



**The Ten Commandments – Part 13**  
**Exodus 20:16**  
**GCSP – 01/16/2010**

A middle-aged pastor in a small farming community was falsely accused. It was a vicious, scandalous story, and it swept through the town like a wildfire.

*"Have you heard about the pastor?"*  
*"Can you believe what he did?"*  
*"He should leave town."*  
*"You would never think that about him would you?"*  
*"Guess he had us fooled."*

After a period of time the rumor was found to be just that, an ugly, empty rumor, without any basis of fact. But the damage had been done. Many people in the community had believed every word and were now reluctant to revise their opinions; after all, there must have been *some* truth to the story if everyone was talking about it.

Some time later, the couple responsible for starting the rumor came to the pastor and asked his forgiveness.

"Of course I will forgive you, but could you do something for me? It may sound strange to you at first."

Relieved that the pastor was willing to forgive them they quickly agreed to do whatever he asked of them.

"All right, here is my request: I would like for you to go home and butcher one of your chickens, pluck out all of the feathers and put the feathers in a bag. Could you do that for me?"

The couple agreed, but it did indeed sound strange.

"Next, I'd like you to walk through town and at each corner scatter some of the feathers. Then climb the old town water tower and then scatter the rest of the feathers to the wind. Could you do these things for me?"

Although totally mystified, the couple nodded their heads in agreement and started for the door. But when they reached the door, the pastor stopped them and called them back. "There is one more thing I forgot to mention. After you have scattered all of the feathers I want you go back through town and gather up every one of the feathers you have scattered – make sure to not miss a single one."

The couple looked at the pastor and said, "But pastor, that's impossible. By the time we finish scattering them they will have spread over three counties."

The pastor didn't say a word, and slowly the couple lowered their heads as the truth of the pastor's word picture sank into their hearts. Yes, they could be forgiven for their

actions, but the damage could never fully be repaired of their false and slanderous words being scattered.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **Exodus**.

### **Exodus 20:16**

Let's pray.

Let's build a little context before we start figuring out all the facets of how this command applies to us today.

In the nation of Israel during Bible times, the system of justice was pretty simple. There were no lawyers, no fingerprints, no DNA, no crime scene investigators, and even no detectives or police; it was simply a judge or a panel of judges that decided the truth of the matter based almost entirely upon the testimony of the witnesses.

The witnesses literally held the life of the accused in their hands. If you had the unanimous testimony of two or three witnesses with no other witnesses refuting the account, the accused could be sentenced to death.

So when God says through the Ten Commandments "**You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor,**" I trust you see the gravity and seriousness of this command. The words of a false witness could bring death to an innocent man or woman, which is why **Proverbs 25:18** says, "**Like a club and a sword and a sharp arrow is a man who bears false witness against his neighbor.**"

In view of the seriousness of this matter, God also put some safeguards in His Law to deter false witnesses. First, it took more than one witness to incur the death penalty no matter how heinous the crime was (**Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15**). Also, when the death penalty was incurred, the witnesses who testified against the accused had to throw the first stones when the death penalty was being carried out (**Deuteronomy 17:7**). To stone someone to death by your own hands requires a lot more courage than a few lying words. And lastly, if a false witness was unmasked and the lies were discovered, he or she immediately received the same sentence the accused would have received (**Deuteronomy 19:16-19**).

Turn with me in your Bibles to a familiar verse in the Book of **Proverbs**.

### **Proverbs 18:21**

In light of our understanding of Israel's system of justice and the power vested in the testimony of a witness, we have some new found meaning to this familiar Proverb; death and life truly are in the power of the tongue, even when that tongue is speaking falsehood.

But please pay attention to the last half of this Proverb – "**And those who love it will eat its fruit.**" Solomon is teaching us that when the pattern of your life is truthfulness or deceitfulness, it doesn't matter which one, you will reap what you sow. If the pattern of your life is speaking the truth regardless of the immediate consequences, your life will be filled with all of the benefits and blessings God has in store for people of integrity. If

the pattern of your life is one of deception and gossip and innuendo then your life will be filled these things coming back upon you; including the wrath of a holy God who hates these things.

But also notice that it says, "...**those who love it.**" This is why I said on both sides of the equation, if this is the pattern of your life. Telling an occasional lie, although still a sin, does not put you in the category of eating its fruit. On the other side, telling an occasional truth does not put you in line for God's blessings either. We are looking at patterns of your life; things you are known for. While it is true that if you are caught in one lie it becomes difficult to regain the trust of the one you lied to, it is altogether different from being commonly known as a liar.

