

REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

THE TEN WORDS WE THOUGHT WE KNEW

A TEN-PART SERIES | PART NINE OF TEN

IS EVERY LIE A VIOLATION OF THE NINTH COMMANDMENT?



DR. THOMAS W. HAWKSLEY

HEARING SINAI THROUGH ANCIENT EARS

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SERMON TRANSCRIPT

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Reason Together Church

Aloha, everyone.

Welcome to Reason Together Church.

I am grateful that you are here, whether you are sitting with us in the room, joining online or listening later in the week.

This is a place where questions are welcome because truth has nothing to fear from an honest question.

So bring your questions. Open your Bible. Let us Reason Together the Word of God.

If you are visiting today, we are honored to have you with us.

Our guest card asks for only your first name and your email address.

We will not ask you for a family history, your shoe size or the name of your first pet.

We would simply like to thank you for coming and help you stay connected if you wish.

Parents, our Keiki Kids Center is available, and our team is prepared to care for your children while we study together.

Afterward, please join us in the café.

The coffee is free, the conversation is unhurried and the refills on conversation are free too.

As we often say, COFFEE means Christ Offers Forgiveness For Everyone Everywhere.

Today we reach Part Nine of our ten-part series, The Ten Words We Thought We Knew.

We have tried to hear the commandments as Israel first heard them, not as isolated rules hanging on a wall, but as covenant words spoken by the God who had rescued slaves and was forming a people.

Last time, the eighth word asked whether we can steal something that cannot be put in a pocket.

We saw that wages, freedom, time, credit and opportunity can be taken just as surely as property.

That study led us to Naboth's vineyard, where theft succeeded because false testimony cleared the way.

The eighth and ninth commandments met in the same crime.

Today we come to the words:

"Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour."

Most of us shorten that to, "Do not lie."

That is not a bad lesson.

The Bible repeatedly commands truthfulness and condemns deceit.

But it is not the whole sentence that God spoke at Sinai.

The command does not merely say, “Thou shalt not say anything inaccurate.”

It speaks of bearing witness.

It names falsehood.

It identifies a neighbor who can be harmed.

So today we will ask a question that sounds simple until we begin to listen carefully:

Is every lie a violation of the ninth commandment?

The short answer is no, not in the commandment’s narrow and original sense.

Not every incorrect sentence is courtroom testimony against a neighbor.

But that answer must not become an escape hatch.

The commandment reaches far beyond a formal courtroom whenever our words, omissions or insinuations make us false witnesses in the court of public opinion, the workplace, the family, the church or the glowing screen in our hand.

Let us pray.

Father, You are the God of truth.

There is no falsehood in You.

As we open Your Word, open our hearts.

Show us where our speech has protected ourselves at another person’s expense.

Show us where we have repeated what we did not know, concealed what justice required or shaped the truth to control the verdict.

Give courage to those who have been falsely accused.

Make our church a place where truth and mercy meet.

Lead us to Jesus, the faithful and true witness, who endured false testimony to save sinners like us.

We ask this in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

Our principal text is Exodus chapter 20, verse 16.

I am reading from the King James Version.

“Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.”

That is the Word of God.

Before we continue, let me speak briefly about giving.

At Reason Together Church, we do not pass an offering plate.

If you are our guest, we do not expect you to give.

If you have a home church, please support your home church faithfully.

For those who call this church home and want to support the ministry, there is a giving box available.

Giving is voluntary, cheerful and an act of worship.

It is not an admission price, a spiritual transaction or a way to purchase God’s attention.

Grace is a gift before our giving is ever a response.

Now let us listen to the language of the ninth word.

The Hebrew begins with lo, “not.”

The verb is anah, a word that can mean to answer or respond and, in this setting, to answer as a witness.

Then comes the phrase ed shaker, a false or deceptive witness.

And God adds, “against thy neighbour.”

The picture is not first of a child standing beside a broken lamp insisting that the dog did it.

The picture is of testimony in a legal setting.

Someone has been accused.

Property, freedom, reputation or even life may depend upon what a witness says.

The ninth commandment protects a neighbor from words that can place an innocent person under judgment.

In the ancient Israelite community, legal matters were often heard at the city gate.

The gate was more than an opening in a wall.

It was a public place where elders sat, disputes were heard, contracts were recognized and judgments were rendered.

There was no security camera to replay.

There was no laboratory waiting with DNA results.

There was no recording of the conversation.

The testimony of witnesses carried enormous weight.

This is why Deuteronomy 19 requires two or three witnesses in serious cases.

One person's accusation was not to be enough to condemn another.

The law also addressed the malicious witness who rose up to testify falsely.

The judges were commanded to inquire diligently.

If the witness was false, the penalty he intended for the accused was to fall upon him.

The one who tried to weaponize the court would answer for the weapon.

