

9th Commandment: Truth & Justice

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[0:00] If you have a Bible there in front of you, please do now turn with me to Exodus chapter 23, and we're going to be reading verses 1 to 9. If you're using one of the Blue Church Bibles, that can be found on page 63.

So that's Exodus chapter 23, verses 1 to 9. And that can be found on page 63. 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, nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his lawsuit. If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall bring it back to him. If you see the donkey of the one who hates you lying down under its burden, you shall refrain from leaving him with it. You shall rescue it with him.

You shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in his lawsuit. Keep far from a false charge and do not kill the innocent and righteous, for I will not acquit the wicked.

And you shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the clear-sighted and subverts the cause of those who are in the right. You shall not oppress a sojourner. You know the heart of a sojourner, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt.

[1:36] Amen. This is God's Word. Please do keep this open in front of you. But before we continue, let's come before the Lord together in prayer. Let's pray. Father, you promise that your Word that goes out will not return to you empty, but will accomplish the purpose for which you sent it.

Father, it's in that confidence we now stand. So please, by your Spirit, do a work only you can do. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. In 2015, 20 judges and magistrates were sacked in Ghana after being found guilty of bribery.

Dismissals followed a thorough investigation into allegations of corruption in the judiciary, as a journalist revealed that he had evidence showing judges demanding bribes and sex to influence court cases.

Announcing the sackings, the Chief Justice said she wanted to assure the public that the Judicial Council, that's the regulatory body for judges, would take prompt and resolute action to redeem the image of the judiciary.

Well, a local journalist says, many people feel the judges got off lightly and are demanding that they be prosecuted. I wonder how you feel after hearing something like that.

[3:08] Judges demanding bribes and sex to influence court cases. It's horrific, isn't it? I mean, imagine being one of the people that had suffered at the hands of those corrupt judges.

In the place of power that you look to in your time of need, you find only greed and deception. You find only lies and injustice.

Now, that might be an extreme example. But in varying degrees, as we look around in this broken world, injustice and deception are everywhere, aren't they?

It's often the case that we can resonate with the words of the preacher in Ecclesiastes when he says, I saw unto the sun that in the place of justice and in the place of righteousness, even there was wickedness.

I mean, just turn on the news or scroll through social media for any length of time. And there you have bad news stories after bad news stories proving exactly that.

[4:20] But what about this morning? As we look up into the ultimate log of receipt, as we set our eyes once again to the God of Sinai that's given us these words, what do we see when we look at him?

Well, that's the question I want us to start off by asking this morning. As we jump back into this section of case law, where we see the broad principles of the ninth commandment being fleshed out for us.

You see, when the Lord wrote in stone the command, you shall not bear false witness against your neighbor, it was primarily given to govern legal testimony that a witness would give in a public trial before a jury.

So when the ninth commandment was given, that we famously know as the command not to lie, it was given to uphold justice. You see, from the very beginning, truth and justice have always been intertwined.

And in this section of case law, we see these two united threads of truth and justice being picked up and fleshed out for us in more detail. As the Lord unpacks for us how he wants his people to uphold truth so that justice might be done.

[5:42] But as we seek to learn from how he wanted them to do that, we first must let them show us more of him. Because if you're anything like me, and you come across a list of commands like this in the Bible, you instantly want to hold them up like a mirror and start looking for your own reflection.

And we'll come to that later on. But first, we want to hold up these commands like a mirror and not look for our own reflection, but instead, look for the Lord's.

And as we seek to do that together this morning, I want to set the stage by drawing attention to how these commands are set out. Because you probably noticed that as I read through them, I said, you shall not quite a few times.

And you shall. In other words, don't be like that. Instead, be like this. God's commands often give us the negative and the positive mixed in together.

Like contrasting pictures that we can look between and learn from. And that's exactly what we get here. We get two negative pictures made from the you shall not in verses 1 to 3 and verses 6 to 9.

[6:54] And then sandwiched in between them, we get one positive picture made from the you shalls. So we're simply going to work our way through each of the portraits and see what they preach to us about God.

First, by looking at the positive and then briefly looking at the two negatives. So let's do that by first looking at the you shalls in verses 4 to 5.

Look down with me. Verse 4. If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall bring it back to him. Verse 5. If you see the donkey of the one who hates you lying down under its burden, you shall refrain from leaving him with it.

