



The 9th COMMANDMENT

You Shall Not Bear FALSE WITNESS Against Your Neighbour

—by Peter Hammond

God is Truth. Jesus Christ is the Way, the Truth and the Life. God's Word is Truth. "You shall know the Truth and the Truth shall set you free." John 8:32

St. Augustine had a sign on his desk that declared: "Whosoever enters this office to bring an accusation against his brother will be ushered out of this room." Augustine took the Ninth Commandment seriously.

Christians often transgress the Ninth Commandment without even realising it - because we have become so accustomed to 'embellishing' the truth...

THE GREATEST INJURY

The great Reformer, John Calvin declared: "No greater injury can be inflicted upon men than to ruin their reputation."

As Mark Twain observed: "A lie can travel halfway across the world while the truth is still getting its boots on!" That was before the advent of e-mail and the internet. Now a lie can be spread far quicker and much wider than ever before.

"The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell." James 3:6

GOSSIP AND SLANDER

All of us, at one time or another, have been guilty of gossip. Yet, it is sin. God takes gos-

sip seriously. The Bible declares: "Whoever spreads slander is a fool..." Prov 10:18. We are commanded: "Do not speak evil of one another, brethren..." James 4:11

PRIDE AND MALICE

Pride is often the engine which drives the gossip industry. It is a desire to portray people better than us in a bad light, to lift ourselves up by pulling others down.

"Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy and all evil speaking." 1 Pet 2:1. Slander is inextricably linked with malice, deceit, hypocrisy and envy.

The Bible warns us of those who "get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying things they ought not to." 1 Tim 5:13

CHARACTER ASSASSINS

The Law of God is clear: "You shall not go about as a tale bearer among your people; nor shall you take a stand against the life of your neighbour. I am the Lord." Lev 19:16

Slander can endanger people's lives. "A man who bears false witness against his neighbour is like a club, a sword, and a sharp arrow." Prov 25:18

Some years ago we witnessed a vociferous campaign of hate and slander launched by disgruntled ex-members against an outstanding mission in Africa. Salvos of letters, articles, e-mails and phone calls were launched.

Websites dedicated to slandering this mission were set up and all manner of vindictive abuse was unleashed against this fine Christian community.

SINFUL SLANDER

I was astounded at the persistence, obsession and unconstructive malice of the antagonists. "Mission of hate"; "Mission of fear"; "I escaped from the Mission from hell!" screamed the newspaper and magazine headlines.

I've also discovered that many other ministries overseas have been victims of similar pathological antagonists.

As Dr. James Kennedy in 'Delighting God', wrote: "If you rise just a little bit above the common herd, if you achieve just a modicum more success than your neighbour, most surely those barbs of criticism are going to be shot your way..." Kennedy quotes one wise old man: "If I tried to read,



much less answer all the criticisms made of me, and all the attacks levelled against me, this office would have to be closed to all other business. I do the best I know how, the very best I can, and I mean to keep on doing this, down to the very end.

If the end brings me out all wrong, ten angels swearing I had been right would make no difference. If the end brings me out all right, then what is said against me now will not amount to anything."

SPURGEON'S COUNSEL

The greatest Baptist preacher of all time, C.H. Spurgeon warned: "Believe not half you hear; repeat not half you believe.

When you hear an evil report, halve it, then quarter it, and say nothing about the rest of it."

MALICE AGAINST MISSIONARIES

Spurgeon wrote: "The more prominent you are in Christ's service, the more certain are you to be the butt of calumny. I have long ago said farewell to my character. I lost it in the early days of my ministry by being a little more zealous than suited a slumbering age.

And I've never been able to regain it except in the sight of Him who judges all the earth, and in the hearts of those who love me for my works' sake." When researching

'The Greatest Century of Missions', I was astounded at how each of the great missionaries of the past had been targeted by contemporaries with the most vindictive slander and abuse.

William Carey, Samuel Marsden, Hudson Taylor, David Livingstone and so many others endured the most cruel and malicious attacks by people who claimed to be Christians.

George Whitefield, one of the greatest evangelists of all time, and a key figure in the Great Evangelical Awakening, was actually kicked out of the Church of England that he had served so faithfully. However, today, the Church of England in South Af- »



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rica has named its college after George Whitefield.

When researching for 'The Greatest Century of Reformation' book I was shocked again by the hostility, not only by contemporaries, but even to this very day, against many of the greatest Chris-

Christianity..." The Scriptures implore us: "Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He, who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the Law and judges the Law." James 4:11

Charles Spurgeon was the target of vicious and slanderous attacks by the Baptist

In the last Book of the Bible we are given a list of eight categories of people who will be excluded from Heaven: "But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." Rev 21:8

THE SIN OF SILENCE

A man may wrong another as much by silence as by slander when you know someone to be wrongly accused, yet do not speak on his behalf.

"You shall not bear false witness" means that we may not look upon, consider, pay heed to or listen to false witness. It can also mean to give or to communicate. This commandment not only prohibits the hearing of false testimony, but it prohibits having anything to do with false testimony. You shall not invent, or give your attention to, or think about, or pass on, false witness. We must never be either a giver, or a receiver, of false witness.