That law reveals the heart of the commandment.

God is protecting the integrity of judgment.

He is protecting the accused from a lie with official consequences.

He is also protecting the community from a system in which truth can be purchased, coordinated or intimidated into silence.

Exodus 23 expands the picture:

“Thou shalt not raise a false report: put not thine hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness.”

Then it says:

“Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.”

The danger is not only inventing the report.

It is placing your hand with the wicked.

It is joining the story because everyone else seems to believe it.

It is letting the crowd supply the courage we lacked when the claim was ours alone.

That sounds remarkably current.

A report appears online.

We do not know the source.

We do not know the context.

We have not heard the person's answer.

But the claim fits what we already wanted to believe, so we press "share."

We did not create the accusation.

We merely put our hand with it.

In the ancient world, a false report traveled from mouth to mouth.

Now it travels at the speed of a thumb.

The commandment has not become obsolete.

The city gate has become portable.

Notice also that Exodus 23 refuses two opposite distortions.

Verse 3 says, "Neither shalt thou countenance a poor man in his cause."

Verse 6 says, "Thou shalt not wrest the judgment of thy poor in his cause."

Do not favor someone merely because he is poor, and do not deny justice because he is poor.

Biblical justice is not prejudice with a preferred direction.

It refuses to bend testimony toward the powerful or toward the sympathetic.

Truth does not change according to which person we want to win.

This helps us answer our title question.

Is every lie a violation of the ninth commandment?

If we mean the precise historical form of the command, no.

A mistake is not false witness. A joke that everyone understands as a joke is not testimony.

A parable is not deception simply because the story did not happen as a news report. Poetry and hyperbole are not lies. Privacy is not dishonesty.

You are not required to tell every person everything you know.

Intent and setting matter.

When Jesus said it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, no honest listener thought He was giving a veterinary report.

When we say, "I waited forever," reasonable hearers understand exaggeration.

When a novelist creates a character, the reader has consented to imagination.

When a friend plans a surprise celebration and says, "I cannot tell you what we are doing Friday," withholding the plan is not bearing false witness.

We should not flatten all human speech into only two categories: literal data or lies.

Language carries humor, symbol, courtesy, confidentiality and art.

The ninth commandment does not forbid imagination.

It forbids using false testimony against a neighbor.

But now we must turn the question around.

Can I violate the ninth commandment without speaking a sentence that is technically false?

Yes.

That may be the more dangerous problem for respectable people.

I can select only the facts that make my neighbor look guilty.

I can omit the fact that would change the verdict.

I can repeat a quotation after removing the sentence that explained it.

I can answer a question with words that are literally accurate while intending the listener to reach a false conclusion.

I can describe another person's worst moment as though it were the whole person.

I can use tone, timing and raised eyebrows to testify without making a direct accusation.

A half-truth can be a complete false witness.

The moral question is not only, "Were my words technically accurate?"

It is also, "What did I intend my hearer to believe about my neighbor?"

Suppose I tell you, "I saw him leaving the building at midnight."

That statement may be perfectly true.

But if I know he was there repairing a broken pipe and I tell the story so you will suspect him of theft, I have used a true fact as false testimony.

The words passed a narrow accuracy test.

The witness failed the truth test.

Truth is more than fragments that protect me from being caught.

Truth is faithfulness to reality before God.

The ninth word asks whether my speech helps justice see my neighbor clearly or places fog around the facts until the verdict I want appears.

Zechariah 8 gives us a beautiful positive expression of the command.

Verse 16 says:

“Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates.”

Truth, neighbor, judgment and the gate all appear together.

Then something surprising happens.

The prophet joins truth with peace.

He does not say judgment of truth or peace.

He says judgment of truth and peace.

We sometimes treat truth and love as enemies.

One person says, “I tell the truth,” but uses truth as a hammer.

Another says, “I want peace,” but buries every hard fact.

Biblical peace is not maintained by falsehood.

Biblical truth is not honored by cruelty.

The God of truth calls us to speech that serves truthful peace.

That includes the truth we say about someone who is absent.

Psalm 15 asks who may abide in God’s tabernacle.

The answer includes the one who “speaketh the truth in his heart,” “backbiteth not with his tongue” and “taketh not up a reproach against his neighbour.”

The truth begins in the heart before it reaches the mouth.

Then the truthful heart refuses to carry a reproach simply because it is available.

Gossip often defends itself by saying, “But it is true.”

Sometimes it is not true at all.

Sometimes it is partly true.

Sometimes it is true information told to a person who has no need or right to receive it.

The ninth commandment asks more than whether the story contains facts.

Why am I carrying it?

Whom will it help?

Whom will it harm?

Am I seeking counsel, protecting someone from danger or quietly enjoying the power of knowing something damaging?

