

EXODUS 20:16

(Readings: WSC 76-78; Acts 6:8-15; Exodus 23:1-9)

The Ninth Commandment

Boys and girls...

We're looking at the 9th commandment; the one about not lying.

Though, can I ask you: Do you remember the four commandments before it?

How about the fifth?

I hope you haven't forgotten already - that was the one about obeying your father and mother!

Do you remember what followed after that?

There was the sixth about not murdering; the seventh about not committing adultery; and the eighth about not... stealing.

Now we have the ninth.

But since it's down the list a bit, near the end, it's not so important is it?

I mean, this is like a sliding scale isn't it, because lying couldn't possibly be as bad as murdering, could it?

Well, actually, there's no sliding scales in scripture; everything is just as important as anything else!

In fact, what we have in these Ten Commandments, as we go further down the list of them, is something that impacts more and more directly on all of us; until with the tenth commandment we're finally convicted by the whole list of them!

Well, boys and girls, I don't think any of you have actually murdered someone.

As for committing adultery, that's usually what those a little older can do.

And with stealing, yes, perhaps most of you would have taken something which wasn't yours, like that biscuit without asking.

But you've all lied - haven't you?

In some way you haven't always told the truth, have you?

Perhaps it was that little white lie, maybe it wasn't quite telling the whole story.

Still, whichever way you did it, you gave false testimony against your neighbour - you didn't tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

So, right from the start, it's clear this commandment is for every one of us.

Let's then, first of all, see... WHAT A WITNESS IS.

A witness is a person who has firsthand knowledge of an event - so he's what we call an "eyewitness"; or he's someone who can testify because of a report he has heard.

Sometimes you will hear or read of someone being a witness in a court case.

This means they were there when the offence was committed.

They saw that crime being done.

And so the law says they must testify as to what they witnessed.

Leviticus 5 says a person sins because he doesn't speak up when he's asked to testify about something he has seen or learned about.

The apostle Peter, in the sermon on Pentecost Day, said that the apostles were all "witnesses" of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

But this telling the truth really goes against an old Australian tradition of not dobbing in your mates, doesn't it?

Because if you know they've done something wrong, you can't just pretend it didn't happen, you

can't say, "Well, **I** didn't do that wrong thing", because by not speaking the truth, you're just as guilty as they are!

In our legal system it's called being an accessory after the fact.

And as part of our legal system which is based on the Bible, it shows there's no place whatsoever for deception or deceiving of any kind at all!

But, anyhow... what have you got to hide?

Honestly, how can living a life of lies actually help you?

You get to the stage that you can't trust anyone because they certainly can't trust you!

So, secondly, we see... HOW A **FALSE** WITNESS GOES.

For President Richard Nixon of the United States, it was one little lie that tried to cover up the Watergate break-in, and which had nothing to do with him at that point, that became covered up all the way to the White House and the infamous tapes which showed just how deep he got caught in that deception.

He lost the highest position in America because of a lie.

What have you got to hide?

Well, he hid the truth.

That's what lies do; that's a false witness.

And there are different types of lies.

Moses, for example, mentions elsewhere the sins of spreading false reports (Ex.23:1a), of helping wicked men by being a malicious witness (Ex.23:1b), of seeking revenge or bearing a grudge against someone (Lev.19:18), and of placing a false charge, which kills innocent or honest people (Ex.23:7a).

So serious is lying of any shape or form that the one who did it would be given the same

punishment as his lie would have brought down upon someone else.

This is also why at least two witnesses were needed, so that, as much as possible, lying would be avoided.

In fact, congregation, wasn't it a lie which crucified the Lord Jesus?

Remember, it was because the Jewish leadership - the Sanhedrin - arranged for false witnesses against Him.

Through them, Satan, "the father of lies", carried out his malice against God in the most hateful way.

By using that wounded Jewish pride - because just as much as malice is using lies to put someone down, so pride is lying to try and keep from being seen in a bad light - Satan showed his full colours in getting Jesus murdered.

You can read about that at the end of Matthew 26.

As we read in Acts 6, later on through the same Sanhedrin the devil produced false witnesses again to testify against Stephen (Acts 6:13).

And so we come to the third aspect.

For now we realise...WHO LIES COMES FROM.

You think about it: Satan has to lie.

The truth would totally destroy him.

Martin Luther has these lyrics in his famous hymn: "The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him; his rage we can endure, for lo! his doom is sure; one little Word shall fell him."

This Word Luther writes of is the Living Word - none other than the Truth in Jesus Christ!

And very soon His Light will completely obliterate the devil's darkness for all eternity!

That's a strong imagery in the Bible - light and dark.

Our Lord Jesus mentioned it often.

And the apostle Paul used it also to contrast living the Christian way with the pagan way.

He says to believers, in Ephesians 5, verses 8 till 14, "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord.

"Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what please the Lord.

"Have nothing to do with the deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.

"For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret.

"But everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for it is light that makes everything visible."

So... what have you got to hide?

Friend, look at yourself.

Do you have a hidden, secret cause for shame?

Is there something you desperately cover up?

I well remember a fellow student at University who was trying to hide something.

He was a habitual smoker of marijuana - even growing a bit of his own.

It affected him in the way it did for so many of the other students who were into it.

In the end he didn't bother turning up for lectures; he used another student's notes from the year before to swot for his exams.

Mind you, he gave all the usual arguments about why there wasn't anything wrong with it, how it didn't affect you, and all that.

He also made a point of openly frowning on my particular 'religious' lifestyle, with his own unique greetings and nicknames for a Christian like me.

