Section: Commands (Law)

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**TEACHING NOTES**

**Q53. Why does God give the ninth commandment: You shall not give**

**false testimony against your neighbor?**

So we will always tell the truth and not speak evil of others.

**Exodus 20:16** “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”

**1 Corinthians 13:6** (NIV1984) Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

**Leviticus 19:11** (NIV1984) “’... Do not lie. Do not deceive one another.’”

**Zechariah 8:16** (NIV1984) “These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts”

Intro:

The 9th commandment prohibits us from using our words to speak falsely to or about our neighbor. Because we know from scripture that the climax and point of the law is love, that is - that the reason we don’t lie against our neighbor is because we are called to love our neighbor. So, implied in the commandment is that we are to speak truth for the good of our neighbor. It’s not just a prohibition against lying but a mandate that we speak the truth in love.

The other commandments in the 2nd table of the law (the portion that governs how we love our neighbor) regulate our thoughts and actions. This commandment specifically regulates our speech and it is meant to regulate everything we would say. It regulates ALL of our speech. Ultimately, this commandment is focused on godly truth telling—we are called to always speak words of truth *in a righteous and godly way*. In a way that is in accord with the truthfulness of God.

The Bible begins by telling us that God spoke the world into creation. He communicated it into existence through speech. In the gospel of John, God we are told that the incarnation of Christ is the Word being made flesh…. Words matter….. Our speech matters.

God is a talking God, and we were created to be His image bearers. We are to reflect His glory not only in how we are seen, but in how we are heard.

Because of the fall, our speech is one of the most damning ways that sin is manifested.

Prov. 18:21 "death and life are in the power of the tongue"

James 3:6 And the tongue is a fire, a world of unrighteousness. The tongue is set among our members, staining the whole body, setting on fire the entire course of life, and set on fire by hell.

That is a harsh indictment of the tongue’s capacity for evil.

Romans 3, starting in verse 10

As it is written:

"None is righteous, no, not one;

11 no one understands;

no one seeks for God.

12 All have turned aside; together they have become worthless;

no one does good,

not even one."

But look at the verses used to drive home the point:

13 "Their throat is an open grave;

they use their tongues to deceive."

"The venom of asps is under their lips."

14 "Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness."

Their unrighteousness is revealed by the words they speak. It is the nature of sinners to abuse the power of the tongue. We must recognize that our battle against sin is going to be waged in a large part in regards to how we speak.

The damage we can do with our tongues is incredibly destructive. We all know how much more lasting and painful cruel words are than sticks and stones.

**Luke 6:45** The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

Our speech reveals our treasure – it reveals who we are. If Christ is our treasure it will be reflected through words that speak the truth from a heart of love. If our treasure is our own self interest that will also be reflected in words that are spoken from a heart of pride, selfishness, rivalry, bitterness, dissention, malice, envy, and strife.

Isaiah 63:8 For [God] said, “Surely they are My people, children that will not lie” (KJV)

And Jesus makes it clear that lying makes us most like the devil. He says to the Pharisees who refused to believe in Him:

John 8:44 You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Our speech reveals who we are. If God’s Spirit lives in us then it should be reflected clearly in our speech. This truth should humble us and be a powerful motivation for us to be growing in Christ so that our speech will be more in line with His Word.

Let’s Pray

Exodus 20:16 “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” As we’ve already stated in previous lessons, the moral law is based on the nature and character of God. It reveals His character to us. So the primary reason we are not to lie is because it is contrary to the nature and character of God.

Titus 1:2 says “in hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised before times eternal”

And Hebrews 6:18a “so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie,”

It is impossible for God to lie because it would be outside of His character and nature.

Jesus said in: John 14:6 "I am the way, and the truth, and the life.”

So when we say that God cannot lie because it’s contrary to His nature, we mean so much more than just that he always tells the truth. HE IS TRUTH. We are talking about who He is in His being. Truth is truth and if truth could lie it would not be truth. If God could lie He would not be God because God is truth.

