

You Shall Not Give False Testimony

SCOTT HOEZEE

On the hit TV show, *Star Trek*, the Vulcan science officer, Mr. Spock, was incapable of telling a lie. Even when a little white lie would have helped get himself out of a jam, he told the truth. In American folklore, it is said that George Washington could not tell a lie, and so when his father asked him who chopped down the cherry tree, young George fessed up. Unfortunately, most of us cannot make that claim for ourselves. We are plenty able to lie, and we do from time to time. In this *Groundwork* program, we come to the second to the last of the Ten Commandments, and its bottom line is pretty simple: Don't lie. Stay tuned.

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Darrell, this is program number seven of an eight-part series on the Ten Commandments. We can do ten commandments in eight programs because we did the first three in just one program; so, now we are up to the ninth commandment, and it traditionally is worded this way: You must not bear false witness against your neighbor.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, witnessing brings up kind of a court feel to it...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DARRELL DELANEY

Testimony and witness on the stand, and do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Do not perjure here; tell the truth; but I think it is important of us to understand that bearing witness is not just to be thought about in that setting. It is supposed to be the life that we live as believers. We are supposed to tell the truth; that is who we are.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; I have never been called to testify in court, and I may never testify in court. Most of us don't, some of us do, but most of us don't; but that doesn't mean that this doesn't apply to us. As you just said, this is to be our life. We are to be known as truthful people; and you know, throughout the Bible, we know that God himself is the ultimate truth, and to follow that God, therefore, means to value the truth. So, listen to these words from Psalm 15:

Lord, who may dwell in your sacred tent? Who may live on your holy mountain? ²The one whose walk is blameless, who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from their heart; ³whose tongue utters no slander, who does no wrong to a neighbor, and casts no slur on others.

DARRELL DELANEY

I think it is important that the character of the person is being named in this psalm, and they speak it from that character—they speak the truth, they speak the honesty that is required of a believer—and God wants to be in fellowship with the truth because he is truth...

SCOTT HOEZEE

That's right.

DARRELL DELANEY

And as believers, that is going to be why this bearing false witness against your neighbor is so bad, Scott.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; he speaks the truth from the heart, right? The heart in scripture is the core...that is the core of who you are. So, that character thing you just mentioned, Darrell, is exactly right. You just are a truthful person. You know, in the Sermon on the Mount, which we come back to many times in this Ten Commandment series, because Jesus kind of ticks through the Ten Commandments and kind of expands on them, deepens them, reveals the root of them...Jesus addressed this in Matthew 5:33*:

“Again, you have heard it said to people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.’³⁴ But I tell you, don't swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne;³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King.³⁶ And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black.³⁷ All you need to say is simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.”

DARRELL DELANEY

You know what is interesting about this passage is that James picks it up in his book as well...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Oh, yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

Making sure that...he actually heavily borrowed from the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus being his brother and all, and then the leader in the Church.

When I was a kid, they would say: I swear; I swear to God; I promise; I put this on my mom. The new kids today, they say: On God...I put that on God...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Oh, really.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, they are trying to make sure that you understand that they are telling the truth, because our word...because of so many lies...our word has become very meaningless over the days...even when you are buying a house or whatnot, you have to sign paper after paper after paper to make sure that you are liable for what you wrote, because our word has become cheapened by the lies that we have told; and I think that we need to understand as a believer our yes should be yes and our no should be no.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, don't clutter up your talk, Jesus says, with all these flourishes that are meant to bolster your credibility. Honest to God... Just say yes or just say no. Anything else is double speak...anything else...and he says it comes from the evil one...whoa; that is putting it pretty starkly! You should be known as a believable person. You should be known as somebody who: My word is my bond; and then you mean it. That makes you a reliable person; and frankly, we all like reliable people.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and I think if we could become people of character who yes is yes and no is no, it makes it easier to bring trust and healing in relationships, but I think we have to talk about kind of why people do this...why we found that...okay, so my daughter loves Oreo cookies, and she has Oreo cookie all over her mouth, and we are like: Who ate the cookies, because we are giving her an opportunity to be honest; and she is like: No, it wasn't me, it was my brother; but you've got cookie all over your face. We caught you. Why does she do that? Why do we make excuses and why do we protect and what is going on there with the heart of the person?