So I had a special nickname for him.

As an open acknowledgment of his lifestyle, as he quite openly shared mine, and also because it rhymed with his name, I used to call him "Druggie".

I mean, he believed in that lifestyle just as religiously as anyone else would worship other gods.

But, talk about paranoia!

If I dared used that name with others around, he used to get furious.

You see, he had something to hide.

That's why he was really afraid.

He knew it was wrong, totally illegal.

That's why the apostle Paul says in Romans 13 verse 3, "For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong.

"Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority?

"Then do what's right and he'll commend you."

In this way we come to our fourth aspect.

Now we see... WHERE THE TRUTH IS.

Congregation, let's transfer this into the spiritual sense.

And let me do this by asking you: Who is the ultimate witness?

Who is the One who sees everything we do, the One from which nothing is hidden whatsoever?

The prophet Samuel said, "The LORD is witness against you" (1 Sam.12:5).

Job confessed, "Even now my witness is in heaven... " (Job 16:19).

And when the people sinned, the LORD told them through Jeremiah, "I know it and am a witness to it" (Jer.29:23).

This commandment, coming as it does from the heart of God, shows how real He is.

The LORD is no piece of human fiction; He's no mirage, neither does He change with the times or adapt Himself to fit our changing circumstances.

God is always the same; people, though, will always change, no matter how great they are.

In fact those carefully crafted public images cover a multitude of human weaknesses and evil ways.

But the LORD is everything the Bible says He is; He needs no made up public image; no pretence, disguise or deceit.

What have you got to hide?

Nothing - absolutely nothing, God knows it all anyway!

He is the Truth, as He showed in Jesus Christ who could see right through people.

But Jesus came most of all so we can know, ... WHY THE TRUTH CHANGES.

This is our fifth aspect.

WHY THE TRUTH CHANGES.

So, why do we hide?

How come we can speak so easily with a 'forked tongue', to use an American Indian expression?

That means we say one thing and do another.

In this way, the ninth commandment would certainly be the one the unbelievers around us notice the most.

They often say, "I wouldn't want to go to church - it's full of hypocrites!"

You see, a hypocrite is someone who says they believe in something but they don't live that way; they're really liars.

So... what have **we** got to hide?

Yes, we are hypocrites.

We've broken this commandment many, many times.

But that's exactly why we go to church isn't it - because we are hypocrites; we know we're sinners; we know we need a God who can save us; we know we have to have Jesus!

And we can say that to unbelievers.

He's the One they need to know in a saving way, because right now their lives are desperately trying to avoid hearing the truth they just can't escape.

Their own hearts constantly condemn them!

That means for us Christians that we have to be witnesses.

And that means true witnesses - not false!

For since we know the Truth, who is Jesus Christ, we have to show it too.

And when we live that Truth it can only be Who Jesus is and what He's doing in our lives.

You see, we don't stand in the world bearing witness to Christ; we stand in Christ bearing witness to the world.

It's like someone once said about lighthouses; they don't fire guns or ring bells to call attention to their light, they just shine!

Dear Christian... what have you got to hide?

I mean, with what God has done in Jesus, haven't we got a whole changed life to show?

Isn't this the most precious love to share?

And it's this love, congregation, which means that sometimes we must bear false testimony **for** our neighbour.

Rare though they may be, there are can be times when it's better not to tell the literal truth.

It could be the time you don't tell an invalid the bad news about his health, because he's not strong enough to take it.

It could be when you don't tell the enemy during wartime that you're hiding refugees, as Rahab did in Joshua chapter 2.

Or it might be a time when you don't tell mad or bad people something which they would use to harm others.

In the words of Answer 77 of the Catechism, the positive side of this commandment is that we should do what we can to maintain and promote our neighbour's good name.

Hard as that may be at the time, the witness to the truth shines then brightly.

Let me end with telling of another fellow student from University days.

He was a Jewish student, whose parents had just escaped from Germany before the holocaust of the 2nd World War.

He said that of all the people in the world, the one race the Jews had the most respect for was the Dutch.

It was the Netherlands, when it became an independent nation in the 16th century, which first gave Jews a genuine freedom as equal citizens.

Throughout the centuries since Jews have always found a haven in Holland.

And it was the Dutch among all the occupied countries of Europe during the 2nd World War, who did as much as they could for the Jews, even to suffering and being killed in their thousands for hiding them from the Germans.

Often those who were protecting them, or knew where they were being hidden, had to lie to protect those Jews.

Why did they do it, when the risks were so great?

Was it just because they hated the Nazis'?

I believe that many did this because they actually loved the Truth - Jesus Christ Himself - and because He was their Lord they chose to love and obey Him first of all.

Some of those Jews protected by those Christians became Christians through their witness.

Now, that situation of telling a lie to the Germans wasn't easy.

Afterwards many of them would have been driven on their knees before God, pleading through Jesus, because of the lie they had to tell.

You know, that's how we have to love today too.

To live with even one lie is to turn your whole life into a lie; and we should regret it and bring before the Lord with every fibre of our being.

In fact, we should make our remorse so great that we will think twice before we spread the latest juicy gossip, or spitefully slander another.

And that's what we need to pray for each other, that you and I have got nothing to hide - whether from our neighbour **or our God**.

Amen.

PRAYER:

Let's so pray...

O LORD...

We have heard Your Word of Truth once again.

We've seen Who You are and what You have done for us in Jesus Christ, He Who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Please help us now to live **in** Him, and so witness to the Ultimate Expression of Your Love - Your only begotten Son.

In His Name we pray, Amen.