You shall rescue it with him. Now let's just ask the obvious. What on earth do donkeys have to do with truth and justice? I mean, we'll see later that the two negative pictures of what the people aren't to be like are a false witness and a crooked judge.

And you know, that seems to fit. You want two examples of what it looks like not to be truthful and not to be just. Well, a false witness and a crooked judge make perfect sense, don't they?

[8:08] But you want an example of a person that is truthful and is just. Well, we wouldn't be rushing to imagining a good Samaritan returning his enemy's donkey.

I mean, it just doesn't seem to fit, does it? Well, how about I paint the same picture but just in modern day terms? Okay? We need to use our imagination.

But I want you to imagine that it's the end of class and the bell has just rung. And little Johnny is getting picked up from his dad on his way home from school. Now Johnny didn't have a good day at school because he was teased from a good kid in his class.

Big Ben was the usual culprit that had made fun of Johnny because of his height. And as we're driving home Johnny notices on the side of the road Ben's bike that he knew had just gone missing. It's starting to rain and it's lying in a puddle and Johnny turns round to his dad with a smirk on his face and says Ha! That's Ben's bike.

[9:16] I hope he never finds it and it serves him right for picking on me. Johnny's dad puts his foot on the brake and slowly starts pulling the car towards the side of the road.

So that's Ben's bike is it? Ben, the boy that gets you all upset each time I come to pick you up from school? Yeah, that's the one dad Johnny replies.

Okay son get out of the car and help me lift the bike into the boot. But dad it's raining and it's Ben's bike.

I don't want to help him. He makes fun of me. I know son but does that mean this still isn't the right thing to do? Or isn't the truthful response to seeing Ben's bike on the side of the road? You might have lots of reasons not to like him son but that doesn't change what's right. So take off your belt zip up your jacket and help me lift this bike in the boot and we'll drop it back to him on our way home.

[10:30] Okay, all that said what does that little snapshot tell you about Johnny's dad? It tells you he's an unbiased man that does what's right doesn't it?

You see him teaching his son to act in a certain way revealed his character. What's true and just doesn't change to him external factors don't suddenly justify wrong actions.

And you see as we look up into the ultimate lawgiver's seat this morning as we gaze up to our heavenly father who commands his people to be those who return their enemies donkey what do we see?

we see an unbiased God who always does what's right. A God who's never blinded in any way that leads to excusing what's unfair.

No, he's never like that because his moral compass well it's unchanging. And I think seeing that first is what helps us get a better grasp of the two negative pictures that are painted alongside this one.

[11:43] God is an unbiased God that's why he's nothing like the false witness and the crooked judge in verses 1-3 and 6-9. His word is always accurate.

He doesn't paint one picture when the reality is much different. No, the reality his word paints is always what's true. And the decisions he makes are always what are right.

he never perverts justice or condemns the innocent. You see the God who sits enthroned this morning is unbiased so always always upholds truth and justice.

And that never changes. and we need to be reminded of that don't we this morning? Because different stories can flash on our screens every day that make us doubt that truth.

just think of the earthquake that hit Colombia and Indonesia leaving many dead or displaced. Or maybe you don't have to go looking at the news because every day heartbreaking cases land on your desk day after day.

[12:58] Another terminal illness. Another abused victim. Another disadvantaged child.

And it can be tempting to despair can't it? And the lies of the enemy are always so quick to start whispering in our ears did God really say?

Or is God really just? I mean look at what he's letting happen. But brothers and sisters this is why theology and truth about God isn't meant for just dusty libraries.

No, it's meant for the muck and grit of the day to day. Truth about who God is is the anchor that every one of our souls need to the storms and heartbreaks of this life.

The truth that God only ever says what is true and only ever acts in ways that are just is the truth that will sustain us. It's a truth we need to cling on to when everything else might be telling us otherwise.

[14:11] God is truth. He is justice and that never ever changes. No matter what we see on our screen or what lands on our desk.

So if you're here and the truth that God only ever acts in ways that are just just hits a raw nerve with you this morning. Why did he let that happen?

Why this? Why now? And you see suffering brings many valid questions and many puzzling providences.

But over all the hurt and over all the filth of this broken world flies the banner that reads the judge of all the earth will do what's right.