This is important for us to understand. There is NO truth apart from God. Truth is not a thing that we can possess outside of God. That does not mean that unbelievers cannot tell the truth. They can and they do. But an unbeliever’s ability to recognize the difference between the truth and a lie, and their ability to tell the truth in certain situations, is a manifestation of God’s common grace to creation. Through God’s common grace to all men,(causing the sun to rise, etc)… unbelievers benefit from the goodness of truth whether they ascribe it to God or not, just as they benefit from the air they breathe, whether they acknowledge or reject that it is from God. But, having the capacity to know the difference between basic truth and lies is much different than actually knowing ultimate truth, the God of truth.

When we talk about the idea of truth from a secular worldview, that is, a worldview that proceeds from a false understanding of reality (or truth) since it is apart from true faith in God, we know that any truth found therein is radically incomplete.

It’s no different from the way Satan and his demons are able to recognize and affirm true statements, even true statements about God.

**Luke 4:41** And demons also came out of many, crying, "You are the Son of God!" But [Jesus] rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew that he was the Christ.

It’s one thing to believe the truth that there is a God and even that Jesus is God, but actually embracing the truth means embracing Christ - embracing the fullness of who He is, believing ALL the truth of who Jesus is and believing ALL of His words.

The truth of scripture is not a bunch of individual words and verses that each contain their own unique truth. Not that each word is not true on its own, but they only exist as part of the revealed truth contained in the whole of scripture. They cannot be understood to have their own truth that stands apart from the rest of scripture. Every single word IS true, but it must be understood in light of the entire revelation.

So even when Satan quoted the true words of Scripture when tempting Jesus in the wilderness…he was lying, because he was speaking them apart from the Truth. He was putting them in a context that gave them a different meaning than what they were intended by God. Jesus revealed Satan’s manipulation of God’s word by reconciling it to the whole of scripture.

**Anytime a true statement is interpreted or understood to have meaning apart from God, it is no longer meeting the biblical definition of truth.** The only true standard of truth is the Word of God.

John 17:17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

When we look at what God’s word says about truth, we begin to see that truth is much more than what we think of as the opposite of a lie. **Truth is not just a statement of literal facts. We see that truth is from God, that the Word of God itself IS truth, that Jesus Himself is THE truth.**

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We’ll come back to some application points for speaking the truth but let’s start by looking closer at some of the prohibitions drawn from the 9th commandment.

I’ve identified 4 of them that I want to expand on.

1. Bearing false testimony
2. Doing damage to our neighbors good name
3. Speaking carelessly
4. Remaining Silent When We Should Speak

**1. Bearing False Testimony**

The most direct and severe way to violate this commandment is by maliciously telling lies to others about your neighbor or by maliciously lying to your neighbor.

But also includes dishonesty in general.

Ezekial 22:13 "Behold, I strike my hand at the dishonest gain that you have made, and at the blood that has been in your midst.”

Proverbs 3:32 for the devious person is an abomination to the Lord, but the upright are in his confidence.

Proverbs 12:22 Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord,

but those who act faithfully are his delight.

Proverbs 20:10 Unequal weights and unequal measures

are both alike an abomination to the Lord.

Devious gain, deception, and lying lips are an abomination to the Lord. Dishonest gain is ALWAYS self-centered and a denial of God’s rightful place of supremacy in our lives. Satan is the father of lies, and unrepentant liars are identifying themselves with Satan.

Remember what I said in the opening, ultimately, this commandment is focused on godly truth telling—we are called to always speak words of truth *in a righteous and godly way*.

The commandment specifically says, “do not give false testimony against your neighbor.” That could be read “do not give or do not deliver lies that work against the good of your neighbor.”

