

Sermon preached. at Faith Presbyterian Church, Springfield, Virginia,
on Sunday, November 13, 1990, by the Rev. W. Graham Smith, D.D.

EXODUS 20:16 and PROVERBS 17:7 (Good News Bible)

“You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.”

“Respected people do not tell lies.”

TEN STEPS TO THE GOOD LIFE
(9) HOW TO BE RESPECTED BY OTHERS

Someone has written about nineteen great American lies. Have you heard any of these, or used them yourself?

- “The check is in the mail.”
- “I’ll start my diet tomorrow.”
- “We service what we sell.”
- “One size fits all!” (Oh yeah!)
- “This hurts me more than it hurts you.” (Parents use that one!)
- “I just need five minutes of your time.”
- “Let’s have lunch sometime.”
- “I’m from the Federal Government and I’m here to help you!”

Dr. Leonard Keeler, the inventor of the lie detector, surveyed about 25,000 people in developing that instrument, and he came to the conclusion that people are basically dishonest. I’m dishonest; you’re dishonest. That’s why God gave the Ninth Commandment.

“You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor” (Exodus 20:16); and a verse that goes along with that in the Good News Bible -Proverbs 17:7 — “Respected people do not tell lies.”

Now the fact is, folks, it’s easy to break this commandment. How old were you when you told your first lie? It’s a problem we all have. It’s like the little boy who got caught lying, and his mother set him on her knee and said, “You know, son, liars don’t go to heaven.” He said, “Well, Mommy, have you ever told a lie?” She said, “Yeah.” “Has Daddy ever told a lie?” “Yeah.” “Has Aunt Martha ever told a lie?” “Yeah.” “Have Billy and Bobby ever told lies?” “Yes.” He said, “Well, Mom, I guess the only people who are going to be in Heaven are God and George Washington”!

You see, the basic message of this commandment is — “Tell the truth.” But, in fact, it’s talking about lying about other people. God is saying, “Don’t ruin someone else’s reputation.”

Those of you who were around during World War II will remember that in the defense factories there was a sign that said, “Loose lips sink ships.” And today, loose lips destroy lives. Loose lips can kill. So, God put it in the Ten Commandments, “Watch what you say.”

So today, let’s talk about how to give respect to others, and how to gain respect for ourselves.

1. In order to be respected, you must first show respect for other people. And the Bible warns against three types of false testimony.

a. Gossip. Some people have “a delightful sense of rumor,” don’t they? Now what is gossip? Somebody said, “It’s hearing something you like about somebody you don’t like!” Somebody else said, “It is mouth-to-mouth recitation!” Basically, gossip is simply repeating private information when you are neither part of the problem or part of the solution.

Look at Proverbs 26:20 and 22: “Without wood, a fire goes out; without gossip a quarrel dies down... The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man’s inmost parts.” He’s saying, “We love to eat gossip; oh, it tastes good! We swallow it whole hog.” You see, everybody loves the truth, especially if it’s about somebody else! It’s like the day a pastor preached on gossip, and the closing hymn was, “I love to tell the story”!

Now there are lots of varieties of gossip.

- There’s what you might call false sympathy. It’s when you preface your gossip with “Isn’t it too bad...!?”; or, “It’s so sad...!” “It really breaks my heart...!”; and then you “share.” Actually, what gossip is — it allows us to enjoy somebody else’s sin.

- Then there’s the technique of asking questions, and that often sounds innocent enough, but it’s really just gossip. “Have you heard...?” “Is it true that...?” Somebody said that in the average beauty salon the gossip alone would curl your hair!

- And then there’s Christian gossip. And that is “sharing prayer requests.” “You know, I’m just sharing this with you about So-and—So, so you can pray about it!” Folks, we’d be a lot more spiritual if we’d just confess our own sins rather than somebody else’s. Gossip is a false testimony.

b. Slander. What is “slander”? It simply means making false accusations — trying to discredit someone. Let’s read James 4:11-12: “Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law... There is only one Lawgiver and Judge.” He’s saying — You have no right to judge anyone else. There’s only one Judge, and that’s God, and when you judge, you’re playing God.

Don’t slander, don’t discredit, don’t try to make up stories that hurt people. Now when we slander, we do it in subtle ways. We use little innuendoes. We just don’t come out and blow them away. You know, you can ruin someone’s reputation with one little three—letter word; it’s the word “BUT.” “Oh, he’s a great guy, but...” “She’s very popular, but...” And then you hang

the person out to dry. The Bible says, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue” (Proverbs 18:21).

