



# IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER

SERIES: RESTORING THE ANCIENT BOUNDARIES

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Exodus 20:16

Seventh Message

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I have heard pastors say that as they are preparing to preach, they undergo severe bouts of spiritual warfare. Everything seems to break loose. Arguments with their wives, trouble with their children, mechanical breakdowns, emotional traumas, and the like, become commonplace.

In the past, I have tended to downplay this notion as an overstatement. But last week, my wife Linda dreamt that in my sermon this morning, I used as an illustration a wretched sin I had never shared with her. In her dream, she, together with all of you, was hearing about it for the first time! Talk about Body Life! As she slowly awoke, she realized, thankfully, that it was all a dream; it was bogus, impossible! It seems we can be under spiritual attack even when sound asleep. I am having second thoughts about my opinions on preaching and spiritual warfare!

In our series of messages on the Ten Commandments, today we come to the ninth commandment, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." I want to say at the outset that when we are confronted with the standards presented in the commandments, we are faced with the requirement to choose: choose to trust God and his Lordship, and obey him, or choose to go our own way.

Today, people are choosing everything *but* God. *Forbes* magazine reports that even after the recent fatal gassing in the Tokyo subway, an atrocity carried out by a fanatical cult, still there is on average one new cult forming every three days in Japan. One cult worships Buddha, Gandhi, Mohammed, Jesus Christ, the Greek Pantheon, and Elton John—all at the same time! While people are free to choose to follow divergent attractions, the Bible requires a personal choice *by us* to become Christians, not through membership in an organization, but solely by believing in and following Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

Friedrich Nietzsche, who had a visceral opposition to Christianity, once described man as an "incomplete animal." The actions of animals, of course, are instinctive; they follow a prescribed imprint. But man directs his existence by choices and actions. He can and must choose. Nietzsche, however, preferred that man be considered instinctual too, and therefore unaccountable to the Creator God. But God wants our choice to be him.

Throughout these studies we have seen that God's purpose in giving the Ten Commandments was first, to

demonstrate his character, and second, to show that our choices and actions could not reflect his character and name unless he himself lived out the law from within our souls. God made us in his own image and likeness so that we would experience his very character in our lives. Sin badly damaged that likeness, and now God's loving covenant of commitment to us is working to restore his likeness in us. The apostle Paul underscores this truth in Philippians 1:6: "I am confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work in you will complete it in the day of Christ Jesus." So from the beginning, God's plan has been to reveal his character *to us* from *within* us.

We have already seen that in the Bible, the words "name" and "character" are synonymous; and throughout the Bible we repeatedly see God's purpose to build and restore his character in us. In the beginning, Adam was taught to learn of God's character and name by the process of naming the animals which God brought before him. As Adam named them according to their differing characteristics, he discovered the fundamental difference between man and animals. That difference is that man has a soul, the place where the Creator God is to dwell, and that man's own character is like God's. This discovery by Adam led to a deepened relationship with God, and an abiding need for God as his Father.

The temple in Jerusalem illustrated this point. When God laid out his plan for the building of the temple, he did not commission it so he could move in. God made this clear in 1 Chron. 17:4, which says, "Thus says the LORD, you shall not build a house for me to *dwell in*." Rather, the temple was intended to house God's *name*. That is what Solomon said in 2 Chron. 2:4, "Behold, I am about to build a house for the *name* of the LORD my God, dedicating it to Him." And David said, in 1 Chron. 28:2, "I intended to build a house for the ark of the covenant of the LORD"—the covenant which embraces God's character, his name.

The temple itself was made following the pattern of man. The outer court represented the body, the inner court the mind, and the soul of man was pictured by the Holy of Holies. It was in the Holy of Holies, the very soul of man, where the ark of the covenant of God's loyal love was to rest, signifying that the character of God must be at home in man's innermost being. The law could no longer be merely an external set of rules. Augustine said that the Christian is "not steered from the outside by a law written on two tablets, but rather is

moved from the inside, as Romans 5:5 says, “because God has poured out his love within our hearts.” Godly choices are not extracted from Christians, rather they well up from within.