It seems that it has become common place to think of companies, corporations, or govt. agencies as entities that are completely isolated from any real human connection. In other words, there is a justification that lying to the government, an insurance company, or the bank is not lying against my neighbor (even though we call that “sticking it to the man”). We need to remember that dishonest gain is dishonest gain. Besides that, any harm we do to a group of persons is realized by the individuals who make up that group. We cannot justify one dollar gained through dishonesty to a bank with a million members and 100 billion dollars in assets.

Proverbs 20:10 Unequal weights and unequal measures

are both alike an abomination to the Lord.

It has nothing to do with size of the ratio, it is about the dishonest gain of the one guilty of lying.

Proverbs 12:22 Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord,

but those who act faithfully are his delight.

We want to delight the Lord by acting faithfully and honestly in all things.

Now I’m going to raise the stakes even higher. If we are concerned with not harming our neighbor through lies, then we must not give them lies that can harm them. When we tell our neighbor that they should listen to or trust someone who we know is a liar, we are just as guilty as if we had lied to them ourselves.

It confounds me when Christians will promote false teachers because of some true things they have heard them speak. Church! Listen to me, a liar is a liar and a false teacher is a false teacher. It doesn’t matter what their motives might be or how much truth is mixed in with the lie.

I’m not saying that we are responsible for any lie or falsehood ever spoken by someone we have approved of. What I am saying is that when we know that someone is teaching a false gospel, that their message does not accord with sound doctrine, but we like their charisma or their ability to make the bible relevant to me in the ways that I discern to be true, I am opening the gate of the sheep pen to let the wolf in.

If you have been guilty of promoting the “good things” that false teachers are preaching, repent! Don’t subject your neighbor to a message that could end up deceiving them to wander from the truth.

**Matthew 16:6** Jesus said to them, "Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

Jesus was warning His disciples that it only takes a little bit of falsehood to mix with the truth and it becomes adulterated and corrupted.

Now there are some people out there who have appointed themselves as the official watchdogs of what they call sound doctrine and they listen to everything and everyone with skepticism. To them, almost no one is considered trustworthy.

Listen, we are called to exercise discernment and avoid false teachers, but we are called to do that with wisdom and grace. We are not to assume the worst of someone’s entire doctrine over one sentence that appears to be unorthodox. We should be quick to give the benefit of the doubt to someone who has a history of being trustworthy. We should exercise caution when there is concern but be very slow to condemn a person as a false teacher until we have thoroughly vetted all of the evidence.

If we falsely label someone as a false teacher we are right back to being guilty of violating the 9th commandment.

Let me just say, if you have questions or concerns about teachers you are listening to or reading, all you have to do is ask. Seek the wisdom and discernment of the shepherds God has called to protect you. Your elders love you and we want you to be growing and benefitting from the gifted teachers God has given the church. There are enough trustworthy and godly teachers out there that you don’t need to waste time sifting truth from false or even questionable teachers.

**2. Doing Damage to Our Neighbors Good Name**

Damaging a person’s character does not necessarily require lying. Saying something true about someone that is unnecessary to say can be just as deliberately damaging to their character.

The requirement upon us not to do damage to someone’s good name or character is not dependent upon the actual content of their character. They don’t actually have to have a good name or be known for their good character for us to be in violation of this command. The good name that all people possess is that they are created in the image of God. What we’re really talking about is gossip and slander. Gossip is generally defined as excessive or harmful talk about others – whispering secrets that have no redeeming quality. Their sole purpose is to entice and entertain at the expense of someone else. More often than not it’s not so much lies that are being told, but true things that are being repeated in a way that is malicious and unconcerned with the level of truth or at how it might affect the one being talked about.

We are called to always speak words of truth *in a righteous and godly way*. Speaking things (even truthful things) at the wrong time or to the wrong people or the wrong reason is gossip. Let us speak words of truth *in a righteous and godly way*.

When the news reports that a man has been accused of some terrible crime before the courts have weighed the evidence, and that news is repeated from person to person, there is permanent damage done to that man’s character whether he is guilty or innocent. It may be true in the sense that he was accused, but the repeated broadcasting of the story fuels the fire of people’s desire for shock and scandal- rendering him guilty before he has even had a chance to speak.

