

**(A GOOD NAME IN THE LAND)****INTRODUCTION**

Short Story...

**Exodus 20:16** "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour."**NOTE****(1) The commandment against bearing false witness guarantees our right to build a good reputation.**

- A good reputation is absolutely essential to life.

**Proverbs 22:1** "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold."

- Anyone who desires to be successful in any endeavor strives diligently to build and protect their good reputation because their continued success in life depends on what people think of them; their ability to earn an income to feed themselves and their families depends on their reputation. (Toyota).
- The eye of this commandment appears to be on the courtroom...particularly perjury...bringing a false witness against our neighbour.

**Exodus 23:1-2, 7** "You shall not spread a false report. You shall not join hands with a wicked man to be a malicious witness. You shall not fall in with the many to do evil, nor shall you bear witness in a lawsuit, siding with the many, so as to pervert justice...Keep far from a false charge, **and do not kill the innocent and righteous**, for I will not acquit the wicked."

- Notice here in the midst of this passage on bearing false witness against our neighbour what God says, "Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent and righteous". Bearing false witness against our neighbour is akin to killing our neighbour! It is an assassination of his good character and a ruining of his life!
- Notice how seriously God tell our courts to deal with a false witness...

**Deuteronomy 19:16-21** "If a malicious witness arises to accuse a person of wrongdoing, then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who are in office in those days. The judges shall inquire diligently, and if the witness is a false witness and has accused his brother falsely, then **you shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother**. So you shall purge the evil from your midst. And the rest shall hear and fear, and shall never again commit any such evil among you. **Your eye shall not pity**. It shall be life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot."

- "You shall do to him as he had meant to do to his brother..." Bringing a false witness against our neighbour was punished (and still should be punished) according to the principle of *lex talionis* (Latin for Law of Retaliation)...That is, the punishment inflicted should correspond in degree to the crime.
- "Your eye shall have no pity..." (a phrase used on only three occasions in relation to the law – murder, attempting to render a man impotent (that is to murder his future offspring), bearing false witness.
- God does not take a breach of this commandment lightly!
- But, this commandment has implications beyond the courtroom:
  - **Slander** (negatively speaking what is not true about your neighbour)
    - 1Peter 2:1** "So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander."
      - Notice here that slander is linked closely with envy. Indeed, one of the primary motives for slander is envy.
      - Slander seeks to steal our neighbours good reputation
  - **Gossip** (involving yourself in matters that do not concern you)
    - 1Timothy 5:13** "Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not."
      - Notice here that motive behind gossip is idleness.
  - **Flattery** (positively speaking what is not true about your neighbour)
    - Romans 16:17-18** "I appeal to you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and create obstacles contrary to the doctrine that you have been taught; avoid them. For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive."
      - Flattery seeks to manipulate your neighbour for personal gain (to gain ones approval or affections)

## **ACTIONS**

### **(a) Build for yourself a good reputation.**

- Building a good reputation for ourselves is a right that is guaranteed by biblical law...if it is a right that God guarantees then it is important...exercise your right to build a good reputation.
- A good reputation is built on a life of integrity and good deeds.
- Building a good reputation is like removing the tarnish from silver...
- *Warning:* Concern for our reputation is not continual psychotic fretting about what people are thinking about us; it is a concern that we present ourselves in such a way that no one can justly malign us.
- We should not be concerned that others think dimly of us for doing what is right, but we should be concerned that others think dimly of us for doing what is wrong.
- A good reputation is essential to life...

### **(b) Never speak untruthfully about your neighbour.**

- This law does not require you to go around polishing your neighbour's tarnished silver...that is your neighbour's responsibility.
- But this law does require that you not sling mud at your neighbour and so taint his reputation.
- Bearing a false witness against your neighbour is akin to murder (you are taking your neighbour's life) and that, God judges it severely.
- In the world Paul says that we are members of each other. If we are to live in unity together it requires a spirit of mutual trust and co-operation. Synergy is the co-operative action between two or more people. Your success in life depends on the success of your neighbour and vice versa.
- In the church we are brother and sisters together, members of one body. How then can we slander our brother and not suffer ourselves?

### **(c) Commit yourself never to tolerate a false witness about your neighbour.**

- No allegation should be supported without evidence...so ask for the evidence.
- BUT FIRST ask if they have approached the person that they are bringing the allegation against.
- On the evidence of two or three witnesses
- While this commandment clearly speaks to lying **about** our neighbour...

## **ONE IMPORTANT AND SOMEWHAT CONTROVERSIAL SIDE NOTE**

### **(2) There is such a thing as evil people who use the truth to do evil deeds.**

- The 9<sup>th</sup> commandment does not prohibit all cases of lying...just lying that harms your neighbour.
- Two biblical examples are Rahab, and the Egyptian Midwives. God declared both Rahab and the Egyptian Midwives righteous because of what they did.
- There are people who do not deserve the truth; people who use the truth to conduct evil do not deserve the truth.
- The overarching principles behind the 10 commandments are (1) Love God – that means love what he stands for, righteousness, justice, and faithfulness. (2) Love your neighbour – that means protecting him from evil people who unjustly desire to harm to them.
- In pre-war Holland this was rarely a concern...for the most part people only concerned themselves with being truthful to their neighbour. But in the space of five short days their nation was defeated by Nazi Germany and they went from a nation that never had to consider the validity of lying to a nation that had to consider the validity of lying on a daily basis. If anyone felt it right to shelter a Jewish person he was often required to lie in order to do it successfully. I have no idea what God has in store for us?
- Now back to one last non-controversial note...

### **(3) The commandment against bearing false witness forbids any other misrepresentation that harms our neighbours.**

- The general tenor of this command is a concern for the life of our neighbour, as such, God forbids any other form of lying, dishonesty or misrepresentation that may be seen as being *"against your neighbour"*
- This commandment gives our neighbour a right to know truth that has personal implications and ramifications on their life (like disclosure when purchasing a house).
- But there is one truth that has implications and ramifications on the life of your neighbour that stands infinitely above all others...that is the truth of the gospel...

- In the last hours of His earthly ministry, Jesus stood before Pilate and said, **(John 18:37)** "...You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world--to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice."
- Jesus states very plainly the reason of his coming, "— to bear witness to the truth", and he did so in two ways, by his words and by his deeds. Everywhere Jesus went his very life bore witness to the truth.
- Some 2000 years ago, those who identified themselves with the Lord Jesus Christ were given a name...they were called "Christians"...which means "Little Christ's", and they were given this name because they represented Jesus to the world by their words and by their deeds.
- The same holds true for us today...we have an obligation to represent Jesus to the world, to represent truth to the world.

## **ACTION**

### **(d) Strive to bear a true witness for your neighbour's good.**

- Sheldon Vanauken said this in his book entitled A Severe Mercy:

*"The best argument for Christianity is Christians: their joy, their certainty, their completeness. But the strongest argument against Christianity is also Christians – when they are somber and joyless, when they are self-righteous and smug in complacent consecrations, when they are narrow and repressive, then Christianity dies a thousand deaths."*

- If we conduct ourselves, or even simply carry ourselves, in ways that makes Christianity seem like a joyless, restless, loveless, lifeless religion, we misrepresent the truth harmfully to our neighbour.
- Matthew 5:14-16** *"You are the light of the world, A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put in under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."*
- Jesus built for himself a good and lasting reputation...a reputation that through the envy of the Jews was slandered, and through the cowardice of Pilate was not defended.
  - What will you do to exalt Christ's good reputation to your neighbour?