FAULT-FINDING

The Ninth Commandment forbids us to carry false witness either in our head, or in our heart, or on our lips. It is a breach of this Commandment to fuel our mind with exaggerated, or imagined, ideas about another person's faults.

A false witness is any dishonest version of events, or any untrue statement. It might be gossip or slander against someone, or it may be untrue information about our self, given to impress others. This would include dishonest or distorted excuses concocted to get ourselves out of trouble, or to avoid disgrace.

THE SIN OF FLATTERY

Unrealistic flattery is also a lie and harmful because it gives the other person a false view of themselves, possibly inducing pride. Many parents have ruined their children with unfounded flattery. Lies grieve the Holy Spirit of truth. Lies also betray

trust. The person to whom a lie is spoken is betrayed, for that person who has trusted in, or respected, the individual as a reliable person has been betrayed. Dishonest statements are also a hostile act. Each lie represents a shattering blow to the character. Lies begin to bludgeon the conscience into insensitivity, damaging and ultimately destroying, personal integrity.

MOTIVES BEHIND FALSE WITNESS

Every lie involves multiple sins and gives birth to other sins. There is normally a sinful motive for the lie. Pride and arrogance are behind boastful lies. Cowardice lies behind dishonest excuses. Hatred, malice or jealousy lies behind vindictive gossip. A liar who tries to give the appearance of being a Christian walking with the Lord is also guilty of hypocrisy. Some people lie and exaggerate to show off and to attract attention to themselves. Others lie to win arguments or to obtain favours.

One of the more common lies that you may be guilty of includes inventive excuse making. When we have done something very foolish, or fail to do something important, we may be tempted to 'bend the truth'.

SPIRITUAL DECEPTION

Another, very common and serious way in which Christians frequently lie is by exaggerating, or even inventing, spiritual guidance, Divine blessings and pretending a deeper walk with the Lord than is real. This also includes taking the Lord's Name in vain. Frequently Christians will speak about: "The Lord told me..." and "the Lord told me to tell you..." or "I am still praying about it..."

Much of what passes for testimonies, worship and intercession in numerous fellowships is actually a breach of the Third and Ninth Commandments.

ANANIAS AND SAPPHIRA

A radical example of this in the Early

Church is the case of Ananias and Sapphira. "But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession. And he kept back part of the proceeds, his wife also being aware of it, and brought a certain part and laid it at the Apostles' feet.

But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land

this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.' Then Ananias, hearing these words, fell down and breathed his last. So great fear came upon all those who heard these things." Acts 5:1-5

TWISTING SCRIPTURE

This passage is a clear warning of the consequences of lying to God. As the Apostle

If we refuse to hear or share gossip, then the destructive downward spiral will be broken. "The mouth of the righteous is a well of life..." Prov 10:11

for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived

Peter said: the land belonged to them and after they sold it the money was theirs. The issue was not the property, or the funds from the sale. The issue was the deception and dishonesty of Ananias and Sapphira, who were claiming to have done more than they actually had.

For the praise of men, they publicly claimed that they were giving to the Lord all the proceeds from their property. This passage reiterates the importance of integrity and honesty.

DESTROYING REPUTATIONS

Slander is the most malicious way in which the Ninth Commandment is violated. To maliciously accuse someone is most destructive. To intentionally set out to tell falsehoods about someone, is to destroy his reputation in the community, in the office, or in the church.

By elaborating on something we don't like about this person, or by embellishing a flaw in that person's character, friends and associates can be turned against the individual targeted, with ease. "A lying tongue hates those who are crushed by it, and a flattering mouth works ruin." Prov 26:28.

CAN YOU SEE THE OTHER SIDE?

Whenever Czar Peter the Great of Russia heard someone denigrating another person, he would respond: "Ah, yes, but »



A false witness is any dishonest version of events, or any untrue statement. It might be gossip, or it may be untrue information about our self, given to impress...

tian Reformers whom God used to bring about the most powerful Spiritual Revival in history. One historian noted concerning John Calvin: "No good man has ever had a worse press; no Christian theologian is so often scorned; so regularly attacked."

TARGETING THEOLOGIAN'S

Even America's greatest theologian, Jonathan Edwards, the man most closely associated with the Great Evangelical Awakening, was actually dismissed by his own church as a result of slander, which was later admitted by the one who bore false witness against him.

In his farewell message, Edwards advised: "...avoid contention. A contentious people will be a miserable people...heat of spirit, evil speaking and things of the like...directly contrary to the spirit of

Union of his day. Now his books are textbooks of Baptist colleges and his statue stands outside the Baptist Union headquarters.