Proverbs 16:28 A perverse person stirs up conflict, and a **gossip** separates close friends. NIV

Gossip is incredibly damaging and it cannot be undone by stopping or recanting. Once the words are out there is no stopping the damage they’ve done and will do.

There’s nothing innocent about gossip. Scripture equates a person who gossips with a person who is perverse. With our culture of social media and instant access to the worldwide web it is much easier for us to participate in gossip. We need to be very careful about what we post on our social media—or what we believe without proper evidence. Just because it’s already blasted all over the internet doesn’t make it true nor give us license to participate in gossip. Stirring up conflict is perverse!

Christian! It is possible to participate in our political system without participating in gossip and slander. We are called to be salt and light. We are to be holy and set apart from the world. We should not be participating in world events on the world’s terms. Our speech should stand out in stark contrast to the world. Think about how different our world might look if just those who call themselves Christians stopped to think about whether or not their words were promoting the welfare of their neighbor or doing them unnecessary harm?

Proverbs 26:20 Without wood a fire goes out; without a **gossip** a quarrel dies down. NIV

If we truly have our neighbor’s best interest in mind, we will do everything in our power to protect their good name. That means that if telling others of their flaws or failures does not promote the welfare or safety of them or others, then I don’t need to share it.

There may be instances where exposing someone else’s sin is the loving thing to do for the sake of others who may be a potential victim of their sin but we should always be on guard against the temptation to discredit someone for our own personal satisfaction.

1 Cor. 13:6-7 [Love] does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

The gospel of Grace helps us to see our neighbor in a different light. We do not need to “just be honest” about their character flaws in a way that lacks any hope for their redemption. Grace motivates us to hope for what God can do.

Is your speech filled with hope? When you speak about the President (any president), is there hope and love in your words? When you are making comments about people in the news or on TV, are your words giving grace to those who hear? Are you participating in the political rhetoric of our day where anything goes because the “facts” are on our side? Are you thinking about the affect your words may have in regard to the person you are speaking about - or the person you’re speaking to?

Do you speak carelessly?

**3. Speaking Carelessly**

Matthew 12: 36, 37 " I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, 37 for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

This is serious! We are not going to get away with saying “I didn’t mean anything by it” or “God knows my heart.” We WILL be held accountable for every careless word we speak. It doesn’t matter if it is not intentionally hurtful, we will be held accountable for it just the same. It makes me tremble to say it out loud.

Every careless word. Wow! I don’t know about you but that challenges me. Do you remember everything you said yesterday?... the day before?...this morning?...I don’t

…where was I?

The KJV uses the phrase “every idle word spoken.”

When I think of the word idle, I.D.L.E. - not the false god, I think of an engine just sitting there not really doing anything. It’s running but it’s not really serving any purpose. It’s not propelling you where you want to go, it’s just running to stay warmed up.

Idle words are like words that just come out of our mouths without really having any intentional or helpful purpose – words that really have no value. It’s the kind of speaking where the words are coming out of our mouths but they are ineffective for any good purpose. It is worthless talk.

With the invention of social media, more and more people are buying into the belief that their opinion is important and needs to be heard by the rest of the world (or at least their online “friends”). I don’t mean to be picking on anyone who makes posts on social media. I’m just trying to make the point that social media has exponentially expanded the potential influence of every careless word we speak.

If we are held accountable for the damage done by every careless word we speak, then social media has exponentially expanded our portion to be held accountable to.

If we are to be judged for every idle or careless word we speak, we should think very carefully before we speak. Sometimes the prudent thing is not to speak at all.

**Proverbs 10:19** When words are many, transgression is not lacking,

but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.

**Proverbs 29:20** Do you see a man who is hasty in his words?

There is more hope for a fool than for him.

**Proverbs 17:27** Whoever restrains his words has knowledge,

and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.