We damage, damn, and destroy other people when we bear false witness, when we speak untrue words about them. And don't think you are getting off the hook by implying things and not actually speaking the untruth. Words of gossip and innuendo are just as much telling a lie as stating the lie straight out. "*I heard this about so-and-so and heard that, so I don't know...*" Why dance around it? If you are going to make the implication just go ahead and spit it out; it's the same thing.

When the Pharisees could not destroy Jesus by any other means, what did they resort to? **Matthew 26:59** says, "**Now the chief priests and the whole council kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, so that they might put Him to death.**" The Pharisees understood that words were every bit as destructive as swords and stones.

The old saying we used to recite as children is not true: "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me." Man, is that ever a lie! We should have been saying, "Sticks and stones may break my bones but words can destroy me!" - Especially false and deceitful words.

I am as guilty as anyone of being a little too loose with my tongue, or my keyboard, at times, but as a pastor I am an easy and common target. So I know how much words can hurt, especially when those words are not true and they are coming from a source of expected trust. Assumptions are made without having all the facts, implications and innuendos are verbalized, and the wounds have been inflicted. And I have been guilty of doing the same.

Words are unbelievably powerful in how they impact a human life. A husband's words have the power to shape the life of his wife, and vice versa. A parent's words have the awesome capacity to forever shape the life of his or her children. It is epidemic in nature how many people walk around in despair and devastation and depression as adults who are still feeling the sting of a father or mother's words while they were children.

What you say, what you don't say, how you say it, and how you neglect to say it, will either build up an individual, or nail by nail and board by board tear that individual down into a pile of rubble.

Does that fall under the category of bearing false witness? – You better believe it does!

Here is the plumb line or the measuring stick for whether or not our words fall under the category of bearing false witness: Whenever you say something to an individual or about an individual that is less than or different than what God would say, you are bearing false witness. Did you catch that? Whenever you say something to an individual or about an individual that is less than or different than what God would say, you are bearing false witness.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **Ephesians**.

**Ephesians 4:25; 29-32**

Beloved, here is the standard: Our words should always build up. And if what you want to say is not going to build up than it shouldn't be said. Make no mistake though, sometimes the truth will hurt. In those instances you must follow **Ephesians 4:15**, which admonishes us to speak the truth in love, and you must run it through the filter of will this build him or her up?

In other words, what is your motivation for speaking? Do you desire to genuinely help and build up the individual you are speaking to, or are there other ulterior motives? Do you have a bone to pick or a score to settle? Are you attempting to mold this person into your own image, your own preferences, your own likes, etc. or are you attempting to help mold this person into the image of Christ?

We do not want to miss the admonition here to speak those words of edification **according to the need**. Often we have a tendency to dump everything we want to dump but it isn't always needful for the person. Our words of edification are to be focused on the actual needs of the person we are speaking to, not the need for us to get something off our chest; and for you to know the true needs of the person you have to spend time with them and time with the Lord in prayer so the Spirit can direct your thoughts and words.

And make sure you realize that your reckless, demeaning, and bitter words actually bring pangs of pain to the heart of God. We **grieve the Holy Spirit of God** when we allow any words that do not bring **edification according to the need of the moment** and **give grace to those who hear**, to escape from our lips.

So how often are we violating this command? How often do we speak words that miss the mark of edification and grace? How often are our words based on our own need to speak our mind as opposed to being based on what is needful for the other person? Is it any wonder that the power of the Holy Spirit is absent in the lives of most believers today? We cannot expect the working and the moving of the Holy Spirit in our lives if we are grieving Him with our lips.

And why do our hateful words grieve the Holy Spirit of God? – Because God knows the damage that is done in the lives of His children when spiteful words are spoken. God knows how easily our spirits are crushed by the careless and thoughtless words that are directed at us. God knows verbal attacks and verbal abuse can often do much more damage than physical abuse. So be very careful with the words you allow to escape from your mouth.

A couple in a quaint suburban community discovered after the fact that they lived next door to an arsonist. This neighbor would deliberately set forest fires, come home in the evening, wave to his neighbors, thumb through his mail, and then turn on the television like everyone else as if nothing else had happened that day.

This man was eventually caught and convicted of his crimes, but the thought of having an arsonist living next door made this couple uneasy even though he was now in prison (kind of made them wonder about their other neighbors).