Can you slander somebody by silence? Sure you can. Someone makes a statement or asks you a question, and you just smile and remain silent. The French say, “You don’t need to slander a person by words; a shrug of the shoulders will do as well.” That says it all - your body language. Have you ever heard someone say this when talking about someone else - they say, “Well, I just better not say anything.” You don’t need to say anything after you’ve said that. The damage has been done. You have put a doubt in their mind about that person. Proverbs 10:10 (Good News Bible) says, “Holding back the truth causes trouble.” Gossip, slander, and then there’s -

c. Flattery. The Bible warns against that kind of false testimony. What is flattery? It is insincere praise. It is when you compliment somebody and you don’t really mean it. Proverbs 26:28 (Living Bible) says, “Flattery is a form of hatred and wounds cruelly.” The word for “flattery” in Hebrew means literally “to make the tongue smooth,” to make it “slick” — and flatterers are real “smoothies”; they are “slick talkers.”

Why do we flatter? Why do we say things to people that we don’t really mean? Proverbs 29:5 says, “Whoever flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his feet.” He’s saying, “When you flatter someone, you’re setting a trap. You’re attempting to manipulate that person.” We flatter people when we think we can get something out of them. Someone has said that man is the only animal that when you pat him on the back, his head swells! Proverbs 26:23 (Good News Bible) says, “Insincere talk that hides what you really think is like a fine glaze on a cheap clay pot.” And the next verse says, “A hypocrite hides his hate behind his own flattering words.” Folks, flattery is wrong.

Now, how do you get respect from others? You get respect from others by being honest -- by not gossiping, by not slandering, by not flattering.

Let’s see what the Bible says.

2. How do you become a more honest person?

a. Examine your own heart. Have a spiritual checkup. Why do we lie? Why are we dishonest? Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is” (what?) “DECEITFUL above all things and desperately wicked.” My heart is deceitful; your heart is deceitful. I’m not OK, and you’re not OK. And because we have deceitful hearts we speak deceitfully. We have a heart problem. Jesus says, “Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matthew 12:34).

Now what is it in our heart that causes us to be dishonest? What motivates us to lie? I think there are a number of things.

(1) Fear is an example - when we’re afraid of what might happen to us if we tell the truth. Do you remember Bob Barker on TV? What was his show called? — “Truth or Consequences.” Folks, truth has consequences. Every time you tell the truth there are

consequences, and when we lie, it is often because we don't have the courage to face the consequences of telling the truth. So, we use an alibi, a cop-out. Adam and Eve were the first to tell a lie in the Garden of Eden, and they did it because of fear -- they were trying to cover up. The crime in "Watergate" was the cover—up, and it was the cover-up that toppled the president and all of his men.

(2) Anger is another cause of dishonesty. When we want to retaliate and get revenge, we just decide to circulate some stories, and spread some rumors, to discredit an enemy.

(3) Pride. When we want to put ourselves in a better light, we prevaricate. When we want to impress people with how great we are, we exaggerate; and don't forget, exaggerating is lying. Resumes can often be the height of creative writing!

(4) Selfishness and Greed. We are dishonest if we can profit by it.

That's why we've got to get to the root of the problem. The beginning of honesty is the confession of dishonesty, and the realization that we need a spiritual heart transplant. We all need a change of heart.

b. Think about honest things. Whatever goes into your mind is going to come out. It's the old statement — "Garbage in; garbage out." Let's read Philippians 14:8: "Whatever is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things." You think about honest things, and it will come out in your life; but if you're always watching TV shows or movies where people are dishonest crooks, that's going to affect your life inevitably, because subconsciously it becomes a model for you.

Multitudes of people read that midnight scab sheet, The National Enquirer." It titillates their baser instincts. If somebody's committing adultery in Hollywood, why do you need to know about that? You want to be honest because people of integrity are respected.

c. Refuse to give or receive gossip if you want to be respected. Proverbs 11:13 (Living Bible) says, "A gossip goes around spreading rumors, while a trustworthy man tries to quiet them." When you're tempted to pass on a rumor, just stop and ask yourself, "Am I willing to sponsor this story by signing my name to it?" You've all seen that TV commercial by the telephone company about "putting it in writing." If you're not willing to put it in writing and sign your name to it, you'd better not share it. People talk about "speaking off the record." Folks, nothing is ever "off the record." If you say it, you're going to get quoted. If you don't want to be quoted, don't say it. And remember, God hears it.

And don't just refuse to utter gossip; refuse to receive it. Don't let somebody go on and on and on in your presence while you just sit sucking it all up like a vacuum cleaner. Challenge it. Ask the person, "Have you checked that out with the source?" It's amazing how many people will back off when you ask for verification of a rumor.