And my favorite, one that has given me much hope over the years and continues to be a helpful reminder:

**Proverbs 17:28** Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise;

when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent.

The best advice I ever got from my dad was derived from the wisdom of this proverb. He would say “It’s better to remain silent and be thought a fool, then to open your mouth and remove all doubt.”

But of course, the wisdom being taught here is obviously not that we should ***never*** speak, or else we would not have the Proverb; right? Wisdom is communicated through words that are spoken. It’s not that we should never speak at all because that would also be unloving.

James summarizes what is being taught here in:

James 1:19 Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger;

There is wisdom in holding our tongue until we have taken the time to listen carefully, and give adequate thought to our words before saying something that we will wish we hadn’t.

Ecclesiastes 5:2 Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few.

I love the way this passage humbles us and causes us to think about what we are saying. Have you ever shared your opinion with friends about a subject you really know very little about? And have you been in a situation where that same subject matter is being discussed with an expert present? The fear of being corrected and made to look like a fool for saying something ignorant is much more real and intimidating when the person you are speaking in front of cannot be baffled by your babbling.

Think about it though. God is the expert on EVERYTHING! He wrote the script. Who are we to stand in front of Him and act as if our words have any value at all. The only way we can speak with confidence in front of Him is when we are speaking according to HIS word!

When our speech is being regulated by His word, in the knowledge of His word, and in obedience to His word, we can speak with confidence and joy.

**4. Remaining Silent When We Should Speak**

1 Corinthians 13:6 (NIV1984) Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.

God has created us in His image and we have been given the incredible honor and joy of being able to use our tongues to accomplish His will on earth. Death AND life are in the power of the tongue. To turn these Proverbs back on ourselves to where we see an easy way to avoid some bad consequences for ourselves by not speaking at all, is to miss the gospel. God has saved us for His purpose, and that is to tell others about the truth of Him and His glorious grace.

It is unloving to withhold the truth from our neighbor. Just as it would be unloving to remain silent as we watch a young child reach out their hand for a hot flame, it is unloving to remain silent as we watch our neighbor embrace a lie that is leading them to pain and misery, and could ultimately lead to their eternal damnation.

James 5:19-20 My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, 20 let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Speaking the truth in a righteous and godly way prohibits us from remaining silent when we have been given the words of life.

So let’s turn from the prohibitions now to focus on some positive application of how we are to speak truth in a righteous and godly way.

**1. We Must Speak the Truth in love**

**Zechariah 8:16** (NIV) These are the things you are to do: Speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts.

In chapter 4 of Ephesians Paul talks about putting off the old self and its sinful desires to put on the new self, created in the likeness of Christ. In verse 25 he says:

Eph. 4:25 Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.

A liar is no longer a liar, not just when he stops his mouth from speaking lies, but when He also begins speaking truth with his neighbor.

As adopted and saved image bearers of God, we are required to represent God by being truthful. This means speaking truth in a way that accords with His Word. It goes beyond just being factually accurate about things, it means using our tongues to promote the living word, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

**There is no higher way that we can love our neighbor with our words, than to speak the words of true life**.

**2. We Must Speak Gospel Truth**

Colossians 1:5b Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel,

As Christians who have a responsibility to be truthful to our neighbor, we are very much at war with our flesh which is conditioned to think of truth in a very incomplete way. We are very good at making true statements that leave out the truth of the gospel. Too often we are guilty of speaking the truth of the law whether it be the moral law or the laws of creation, but falling short of using our words to show how these truths lead us to the truth found only in the gospel.

As a parent I would be guilty of this by emphasizing to my kids that their disobedience to me was a violation of the 5th commandment. Not that I even used God’s commandment in my instruction – it was more likely to be focused on the pragmatic reality that if they disobeyed me there would be temporal consequences. When I was disciplining my kids well, I would always take those opportunities to point out how their disobedience was a reminder of their sin and their need for a savior. It’s so easy to believe the lie that our kids have heard that enough and that we don’t need to keep repeating it. If that’s really true then why do we take the time to repeat everything else we say to them?