Confidentiality must never become a cover for abuse, danger or crimes that must be reported.

If a child or vulnerable person is at risk, protecting life matters more than protecting a reputation.

Truth may need to be brought to appropriate authorities.

But the need to tell the right person does not become permission to tell every person.

Responsible disclosure seeks protection and justice.

Gossip seeks an audience.

Proverbs 18:8 says:

“The words of a talebearer are as wounds, and they go down into the innermost parts of the belly.”

Words can enter places a fist never reaches.

A false accusation may be corrected on page twenty, but the accusation lived on page one.

A rumor can be disproved and still remain attached to a name.

Someone may be declared innocent in the room and treated as guilty in every hallway afterward.

This is why a person’s reputation is not a toy for our conversation.

Reputation is not everything.

We should not live as slaves to public approval.

But Proverbs 22:1 says, “A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches.”

To steal a good name through false witness is to take something Scripture calls precious.

The church must hear this carefully.

Prayer requests can become gossip wearing a respectful voice.

“I only tell you so you can pray” may introduce information the person never gave us permission to spread.

A concern can become an accusation before anyone has spoken to the person involved.

A group can decide that silence proves guilt, emotion proves truth or repetition proves evidence.

Matthew 18 gives a different path.

Jesus says that if your brother trespasses against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.

The first movement is not a broadcast.

It is a conversation.

If he will not hear, others become involved.

The process widens only as the need widens.

Jesus protects both accountability and the neighbor from unnecessary public shame.

There are situations in which direct contact would be unsafe or improper.

A person facing abuse should not be forced into a private confrontation with an abuser.

Victims should not be silenced with a careless use of Matthew 18.

Seek help from safe leaders and proper authorities.

The goal is not secrecy at any cost.

The goal is truth handled in a way that protects people and serves justice.

Proverbs 6 says that the Lord hates “a false witness that speaketh lies” and “he that soweth discord among brethren.”

Those are listed separately, but they often work together.

False testimony does not merely damage one individual.

It fractures the community that believed it.

Homes, churches, workplaces and friendships can be divided by a story no one took time to test.

Let us talk about memory.

We often assume that if someone sounds confident, the testimony must be accurate.

But human memory is not a video recording.

We forget.

We fill gaps.

We confuse what we saw with what someone later told us.

Two sincere people can remember the same conversation differently.

That does not mean truth is unknowable.

It means humility belongs in testimony.

There is a moral difference between saying, “As best as I remember, this is what happened,” and saying, “I know exactly what happened,” when I do not.

Certainty can become false witness when we claim more knowledge than we possess.

We should learn to say:

“I do not know.”

“I was not there.”

“I may be remembering this incorrectly.”

“I heard the claim, but I have not verified it.”

“There may be another part of the story.”

Those sentences do not sound powerful.

They will not attract a crowd.

But they may save a neighbor from an unjust verdict.

Deuteronomy commanded judges to “make diligent inquisition.”

That is a needed discipline for everyone who hears an accusation.

Ask what is known.

Ask who observed it.

Ask what evidence supports it.

Ask whether the accused has been heard.

Ask whether the source has a reason to distort the story.

Ask what conclusion the evidence truly supports and what remains uncertain.

This is not a demand to become suspicious of every victim or to make disclosure impossible.

Some testimony is painful, credible and urgent.

Compassion should listen carefully.
Justice should investigate diligently.
We do not honor victims by refusing to hear them.
We do not honor truth by declaring a verdict before listening is complete.

The ninth commandment protects the accused, but it also requires truthful witnesses to speak when silence would abandon the innocent.
Leviticus 5 speaks of a person who hears the voice of swearing and is a witness, whether he has seen or known of the matter.
If he does not utter it, he bears iniquity.
There are moments when withholding testimony is not neutrality.
Silence can leave a false story unchallenged.

Imagine that you know a coworker is being blamed for an error you saw someone else make.
You did not start the accusation.
You can remain quiet and protect your comfort.
But your silence helps false witness complete its work.
Truth sometimes requires us to enter a situation we would rather avoid.

This does not mean we insert ourselves into every dispute.
It means that when justice genuinely depends upon what we know, love of neighbor may require speech.
There is a time to hold a confidence and a time to report danger.
There is a time to remain silent because we do not know and a time to speak because we do.
Wisdom asks which time this is.

Now we come to one of the difficult questions beneath today's title.
What about the Hebrew midwives in Exodus 1?
Pharaoh commanded them to kill the Hebrew sons.
They feared God and preserved the children alive.
When Pharaoh questioned them, they gave an explanation that concealed their resistance.
Scripture says God dealt well with the midwives.

What about Rahab in Joshua 2?

She hid the Israelite spies and sent the king's men in another direction.

The New Testament honors her faith and her welcome of the messengers.

