

AMERICA'S FAVORITE SIN

EXODUS 20:16

Introduction:

This is the sin that most Americans admit committing on a daily basis. This became obvious when James Patterson and Peter Kim authored the book The Day America Told the Truth. Their book was based on a survey of two thousand Americans about the most intimate aspects of their morality. They have a chapter entitled “American Liars” in which they wrote: “Just about everyone lies—91 percent of us lie regularly. The majority of us find it hard to get through a week without lying. One in five can’t make it through a single day—and we are talking about conscious, premeditated lies. In fact, the way some people talk about trying to do without lies, you’d think that they were smokers trying to get through a day without a cigarette.... We lie to just about everyone, and the better we know someone, the likelier we are to have told them a serious lie.”

Yet we have this ninth commandment that says, “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.” A lie may well be “an ever present help in

the time of need”, but it is still a sin against the Holy God of truth. What do we have to say for ourselves?

I. WHY DO WE COMMIT THIS FAVORITE SIN?

In a helpful discussion of integrity Jim Henry has identified three reasons that we lie. I have added a fourth one.

1. We lie to cover up.

We now know that this why President Bill Clinton lied before a Grand Jury—He was attempting to cover his affair with Miss Lewinsky. It did not work, but he tried. Children often have this as a motive when they lie to their parents. Employees will lie to employers to cover up some failure.

People go to all extremes to cover up the facts, to discredit the evidence, and to shift the blame.

2. We lie to get along.

It seems easier to tell a lie than to face a difficult situation. A friend asks you, “What do you know about this situation?” You know that if you tell them what you know it will involve you in some things you would rather

avoid—so you deny knowing anything. You lied to get along. We sometimes attempt to be peacemakers at all costs—even at the cost of truth.

3. We lie to get ahead.

We may lie to make a sale, to pass a test, or to win a vote. We may falsify a document, squelch the truth, or deceive. We are simply doing what everyone else is doing—and feel alright. But we lie!

4. We lie to hurt.

This is what was in the mind of God when He gave the commandment. We may actually swear to something that we know to be false because we want to hurt someone. We may pass on a false rumor, or gossip, because we want to hurt someone.

The bottom line is that we lie because we are sinners. Our failure to speak the truth indicates that we are more like the Enemy than we are like the God of truth. The lie is more characteristic of Satan than it is of God.

II. HOW DO WE COMMIT THIS FAVORITE SIN?

1. We lie by perjury.

This is what the ninth commandment actually addresses. It is the serious sin of giving a false witness on the witness stand before the judge or the jury.

What we share may be intended to hurt the defendant, or it may be intended to protect the defendant. If it is anything less than the truth, what we know for sure to be the truth, then it is a lie. There is mounting evidence that many Americans knowingly bear false witness on the stand—and thereby undermine the whole system of justice on which our nation depends.

2. We lie by deception.

Calvin Miller tells the following story.

“Many years ago I worked my way through seminary employed in a factory. During final exams one semester, I knew that if I was going to pass a test next day I must study and not go to work. Yet, I didn’t want to lie to my boss about why I wasn’t showing up for work that night. I hit upon this plan. My wife and I were to have fish for dinner. So I laid down on the bed and asked her to bring me the package of frozen fish we were going to eat. Then, as I remained in a prone position on the bed, I threw the fish into the air and caught, returned them to my wife, and told her to call my boss. “Tell him

that I'm flat of my back in bed and had just thrown up my dinner," I said. It worked. I did not have to go to work that night."

While what was said was truthful, it was actually a lie. We often use deceit and thus lie.

3. We lie by omission.

When you are involved in a business transaction, and you fail to make a full disclosure, you lie. On a personal level if a person failed to tell their potential marriage partner that they actually had children from a previous marriage, or had financial responsibility for a child fathered out of wedlock, is this not lying?

4. We lie by insinuation.

We may not actually say that something is true, but we insinuate that it is, when we know it is false, we lie.

