

ills: In May of 2010, with Ralph and Ruth Shareski as tour guides—I travelled through Eastern Germany and parts of Switzerland. Most of our destinations coincided with places where Martin Luther and other Protestant Reformers had lived, taught, and pastored. But there was one notable exception among the places we visited—we stopped at a concentration camp in Buchenwald.

While Auschwitz functioned as an extermination camp, Buchenwald worked their prisoners to death; of the 250,000 prisoners at Buchenwald during WWII, an estimated 56,000 prisoners died.

When we entered Buchenwald, by way of the front gate, she had us stop and turn around. On the inside of the gate was a phrase that reads, “*Jedem das Seine;*” this sign faced inwards so that it could be seen by the prisoners. When translated, this sign reads: “*Everyone gets what he deserves.*”

While in Buchenwald we saw disturbing images of emaciated prisoners, but we also discovered that this camp held more than prisoners; soldiers lived there, and some of the higher ranking officers had their families with them. We saw images of Nazi officers and their families enjoying a picnic—the kids playing games and riding ponies—while just a few feet away, on the other side of the fence, prisoners were dying.

How does one reconcile the atrocities on one side of the fence with the frivolities on the other?

Dennis Prager writes, “There are many important values in society, but truth is probably the most important... Virtually all the great societal evils... have been based on lies. There were... Nazis... who were compassionate in their personal lives, but all of them told, and most of them believed, some great lie that enabled them to participate in a great evil.”¹

The **great lie** was that Jews were subhuman, or at the very least, inferior to German Aryans. The **great lie** was that the Jews were to blame for Germany’s, and the world’s, problems, and so, to rid the world of the Jews was considered a **great kindness**.

Prager continues, “There is only so much evil that can be done by individual... sociopaths. In order to murder millions, vast numbers of otherwise normal, even decent, people must believe lies. Mass evil is committed not because a vast number of people seek to be cruel, but because they were fed lies that convince them that what is evil is actually good.”²

There are many important and necessary values in order to create a good and flourishing society, but truth just might be the most important among them. Wherever truth is rejected, the potential for shalom diminishes—the potential for trust, for the common good, for safety, and beauty erodes, and humanity is the worse for it.

This morning we come to the 9th Word and I’ve entitled my message, *Telling The Truth About Lying*. Like the previous 8 Words,

¹ Dennis Prager, *The Ten Commandments: Still The Best Moral Code*, 76-77.

² Prager, 77.

Word #9 is rooted in God's own character. And like the previous 8 Words, the prohibition found in Word #9 is meant to protect us from harm and lead us into freedom.

At this time I want to encourage you to open your Bible with me to Exodus 20:16. After I read the 9th Word, I'm going to provide some contextual insight before answering the following three questions:

- (1) *What does the 9th Word reveal about God?*
- (2) *Why do we lie and what are the consequences?*
- (3) *Is there such a thing as a "good" lie?*

Context: Allow me to read Exodus 20:16 before proceeding with the context. "*You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour.*"

We notice right away that Word #9 does not read, "*You shall not lie;*" the context is a formal court hearing where one might be called upon as a witness. Peter Enns writes, "Israelite justice depended on witnesses to a much larger extent than in modern times. Without surveillance cameras or DNA tests, establishing guilt or innocence depended on honest witnesses and their integrity."³

The 9th Word is further explained in Exodus 23:1-3, 7-8. "*Do not spread false reports. Do not help a guilty person by being a malicious witness. 2 "Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd, 3 and do not show favouritism to a poor person in a*

lawsuit....7 Have nothing to do with a false charge and do not put an innocent or honest person to death, for I will not acquit the guilty.

8 "*Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the innocent.*"

God took truth—and the perverting of it—seriously, so much so that if a false witness was exposed during a court proceeding, the witness was subjected to the punishment reserved for the accused.⁴

The 9th Word specifically prohibits lying in a courtroom, but it's hard to imagine a setting in which this Word *doesn't* apply. The rest of Scripture reveals that lying is outside of God's intent for humanity because it goes against the grain of God's own character and action. Let's move on to address the first question:

1. What does the 9th Word reveal about God?

The Scripture reveals God as a Truth-Teller. In 1 Samuel 15:29, the prophet Samuel says the following about God: "*He who is the Glory of Israel **does not lie** or change his mind; for he is not a human being, that he should change his mind.*"

In John 14:6, Jesus says the following about Himself: "*I am the way and **the truth** and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.*" In Revelation 19:11, Jesus is described as the One who is "Faithful and **True**".

