

a sermon on EXODUS 20:16 - The Ninth Commandment

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour!

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I. A PROPOSITION

The wicked slay their fellow man with the lying lips and twisted tongues of false oaths!

II. INTRODUCTION

What things in man does The Almighty despise, which are abominations before His perfect holiness? PROVERBS 6:16-19 tells us that they are these: "...A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren!"¹ Such sins are the results of a heart that is darkened by the corruption of rebellion against GOD, a mind that exalts itself above The Commandments of The Almighty and a soul that is lifted up in vanity before The Eternal Throne. And from such a heart, mind and soul comes the violation of The Ninth Commandment, which decrees "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour!"²

III. THE TEXT - EXODUS 20:16

Which brings us to our text in EXODUS 20:16: "And GOD spake all These Words, saying, Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour!"³ Or in The Hebrew Text - :לֹא־תִעֲנֶה בְּרֵעֶךָ עֵד שֶׁקֶר: ⁴ - LO'-TA"ANEH VERE"CHA "ED SHAQER!⁵ More literally, "Not you will answer at the friend of you [as] a witness [of] falsehood!"⁶ Or as The Young's Literal Translation says, "¹⁶ Thou dost not answer against thy neighbour a false testimony!"⁷

IV. THE HEBREW TEXT

The verb "ANAH - עָנָה - "to answer, respond to, testify [or] speak as a witness" is given as "You!" personally and in an ongoing sense, in that the command remains

¹ 1, KJV, PROVERBS 6:16-19.

² 1, KJV, EXODUS 20:16.

³ 1, KJV, EXODUS 20:1 and 6.

⁴ 2, BHS, EXODUS 20:16.

⁵ I represent in my transliteration from The Hebrew the letter aleph as ' and ayin as '.

⁶ This is my roughly literal translation from The Hebrew Text in a word for word fashion. Compare this to The Young's Literal Translation.

⁷ 3, YLT, EXODUS 20:16.

indefinitely in effect.^{8 9} The negative particle LO' – לֹא – “not” comes before the verb, making this a negative imperative.¹⁰ The prohibition is directed “at your friend,” from the noun REY”A – רֵיֵא – which means also a “...companion, ...lover, fellow-citizen, even another person, [one] with whom one stands in reciprocal relations...”¹¹ What we are commanded to not be against our neighbour is an “ED – עֵד – a “witness, [a] testimony, [a giver of] evidence”¹² which is full of “deception, disappointment [or] falsehood.” This includes the prohibition against the “...false oath; [the] false or self-deceived prophet... [the] false tongue; ...[and] lips [which speak lies].”¹³

V. A MATTER OF DEFINITION? WHAT IS BEARING FALSE WITNESS?

The function of The Ninth Commandment is to protect one’s fellow man from “...unjustified injury ...by protecting [the] individual’s reputations.”¹⁴ By The Ninth Commandment, “Not only is lying prohibited, but false and unfounded evidence in

⁸ 4, BLB Lexicon, EXODUS 20:16, Strong's 06030: “ANAH – אָנָה - verb, to answer, respond to, testify [or] speak as a witness. 2nd person masculine singular qal imperfect.

⁹ 5, Whittaker’s R-BDB Lexicon, B7459 “ANAH אָנָה vb. answer, respond -- Qal 1. answer, respond to something said, actual or implied... be responsive, i.e. answer kindly, grant request... be amenable, docile... respond to an occasion, speak in view of circumstances... respond as a witness, testify... Qal imperfect 2nd person masculine singular, page 772.

¹⁰ 5, Whittaker’s R-BDB Lexicon, B4782 LO' לֹא or LO' לֹא adv. not – [negative particle, meaning] not denying objectively: 1. in predication: a. with a verb; so most freq., and nearly always (a) with the finite tenses, whether perfect or imperfect... Negative particle, page 518, 529-530.

¹¹ 5, Whittaker’s R-BDB Lexicon, B9466 REY”A רֵיֵא n.m. friend, companion, fellow -- 1. friend; associates... of lover, husband, paramours; 2. in weaker sense, fellow, fellow-citizen, even another person, with whom one stands in reciprocal relations... to thy fellow, = another than thou... Noun common masculine singular construct suffix 2nd person masculine singular, page 945.

¹² 5, Whittaker’s R-BDB Lexicon, B7075 “ED עֵד n.m. witness 1. witness, testimony, evidence, of things: heap of stones, torn animal, song of Moses, law-book, witness of ...against Israel... 2. witness, a person: a. God, in heaven for Job; on earth, for Samuel; against persons, nations; between ...persons. b. Davidic dynasty, to nations. c. witnesses, ...usually of testimony in court, and in civil and social relations, ...answer (in court) as a false witness against... at the mouth of witnesses... Noun common masculine singular construct, page 729.

¹³ 5, Whittaker’s R-BDB Lexicon, B10648 SHEQER - שֶׁקֶר - deception, disappointment, falsehood -- 1. deception, what deceives, disappoints, and betrays one: a molten image... 2. deceit, fraud, wrong... 3. injurious falsehood, in testimony, especially in courts; ...testify falsehood; ...false oath; ...swear falsely; absolutely false! 4. falsity, of false or self-deceived prophets... 5. lie, falsehood, ...false tongue; of lips; ...liar. Noun common masculine singular absolute, page 1055.