5. We lie by spreading rumors.

This may be the most common way of lying. Are you aware of how much of our conversations with others actually are about other people? It is a major part of what we talk about. Have you ever evaluated how much of it is negative? Of the information you pass on about others, how much of it do you know personally be true? How much of it is actually something that

someone passed on to you? You are aware that every time something is told it is very likely that it is altered.

Have you ever played the game where something is whispered in the ear of a person, who then whispers it in the ear of the person sitting beside them, who then passes it on to the next person. You go through the whole group like that and then let the last person share what they heard. Almost invariably it will have very little resemblance to what was shared with the first person. You can lie by passing on something that you think is the truth.

6. We lie by exaggeration.

This is probably a more respectful form of lying. You have probably heard about the pastor who had this problem. It became so embarrassing to the church that the deacons confronted him with the problem. It moved the pastor so deeply that he said to them, “Brothers, I admit that I have in problem. It is a great source of grief to me. In fact, I am sure that I have shed buckets of tears over it.”

Even grandparents who are describing the intelligence, beauty, and achievements of their grandchildren are not exempt.

7. We lie by vain flattery.

It is flattery when you really think the dress is unbecoming on the lady, but you say to her, “You are dressed so beautifully today. I just love that dress on you.”

Dr. Phillip Brooks, the famous Boston Pastor, found a helpful way to avoid flattery. Like most pastors it was his joy to see many newborn babies soon after birth. He was not sure what it was appropriate say on such occasion. Usually newborn babies have plenty of room for improvement in looks. Their heads are often bent out of shape; they have no hair; they are wrinkled. Brooks found it was adequate and acceptable to just say on such an occasion, “That is a baby!” The new parents accepted it as a compliment.

This is not exhaustive list, but it a reminder of how creative we are in breaking the ninth commandment.

III. HOW CAN WE STOP COMMITTING THIS FAVORITE SIN?

There is urgency about learning to obey this commandment. Since the Psalmist declared that we came forth from our mother’s wombs speaking lies, it will obviously have to be learned. It is urgent because all of the byproducts of lying are negative. Lies negatively impact our relationships with others. Lies negatively impact the way that we feel about ourselves.

Lies negatively affect our relationship with God—so much so that we are told that there are no liars in heaven. What can we do?

1. We can learn to walk in the Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Truth. He indwells the life of each believer. It is His ministry to bring us into conformity to the likeness of the Lord Jesus—who bears the name “Truth”. The Holy Spirit is able to change you from the inside so that truth telling becomes a way of life for you. It will not be an immediate and full transformation, but a gradual and partial—but real transformation. As long as we live in this world, we will probably never be completely a person of truth.

Do you remember how committed Jesus was to the truth? When He stood before both the Jewish and Roman officials on trial, he was put on the spot. If He had been willing to say something less than the truth, He might have avoided the Cross. When the Jewish officials asked Him if He was the Son of God, He confessed the truth—He affirmed that He was. When Pilate asked Him if He was the King of the Jews, He admitted that He was. A different answer, something less than the truth, might have brought a different outcome. The Holy Spirit can make us into such persons of truth.

2. We can become accountable.

If this an area in which you fail often, why not make yourself accountable to someone? Your accountability partner or partners might be a prayer partner, just a Christian friend, a business associate, a spiritual leader, or just anyone that you can trust. They will help you by encouraging you in your pursuit of truthful speech, correcting you when they find you in error, praying for you in your struggles. God has someone around you who could help you with this problem.

3. We can fill our hearts with God's Word.

David had it right—"Thy word have I hid in my heart that I might not sin against thee."(Psalm 119:11) "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word." (Psalm 119:9) Having a daily time with the word of God is no quick fix, but it is a sure fix. God will use His word to cleanse away the things that cause you to break the commandment, and it will cultivate any you the desire to be a person of truth and integrity.

Helmut Thielicke, the great German theologian and pastor who kept his integrity through the days of Hitler in Germany said: "The avoidance of one

small fib...may be a stronger confession of faith than a whole ‘Christian philosophy championed in lengthy, forceful discussion.’”

May God make us to be truth speakers and livers.