Our conviction of truth will be displayed in how often we take the opportunity to show that it is true.

Another way this can be tested is by how we give counsel to others. When people are sharing their hurts and struggles with us, are we pointing them to the truth of the gospel or are we more concerned with giving them “practical” advice?

It’s good and right to give pragmatic application and advice in how we help people in their struggles, but we should NEVER think that their problems are beyond the gospel. We have to be very careful not to adopt a mindset that says “yeah, the gospel is great – but what they really need is some practical advice” as if the gospel isn’t practical.

The reason there is pain and suffering in this world is because of sin, and the only real answer to sin is found in the gospel.

It continues to be more and more natural for me to point others to gospel truth when I am pointing myself to gospel truth, and when others are pointing me to gospel truth.

***Every*** victory over sin that I have ever experienced has come from a clearer and more prominent view of the gospel.

Some of the hardest people in the world to share the gospel with are the people who have found a content rhythm to life, by applying and benefitting from the practice of biblical principles and truths, to the degree that they feel no need for a savior. Knowing the true words of scripture is not the same as knowing the One who is the truth.

So for instance, when we have opportunity to speak to our unsaved neighbor about their struggle with pornography we want to be gospel-centered in our speech.

That means that we ourselves are first approaching the conversation with grace based on our own faith and understanding of the gospel. And then, we are communicating gospel truth, not saddling them with a list of religious actions they should try and perform to fix their problem, but showing them how the truth of the gospel is a much more satisfying and lasting joy than the temporary high they get from the false idol of porn.

Gospel-centered speaking means keeping the gospel our central focus. Getting our neighbor to trade in his addiction to porn to be a better father, a better spouse, or even to become a counselor who helps others to become better fathers and spouses, may be a good thing for human flourishing in this life. But if that is where it ends, all we have really done is given our neighbor a different idol to serve. Being a good husband or a good father is a good thing, but if the motivation for it is rooted in a desire to find a new identity apart from Christ, it just becomes another idol that is keeping them from obeying the gospel.

This is true for our saved neighbor as well. We don’t want to give a message that we are saved by grace but now we have to do OUR part. We need to be constantly speaking the truth of the gospel. We should never think that there is a more relevant or effective truth.

Again, it’s not a bad thing to give practical help to our neighbor in specific struggles they may be dealing with. But we need to be careful not to fall into the trap of believing that the gospel is not practical or that it might do more harm than good. We should not think that we can build credibility with our neighbor by telling them things that we think will be less offensive than the true gospel, hoping that there will come a day when they will finally ask us to tell them what we have been holding back. Loving our neighbor requires that we risk offending them. That is the loving thing to do.

Please turn with me now to Ephesians 4, starting in verse 11. We will read through verse 16.

Eph. 4:11-16 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

So, God has given the gift of men who expound the word of God. They present and explain it in great detail with their mouths. They do this for the sake of building up the body of Christ unto mature manhood, so we will not be deceived by lies, by doctrines that do not contain the truth in its fullness. Why do deceptions work? It’s because they always contain a measure of truth, in some cases even a majority of truth.

Our growth in Christ happens through this loving truth speaking, through the proclamation of gospel truth. Not by proclaiming half-truths that fall short of the truth. We are not changing our message from one day to the next. We are not being manipulated by the waves of culture that beat against us every day, with all kinds of deceptions that try to adulterate the truth of the gospel with lies and half-truths.

Encouraging our unsaved neighbors to seek peace and joy through obedience to the truth of biblical principles regarding marriage, money, relationships, work, health, government, etc., etc…can be a very unloving thing to do if it is not done in the context of the gospel.

