

“THE TRUTH, THE WHOLE TRUTH AND NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Heidelberg Catechism: Lord’s Day 43

Scripture Texts: Exodus 20:16; 23:1-3

Introduction.

Whatever Became of Truth

I am sure you have noticed how truth is vanishing all around us, from textbooks, from courtrooms, legislative chambers, from the media and social media. It’s even disappearing from the places where you would still expect to find it, like the pulpits in churches all across America.

Truth is in short supply. Our culture is all about image, hype, feelings, experience. Everyone is bowing to the gods of political correctness, tolerance, relativism and opinion.

Today there are no ultimate realities, no absolutes. What is real today is what I create or what I say it is. What is true is true for me. And how dare you suggest I am wrong. What makes you think you are so right? We dismiss whatever we don’t like with “well that’s your interpretation.”

Toxic social media.

This is moral relativism and it fills our schools, universities, public squares, businesses, and social media. Our culture is agnostic when it comes to ultimate truth. It might be willing to say there is such a thing but as soon as you start to try to define it, they push back.

Christianity stands in contradiction to the world and our current culture. God is the God of truth, and He has broken into our world and revealed Himself to us. He has declared the truth, written down the truth, sent His Son to preach and proclaim and live the truth in the flesh and He has sent His Spirit of Truth to lead and guide us all into the truth.

The ninth commandment collides head-on with our culture. It’s a commandment about truth. About telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God. All the time, everywhere, in every situation, about everyone.

The last commandment showed us God’s high regard and respect for our neighbor’s personal, private property. This commandment places shows us God’s high regard for the truth and our neighbors honor and reputation. We must protect both our neighbor’s property and his name.

God loves the truth. He can only speak the truth. God is a truth-telling, promise-keeping, covenant-making God. His word is good. God is a god of fairness, honesty, and integrity.

God delights to see His own character and nature reflected in the character and action of His people. As His children we must love and highly regard the truth as He does.

As the HC says, the ninth commandment is not just for the court room. I hope my sermon title doesn't imply that. Truth touches every aspect of our lives and our world. Without truth there is no trust and without that it's impossible to be in relationship with others. Only by preserving truth can we preserve relationships.

In this morning's sermon on Romans 3:1-8 Paul cast a wide net calling all men liars. The HC casts a wide net as well. Almost every phrase catches us in its net. Every phrase reminds me that I am a man of unclean lips, and we are all a people of unclean lips. We are guilty as charged.

Why does bearing false witness make God's top ten list? Because He hates it.

Proverbs 6:16-19 There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him:

17 haughty eyes, a *lying tongue*, and hands that shed innocent blood,
18 a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil,
19 a *false witness* who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.

As we have seen with the other commands, there is much included behind the simple words. Let me expand on this using several of the lines of admonition in the HC as an outline.

Never give false testimony against anyone.

No speaking that which is false. Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord (Proverbs 12:22). No fraud, deceit, backbiting, evil speech, or vanity. No stirring up suspicions or fabrications.

Have you ever spoken a half truth or bent the truth about someone's character or ideas or words or actions?

Do you know that this includes not lying to ourselves? How many of us do that?

Romans 12:3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

Galatians 6:3 For if anyone thinks he is something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

Twist no one's words.

The false witnesses did this to Jesus. They took His words, saying He was going to tear down the temple and rebuild it in three days, and then twisted them into blasphemy.

Have you ever retold a story and changed it a bit, made yourself look better and someone else less so? Have we ever left out the less than flattering parts about us and our words or actions?

No little white lies, no half-truths, no falsely adorning the truth, no spin artistry. No exaggerations.

This includes putting the worst spin on something or casting it in the worst possible light. Or interpreting things rashly or hastily, especially without any basis in fact.

No concealing the truth, covering up the truth, spinning the truth, using guile, deceit.

No gossip or slander.

This is a big one. This takes several forms. We all know small towns are notorious for this. We all know too much about too many people, things we shouldn't know, or have no need to know.

I wonder how much of what is said at Rustlers, Dutch Treat or Fairway Café would qualify as gossip. Coffee has probably loosened more tongues than alcohol.

Gossip is sharing unnecessary information, hurtful or negative information or information that lacks evidence.