¹⁴ 6, Walvoord and Zuck, EXODUS 20:16, page 140.

general” against one’s neighbour.¹⁵ The foundation of This Commandment is this, in that it forbids any “...misrepresenting [of] the truth in our relations [with The Almighty or] with other... [men]. This moral prescription flows from the vocation of ...[The LORD’s] holy people to bear witness to their GOD Who is The Truth and [Who] wills the truth. [Forbidden here are] offenses against the truth express[ed] by word or deed, [or] a refusal to commit oneself to moral uprightness; ...[for such offenses] are fundamental infidelities to GOD ...[and] undermine the [very] foundations of The Covenant[s]” – both Old and New.¹⁶

PSALM 119:89-90 declares, “For ever, O LORD, Thy Word is settled in Heaven. Thy faithfulness is unto all generations... Thy righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and Thy Law is the truth.”¹⁷ The Word of The Creator is His Eternal Decree, which has been ordained from His mouth for all time. It is given to mankind through His holy servants of Old and New in The HOLY SPIRIT. GOD’s Word is all righteousness and truth, as He Himself is all righteousness and truth. The Almighty is faithful for all time in all that He is, does and say. Therefore His Holy Scriptures are as He is, faithful in all that they proclaim. And as GOD’s oaths are unshakable, upright and true, so He calls us to model our words!

Our Saviour JESUS CHRIST commands all men to speak truth, even as their Maker does, as in MATTHEW 5:33, “Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto The Lord thine oaths. But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by Heaven; for it is GOD’s Throne: Nor by the earth; for it is His footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of The Great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil!”¹⁸

¹⁵ 7, Wycliffe, EXODUS 20:16, page 70.

¹⁶ 8, Catholic Catechism, # 2464, page 651.

¹⁷ 1, KJV Bible, PSALM 119:89,90,142.

¹⁸ 1, KJV, MATTHEW 5:33-37.

VI. O LORD, WHO IS MY NEIGHBOUR?

To whom are we not to answer or respond to falsely? To whom are we not to testify against as a witness falsely? Does this mean only to those who are like us in thought, denomination, race or culture? Does this mean only to those who are our brethren within The Church, and only those whom we approve of and deem worthy of giving respect to? Or does this mean to only those who hold some form of monotheism – Jews, Muslims, Christians? Or does this mean to all our fellow man? Indeed, who is our neighbour? The Israelites understood to object of this negative command - “your neighbour” – in the limited sense of their fellow Israelites; those who were as they.

But CHRIST teaches us that all men are our neighbours. Why? Because all men are made in The Image of GOD. Recall The Lord’s example of The Good Samaritan in LUKE 10, which He offered in reply to “...a certain lawyer [who] stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?”¹⁹ There was, The Messiah said in reply, a certain man who went down from Jerusalem and was overtaken by thieves, being left on the roadside for dead. Now when the pious Jewish priest saw this poor man lying bloodied and half dead on the ground, he “...passed by on the other side.”²⁰ So also the righteous Levite, who “...came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.”²¹

But when the half-Jewish Samaritan man - of a people whom the Jews saw as so inferior that they would not even speak to them - came upon this poor man gasping in agony in the dirt, what did he do? The Samaritan stopped, bound up the man’s wounds, put him upon his beast of burden, delivered him to an inn, arranged for his care and covered all needed expenses. Now The Lord turns and asks this same lawyer in LUKE 10:36 who had just tried to tempt Him, “Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?”²² The lawyer replied, “...He that shewed mercy on him.”²³

¹⁹ 1, KJV, LUKE 10:25.

²⁰ 1, KJV, LUKE 10:31.

²¹ 1, KJV, LUKE 10:32.

²² 1, KJV, LUKE 10:36.

²³ 1, KJV, LUKE 10:37.

And what does JESUS instruct next? He commands, "...Go, and do thou likewise!"²⁴ And what is to be learned here? What good is pretended piety and rigorous religious pretense if a man has no love for his fellow man? Who is our neighbour? Every man, for we are all made in GOD's Image! Therefore The Ninth Commandment forbids false oaths of whatever form directed against all men. For Moses recorded The Maker's testimony in GENESIS 1:27, "So GOD created man in His own image, in The Image of GOD created He him; male and female created He them."²⁵ Therefore all men have inherent equal worth before GOD, and should be so before men.

Are we indeed then our brother's keeper? This is what Cain – whose hand dripped with the innocent shed blood of Abel - dared to utter to The LORD, when GOD asked of him, "...Cain, Where is Abel thy brother?"²⁶ Indeed, whenever we give false oaths that slay the reputation of our fellow man - whenever we thus deprive our neighbour of his good name, property, safety, peace of mind, spouse, family, honestly gotten gain or even life – are we not murdering him in our hearts? Is it not then only a small step to spilling the blood of those whom we attack with false lips and lying tongues?