How do these stories fit with truthfulness?

Faithful Christians have answered in different ways.

Some say Scripture commends the faith and courage of these women without approving every word they spoke.

Others say that a person committing murder has no moral right to information that would make us an accomplice to evil.

On that view, protecting innocent life from a violent aggressor is not bearing false witness against a neighbor.

We should not treat that disagreement casually.

Neither story gives us permission to lie for convenience, profit or reputation.

Pharaoh was killing babies.

Rahab was protecting lives in a time of war.

These are not Biblical excuses for hiding an embarrassing purchase or escaping a difficult conversation.

At minimum, the stories teach us this:

Truthfulness does not require us to assist evil.

If an abusive person demands to know where a victim is hiding, love does not hand over the address.

We can refuse to answer, seek help and protect life.

The ninth commandment was given to prevent the use of speech against a neighbor, not to force the righteous to become informants for oppression.

The question is not merely, "Did I disclose all information?"

The question is, "Was I faithful to God, to truth and to the life of my neighbor?"

Hard cases require prayer, wisdom and humility.

Easy cases should not borrow the clothing of hard cases to excuse ordinary deceit.

There are other kinds of statements that may be false without being deliberate lies.

A doctor may make the best diagnosis available and later discover it was wrong.

A teacher may repeat a fact that new evidence corrects.

A friend may promise to arrive at noon, then face an emergency.

An error becomes a lie when we recognize the truth and choose deception.

When we discover that we spoke wrongly, truthfulness calls us to correct the record.

That last step matters.

We often apologize for “any misunderstanding” but leave the misunderstanding intact.

If my words harmed someone, I should not whisper the correction after shouting the accusation.

Restoration should travel as far as the false report traveled.

If I told five people, I should correct it with five people.

If I posted publicly, a private apology may be sincere but incomplete.

If my testimony cost someone a position, an opportunity or a relationship, repentance asks what I can do to help repair the loss.

We learned last time that repentance for theft includes restitution.

When false witness steals a good name, repentance includes restoring the truth.

That may cost us.

We may have to say, “I was wrong.”

We may have to admit, “I exaggerated.”

We may have to confess, “I presented only the part that favored me.”

We may lose the advantage our story created.

But a repentance that preserves the benefit of the lie has not yet come fully into the light.

Ephesians 4:25 gives the positive command:

“Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another.”

Paul does not say merely that lying breaks a rule.

He says lying injures a body.

We are members one of another.

When one member deceives another, the body cannot move with trust.

Think of what happens when a hand lies to an eye about whether the stove is hot.

The body is injured.

In the church, truth is not cold accuracy between strangers.

It is faithful communication among people joined in Christ.

We tell the truth because the life of our neighbor is connected to our own.

That does not mean speaking every true thought that enters our mind.

Cruelty does not become holy by calling itself honesty.

“I am just being truthful” is sometimes a way of saying, “I wanted to say something hurtful without accepting responsibility for the hurt.”

Truth should be spoken in love.

Before speaking, we can ask:

Is it true? Do I know it is true? Am I the right person to say it?

Is this the right person to hear it? Is this the right time?

Am I seeking restoration, protection and peace, or am I seeking control, attention and revenge?

Those questions will slow us down.

That is useful because anger moves faster than truth.

James tells us to be swift to hear, slow to speak and slow to wrath.

Social media trains us to reverse the order.

Be swift to react, slow to listen and certain by the end of the headline.

The ninth word calls us back to the gate where testimony has consequences.

The person on the other side of the screen is still a neighbor.

The person in the story still bears God’s image.

The share button does not remove our responsibility as a witness.

We also bear false witness against ourselves.

That is not the primary meaning of the commandment, but it is a real spiritual danger.

We tell ourselves, “I am beyond forgiveness.”

We say, “Because I failed, failure is all I am.”

Or we move in the other direction and say, “I have no sin that needs confession.”

Both statements reject God’s testimony.

The truth is that our sin is worse than our excuses admit and Christ’s grace is greater than our shame can imagine.

The Gospel does not flatter us.

It does not condemn those who are in Christ.

It tells the truth about our guilt and the truth about our Savior.

Jesus knows false witness from the inside.

Mark 14 says that the chief priests and all the council sought for witness against Jesus to put Him to death and found none.

“For many bare false witness against him, but their witness agreed not together.”

They wanted a verdict first and testimony second.

The court was not searching for truth.

It was searching for words that would make injustice look lawful.

Stephen faced the same pattern in Acts 6.

Men were induced to accuse him, false witnesses were set up and religious language was used to justify violence.

The ninth commandment was spoken by God, yet people claiming to defend God violated it against God’s servants and against God’s Son.

At Jesus’ trial, the faithful and true witness stood before false witnesses.

He could have exposed every hidden motive.