Can you imagine living next door to an arsonist? Yet the truth is, most of us do; or maybe the arsonist is living under your roof.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **James**.

### **James 3:5b-10**

Beloved, all of us are at times guilty of arson; we set ablaze a firestorm by our words. I've done it and still do when I allow my emotions to take control. It may only be a tiny spark here and there, but what did one match do just a few miles from here 7½ years ago? The largest wildfire in Colorado history was started with one careless match. And that one careless match disrupted and devastated thousands of lives, destroyed 138,000 acres of forest, consumed 600 structures including 133 residences and one commercial building, caused the death of several firefighters while on their way to the scene, and has cost over \$39 million to date.

And people who start raging fires with their words come home in the evening, wave to their neighbors, thumb through their mail, and then turn on the television as if nothing happened that day; very little or no thought is given to the damage and devastation that was inflicted.

**Proverbs 16:24** teaches us that our words are supposed to be **sweet to the soul** and bring **healing to the bones**, not killing poison.

And in case you didn't allow the weight of James' words to sink in, let's look again. After he says "...**the tongue is a fire**," he calls words of this manner, "...**the very world of iniquity**." James points out to us that all of the iniquity and evil in this world has its basis in the words of the tongue. In essence, all of the murder, war, terrorism, rape, etc. originates in the power of words.

James goes on to say, "...**the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body**." When your tongue is turned over as an instrument of evil and iniquity, your entire body, character, and personality become stained and polluted. Jesus said it this way: "**It is not what enters into the mouth that defiles a man, but what proceeds out of the mouth, this defiles a man**" (**Matthew 15:11**).

James continues: "(the tongue) **sets on fire the course of our life**." The course of your entire life is determined by how you use words according to this verse, and the implication is that most lives are akin to blazing out of control fires. And if you weren't completely sure of what James meant, he adds, "...**and is set on fire by hell**." When we are careless with our words we are living our lives by all that encompasses hell; we

are in essence rejecting the control of the Holy Spirit in our lives handing that control over to Satan.

James still has more to say: **"For every species of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by the human race. But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison."**

We hear stories all the time about some idiot raising a wild animal in his home and although he thought the animal was tame it eventually reverts to its true nature and attacks its owner or some unsuspecting child or neighbor. Our tongues have that same awful potential. Just when we think we've got our tongues under control, just when we think our tongue has been tamed, something will set us off and we will maul someone with our angry or bitter words.

You simply have to come to the vital conclusion that you cannot tame your tongue; only God can. You will never train your tongue to bring life instead of death. You will never domesticate your wild tongue to the point of it bringing sweetness to other's soul and healing to other's bones. Only God can accomplish the impossible and taming your tongue is impossible.

Just prior to receiving the Ten Commandments, the Children of Israel came to a place called Marah. The water was bitter and unfit for consumption at Marah. God, through His servant Moses supernaturally transformed the bitter water into sweet. And only God can turn our bitter tongues into sweet.

So how do we allow God to accomplish this in our lives? How do we escape the all too often trap of unleashing bitter words?

#### Respond to the Holy Spirit's Prompting

A pastor who had a very wise secretary, walked into her office and said, "You know I probably shouldn't tell you this..." to which the secretary replied, "Well then, I guess you better not."

If you say what you think you probably shouldn't say, someone is going to get hurt. And that inner prompting that is causing you to be hesitant in saying the words is the Holy Spirit telling you to stop. When you ignore these promptings and you say it anyway, you tend to have a sick feeling in the pit of your stomach – that's an indication of the Holy Spirit being grieved.

So respond to the Holy Spirit.

#### Be Accountable

Primarily be accountable to the Holy Spirit. When He says, "Watch it," then watch it. When He says, "Don't," then don't. When He says, "Hush," then hush. When He says, "Bite your tongue," then clamp your teeth down. When you feel that nudge to stop talking about this or to walk away from the conversation, then do so. Don't worry about looking silly or making the situation awkward for others, choose to please God and not man.

Choose a close friend to be accountable to as well. Confessing your sins to one another is a great way to be more aware the next time, and thus possibly avoid it the next time.

Cry Out for Help

**Psalm 19:14** says, "**Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.**" God always, and let me repeat, always, supplies you with help when you ask.

Praise & Worship More

Your tongue simply cannot be spewing out poison if praise and worship is continually on your lips.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor – let's take the necessary steps to ensure that we don't. It is another way that God is expressing His love toward us.

Let's pray.