The ninth commandment, “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor,” like the other commandments, cannot be obeyed with any consistency unless the Father’s name is welling up from within our hearts. How many of our comments about our neighbors, and how many of our actions toward our wives and children, our friends and co-workers, can we preface with the phrase, “In the name of the Father...”? What portion of our life and interaction with others is characterized by the name of the Father welling up from within us?

Jesus said on one occasion, “If you want to enter life, keep these commandments.” The instruction here is for us to know him fully, and invite his life and character, his name, to reside at the very core of our being. Our lives in him, and through him our actions towards others, are to be remolded into the likeness of the “name of the Father,” who is characterized by infinite, loyal love.

As we have been taught in this series, the first five commandments teach us how to respond in love to this God of love:

**“You shall have no other gods in preference to me.”**

We are to love God exclusively, the living God who saves us by his own initiative, calling us out of “Egypt” (the world), and into the promised land of life in him.

**“You shall make no image to worship of what is in the heaven, on the earth, or in the sea.”**

God loves us with a jealous heart of ownership.

**“You shall not take the Lord’s name in vain.”**

We cannot love God when we dishonor his character in our lives, our dealings and commitments.

**“Remember the sabbath to keep it holy.”**

We are to rest in God alone for all our needs and our fulfillment. (Here we see God’s requirement for the New Covenant—everything coming from God, and nothing from our own resources.)

**“Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged, and it may go well with you.”**

Here is where we begin to learn to love, honor and obey the Lord himself.

As we consider these first five commandments, we can see that they establish man’s right to worship God. The last five commandments establish man’s responsibility to respect the personal rights of his neighbors:

**“You shall not murder.”**

This commandment protects our neighbor’s right to

his life.

**“You shall not commit adultery.”**

God’s command protects our neighbor’s rights to his family.

**“You shall not steal.”**

By this commandment, God protects our neighbor’s rights to his property.

**“You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”**

The ninth commandment forbids our speaking falsely against another person, thus protecting our neighbor’s right to his reputation. This commandment was applied in Israel, both in the courtroom and in daily life. Hebrew law required that two or more witnesses be brought forward whenever an accusation was made against someone. We find this in Deut. 19:15-21: “A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed. If a malicious witness rises up against a man to accuse him of wrong doing, then both the men who have the dispute shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who will be in office in those days. If the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, then you shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you. And the rest (of the people) will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such an evil thing among you.”

In Israel, a false accusation was a very serious matter.

In the New Testament gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke, we find this ninth commandment repeated verbatim by Jesus to the rich young ruler, to inform him of one of the requirements demanded for entering the kingdom of heaven. By this clear evidence we see that God intends no change in his original charge concerning our neighbors.

False accusations can be very destructive. A friend of mine is presently experiencing the trauma of false witness against him. In a business partnership he is being accused of withholding information from tax returns, misappropriating company funds and falsifying records. He is being hounded night and day with threats of lawsuits and worse. He faces sleepless nights, worry and stress, and huge legal fees—all because of these false accusations. The tongue, as the book of James points out, is a small member of the body, but when it is not controlled by the character of God, it can bring devastation and even death. I wonder how many suicides have had as their impetus the ruthless and careless tongues of men and women? God designed the tongue to express love for him and for others, not to express poisonous gossip and false witness.

The Old Testament is both clear and strong in what it says about false witness:

Proverbs 6:16-19: "There are six things which the Lord hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, a false witness who utters lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers." Notice that sexual sin is not even listed here. False witness is considered far more damaging, cold-hearted and insidious.

Proverbs 25:18: "Like a club and a sword and a sharp arrow is a man who bears false witness against his neighbor." These are the weapons of aggression; they have nothing to do with godly character.