³ Peter Enns, *NIV Application Commentary: Exodus*, 423.

⁴ Deuteronomy 19:16-19.

And when Jesus foretold the coming of the Holy Spirit, He described the Spirit as “the Spirit of **Truth**”. The whole blessed Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—are Truth-Tellers. And not only does God not lie, but He calls us to truth-telling, and, is at work among us to transform us into truth-tellers.

In Zephaniah 3:9, 13, God speaks about what will one day be true of us: “***I will purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the Lord and serve him shoulder to shoulder... They will do no wrong; they will tell no lies. A deceitful tongue will not be found in their mouths. They will eat and lie down and no one will make them afraid.***”

Colossians 3:9-10 says, “**9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.**” God is a Truth-Teller and we are to be people of the truth because we’ve been made in His image and likeness.

Let’s now address the second question:

2. Why do we lie and what are the consequences?

Most of us tend to lie for two primary reasons: to **protect**, or, to **punish**.

(a) The instinct towards self-**protection** is very strong and begins when we are very young. When you tell your five year old, “*No cookies before dinner,*” and 10 minutes later see chocolate chips

smear on her face, it’s easy to put two and two together. But when you ask your daughter, “*Did you take a cookie?*,” the chances are very likely that she will tell you a bold-faced lie.

Lying isn’t necessarily a learned behaviour; it’s a self-protection strategy. We lie to protect our reputation, to advance our social status, or to protect ourselves from pain and punishment. At times we lie, not to protect ourselves, but in order to protect the interests of others. Fear and love are powerful motivators—we lie to protect ourselves and others.

(b) Hurt, anger, or feelings of rejection can also fuel our lying; sometimes we lie to protect, at other times we lie to punish others. False witness extends far beyond the bold-faced lie to include a shading of the truth, a half-truth, an exaggeration or an insinuation that casts doubt on the character of another.

When Adam and Eve hid from God in the Garden, they did so out of fear; when the Serpent told Adam and Eve half-truths about God, He did so out of hatred. Throughout the Scriptures, the Serpent is called by many names—the Devil, the Dragon, Satan—and Jesus spoke of him saying, “*there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.*”⁵

The 9th Word provides very little wiggle-room. What if telling the truth has undesirable consequences? What if a little white lie would go a long way towards smoothing things over and bringing about significant benefits to myself and others? *You shall not give false testimony.*

⁵ John 8:44.

J.I. Packer writes, “Lying insults not only your neighbour, whom you may manage to fool, but also God whom you can never fool.”⁶ When we lie, we speak Satan’s language; by contrast, when we speak the truth, we engage in the language of God.

illus: I want you to look for a moment at the picture on the screen behind me. Consider the spider’s web...is it not beautiful? A spider’s web is a work of art—a brilliant architectural design that pleases the eye. But no matter how beautiful the web is, it serves a single purpose—to ensnare and destroy.

It is only a matter of time before lying leads to bondage; when we lie we become trapped in a web of our own making. All too often, a first lie needs to be covered by a second, the second by a third, and the third by a fourth. When I lie—even if you are not aware of the lie—I create distance between us; I can no longer be myself, I must pretend, I must keep up appearances. In these circumstances, I cannot give and receive love, friendship, and trust—a lie eats away at the foundation of relationships. Brothers and sisters, this is an exhausting way to live—we were made for more than this—we were meant to live in the light, not skulk about in the shadows.

Truth-Telling In Our Culture: To this point I’ve been talking about lying in terms of the consequences to personal relationships, *but what are the consequences of Christians publicly speaking the truth in our current culture?*

If we take God’s Word as authoritative, we must conclude that in many different ways, our Western Culture has rejected what God has

deemed “true” in favour of a “lie.” In so many ways the British-American rock band, Fleetwood Mac, captured the spirit of our age with the following lyrics: “*tell me lies, tell me sweet little lies*”. Western Culture looks for and appreciates what could be called a “convenient truth”—something that affirms public opinion, rather than something that reveals the way things really are.

The Christian vision begins with God Himself; He is Transcendent, which is to say, He is higher, greater, and beyond us. God created all things and to Him all things must give an account. Christians believe that God has revealed unchanging truths through the Bible, through the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by the ongoing witness of the Holy Spirit. Through connection with God we come to know and live by these transcendent truths.

