver me over to the desire of my adversaries,
For false witnesses have risen against me,
And they breathe out violence.*

Had David been caught by King Saul, he would have been put to death in no time because there were already false witnesses lining up against David.

*Proverbs 14:25. 25A truthful witness saves lives,
But he who utters lies is treacherous.*

So much lies going on in modern politics. There is so much fraud and manipulations. Even presidents in this country were caught up in the perjury charges, and more to join this list.

Perversion of justice is a horrible act, but yet people get away with it because of the presidential pardon power.

Let us see what the New Testament has to offer concerning false testimony.

Matthew 18:16, 17. 16"But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that BY THE MOUTH OF TWO OR THREE WITNESSES EVERY FACT MAY BE CONFIRMED. 17"if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

Even though this passage does not relate to false witnessing, it shows the importance of having more than one witness. You may not want to judge someone with just one witness. You can use that one witness as one piece of information, but you must corroborate it with other evidences.

The chief priests had tough time charging Jesus!

Matthew 26:59-62. 59Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, so that they might put Him to death. 60They did not find any, even though many false witnesses came forward. But later on two came forward, 61and said, "This man stated, 'I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days.'" 62the high priest stood up and said to Him, "Do You not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against You?"

Many false witnesses came forward to testify against Jesus, but yet it did not stick in favor of their charge. The charge of destroying the temple was brought as a blasphemy charge but it was not good enough because Jesus said that He would rebuild it again in 3 days,

Jesus was charged only when high priest demanded His answer under oath! The high priest asked, "I adjure thee by the living God, Are you the Christ, the Son of God?"

"Jesus said to him, "You have said it yourself; nevertheless I tell you, hereafter you will see THE SON OF MAN SITTING AT THE RIGHT HAND OF POWER, and COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN.""

Here the high priest took that as a blasphemy of equating with God, and he tore his own clothes and convicted Jesus. There were many who witnessed this moment! Yes Jesus was condemned to death through false witnessing. Even high priest was part of it.

Stephen in book of Acts was also put to death through false witnessing.

Acts 6:11-14. (Stephen). 10But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the Spirit with which he was speaking. 11Then they secretly induced men to say, "We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God." 12 And they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they came up to him and dragged him away and brought him before the Council. 13They put forward false witnesses who said, "This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law; 14for we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us."

We are going to witness many perjury charges soon in our own time. watch it carefully. It is not a minor offense according to Ten Commandments, but a major offense! Let us not take it light heartedly.

Speaking unjustly against our neighbor, to hurt his reputation. Bearing false witness against him, or in common conversation slandering, backbiting, and tale-bearing etc. How often we break this command every day! We are all guilty!

One last thought concerning false witnessing: We are Christ's witnesses. It is easy to become false witnesses for Christ by leading a sinful life style. Beware!

So this wraps up our 10 Commandments series! What can we learn from these commandments?

These Ten Commandments teaches us very clearly, how we ought to live. They may be summarized through two important commandments:

Love your God with all your heart, all your mind, all your soul, and all your strength! The first four commandments teaches us exactly that: to love God more than anything.

The last 6 Commandments teaches us to love our neighbors as ourselves. If we do that we should not have any problem with any of these laws.

What does Jesus say concerning the Law? If we love God and genuinely love people, we will fulfill all the laws! Jesus actually raised the bar of these laws and taught us to fulfill these laws at the heart's level itself. If our heart is filled with love, there will not be any anger or malice or lust! If we control the heart, we can save ourselves from breaking the law. Out of the abundance of the heart mouth speaks, and we are judged by what we say and what we do.

We tend to twist Paul's saying concerning these laws also. Paul is not saying that we totally throw away the laws of God. What he is saying is that there are two different systems in New Testament era. The law of the letter, and the law of the Spirit. It is like having a gramophone record album vs a CD player. We must choose one system. Or else it will not work. We have the Holy Spirit! He will hold our hands and walk us through the jungle of various interpretations of the law. When we focus on love as the only law, we will end up fulfilling all the relevant laws that affects others, and ourselves.

Conclusion:

New Testament summarizes all laws in just one sentence, Love one another as Christ loved us.

Romans 13:8-10. 8 Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law. 9 For this, "YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET," and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, "YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF." 10 Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

What a grand finish to these Ten Commandments! Love is indeed the fulfillment of the Law! Jesus showed that love for us and carried our weaknesses, sins on the cross and nailed it so that we may be freed from the consequence of breaking these laws. Let us follow the same path of sacrificial love and love God and our neighbors dearly!

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