

# The Ninth Commandment

by A.W. Pink

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*The Ninth Commandment prohibits bearing false witness against our neighbor and emphasizes the importance of veracity in our speech and actions.*

**Scripture:** Exodus 20:16, Psalm 31:5, Psalm 141:3, Proverbs 15:4, Proverbs 18:21, Zechariah 8:16, Matthew 12:36-37, Ephesians 4:15, James 3:8, Revelation 21:8

**Topics:** "The Power of Words", "Truthfulness"

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## Description

A.W. Pink emphasizes the significance of the Ninth Commandment, which prohibits bearing false witness against our neighbor, extending its meaning beyond perjury to encompass all forms of harmful speech. He highlights the importance of truthfulness in our communication, asserting that our words can either uplift or destroy reputations, and that we must speak truth in love. Pink warns against the dangers of lying, noting that it aligns us with the nature of the Devil and is contrary to God's character as the God of Truth. He encourages believers to be mindful of their speech, to avoid unnecessary criticism, and to uphold the truth in all circumstances. Ultimately, Pink calls for a commitment to veracity as foundational to righteousness and character.

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## Transcript

### THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

### THE NINTH COMMANDMENT

"Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour" (Ex. 20:16). Take these words simply at their face value and they prohibit only the horrible crime of perjury or the giving of false testimony in a court of law. But as with the previous Commandments, so it is here: much more is implied and inculcated than is specifically stated. As we have so often pointed out, each of the Ten Commandments enunciates a general principle, and not only are all other sins forbidden which be allied to the one named and prohibited, together with all causes and tendencies thereto, but the opposite virtue is definitely required, with all that fosters and promotes it.

Thus, in its wider meaning, this ninth commandment reprehends any word of ours which would injure the reputation of our neighbor, be it uttered in public or in private. This should scarcely need any arguing, for if we restrict this commandment to its literal terms it would have no bearing on any save that small minority who are called upon to bear witness in a court of justice. In its widest application this commandment has

to do with the regulation of our speech, which is one of the distinguishing and ennobling faculties that God has bestowed upon man.

Scripture tells us that "death and life are in the power of the tongue" (Prov. 18:21), that "a wholesome tongue is a tree of life" (Prov. 15:4), and that an unbridled one is "an unruly evil, full of deadly poison" (Jas. 3:8). That our words are not to be uttered lightly or thoughtlessly is made clear by that unspeakably solemn utterance of our Lord's: "But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Matthew 12: 36, 37).

O how we need to pray, "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips" (Ps. 141:3). The duties concerning our tongues may be summed up in two words: our speech must always be true and spoken in love (Eph. 4:15). Thus, as the eighth commandment provides for the security of our neighbor's property, so this one is designed to preserve his good name by our speaking the truth about him in love. Negatively, this ninth commandment forbids all false and injurious speeches respecting our neighbor; positively, it inculcates the conservation of truth.

"The end of this Precept is that because God, who is Truth itself, execrates a lie, we ought to preserve the truth without the least disguise" (Calvin). Veracity is the strict observance of truth in all our communications. The importance and necessity of this appears from the fact that almost all that mankind knows is derived from communications. The value of those statements which we accept from others depends entirely on their verity and accuracy. If they are false, they are worthless, misleading, and evil.

Veracity is not only a virtue, but it is also the root of all other virtues and the foundation of all right character. In Scripture, therefore, "truth" is often synonymous with "righteousness. The godly man is "he that speaketh truth in his heart" (Ps. 15:2). The man that "doeth truth" (John 3:21) has discharged his duty. It is by the truth that the Holy Spirit sanctifies the soul (John 17:17) The positive form of this ninth commandment is found in these words: "Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour" (Zech. 8:16).

Thus the first sin prohibited therein is that of lying. Now a lie, properly speaking, consists of three elements or ingredients: speaking what is not true; deliberately doing so; and doing so with an intent to deceive. Every falsehood is not a lie; we may be misinformed or deceived and sincerely think we are stating facts, and consequently have no design of misleading others. On the other hand, we may speak that which is true and yet lie in so doing, as in the following examples: we might report what is true, yet believe it to be false and utter it with an intention to deceive; or we might report the figurative words of another and pretend he meant them literally, as was the case with those who bore false witness against Christ (Matthew 26:60).