Our Western Culture has rejected the Christian notion of transcendence. We’re told there is no God above; neither is there a spiritual dimension to humanity. We are purely material beings—bodies and brains, but no soul. Jonathan Grant writes,

“Modern authenticity encourages us to create our own beliefs and morality, the only rule being that they must resonate with who we feel we *really* are. The worst thing we can do is to conform to some moral code that is imposed on us from outside—by society, our parents, the church or, whoever else...Ultimately, this form of expressive individualism, with each person doing his or her own thing, leads to a soft form of moral relativism: we should not criticize

⁶ J.I. Packer, *The Ten Commandments*, 65.

each other's 'values' because each person's right is to live as they wish. The only sin we cannot tolerate is intolerance."⁷

If there is no God, there's no higher authority, and no universal truth. And thus, as a society, we may decide from time to time to enforce particular boundaries—we may even call them "truths"—but they are merely truths "*for the time being*;" as public opinion changes, so do our "truths".

I've seen these shifts in my own lifetime. It wasn't that long ago that our culture was overwhelmingly against abortion; in my lifetime public opinion has shifted—what was once considered "wrong" is now considered a "right". It wasn't that long ago that our culture was overwhelmingly against assisted suicide; in my lifetime public opinion has shifted—what was once considered "wrong" is now considered a "right". It wasn't that long ago that our culture was overwhelmingly against sex outside of marriage; in our lifetime public opinion has shifted—what was once considered "wrong" is now considered "good" and "necessary" to human fulfillment.

As Christians, what are we to do? Do we speak up or do we remain silent? George Orwell is credited with the following quotation: "In a time of deceit, telling the truth is a revolutionary act." I might go even further—in a time of great madness, the truth itself will be rejected as foolishness. In a time of moral relativity, speaking the truth will be considered "hate-speech".

illus: Martin Niemoller was a prominent German pastor who spoke against the agenda of Nazi party. Niemoller is best remembered for the following quote,

*First they came for the Socialists, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Socialist. Then they came for the Trade
Unionists, and I did not speak out—Because I was not a Trade
Unionist. Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—
Because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me—and there was no
one left to speak for me.*

There is a time to speak the truth, and I believe we live in such a time. Begin where God has planted you, among the people with whom you have influence. And as you speak the truth, do not trade like for like, insult for insult; speak the truth in love—always in love—for the ultimate goal is that our hearers may come to know the love of God. We are not responsible to make anyone believe, but we do have an opportunity to represent God and His truth to a world that desperately needs it.

In the time remaining, lets consider the third and final question:

3. Is there such a thing as a "good" lie?

illus: In the Summer of 1997, I began my first pastoral posting at a church in Calgary. I was 24, single, and living on my own for the first time. The church community was very warm in their welcome and before long I was regularly being invited over for meals. What a gift! Though I knew how to cook, my repertoire was limited, and

⁷ Jonathan Grant, *Divine Sex: A Compelling Vision For Christian Relationships In A Hypersexualized Age*, 30.

being invited into different homes allowed me to fill my stomach, and, get to know people.

But very quickly I began to detect an emerging pattern; I would show up for dinner only to be seated beside a young, single, and *very available*, woman. Sometimes it was a daughter, sometimes a niece, or a friend but it became very uncomfortable and I began to suspect ulterior motives when it came to dinner invitations.

At the same time, as I was hanging out with young adults from the church, I became aware that one of the young women was interested in me. Cheryl made her interests clear, and I made it clear that I wasn't interested—at least I thought I had—but she began to show up at events where she knew I could be found.

One Sunday after church, Curtis and his wife invited me over for lunch—Curtis was our church organist, and while I didn't know him very well, lunch provided the perfect opportunity to get to know him better. Curtis gave me his address and after the second service I pulled up to his house; I walked up his driveway, knocked at the door, and to my surprise, Cheryl was the one who answered. In a church of 1600 people, it takes awhile to discover the family connections—I didn't know that Cheryl was Curtis' daughter.

We sat down for lunch, me seated beside Cheryl—of course—and the rest of the family gathered round; it was incredibly awkward. But the awkwardness of the meal paled in comparison to what came next. After lunch was over, Curtis turned to me and said, “*Mark, why don't you take my daughter out for a walk?*”

At that moment I could have been quite happy for the ground to open up and swallow me, but no escape presented itself. And so, about 5 minutes into our walk I told my first pastoral lie—*Cheryl, I really need to get going, I have another event that I need to attend—you know how it is, always a pastor, duty calls.*

We got back to the house, I jumped in my car and drove out of there like a bat out of hell. Like I said, the self-protection instinct can be very strong—I lied to Cheryl, and it clearly wasn't a “good” lie.

