

The Ninth Commandment

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BIG SANDY, Texas—We as believers are thankful that we are saved by grace. In fact, we should reflect our appreciation by giving much thought and attention into recognizing God's expectations for us.

We can reflect back to the time in the Old Testament when the children of Israel were brought out of the land of Egypt—the house of bondage (Exodus 20:1-2)—and remember that God gave them instructions about how to live (verses 3-17).

Let's spend some time considering the Ninth Commandment.

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

Listed twice on sin list

Although most people quote the Ninth Commandment as "You shall not bear false witness," some people quote it as "You shall not lie." Are they the same?

Both concepts are listed among the seven characteristics that God hates (Proverbs 6:16-19).

The second item was listed as "a lying tongue" (verse 17). The sixth item was listed as "a false witness that speaks lies" (verse 19).

- A lying tongue could be interpreted as spoken lies in many situations for various reasons.
- A false witness could be interpreted as using lies in more-specific situations where a person gives a false testimony to harm another person.

The obvious scenario about a false witness is an official legal setting.

However, the principle would still apply where a person gives a false testimony in an unofficial legal setting. An unofficial judicial setting might be parents questioning children about an event that happened in the family or employers questioning employees about an event that occurred on the job.

Corresponding consequence

Have you ever noticed the fair consequence that the Old Testament administration of the law placed upon false witnesses?

Deuteronomy 19:19, 21—“Then you shall do to him as he thought to have done to his brother . . . Your eye shall not pity: life shall be for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.”

Ancient principle

One of the most valuable principles found in the Old Testament administration of the law was the concept of “in the mouth of two or three witnesses.”

This concept is found in many scriptures in the Old and New Testament—including Numbers 35:30; Deuteronomy 17:6-7; Deuteronomy 19:15; Matthew 18:16; John 8:17; 2 Corinthians 13:1; 1 Timothy 5:19; and Hebrews 10:28.

God hates lying

There are many scriptures to show God’s view about lying and about God’s expectations about believers to avoid lying.

When talking to the Pharisees in John 8, Jesus made it very clear that He viewed the devil as the father of lies (verse 44).

While it is crystal clear that a believer should avoid the character flaw of lying, there is one example that demonstrates an acceptable time to lie.

Rahab’s famous lie

Do you remember the story of Rahab? It is my opinion that Rahab told the same lie four different ways in Joshua 2:4-5.

- “The men came, but I didn’t know from where.”
- “When it came time to close the gate at dark, the men left.”
- “I don’t know where the men were going.”
- “Pursue after them quickly. You can catch them.”

Rahab made those comments, even though she had hidden the men on her roof (verse 6).

Biblical view of Rahab’s lie

Were you surprised when you first realized that the Bible uses Rahab’s lying as a good example?

Rahab was listed in Hebrews 11—which is often identified as the faith chapter—specifically in verse 31.

Rahab was one of the two examples used by the apostle James to explain the concept of “faith without works is dead” (James 2:14-26).

Rahab was memorialized for receiving the spies and for sending the pursuers away (verse 25).

Take special note about her reason for lying. She did not lie to gain a personal advantage, to fulfill a hidden lust or to hurt other people. She lied to save lives.

You may never have a situation arise where you have to imitate Rahab’s example. But please recognize the honor of Rahab’s example.