You know, the law says that if you accept stolen goods, you are as guilty as the person who stole them. Now the same thing is true of gossip. When you receive stolen information,

you're as guilty as the person who gossips to you. Noah committed a sin (Genesis 9:18-27). You remember how, after the Ark, he got drunk, and he lay around his tent naked and made a big fool of himself. And his son Ham came into the tent and saw him and then, big blabbermouth that he was, he went out and told his two brothers. Now Noah was forgiven of his sin, but Ham carried a curse upon himself for the rest of his life. God said that talking about someone's sin is even worse than committing it.

And here are two things never to do: (1) never read an anonymous letter; and (2) never react to anonymous critics. It's impossible to evaluate a statement if you don't know where it came from. The context makes all the difference in the world. And do remember - the person who will gossip to you will gossip about you. You can count on it.

d. Keep your promises. Look at Psalm 15:4 and 5: "He who keeps his oath even when it hurts...shall never be shaken." The mark of integrity is that you keep your promises. Are you a person of your word? Proverbs 25:14 (Living Bible) says, "One who doesn't give the gift he promised is like a cloud blowing over a desert without dropping any rain." There are a lot of great talkers in the world. They promise the moon. But the person who is respected is the one who keeps his promises.

e. Make it your goal to be an encourager. Look at Ephesians 4:29: "Do 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." God says, "You share things that build up others, according to their needs." Isn't that a wonderful challenge?!

I would love to establish an M.E.F. here at Faith, and I'd like every member and friend of our fellowship to join. What is an M.E.F.? It is a Mutual Encouragement Fellowship. And there would be only one qualification for you to join — you would have to be willing to say, "I will think before I speak." Here's a little acrostic for you to think about and act upon:

T - Is it the truth? --	If what you say is not the truth, you are a barefaced liar!
H - Will it help? --	Some things are true but not helpful.
I - Is it inspiring? --	Does it encourage or does it discourage?
N - Is it necessary? --	A lot of things we say would be better left unsaid.
K — Is it kind? --	Is it a kind thing to say?

You see, there's always a qualification. The Ninth Commandment says, "Tell the truth; don't be dishonest." But it is not a license to blow people away with the truth. Someone says, "But it was the truth." Just because something is the truth does not give you the right to share it. If your grandfather was a horse thief, would you like me to go around telling everybody? Ephesians 4:15 says, "Speak the truth in love." Love is always the qualifier. The truth is never a license to blow people away.

Jesus always spoke the truth in love. That was His nature. You may say, "Why does God make such a big deal about honesty? What's the big deal about gossip? It's harmless." It is not

harmless. It is a false testimony. God is a God of truth. That's His nature. Jesus said, "I am the Way; I am the Truth." Jesus is totally truth. That means that when I lie, when I'm dishonest, when I gossip, when I slander, when I flatter, I am being the exact opposite of Jesus Christ.

Now, is there any benefit in being honest? There certainly is! Look at Psalm 34:12,13: "If you love life and desire to see many good days, then keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies." What God is saying here is this: "The key to a long and enjoyable life is honesty." Why? Well, for one thing, you can go around with a clear conscience. Abraham Lincoln said, "No man has a good enough memory to be a successful liar." And I like what Mark Twain said, "If you always tell the truth you never have to remember anything!" You see, if you tell someone a lie, you have to backpedal, and cover up, and you're always thinking, "Whom did I tell that to?" And you're going to get caught! The Bible says, "Be sure your sin will find you out" (Numbers 32:23). The Bible says, "Do not be deceived. God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows" (Galatians 6:7). If you gossip, you will be gossiped about. If you lie, you will be lied to. What you sow, you'll reap.

Now folks, I could lie to you; and I could lie to other people; and I could even lie to myself; but I cannot lie to God and get away with it, because He knows everything that's going on.

Let me close by simply reading to you a few verses that tell us what the Bible says about honesty. So just sit back and listen:

Proverbs 10:9 - "The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out."

Proverbs 10:25 — "Disaster strikes like a cyclone and the wicked are whirled away. But the good man has a strong anchor."

Proverbs 11:5 — "Honesty makes a good man's life easier."
(Good News Bible)

Proverbs 12:13 - "Lies will get any man into trouble, but honesty is
(Living Bible) its own defense,"

Proverbs 19:1 — "It is better to be poor and honest than rich and
(Living Bible) dishonest."

What are we saying? We're saying that we live in an age of "truth decay." The fact is -- nobody respects honesty any more. Everybody assumes that you can lie, cheat, do anything you want to do, and get away with it. But God says, "I want My people to be people of absolute integrity, people who say what they mean, and mean what they say."

There's a cost to being honest. It's much easier to lie most of the time. It costs, but it also pays; and the payoff is a clear conscience, and peace of mind, and an unclouded relationship with God.

Now, do you want to be respected by other people? It's simple — develop personal integrity.

AMEN.