He could have called testimony from heaven.

Instead, He walked willingly toward the cross.

The One against whom false charges were raised bore the true charges that stood against us.

We have lied.

We have exaggerated.

We have repeated reports we did not verify.

We have kept silent when truth was needed and spoken when silence would have been loving.

We have shaped stories to make ourselves innocent and our neighbor guilty.

We have wanted the verdict more than we wanted the truth.

Jesus bore our judgment.

He died on the cross, was buried and rose again on the third day.

He is not merely a teacher telling liars to improve.

He is the Savior who forgives, gives a new heart and puts His Spirit within His people.

Revelation calls Jesus “the faithful witness.”

He tells the truth about God.

He tells the truth about us.

He tells the truth in love, and His testimony can be trusted completely.

When we come to Him, we no longer need a false story to save ourselves.

We can confess because our standing rests in His righteousness, not our performance.

Maybe you have spent years managing a version of yourself.

You have edited the story so carefully that you are afraid of what will happen if anyone sees what is true.

Jesus already knows.

He does not ask you to defeat the truth.

He asks you to come into the light.

If you have never trusted Christ, you can come today.

Admit your sin.

Believe that Jesus died and rose again.

Receive the forgiveness and eternal life He gives.

The truth will not destroy the person who takes refuge in Christ.

It will become the doorway out of hiding.

If that is the desire of your heart, you may pray with me.

The prayer is not a magic formula.

Jesus saves those who trust Him.

Lord Jesus, I confess that I am a sinner.

I have spoken falsely, hidden the truth and used words to protect myself at the expense of others.

I cannot make myself righteous.

I believe You died for my sins, that You were buried and that You rose again.

Forgive me.

Give me eternal life.

Make me Your own.

Teach me to love truth, protect my neighbor and use my words for peace.

I place my trust in You alone.

I ask this in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

For those who belong to Christ, let us bring this commandment into the week ahead.

Begin with one conversation, one post, one memory or one unresolved accusation.

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you where your witness has not been faithful.

Have I repeated something I did not know to be true?

Have I presented suspicion as fact?

Have I omitted the part of the story that would make my neighbor look different?

Have I used someone's private failure to gain attention or influence?

Have I stayed silent while someone innocent carried blame I could correct?

Have I claimed certainty where honest memory should have said, "I may be wrong"?

Have I apologized without repairing the record?

Then take a concrete step.

Delete what should not remain public. Correct what was false.

Go to the person rather than around the person. Give the missing context.

Tell the appropriate authority what justice requires.

Ask forgiveness without blaming the hearer for misunderstanding what you intended them to believe.

And if you are the one who has been falsely accused, God sees you.

The commandment itself is evidence that your good name matters to Him.

Jesus understands the loneliness of standing beneath an accusation designed to secure a verdict.

Seek wise help.

Tell the truth steadily.

Do not let another person's false witness recruit you into falsehood or revenge.

Your final verdict does not belong to the crowd.

The world shaped by the ninth commandment is not a world where everyone says everything.

It is a world where a neighbor is safe in our testimony.

At the gate, we will not sell the truth.

In the church, we will not baptize gossip as concern.

In the home, we will not rewrite an argument to make ourselves flawless.

At work, we will not protect our position with another person's blame.

Online, we will not join a multitude simply because accusation is moving quickly.

We will speak truth to our neighbor.

We will pursue the judgment of truth and peace.

We will learn the courage to say, "I know," the humility to say, "I do not know" and the integrity to say, "I was wrong."

Let us pray.

Father, You know every word before it reaches our tongue.
Forgive us for false reports, selective stories, careless repetition and convenient silence.
Heal those whose names have been damaged by accusation.
Give wisdom and courage to those who must report wrongdoing.
Protect victims from being silenced and protect the accused from verdicts built on rumor.
Make us slow to speak, diligent to inquire and ready to correct ourselves.
Teach us when confidentiality serves love and when disclosure serves protection.
Let our words be true without cruelty and gracious without deception.
Thank You for Jesus, the faithful witness, who endured false testimony and bore our true guilt at the cross.
Form His truthfulness in us.
We ask this in the name of Jesus.
Amen.

Before we leave, choose one sentence you need to say this week.
Perhaps it is, "I do not know whether that is true."
Perhaps it is, "I should not have repeated that."
Perhaps it is, "There is another part of the story."
Perhaps it is, "I was wrong, and I need to correct the record."
Let your obedience become audible.

If you trusted Christ today, if you have been wounded by false accusation or if you need help making a truthful correction, please speak with us.
We will listen and pray with you.

Then join us in the café.
Bring the questions that did not fit into the sermon.
Bring your coffee cup too.
Remember, Christ Offers Forgiveness For Everyone Everywhere.
That forgiveness frees us to stop managing appearances and begin living in truth.