The worst form of lying (between men) is when we maliciously invent a falsehood for the purpose of damaging the reputation of our neighbor, which is what is more especially in view in the terms of the ninth commandment. How vile and abominable this sin is appears from the following considerations. It is a sin which makes a person most like the Devil. The Devil is a spirit, and therefore gross carnal sins do not correspond to his nature. His sins are more refined and intellectual, such as pride and malice, deception and falsehood.

"He is a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44), and the more malice enters into one composition of any lie, the more nearly one resembles him. It is therefore a sin most contrary to the nature and character of God, for He is "the Lord God of truth" (Ps. 31:5), and therefore we are told that "lying lips are an abomination

unto the Lord" (Prov. 12:22). As Satan is a liar and the father of lies, and as God is the Lord God of Truth, so His children resemble Him therein, "seeing they are My people, children that will not lie" (Isa. 63:8).

God has threatened a most fearful punishment upon them; "all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone" (Rev. 21:8). Alas, to what fearful heights has this sin risen. It has become so common that few indeed have any conscience thereon, until we have to lament that "truth is fallen in the street" (Isa. 59:14). First, truth has departed from the pulpits. A whole century has passed since the lie of evolution captivated the scientific world and then was taken up by thousands of unregenerate preachers--a lie which strikes at the very foundations of Truth, for it repudiates man's fall, and sets aside his need both of redemption and regeneration.

For the same length of time the so-called "higher criticism" of German neologians has been peddled throughout the English-speaking world by thousands of godless ministers, who wish to be looked up to as men of superior intellectuality. Once Truth departed from the pulpits it was not long before it departed from the halls of legislation and the marts of commerce, until we now live in a world where confidence between nations is nonexistent, and where the word of our fellows is no longer to be relied upon.

How deeply important it is, then, that a sacred regard for the truth should be constantly pressed upon the young and that they should be taught that lying is the inlet of all vice and corruption. Equally important is it that those who have charge of the young, particularly their parents, should set before the little ones a personal example of what they teach, and not neutralize the same by making promises to them that they fail to fulfill or by uttering threats that they never carry out.

It is the part of wisdom and prudence that each of us should be very slow in making an unconditional promise; but once it is made it must be kept at all costs, unless the keeping of it compels us to sin against God. The prohibition of bearing false witness against my neighbor equally forbids me to bear false witness about myself, which is done when I pose as being holier than I am or when I pretend to be more humble or more anything else than is actually the case. It remains for us to point out that we may violate this ninth commandment even when we speak the truth, if we speak it unnecessarily and from improper motives.

"We injure the character of our neighbor when we retail his real faults without any call to divulge them, when we relate them to those who have no right to know them, and when we tell them not to promote any good end but to make him lose his estimation in society. . . . Nay, we transgress this precept when we do not speak at all, for by holding our peace when something injurious is said of another we tacitly give our assent, and by concealing what we know to the contrary" (John Dick).

Flattering a person is another form of violating this precept. To compliment another merely for the sake of pleasing him or gratifying his vanity is to perjure your soul and imperil his safety. So also to give a false testimony of character or to recommend a friend to another when we know him to be unworthy of the testimonial is to bear "false witness." The following directions, through the grace of God, may be helpful in preserving one from these common sins. (1) Be not swayed by party spirit if you would be kept from slandering others.

The spirit of sectarianism begets prejudice, and prejudice makes us unwilling to receive and to acknowledge good in those who walk not with us, and ready to believe the worst of them. How of. ten writers are guilty here. Denominational bigotry has caused many a man to misinterpret one who differs with him and to impute to him errors which he does not hold. (2) Be not busy in other men's affairs; attend to your own business and leave others for God to attend to. (3) Reflect much upon your own sinfulness

and weakness.

Instead of being so ready to behold the sliver in your brother's eye, consider the plank in your own. (4) Shun the company of talebearers and tattlers; idle gossip is injurious to the soul. (5) If others slander you, see to it that you have a conscience void of offense toward God and man, and then it matters not what others think or say about you.

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