SCOTT HOEZEE

We could probably list several reasons why even as you just said, from a young age, you know...who broke the basement window with a baseball? Wasn't me! It was too you! You can still hear the glass shattering in your head. When we are kids, in particular, we don't want to get into trouble...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But it is not that much trouble when we are grown-ups. We don't want to get into trouble. That is one reason we lie. A second reason might be, well, actually, we are embarrassed by something we did, and we really don't want to own up to it, or maybe we hope somebody else will get the blame. That is the baseball breaking the window. Maybe Billy down the street will get blamed for it, even though I did it. So, maybe somebody else will take the fall. We just want to make the world convenient for us, so we bend it to a shape, you know; or, frankly, we benefited from something we did wrong, and we don't want to own up to it because that benefit might get taken away from us if somebody finds out it was premised on a lie; and you know what, Darrell? Through all of those, and we could maybe list a few more, there is one common theme: Selfishness.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and it sounds like when you were naming those things that were going down, down, down into more and more problematic situations, whether it be escaping consequences or shame attached to it; but ever since the fall of humanity, we have been trying to preserve self; we have been trying to protect self; we have been trying to make self look bigger and stronger and better than it should be, higher than it ought to be; and even we have gotten to a place where we deceive ourselves when we really don't even know that we are lying to ourselves; and that has been a situation that has happened a lot.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; I mean, there are in life...thankfully very few people qualify as a pathological liar...but, there are people who just cannot tell the truth even when telling the truth wouldn't even hurt them. They just cannot do it, and the weird thing about...and this is scary, actually...so, the weird thing about it is the more you separate yourself from the truth, the more you actually end up believing your own lies. So, there is a famous example of President Lyndon B. Johnson. He was on like a three-minute bomber run in World War II, on an airplane. Over time, this thing got embellished to like hours and hours of combat, and he managed to finagle a silver cross service, which he wore on his lapel for the rest of his life. Every picture you ever see of Lyndon Johnson, that silver star is on his lapel, and it is just all a lie; but it got to the point where he didn't even know it was a lie anymore. He actually remembered it happening that way, even though it was so far removed from the truth, it was ridiculous. Well, that is an extreme example. Most of us aren't quite that bad off, but it is interesting, Darrell, that you know, we get trapped in the world of our own lies, and eventually, if you tell enough lies, you cannot even keep track of them anymore...that is one of the problems of lying, you have to remember what you said so you are consistent next time. Truth tellers don't have to worry about that; but yes, if we recreate a world for ourselves, we can get trapped in that world, and the truth is not in us.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, in the next segment, we want to expand on this commandment a bit and target the real problem we are having right now in society. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Darrell Delaney, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture as part of a look at the Ten Commandments; and on this particular program, the ninth commandment: You must not lie.

Now Darrell, a few times in this series, we have referenced that classic Reformed confessional document, the Heidelberg Catechism, and the Catechism does a nice job of deepening our understanding of each commandment, and kind of giving us a positive spin on it.

DARRELL DELANEY

What I like about the Heidelberg Catechism is that it was designed to help form people in their faith and help them to understand what we are to know about scripture and how we are to live; and so, you have these Lord's Days they go through, and then you have the section on the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer; and this particular question is about the ninth commandment. It says: What is the aim of the ninth commandment? And the answer: That I never give false testimony against anyone, twist no one's words, not gossip or slander, or join in condemning anyone rashly or without a hearing; rather, in court and everywhere else, I should avoid lying and deceit of every kind. These are the very devices the devil uses, and they will call down on me God's intense wrath.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well Darrell, I don't know about you, but when I hear those words from the Catechism my thoughts turn immediately to just one thing: social media...Facebook, Twitter...as we have all discovered, these media platforms have become a haven of slander and of gossip and of twisting peoples' words.

DARRELL DELANEY

It is really powerful how the Heidelberg Catechism talks about gossip and slander, but we can take it up another notch and call it libel because it is written...it is written in those social media platforms, how things are taken out of context. They will say part of a thing...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DARRELL DELANEY

That makes you look worse, but we won't say the rest of the thing you really meant to say. So, that would actually clear your name and have you justified in what you said; and if you are angry with someone, or if you want to hurt someone, you go after their reputation, their profile; and that has been really painful for people to endure. You have heard about social media bullying, and things like that, where people are saying negative things, and they are making these things up in some cases, and it has really been painful for folks.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In a lighter vein, it reminds me of a scene on the TV show, MASH, when they are trying to motivate somebody to do something and they say: If you don't help us out, we are going to tell everybody your brother is in prison. And the person says: My brother is a warden! And they say: Well, we won't say that part. Right; you tell half a truth, you can make people look really bad; and there is also the other thing that, you know, this actually started a little bit, Darrell, when we all started using e-mail, but it has gotten much more intense with Facebook and Twitter and maybe Instagram. Things we would never dare to say to somebody if we were on the phone with them...