Next time we reach the final word in this series.

The first commands addressed what Israel worshiped.

The final command reaches into desire before a hand moves, before a witness speaks and before anyone else can see.

Our question will be:

Why Does God End With a Sin Nobody Else Can See?

Until then, remember this:

Not every inaccurate sentence is false witness.

But every neighbor should be safe in our testimony.

Truth is not a weapon for winning the verdict we want.

Truth is a covenant responsibility before the God who sees, knows and judges rightly.

Aloha Nui Loa.

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PASTOR'S COMMENTARY

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Exodus 20:16

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Pastor & Teacher

www.ReasonTogether.Church

*Bring your questions. Open your Bible.
Let's Reason Together the Word of God.*

Introduction

Most people summarize the ninth commandment as, 'Do not lie.' That is a useful moral lesson, but it is not the whole sentence spoken at Sinai. God said, 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.' The Word begins with witness, names falsehood and protects a neighbor who may suffer beneath an unjust verdict.

This precision does not make deception harmless. It makes the command more personal and consequential. A sentence may be technically accurate while its selected facts, omissions, timing or tone intentionally lead a hearer to judge another person falsely. The commandment follows testimony from the ancient gate into the family, church, workplace and digital court of public opinion.

This Commentary develops the sermon through covenant witness laws, truth and peace, gossip, reputation, memory, silence, confidentiality, safeguarding, the Hebrew midwives, Rahab, correction and Christ. It protects victims from secrecy and the accused from rumor while calling every witness to humility, courage and truthful love.

Controlling answer: No, not every inaccurate sentence is false witness in the ninth commandment's narrow historical sense. Yet any deliberate use of testimony, silence, context or repetition to place a neighbor under a false verdict violates its moral purpose. Truthfulness speaks what is known, admits what is unknown, protects rightful confidence, reports what safety requires and repairs the record when harm has traveled.

1. Hear the Whole Ninth Word

More Than Do Not Lie

The command does not speak first about every false statement in every genre. It names bearing witness, identifies falsehood and places a neighbor within the sentence. Its immediate concern is testimony with consequences.

Precision Must Not Become Permission

The narrow form does not excuse deceit elsewhere. Scripture repeatedly condemns lying, talebearing, flattery, manipulation and speech that fractures the community. The commandment supplies the courtroom center for a wider Biblical ethic.

2. The Gate Was a Court of Consequence

Witnesses Carried Great Weight

At the city gate elders heard disputes, recognized transactions and rendered judgment. Without recordings or modern forensic systems, a witness could shape the loss of property, freedom, reputation or life.

The Community Needed Trustworthy Judgment

False witness harms more than the accused. It corrupts the process by which a community recognizes truth. When testimony can be purchased, coordinated or intimidated, every neighbor becomes less safe.

3. Deuteronomy Requires Diligent Inquiry

One Voice Was Not Enough

In grave cases Israel required two or three witnesses. The rule resisted condemnation resting upon one untested accusation and reminded judges that consequences must follow evidence.

The Malicious Witness Faced the Intended Penalty

Judges were to inquire diligently. If the witness had falsely sought another person's punishment, that intended consequence returned upon the accuser. Words at the gate were moral acts, not disposable tools.

4. Do Not Put Your Hand With a False Report

The Carrier Shares Responsibility

Exodus 23 forbids raising a false report and joining the wicked as an unrighteous witness. The person who forwards an accusation is not morally absent simply because someone else originated it.

The Multitude Does Not Create Truth

A report may become popular before it becomes proven. Repetition, outrage and a familiar storyline can make a crowd feel certain. Scripture commands the witness not to let the multitude supply a verdict the evidence has not earned.

5. Justice Must Not Bend Toward a Preferred Side

Neither Favor Nor Oppression

Exodus 23 forbids favoring a poor person merely because he is poor and forbids denying justice to the poor. Truth is not prejudice pointed in a preferred direction.

Compassion and Investigation Belong Together

A painful disclosure should be heard seriously and compassionately. A final finding should follow diligent inquiry. We do not honor victims by refusing to listen, and we do not honor truth by announcing the verdict before listening is complete.

6. Not Every Inaccuracy Is False Witness

Genre and Shared Understanding Matter

A recognized joke, parable, novel, poem or ordinary hyperbole is not offered as courtroom data. Language includes imagination, symbol and humor. The commandment does not forbid art.

Mistake Is Not Deliberate Deception

A person may remember incorrectly, repeat the best available information or fail to keep a promise because an emergency intervened. When the error becomes known, truthfulness requires correction rather than concealment.

7. A True Fact Can Carry a False Verdict

Fragments Can Mislead

A speaker may quote exact words while removing the sentence that explains them or report a true action while hiding the circumstance that makes it innocent. The fragment is accurate, but the witness is false.