VII. IN THE DARK CITY OF FALLEN MAN WHERE MEN'S OATHS ARE FALSE

In the society where men's oaths are not grounded on GOD's Absolute Truth as the standard, their words are inherently unstable and judged as true or false by what serves each man in his own eyes. It is a place where men mock the very nature of Truth in The Almighty, as in PSALM 12:2-4, "They speak vanity every one with his neighbour: with flattering lips and with a double heart do they speak.... Who have said, With our tongue will we prevail; our lips are our own: who is lord over us?"²⁷ This is a time and place where men think that The Creator, if He indeed exists and if He indeed sees, will never bring their lying words into the light! In such dark cities of fallen men - where the creature elevates himself to be as a god to be sovereign over all things and answerable to none but himself – all are at the mercy of the false oaths of men!

²⁴ 1, KJV, LUKE 10:37.

²⁵ 1, KJV, GENESIS 1:27.

²⁶ 1, KJV, GENESIS 4:9.

²⁷ 1, KJV, EXODUS 12:2-4.

It is a place where “a witness of a lie” is the norm and where men slay the Image of GOD in their fellow man by spewing forth “false testimony against him” where and when ever it might suit their own selfish ends. It is a place where the oaths of men in every corner of society count for nothing, but what they might obtain at any price for the mouth that speaks them. This is the nation where “not only evidence before a judge [is routinely untrue,] but false evidence of every kind [is offered up,] by which the [very] life, married relationship or property of a neighbour ...[is forever] endangered!”²⁸ What was offered up yesterday as truth to defend a man’s person, property or very life is today a lie, by which other men justify taking from him these very things. And what is truth today, used by man to beat down their fellow man, is tomorrow a lie!

VIII. IN THE BRIGHT CITY OF GOD WHERE MEN’S OATHS ARE TRUE

But in the bright city of GOD – where men live in this life by The Truth and Word of The LORD as their standard – the upright give their oaths in the fear of He Who is only All Truth. So our Lord JESUS CHRIST declares in JOHN 17:17 that The Elect are sanctified by His Truth, for He says of His Word, “...Thy Word is truth!”²⁹ And how is The Christian to keep The Ninth Commandment in not bearing false witness against his neighbour? In what way shall we dwell in the bright City of GOD where men’s oaths are true, as are Those of our Lord JESUS CHRIST?

The Westminster Longer Confession gives us a summary our duty here: The Commandment calls for “...the preserving and promoting of truth between man and man, and the good name of our neighbour, as well as our own.” How? By “(1)...appearing and standing for the truth; and from the heart, sincerely, freely, clearly, and fully, (2) speaking the truth, and only the truth, in matters of judgment and justice, and in all other things whatsoever; (3) [having] a charitable esteem of our neighbours; (4) loving, desiring, and rejoicing in their good name; (5) sorrowing for, and covering of their infirmities;”³⁰

²⁸ 9, Keil and Delitzsch, Commentary on The Old Testament, 1. The Pentateuch, The Second Book of Moses, Chap. XX, Vers. 13-17, page 124.

²⁹ 1, KJV JOHN 17:17.

³⁰ 10, WCS, WLC 144, Question, “What are the duties required in The Ninth Commandment?” Answer.

The Ninth Commandment further calls men to always “(6) [be] freely acknowledging of ...[other men’s] gifts and graces, (7) [and] defending their innocency; (8) [have] a ready receiving of a good report, and unwillingness to admit of an evil report, concerning them; (9) [be] discouraging tale-bearers, flatterers, and slanderers; (10) love and care of our own good name, and defend... it when need requireth; (11) keep... lawful promises; (12) [be] studying and practicing of whatsoever things are true, honest, lovely, and of good report.”³¹

IX. IN CONCLUSION

We have seen that false oaths are forbidden in The Ninth Commandment, not only in the sphere of earthly courts, but in all aspects of men’s lives. For in the Heavenly courts, there are no false oaths, and Truth reigns everywhere Up Above. We have seen that to give false testimony against our neighbour is to slay him in his reputation, his property, his family, even his very life. And more than this, false oaths attack the very dignity of one’s neighbour, and thus attack The Dignity of The Creator, in Whose Image all men are made!

For within The “Thou shalt not” of The Ninth Commandment are the forbidding of the very things which The LORD declares as hateful abominations before His holiness as in PROVERBS 6:16-19: “...A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren!”³²

Indeed, the wicked slay their fellow man with the lying lips and twisted tongues of false oaths! Such things should never be among those who are called by The Name of The Redeemer, The Son of GOD, Who died on The Cross to make us His people! O Lord JESUS CHRIST, keep our mouths from speaking lies, our tongues from uttering false oaths and our hearts from the hatred that slays our neighbour! Give us the conviction and the grace needed, that our mouths may speak only truth, our tongues offer

³¹ 10, WCS, WLC 144, Question, “What are the duties required in The Ninth Commandment?” Answer.

³² 1, KJV, PROVERBS 6:16-19.

up only honest oaths and our hearts kept in love and respect for all our fellow man! In
The Name of GOD The Father, and The Son and The Holy Ghost! AMEN.

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