

Exodus 20:16 – The ninth commandment: false witness

We are studying the ten commandments, the law of God. In them, God shows us himself. He says, “here is what I am like”. The commands tell us that he is the only true God, worthy of all our worship (1st command). He is beyond our imagining and we must submit to his word (2nd). His name is awesome and holy and glorious (3rd). He has the right to rule over our work and our rest, and worthy of the first day of each week being given to him for worship (4th), and so on. This is the holy God who will judge us. All men may think they are clean; but the “mirror” of God's law shows them their guilt and sin. We should look at God's law, then run to Christ to be saved. Then he can give us a new heart to live a new way.

1. A command about words

The ten commandments cover all of life – family, childhood, adulthood, work, rest, buying and selling, actions, thoughts and here, words. God's law is comprehensive; we can never escape it. It is always examining us. God cares about our words, and he listens to them all (Psalm 94:9). Our words reveal our hearts (Matthew 12:33-37). A bad tree produces bad fruit, and a good tree produces good fruit. Jesus taught that we will have to explain every idle (careless) word on the day of judgment. Our words reveal if we have a new heart, or if we are still unconverted and unsaved. We cannot fool God. What do your words show about you? What kind of person are you? God will use your words to show that he is right to condemn you, if you have not come to Christ and been saved and been changed.

2. A command about truth, justice and peace

Every law shows us what the law-giver is like. In countries with good law-givers, the law brings freedom and peace. In countries ruled by tyrants, the law is hard and painful for the people. This command shows us that God is a God of justice. He hates a false witness, who corrupts justice (Exodus 23:1-3). On the day of judgment, God will judge according to perfect justice – with no forgetting, no bribing and no special favours. He is a God of truth. He desires our testimony to always be true. Normally a person lies because they wish to hide some other sin. But God has nothing to hide: his whole being is perfect and pure. He is also a God of peace: he desires us to live with our neighbour in peace, not hatred. The good news of the gospel is that God can save us and still be just, because Jesus has paid the price on the cross. The gospel is truth, and brings peace between men and God and between men in the church. We have all fallen short of God's marks of justice, truth and peace: but in Christ can be forgiven.

3. A command about loving our neighbour

This command tells us to care for our neighbour. We are not to allow him to suffer harm, if we can prevent it. Nor are we to do harm ourselves. We must not spread any untruth, or receive any bad report without very good reason. Love covers up others' sins. We must not rejoice in any evil thing, but must mourn over it. We must rejoice over the good in our neighbour, and not envy him. We should not listen to gossip or slander, but rebuke them. Our words should be true and always to be trusted. Surely we all need forgiveness and a new heart from the Lord Jesus!