Ask What the Hearer Was Meant to Believe

The moral test reaches beyond whether a fact can survive technical inspection. Did I intend the hearer to see my neighbor truthfully, or did I arrange facts until the verdict I wanted appeared?

8. Truth and Peace Meet at the Gate

The Prophet Joins Them

Zechariah commands, 'Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates.' Truth without peace becomes a hammer. Peace without truth becomes concealment.

Truthful Love Refuses Both Distortions

Biblical love does not bury a fact that protection and justice require. Biblical truth does not enjoy humiliation. Faithful speech serves reality, the neighbor and a peace sturdy enough to endure what is true.

9. A Good Name Is Not Conversation Material

Reproach Can Be Taken Up

Psalm 15 honors the person who speaks truth in the heart, refuses backbiting and does not take up a reproach against a neighbor. Gossip involves not only making a story but also lifting it and carrying it.

True Information Can Still Become Gossip

The relevant questions are why I am carrying the information, who needs to hear it and what good the telling can accomplish. Seeking counsel or protection differs from quietly enjoying the power of damaging knowledge.

10. Tell the Right Person, Not Every Person

Confidentiality Can Serve Love

Privacy is not dishonesty. A friend, counselee, patient or family member may entrust information that is not ours to distribute. Curiosity does not create a right to know.

Confidentiality Has Protective Limits

Secrecy must not cover abuse, imminent danger or matters that law and justice require be reported. Responsible disclosure takes truth to people able to protect or investigate. The need to tell the right person does not become permission to tell every person.

11. Matthew 18 Is Not a Shield for Abuse

Ordinary Conflict Begins Narrowly

Jesus directs a brother to begin an ordinary trespass conversation privately and widen involvement only when needed. The pattern resists broadcasting a concern before speaking responsibly.

Safety Changes the Path

A victim must not be forced into private confrontation with an abuser. Seek safe leaders and proper authorities. The goal is truthful accountability with protection, not secrecy at any cost.

12. Memory Needs Humility

Confidence Is Not Proof

Human memory is not a perfect recording. We forget, fill gaps and sometimes confuse what we saw with what we later heard. Two sincere people may remember one conversation differently.

Truthful Witness Marks Its Limits

Faithful phrases include, 'As best as I remember,' 'I was not there,' 'I have not verified that' and 'There may be another part of the story.' Humility does not weaken truth. It prevents our confidence from outrunning our knowledge.

13. Silence Can Assist a False Story

A Witness May Need to Speak

Leviticus 5 recognizes guilt when a person who has seen or known a matter refuses required testimony. If an innocent coworker carries blame for an error we saw another person make, silence may protect comfort by sacrificing the neighbor.

Not Every Dispute Is Ours

The command does not require intrusion into every disagreement. It requires truthful courage when justice genuinely depends upon what we know and restraint when we do not know enough to testify.

14. The Midwives and Rahab Are Hard Cases

Scripture Honors Faithful Resistance

The Hebrew midwives preserved children against Pharaoh's murderous order. Rahab hid Israelite messengers and directed the king's men away. Scripture honors their fear of God, faith and welcome.

Christians Explain the Words Differently

Some commend the faith without approving every statement. Others argue that a violent aggressor has no right to information that would make the hearer an accomplice. Both readings forbid turning extraordinary protection of life into permission for ordinary deceit.

15. Repentance Corrects the Record

A Vague Apology May Leave the Lie Standing

Saying, I am sorry for any misunderstanding, can preserve the exact conclusion our words intended. Confession names what was false, exaggerated, omitted or presented without adequate knowledge.

Repair Should Travel as Far as the Report

If five people heard the accusation, those hearers need correction. If the claim was public, private remorse is incomplete. Repentance surrenders the advantage the false story created and helps restore reputation or opportunity where possible.

16. Truth Belongs to the Body of Christ

Members One of Another

Ephesians 4:25 commands believers to put away lying and speak truth with the neighbor because members belong to one another. Deception injures a body that depends upon trust to move together.

Honesty Is Not Cruelty

Not every true thought must be spoken. Before speaking, ask whether it is true, known, yours to say, needed by this hearer, timely and directed toward restoration, protection and peace rather than attention or revenge.

17. Jesus Stood Before False Witnesses

They Wanted a Verdict Before Testimony

Mark 14 says many bore false witness against Jesus, but their witness did not agree. The council was not asking what judgment truth required. It was searching for words that would make a desired injustice appear lawful.

The Faithful Witness Bore Our True Guilt

Jesus could have called heaven to testify. Instead, He went willingly to the cross, where the One falsely accused bore the true charges against us. He died, was buried and rose again. Revelation rightly calls Him the faithful witness.