He will because that's all he ever does. And you know often when we think what we need in our most painful moments is for God to come along and give us the answers to all our questions.

[15:25] I know that's how my mind works. But friends what we need is to be reminded of his character because we couldn't begin to understand how he's weaving this all together but we can begin to understand more of who he is.

We can bend the knee of our hearts to his word and trust what it says to be true. Lord I have so many questions but I believe whatever happens I know this to be true.

the judge of all the earth will do what's right.

God or maybe you hear this morning the brokenness of this world and the brokenness of your own life is making you doubt God's word making you doubt if what it says really is true.

We need to be encouraged he never lies. There's no deceit to find or there's no deceit to be suspicious of when it comes to God for his word it's not full of half truths but absolutes.

[17:03] So when his word says he works all things together for the good for those that love him we can rest all our uncertainties there. When it promises that God will meet all of his children's needs we can believe and expect that's exactly what he'll do.

And when it assures us of the life yet to come in Christ we can rest looking forward to the eternity that he has promised. Now we've lifted up the mirror to see more of God but now it's time to do the far more uncomfortable work of looking at that same mirror and see more of ourselves.

God because while these commands reveal to us an unbiased God they also reveal our biased hearts our biased hearts that often cause us to tear down truth and justice rather than uphold them and I hope we're going to see that together as we just simply walk through again these portraits that are given to us but we're just going to take them in the order that they're given so look down with me to verses 1 and 3 1, 2, 3 sorry 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 nor shall you be partial to a poor man in his lawsuit again what kind of person is being described here well someone who's a false witness and would stand up in a court of law and give a false testimony in order to do harm to the innocent or pervert justice for the guilty now again we might look at that description of a false witness and think we're in the clear since we've never been called up for jury duty but as one commentator healthily points out

God's commands often paint for us the most extreme example that we can look at and learn from this is dishonesty in one of its most crooked forms but as we linger over the image it sheds light into many dark areas of our own hearts I mean even the simple command not to spread a false report confronts us all doesn't it stories spread about others that are full of half truths and inaccurate details and we gobble them up like gummy sweets instead of stopping to ask how do you know that or is that really true you see let that seed grow and this is what it looks like fully grown the false witness in this picture has a long lying tongue don't they but again notice when it comes out verse two when there's a crowd around when they fall in with the many and quickly side with the majority can you see the biased heart being revealed it just takes a crowd and then what's produced well that long lying tongue we followed the crowd even when that led to behavior that was wrong as soon as others are doing it we quickly justify it and our biased hearts produce that long lying tongue that's far too familiar the majority is lie becomes our own and even if that means people get hurt in the process we soothe ourselves with saying

I mean it's just what everyone else did you see our hearts are not only biased when there's a crowd around they can also be biased when we're dealing with the minority you notice that in verse 3 just after saying not to side with the many comes don't be partial to the poor our hearts can go to the opposite end of the spectrum just as quickly we can quickly justify dishonesty or injustice because someone is poor or in less fortunate circumstances I'm in the minority so the same rules don't apply I mean our culture loves to quickly rally around groups of people deemed less fortunate and quickly weaponize that fact it becomes the justification for all sorts of unjust behavior now this isn't saying we shouldn't show understanding or sympathy no not at all it's simply saying that what is right is right and what is wrong is wrong no matter your position or status having a hard upbringing might explain bad behavior but that's different from justifying it you see the difference big

[22:51] Ben might grow up in a more deprived area but that doesn't justify him bullying little Johnny does it you see our biased hearts can go between two extremes can't they and that bias can produce subtle forms or blatant forms of dishonesty in each one of us we sit here today looking in the mirror realizing our heart often produces long lying tongues but that's not all we need to keep looking verse four and five I know that's their property and I know they need it back but I don't like them so I'm just going to pretend I didn't see it or I know they need help right now but they hate my guts and wouldn't help me so I'm just going to leave them struggling on their own what else do biased hearts produce well blind eyes don't they you see