DARRELL DELANEY

Ah, yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Much less if we were sitting down with them in person, somehow, we feel liberated to say in an e-mail or in a Facebook post because it feels less personal; and so, people call each other idiots and slobs and all of kinds of terms, some of which we cannot even say on the radio, much less on a Christian show, and somehow people think it is okay; and it just reminds you...you had mentioned earlier in this program, Darrell, James, who was very concerned...the Apostle James...and indeed, from his letter, many of us know this verse very well:

^{3:5}The tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. ⁶The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself on fire by hell. ⁷All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, ⁸but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil full of deadly poison.

Ooh, James never spars the horses, you know.

DARRELL DELANEY

He always hits right between the eyes; and it is interesting because, I mean, we all think about this when you heard this saying: Sticks and stones may break our bones, but words will never hurt me. Oh, man; that is the biggest lie I have ever heard in my life...

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is not the truth, that is a lie itself.

DARRELL DELANEY

In some cases, you would rather take the stick or the stone, because there are some words that are really powerful, that have been damaging and detrimental, that some people are paying thousands of dollars in therapy to undo the emotional damage and scars from words that they heard, even when they were children. So, that is a lie, and there are still people who are healing right now from words that they were told. They were lies, whether they were lied on, or whether it was just negative in general.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and you know, as pastors, Darrell, we have sometimes...you know, you talk to somebody who is 92 years old. Their own mother has been dead for 30 years, and they can still hear their mother in their head saying that cutting thing they said 42 years ago, and it has never left them. They can never get over what Mom said to me that one time. It haunts them for the rest of their days. That is how much words can cut; and so, when the Catechism associates slander and gossip or lying or harsh rhetoric with this commandment on not lying, there is a good reason for that, because lying at its heart hurts people very, very, very much; but the thing is, for the people who lie a lot, it can kind of become addictive...

DARRELL DELANEY

Intoxicating.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; that is the word I was looking for...intoxicating, because it makes you feel powerful. I will dictate your world, Darrell; I am going to deprive you of the truth, tell you what I want you to believe, and ooh, that gives me a little bit of a buzz, because, you know, that is control.

DARRELL DELANEY

So, then, we see this all the time in marketing and media. We see where there are the smear ads in the campaigns, and we see propaganda in history, where people have been given this false narrative, and it has actually concluded in the masses, where people have this ideology that has been formed in their minds, and

the people who put that lie out there...those lies out there...it gives them a sense of power because they are manipulating a whole bunch of people at once; and this is the essence of the destruction of a lie. It is like a spark, like James is saying, it can turn into this wildfire that can...man, it could hurt a whole society...it could hurt a whole group of people at one time. We have seen it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, no such book exists that I am aware of, but if there were a book called *The Tyrant's Guide for Dummies*, rule number one would be: Eliminate the free press. Eliminate the press, eliminate TV stations where people just speak the truth; you need to control the media...you control the message, you control your people; and indeed, that has ruined whole societies, and usually leads to killing people, too, right? Because truth has a way of getting out there, and people committed to the truth have a way of sticking in there, and sooner or later, tyrants kill those people because there is no other way to stop them. So, some people just fear the truth; and you know, we have seen in recent years, Darrell, the sad spectacle of holocaust deniers...people who deny that the holocaust ever even happened...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is a lie, but they have a stake in people believing that lie, whatever that stake might be. I read an article just recently in the *Atlantic* about how increasingly there are a lot of people, particularly in the southern United States, who are rewriting history, saying the Civil War had nothing to do with slavery...it wasn't about slavery at all, it was about something else. Well, that is not true, but the people telling that lie have a stake in it for some reason. It makes the world more comfortable for them; and again, we said earlier in the program, selfishness is clearly the main motive in lying; so that is all trouble, and it should motivate us to tell the truth and love the truth, and stand up for the truth; but also, positively what can we do? As we close the program, Darrell, we will take that up next.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee. We mentioned the Heidelberg Catechism earlier, Darrell, and its section on the ninth commandment, and here is how that part closes. We didn't read this part before. I should love the truth, speak it candidly and openly acknowledge it; and I should do what I can to guard and advance my neighbor's good name. I should do what I can to guard and advance my neighbor's good name. That is a word for our age, Darrell.

DARRELL DELANEY

Oh, that was really powerful. Guard and advance. So, I have seen so many cases where it has been the opposite of that, where we have tried to do what we could...and it is not a thing we should be proud of...but we have actually unguarded people's names and made them look worse than they actually do, but if we actually ask the question, if we are going to say something about someone, will this actually guard and advance their name? Well, maybe I shouldn't say it then, or maybe I shouldn't write it or post it then; and we have to look carefully and be discerning on that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

You know, you see this on social media, so, I mean, you may disagree with whoever the president of the United States is at any given time. You might disagree on this and that, you might disagree with almost everything. Okay, that is legit. People disagree on issues, that is okay; but that doesn't justify calling the president dirty names or suggesting that he is in charge of a secret organization that does terrible things, or

suggesting that his religious faith is fake. If you don't know those things for sure, and mostly they don't, then you are just dragging the president's name through the mud for your own personal gain. You are not guarding and advancing his good name. Disagree all you want, but you know, to assassinate someone's character and good name, that is something that the ninth commandment also forbids, because it too is, of course, a form of lying.