There are preachers who will go on and on about the immorality of sin and proclaim true statements regarding God’s moral law. But as it says in Galatians 3:11 “no one is justified before God by the law”. The law is true but it’s not loving to speak law without the gospel. The purpose of the law is to show us our need for the gospel. Showing someone the hopelessness of their sinful condition without pointing them to the truth of Christ and His salvation for all who trust in Him is simply cruel. It leaves a person with only two options. They can either try harder – work to try and make up for their sin, try to earn their way into God’s favor. Or, they can accept the fact that they are doomed to an eternity in hell and that this life is the only chance they will ever have at being happy – so the conclusion would be to eat, drink, and be merry. They decide that since they are already condemned for their sin, they might as well indulge in more sin. Without the gospel, the truth of the law is a burdensome, condemning weight.

Then there are other preachers who have decided in their own sinful, worldly wisdom (which is really just foolishness), that people don’t need the truth of the law. They are convinced that they can speak lovingly by avoiding any speech that calls attention to man’s sinful violation of God’s law, by emphasizing only that God is love and that He sent His Son to die for sinners. They see the truth of the law and its condemnation of sinners as unloving so they avoid mentioning it, or even deny that it has any application to those who are in Christ.

We cannot speak gospel truth without speaking about the truth of the law.

**3. We Must Promote our Neighbor’s Welfare**

Eph. 4:29 Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

Proverbs 12:18 There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts,

but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

Proverbs 16:24 Gracious words are like a honeycomb,

sweetness to the soul and health to the body.

Our words have the power to build up and to heal. We should speak words that are good, and sweet, and full of grace. Put off corrupting talk, words that tear down, and put on words of grace and truth and healing.

**4. We Must Defend our Neighbor’s Good Name**

The requirement imposed in this command includes speaking out to defend our neighbor’s good name. Staying silent when others are speaking evil makes us guilty with the false speakers. If we are listening to gossip and not saying anything to stop it, we are encouraging it to continue.

Even when true things are being said about someone in a genuine effort to help them, we need to make sure that the audience who is listening has the maturity and the relationship to be able to process the information in a way that doesn’t taint their perception of them in a negative way.

**5. We Must Love our Neighbor**

**Love is the fulfillment of the law**. We tell the truth out of love for our neighbor. Love for God being expressed in love for our neighbor is our motive for speaking truthfully to and about our neighbor.

**1 Corinthians 13:1** If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

If our motivation to keep this commandment is not grounded in love, we are not keeping the commandment, even if we are telling the truth and speaking graciously.

We are called to speak the truth in a righteous and godly way, and that is only possible when we are speaking from a heart that is overflowing with the love of God. Let us speak words of truth *in love, because God first loved us*.

**CLOSING**

Praise God for the work He has done in this church to go after the sin of gossip and slander. We have seen Him do great things through the peace-making efforts of many of you. We should all be encouraged by this, and let it be a beautiful reminder for us to continue doing away with slander and malice and gossip.

I really like the put off and put on language. We are to put off lying and gossiping and slandering and put on speaking the truth in love. We are not just abstaining, we are replacing. We are not focusing on the ugliness of what we are ditching, we are focusing on the beauty of who we are becoming in Christ.

Doing this means we need to KNOW the truth. Are you growing in your knowledge of the truth? Are you growing in your ability to share it with others? Keep up the effort, keep digging in. Rightfully handling God’s Word is a weighty endeavor that takes a real commitment to time in the Word.

2 Timothy 2:15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. NASB

I hope you feel the weight of how crucial this is to our Christian walk. Please don’t just say you will work on this. Really seek growth. Make real war with areas of dishonesty and withholding truth. Let your speech reveal who you are.

We have been forgiven and saved by the blood of Christ. We have been adopted as children of the Most High God. We can repent of the sin in our flesh and say with the prophet Isaiah “woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips”, and then by faith, cling to the grace of the Gospel for the power and the motivation to change.

As you break into your groups for discussion, let’s be mindful of our words, even as we are sharing tonight, that we would use our words to edify and build one another up in truth and love.