I don't like them or they don't like me becomes our justification for turning a blind eye and not treating someone fairly and I don't know about you but this exposes so many of my past decisions and gut reactions I'm often like little Johnny sitting in the car happy to ride on past seeing Ben's bike sitting there in the ring all the while feeling a sense of vindication because I think if I don't like someone or someone doesn't like me that means what's right and wrong now changes I mean just

think of that colleague you don't get on with or that person that just doesn't seem to like you and how many times have you acted in ways that if it was anyone else you'd feel bad about it but since it's then you think your actions are justified again we don't have to think long before we see that our biased hearts not only produce long lying tongues but they also produce blind eyes and you see this all culminates in our final image given to us in verses 6 and 9 again look down with me and we'll read through you shall not pervert the justice due to your poor in his lawsuit keep far from a false charge and do not kill innocent and righteous for

I will not acquit the wicked and you shall take no bribe for a bribe blinds the clear sighted and subverts the cause of those who are in the right you shall not oppress the sojourner you know the heart of the!

sojourners for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt and finally here we have the portrait of the crooked judge showing where biased hearts ultimately lead and that is to bloody hands stained with innocent blood bloody hands clutching wads of cash now again this is the extreme example but again the root sins that leads to this final portrait are inside each one of us we in many smaller ways have not done what's right because we're in a position where we could just get away with it or we have justified those in the wrong because we prefer their company it's amazing isn't it how the same mirror can reveal God's beautiful reflection one minute and our ugly face the next we hold it up and look at ourselves to find that we often have serpent tongues blind eyes and bloody hands so what on earth are people like us to do knowing that there is an unbiased

God of truth and justice who will by no means acquit the wicked how can a just judge let criminals go free how can a God of truth welcome liars like me and you I mean that's a big question isn't it but the Old Testament points us towards time and time again and the answer is the cross of Christ you see to our great predicament the Bible promises one great solution it promises a great savior that perfectly fulfills what these commands demand being a savior of truth and justice who loves his enemies so much that he laid down his life in their place you see the Lord is a just judge meaning justice must be upheld and we've seen he's not like a crooked judge who will turn a blind eye to our sin we can't bribe him with any good works or anything else no we stand in the heavenly docks deserving nothing but condemnation you see this is why the gospel is such good news!

[28:37] God comes down takes on human flesh he becomes a man and lives the life we should have lived and then stands in another dock and this time it's on earth surrounded by biased Pharisees that spread false reports so that he might be condemned bringing in false witness after false witness to bring false charge after false charge against him surrounded by a biased crowd made up of people that join in with the many so that justice might be perverted crucify him they shouted crucify him but why what evil has he done I have found in him no guilt deserving of death Pilate replies but they shout all the louder crucify and

Pilate the crooked judge attempts to wash his bloody hands clean before handing him over to be killed! you see Jesus died by the hands of false witnesses!

and crooked judges so liars and criminals like you and me could go free because you see as Jesus is unjustly cast out by wicked humanity he is simultaneously stepping forth into the heavenly dock of perfect justice in our place where God the father puts on him all our crimes and rebellions and on that cross he takes the punishment that all of our sins deserve and three days later he rises again declaring to the whole world that ransom has been paid for all those that would trust in him so where do we go after being exposed by the law but we run to Christ our refuge don't we if you're not a believer here today you need to run to

Christ for rescue because there is a court date with your name on it the day that you will stand before the just judge of all the earth without any excuse so please whoever you are run to Christ for the father really does love this world in this way that he sent his one and only son so that whoever whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life but for those of us who do have our trust in Jesus here today and no longer have to fear that day of judgment we run to Christ for renewal for these commands show us what our true friend in heaven is like and we get to run to him and thank him that he is everything we fail to be we get to ask him that by his spirit he would make us gradually more and more into people that speak truthfully and act justly people with less divided hearts that would turn away from falsehood and seek to uphold justice being those known for having honest lips rather than lying tongues those known for treating our enemies fairly rather than treating them out of spite and being those known for just action well just like

Johnny's dad Lord I often have such a divided heart but by your grace make me more like you let's pray that for ourselves now as we close let's pray father we thank you that you are an unbiased God that only says what is true and only acts in ways that are just help us hold on to that truth no matter what surrounds for father if it's not true we have no hope but we praise you that it is and father for those of us who have placed our trust in your son we simply ask you make us gradually more like you make us more truthful in our speech make us more just in our actions we pray and for those who aren't

[34 : 05] Christians here today that are among us lord you know who they are may your law send them running to the savior father be with us now as we seek to sing your praises once again again for your glory and for our good be with us now in Jesus name amen