WARNINGS FROM THE WORD

The Bible warns us that: "...envy is rottenness to the bones." Prov 14:30. "By pride comes nothing but strife." Proverbs 13:10. The Apostle Paul warned about the "...conceited...he has an unhealthy interest in controversies and arguments that result in envy, quarrelling, malicious talk, evil suspicions..." 1 Tim 6:4

The Word of God warns us of "the ruthless...mockers...with an eye for evil. Those who with a word make a man out to be guilty, who ensnare the defender in court, and with false testimony deprive the innocent of justice." Is 29:20-21

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is there nothing good about him?" The Founder of Campus Crusade for Christ, Bill Bright, observed: "People don't dump garbage on green lawns." Garbage tends to be dumped on vacant lots filled with rocks and rubbish, sand and weeds.

The question is: Do you invite the dumping of gossip? "An evil-doer gives heed to false lips, a liar listens eagerly to a spiteful tongue." Prov 12:4

"A tale bearer reveals secrets, but he who is of a faithful spirit conceals a matter." Prov 11:13

slander and gossip and then do not repent are evidencing rotten fruit which must come from a rotten heart. "A fool's mouth is his destruction, and his lips are the snare of his soul." Prov 18:7

RESTORATION OR DESTRUCTION?

One of the ways in which we can distinguish between a fool and a wise man is in their speech. A godly man will attempt to win his brother and restore him by confronting him with his sin. The ungodly

When people come to you with some tale-bearing, you should ask: Have you spoken to the individual concerned personally? If not, then I should not hear it.

CAN YOU BE TRUSTED?

The question is: Can you be trusted to maintain confidentiality and to keep a secret? One good rule of thumb is to never say anything about someone that you have not already said to that person himself. If we cannot prove that something has happened, then we have no right to an opinion about the matter and we certainly should not bear false witness about it. Never underestimate the degree to which sinful men will try to make themselves feel important by destroying the reputation of others.

"An ungodly man digs up evil, and it is on his lips like a burning fire. A perverse man sows strife, and a whisperer separates the best of friends." Prov 16:27-28

UNREPENTANT HEARTS

Those who gossip and slander others and do not repent, reveal that they have a wicked and unregenerate heart. Those whose hearts are actually unregenerate and wicked will not repent when they sin.

People who repeatedly, willfully

man instead will attempt to destroy his victim by speaking to others in a destructive way.

"Wise people store up knowledge, but the mouth of the foolish is near destruction." Prov 10:14

DOES THIS HELP OR HURT?

One of the questions we should ask to discern the difference between the Godly desire to help and the ungodly desire to hurt is: Does the negative information being shared help or hurt the accused?

When people come to you with some tale-bearing, you should ask them: Have you spoken to the individual concerned personally? If not, then I should not hear it. This has nothing to do with me. I recommend that you speak to this person directly.

BREAK THE CHAIN

If we refuse to hear or share gossip, then the destructive downward spiral will be broken. "The mouth of the righteous is a well of life..." Prov 10:11. ■

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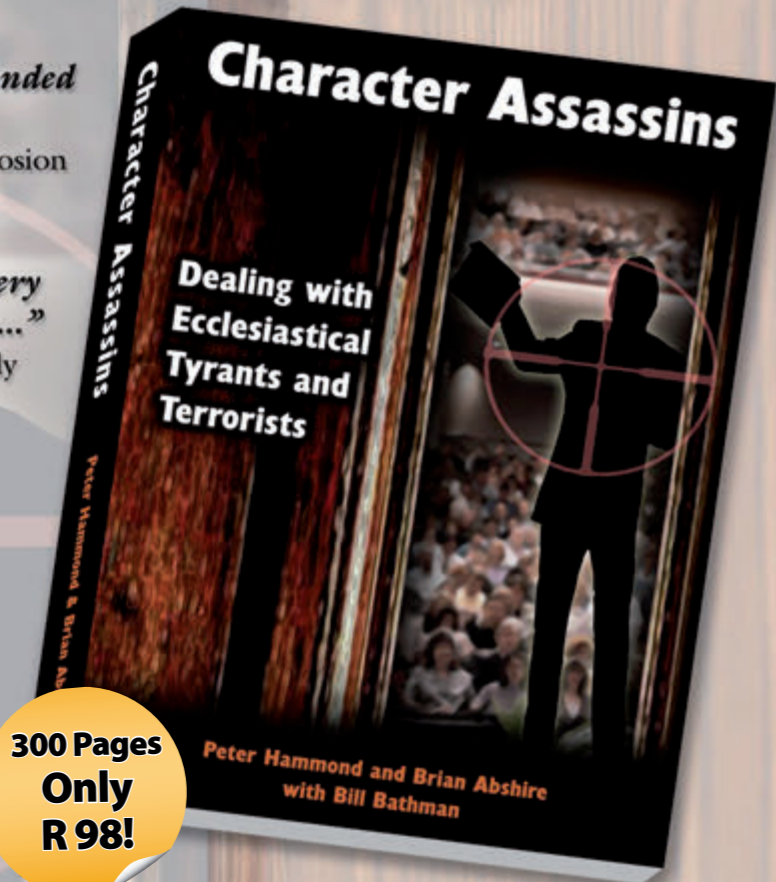
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