Proverbs 19:5: "A false witness will not go unpunished, and he who tells lies will perish." God will deal with a false witness. It is an abomination to his name.

Does the commandment also preclude gossip? David Roper says that gossip is like a public hanging: it is perversely entertaining. This is why gossip is so popular—because it is fun to participate in it. But 1 Tim. 5:13 has this to say about people who gossip: "they are *malicious* gossips and busybodies, talking about improper things."

It's tempting to talk about people behind their backs. Sometimes Christians offer the excuse that they want to pray for people and their besetting sin. But if the conversation is not Spirit-led, it is still raw gossip. In Bible Study Fellowship leadership twenty years ago, Miss Johnson, the founder of BSF, always insisted whenever another person was being discussed regarding any area of concern, that we immediately pray specifically for that person, giving him or her to the Lord for his care. It is hard to have a critical spirit against one for whom you are in prayer to the Father. This principle has remained a strong example and exhortation for me.

In the New Testament, Matthew 5 instructs us how to act if we have a difference with our brother. We are told we must even set aside our worship until we have met with that brother and settled any differences between us. I had to do this very thing with my own brother. We met together and discussed the problems between us. Each of us had legitimate grievances, but by honest and open discussion, we worked them out, and God restored our relationship to a greater intimacy than we had ever enjoyed. Matthew 18 teaches that we must take our concern to our neighbor personally, to see if it is well-founded and true, for the purpose of seeking healing. If in the end that neighbor refuses to repent, we are to treat him "as a pagan and a tax collector."

How should we treat a tax collector or a pagan? We are to treat him as Christ treated us before we knew him personally. We are to love him, and lead him to Christ. We must learn to separate the person from the

point of our dispute with him, praying for him in the name of the Father.

In his letter to the church in Ephesus, Paul gives us the positive application of the truth of the ninth commandment: "Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbor, for we are members of one another" (Eph. 4:25). In encouraging us to this changed life, Colossians 3:9-10 says: "Do not lie to one another, since you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, and have put on the new self who is being renewed, restored, renovated, according to the image of the one who created you."

Renovation work always exposes things we would rather not see. A few years ago we did some renovating in our home. When we removed part of a bathroom wall, we found the remains of a rat wrapped around a water pipe. I remembered that some months earlier there was a strange, unpleasant smell which I could not trace. Now I knew the source of it. It is hardly necessary to say that I did not tell the workers to leave the rat in the wall! I had it removed. How often, when God is doing his renovating work in us, do we insist that he leave in place those things that are detestable to him? We become familiar with the "odor" in time, and learn to live with it. But God wants all of us. We must allow, even welcome, his work of restoration in us. Only by this process can we learn to "love our neighbor as ourselves," and see him as one for whom Christ died.

When God chose Israel and made his eternal agreement with them, he declared to them, "I AM your God, you are my people." It was God's choice, and it depended solely on him to establish them. Then he demonstrated how he wanted them to live, by giving them the Ten Commandments. In a simple, straightforward way, God laid out these commandments, so that no one could mistake his character and his purpose.

God acts in the same manner with believers today. As we sang earlier this morning, "We are the people of God, called by his Name." If you own Christ as your Lord, he will take control of your life and root out the sin of deceit, gossip and false witness toward others. If you are *not* his possession, then no amount of self-effort, trying harder, or new year's resolutions will matter. These things do not impress God; they are inadequate to accomplish any lasting change. God wants us to come to him as we are, and allow his Holy Spirit to change us from within.

A few years ago, a friend told me that he borrowed Ray Stedman's car one day to run an errand. As he drove out of the parking lot into the sun, he flipped down the sun visor. Fastened to the back of the visor, he told me, was a printed sign that read, "No Compromise." That is the character of God, the name of the Father. Without Compromise: this is how we are to learn to love him, and to respect our neighbor's reputation.

May God grant that this is how we will live and act

today and every day in all of our dealings with our neighbors, our families, and one another.

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