DARRELL DELANEY

I have seen this happen in situations of race and people of color in general whose names have been denigrated and disrespected over lies, and it is not okay to do that under the guise of the First Amendment and freedom of speech. Freedom of speech doesn't mean you say whatever you want. It means that you say it, but you can say respectfully what you need to say. So, there is a way to disagree, is what I am saying, but you don't have to, because you don't like a person, add to their character in a negative way; but you also have to understand that, as the person who has the character of God, we need to look in our hearts on why we want to do that. So, this is the thing that is going to take us to a soul-searching place, and why we think we need to do that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, what motivated me to say that or write that? And you know, we have touched here and there in this series, Darrell, on the seven deadly sins and how a lot of them... So, in the previous program we talked about stealing, and we said that greed...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Or avarice...but we also said that envy can lead one to steal. Envy can also lead you to lie. One of the things that happens with envy is that there is somebody, usually a near rival—a peer—somebody a lot like you, who does something a little bit better than you do, and you don't like that; and so, you try to knock her down a few pegs. So, Marge is somebody at your church who cooks and bakes way better than you do. Everybody compliments her apple pies at the potluck more than yours. Well, okay; so, then you are tempted to say: Well, yeah, Marge makes excellent apple pies, but I hear she's got major problems with that one daughter of hers, and let me tell you...and then you go on with gossip and rumor to try to take Marge down a few pegs in other peoples' eyes. We get on the rumor mill; we tear down somebody's good name. Somebody told me that, and there you go. We are not guarding or advancing our neighbor's good name anymore.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, it is interesting because if people praise that person, instead of being genuinely happy for Marge, in this situation, we will say: Well, Marge's pies aren't all that. They actually have a few flaws in them or a few lumps in them, or whatever; but we really aren't thinking that we are putting someone in their place, but it actually takes value away from *us* when we do that; and this falsehood is something Paul specifically told us not to do in the book of Ephesians, in Chapter 4, and it says this:

²⁵Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. ²⁹Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. (And then he says:) ³¹Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³²Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, it is so interesting that kindness and compassion are Paul's antidotes to lying and to gossip and to rumor and slander, and dragging people's names through the mud. Just be kind. It is that simple. You know, I write a blog, and a while back, somebody in the commentary section of the blogs, which probably I should learn not to look at, but I do anyway...but anyway, he tried to belittle me and impugn my character, and he accused me of some stuff that was just plainly false, and a few people came to my defense, but a good friend

of mine who commented on that chain, too, and tried to defend me, he later said to me: You know, that person wrote what he did because he forgot the simple advice that my grandmother always gave me: Before you open your mouth to say something, ask yourself: is it true; is it helpful; is it kind? If the answer to any of those questions is no, then keep your mouth shut, don't send that e-mail, don't post that thing on Facebook.

DARRELL DELANEY

And if we did actually do that, I think it would keep us away from the temptation to defame a character or lie on a person, but we also need to remember the fact that this isn't the character that God has called us to live in. In the kingdom of God and the fellowship with one another, it is most important that we remember who we serve, and our God is a God of truth.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; and you know, John said it in his first letter...the first epistle of John...1 John; he said, you know, if you deceive yourself—if you lie—the truth is not in you, and if the truth isn't in you, you cannot be one with Jesus, because he is the truth. Jesus said: I am the way, the truth and the life...

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, when we separate ourselves from the truth, we separate ourselves from Jesus. You know, light cannot have fellowship with the darkness, the falsehoods cannot have fellowship with the truth. That is just how important it actually is.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I think it is important for us to remember, Scott, as we wrap up this segment and this episode, that the truth is not just what we do and what we say. The truth is a person, and his name is Jesus; and if we want to be in fellowship with him, then we need to make sure that we live in truth.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; he is the truth. We have fellowship with him, and now we need to live like we know that, thanks be to God.

Thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Darrell Delaney, and we hope you will join us again next time as we discuss the last of the Ten Commandments: You must not covet.

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DARRELL DELANEY

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***Correction:** The audio of this program misstates the reference for this passage as Matthew 6:33. The correct reference is Matthew 5:33.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/you-shall-not-give-false-testimony>

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