18. Come Into the Light

The Gospel Tells Both Truths

Our sin is worse than our excuses admit, and Christ's grace is greater than our shame imagines. The Gospel neither flatters nor abandons us. In Christ, we no longer need a false story to establish our righteousness.

For the Person Ready to Trust Christ

You may pray: Lord Jesus, I confess that I am a sinner. I have spoken falsely, hidden truth and protected myself at the expense of others. I believe You died for my sins, were buried and rose again. Forgive me, give me eternal life and make me Your own. Teach me to love truth, protect my neighbor and use my words for peace. I place my trust in You alone. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Pastoral Summary

1. The ninth commandment first protects a neighbor from false testimony with judicial consequences.
2. Its Biblical ethic reaches every forum where words can create an unjust verdict.
3. A person who carries an unverified report may join the wrongdoing of its originator.
4. Crowd agreement, repeated claims, emotion and status do not create evidence.
5. An honest mistake is not identical to a deliberate lie, but discovered error requires correction.
6. Recognized humor, fiction, parable, poetry and hyperbole are not offered as literal testimony.
7. A technically accurate fragment can become false witness when context is removed to mislead.
8. Truth and peace belong together. Love does not conceal danger or enjoy humiliation.
9. A true report may still become gossip when carried to an unnecessary audience for a selfish purpose.
10. Privacy and confidentiality are real goods, but they must not conceal abuse or prevent proper reporting.
11. Matthew 18 does not require an unsafe confrontation between a victim and an abuser.
12. Memory requires humility about what was observed, remembered, inferred or heard from others.
13. Silence may become culpable when an innocent person bears blame the witness can correct.
14. The midwives and Rahab do not provide ordinary excuses for deceit motivated by convenience.
15. Correction should travel as far as the false report and surrender the advantage it created.
16. Truth in the church serves members who belong to one another rather than strangers competing for verdicts.
17. Jesus, the faithful witness, endured false testimony and bore the true judgment of sinners.
18. Grace frees us to confess, correct the record and live in truthful love.

Truthful Witness and Repair Worksheet

1. Identify one accusation, memory, post or unresolved conversation that requires review.
2. Write what you personally observed without adding interpretation.
3. Separate what you remember from what another person later told you.
4. Name any fact or context that could change the hearer's verdict.
5. Ask whether you presented suspicion as fact or confidence beyond your knowledge.
6. Identify who has a legitimate need or duty to receive the information.
7. Ask whether direct contact is safe and proper before beginning a conversation.
8. Identify any danger, abuse or reporting duty requiring qualified help.
9. Name the audience that received the original report.
10. Draft a correction that clearly states what was false, exaggerated or unsupported.

11. Choose a repair proportionate to damage in reputation, opportunity, relationship or official record.
12. Use one truthful sentence this week: I do not know, I should not have repeated that, there is more to the story or I was wrong.
13. Bring guilt, fear and consequence to Jesus Christ, whose grace makes the light a place of freedom.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. Why does the complete wording of Exodus 20:16 matter?
2. What could false testimony cost a neighbor at the ancient city gate?
3. How do multiple witnesses and diligent inquiry protect justice?
4. How can a person put a hand with a false report without inventing it?
5. Why must Biblical justice refuse partiality in both directions?
6. What distinguishes mistake, nonliteral speech and privacy from false witness?
7. How can a true fragment intentionally produce a false verdict?
8. What does the judgment of truth and peace require?
9. Why can factually true information still become gossip?
10. How do responsible disclosure and public gossip differ?
11. Why must Matthew 18 not be used to force unsafe confrontation?
12. What phrases help a witness speak honestly about the limits of memory?
13. When can silence help false witness finish its work?
14. What do the midwives and Rahab teach without excusing ordinary deceit?
15. Why should correction travel as far as the harmful report?
16. How does being members one of another change Christian speech?
17. How did false testimony operate in the trial of Jesus?
18. Why does the Gospel make truthful confession possible?
19. What sentence of truth, humility or correction do you need to say this week?

Prayer

Our Heavenly Father, You are the God of truth. Forgive us for false reports, selective stories, careless repetition and convenient silence. Show us where we wanted a verdict more than we wanted reality and where our words protected us at a neighbor's expense.

Heal those whose names have been damaged by accusation. Give courage and safe help to those who must report wrongdoing. Protect victims from being silenced and protect the accused from conclusions built on rumor. Make us compassionate listeners, diligent inquirers and humble witnesses.

Teach us when confidentiality serves love and when disclosure serves protection. Give courage to say, I do not know, I was wrong and I need to correct the record. Let repair travel as far as our harmful words and keep us from preserving the advantage of a false story.

Thank You for Jesus Christ, the faithful witness who endured false testimony and bore our true guilt at the cross. Because He died, was buried and rose again, bring us out of hiding. Make our words true without cruelty and gracious without deception. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

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