But the question remains: *is there a time to withhold the truth, shade the truth, or tell an outright lie?* We need to be careful how we answer this question, and to be honest, so much depends on who is asking the question, and why. One might ask this general question seeking to justify a specific instance...*if we can justify shading the truth in one arena, then perhaps lying can be justified in my circumstances.*

There are times that wise and loving parents will withhold certain truths from their children until the time they are mature enough to comprehend them. We might suspend telling the truth for a season, for someone else's sake—they may not be able to hear it, at present, without being destroyed.

J.I. Packer writes, “The positive command implicit in the [ninth commandment] is that we should seek our neighbour's good, and speak the truth to him and about him... When the love that seeks his good prompts us to withhold the truth which, if spoken, would bring him harm, the spirit of the ninth commandment is being observed. In such **exceptional** cases... all courses of action have something of evil

in them, and an outright lie...may actually be the best way, the least evil, and the truest expression of love to all the parties involved.”⁸

illus: This is not to say that lying is ever virtuous, but that sadly, at times, it may be the only way to minimize evil. Take Corrie Ten Boom as an example. She is not primarily known for being a liar but liar she was. Corrie and her family hid Jews from the Nazis and lied in order to keep them hidden. In hiding the truth, lives were saved.

Before we jump to excuse a lie, we must ask ourselves: *am I seeking to protect myself and others from real harm, or, am I simply trying to avoid the consequences of my own making?*

Conclusion: As I conclude this morning, I want to return to where I began. There are many important and necessary values in order to create a good and flourishing society, but truth might be the most important among them. Wherever truth is rejected, the potential for shalom diminishes—the potential for trust, for the common good, for safety, and beauty erodes, and humanity is the worse for it. May the Lord Jesus Christ—the One who is Faithful and True—fill us and shape us that we might come to know, love, and speak the truth. Amen.

Worship Response

Celebrating Dave’s 20 years at NSAC: We’ve ended a little earlier this morning by design, and that’s because we have something to celebrate. At this time I want to invite Dave Sattler to come and join me on the stage.

I told Dave a few days ago that I wanted to make an announcement this morning about his upcoming sabbatical—from August 1st until early December, Dave is going to enjoy a season of rest and renewal. I wanted to make this announcement before July hits and many of you begin to travel.

But Dave, I have a confession to make...what I told you wasn’t the whole truth—it was another pastoral lie. The real reason I’ve called on stage wasn’t to make a sabbatical announcement, but too celebrate your 20 years of pastoral ministry here at North Shore Alliance Church. Because your anniversary falls while you will be on sabbatical, I thought we could celebrate early.

And so, with the help of your family and some friends, lets take a brief tour through 20 years of ministry by way of the video screen.

Play slide show.

Ephesians 4:11-13 says, “*Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the **pastors** and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*” The Spirit has given all kinds of gifts to the people of God—gifts of mercy, healing, faith, and teaching—but here Paul indicates that certain people are themselves gifts to God’s people—among others, Paul names **pastors**.

Dave, for 20 years, you have been a gift to North Shore Alliance. You, Joanne, and your family, have committed yourselves to us—for

⁸ Packer, 66.

better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, you have shared in our lives, and, shared your lives with us. There is no greater gift you could have given us than the gift of your authentic self.

Many of us have come to faith because you faithfully spoke of Christ's forgiveness. When we felt alone, your presence reminded us that the Holy Spirit is present. The way you have served us, prayed for us, and loved us has been a sign pointing to the faithful love of God our Father. You have befriended us, disciplined us, and led us.

When I was 19 years old, you became a youth pastor at my church. I remember the day when you told me that you saw gifts of teaching and leadership in me. At first I didn't believe you—I certainly didn't see what you saw—but you are a very hard person to ignore. What you lack in physical stature, you make up for in strength, resolve, and a booming voice. With your help I began to take my first few shaky steps towards preaching and leadership, and the rest, as they say, is history.

Over the course of 20 years, hundreds of us have served on teams that you led; you helped us to see how our lives, and our unique contribution, was a part of God's kingdom. Every time you talk about God's mission, we have been challenged to get in on what God is doing in our City and around the world.

We are not the perfect church, and you are not the perfect pastor, but you have loved us and served us well for 20 years. And so today, we simply want to say "thank you." In honour of all that you are, and all that you have given, we want to present you a gift. We commissioned one of your good friends, Caroline Chao, to paint a picture that

captures the beauty of God's creation—whenever you look at it, I trust you will remember that you and your family are dearly loved.

Prayer (invite people to stand and hold out their hands)