A gossip doesn't know how to keep silent. They prattle on about everything they have heard, passing on reports or rumors having no idea if they are true, and passing on true reports that are not necessary to pass on.

We share prayer requests that uncover and expose other people, family members, friends, church members. Are we expanding the circle of knowledge or keeping it as small as possible?

Do we say things that lead others to think less of or more poorly about a third party?

And don't even listen to gossip.

As Thomas Watson put it, very bluntly, it makes little difference if we carry the devil around in our mouth or in our ear.

Take responsibility for what you hear. Don't give a gossip a platform.

Slander is sharing false information, lies. This includes impugning the motives of others and it includes letting others think critical things we know are false but don't correct.

Like when they called Jesus a drunkard and a sinner. Or said John the Baptist had the devil (Matthew 11:18). Peter and the disciples were accused falsely of being drunk on Pentecost.

When we sin in this way we wound three people at once. The person against whom we speak; the person to whom we speak who now has negative or false views of the other; and our own souls.

Psalm 15:1 O Lord, who shall sojourn in your tent? Who shall dwell on your holy hill?

2 He who walks blamelessly and does what is right and speaks truth in his heart;

3 who does not slander with his tongue and does no evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend.

It is a sin to give a false report and it is a sin to receive a false report. Don't let the devil be on your tongue or in your ear. Stop those who are about to tell you such things.

To slander turns the tongue into a sword. It is an act of violence directed against someone with whom you should be at peace.

Proverbs 25:18 A man who bears false witness against his neighbor is like a club, a sword, and a sharp arrow (cf. 12:17–18).

Don't read gossip columns or pick up tabloid journalism. People magazine is too much gossip. Why on earth do we need to know about all the sins of Hollywood personalities? Since when is it healthy to uncover others sins and failures? Supermarket tabloids are the worst. Don't fill your minds and hearts with gossip and slander. Out of the heart the mouth speaks.

Just as we are to protect marriage, life and property, so we are to protect reputations. Just as we are not to take God's name in vain, so we are not to use our God-like power of speech and reason to take each other's names in vain, to do damage to their reputation and community standing. Remember they are created in the image of God.

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.

I should avoid lying and deceit of every kind

And of course, no lying. Children, wives, husbands, neighbors, church members. No lying.

Lying is Satan's native language. It is what he does all the time.

Why do we lie? Often we lie either to hurt someone else or to protect ourselves. Malice or pride. To tear them down or build ourselves up. Lying is so universal, it's proof of the fall.

A lie, properly speaking, consists of three elements or ingredients:
speaking what is not true;
deliberately doing so;
and doing so with an intent to deceive.

When do we fudge the truth? When have we exaggerated in our favor?

Pastors are great at this, exaggerating how big their church is, or how many hours they study or how big their church budget is, or who they know.

Do farmers exaggerate how many cows they milk or how good production is? Do business men brag how successful their business is or how many employees they have? Do grandmas inflate the successes of their grandchildren?

No quick lies. Do you know what a quick lie is? Its when we are caught not doing what we said we would do so we cover it up by saying we were on the verge of obedience.

"I was going to call you today . . ."

"I had been meaning to tell you . . ."

"I was just going to pay you back . . ."

The reason we tell these is in order to save face, or preserve our pride, or make us feel like we are being better Christians than we actually are.

In some ways this last of the negative statements in HC112 is the biggest net. It captures us all at one time or another.

In a word it means no lying, deception, stretching the truth, prevarication, falsifying, exaggerating, half-truths or misleading silences. Do not lie.

Let's think about how this applies to one very current issue, the whole gender debate and preferred pronouns. People are choosing to identify as someone other than their birth sex. So hes want to be called shes and shes want to be called hes. I met a person in Bellingham on Friday who prefers he/they.

To honor this commandment, we can't lie or tell a lie or promote what is a lie. We have a higher standard. We can call someone something they aren't. We should seek to avoid doing so.

Names are of a different category. Names don't have to imply gender. There are lots of names that can be either male or female. Parents can name their kids after just about anything, planets,

cities, personality traits, Greek gods or grandpa. As Johnny Cash sang, if there is a boy named Sue, call him Sue. But don't refer to him as she or her, as that would be bearing false witness.

Parents.

Parents should be especially vigilant against all lying. This must be disciplined clearly, firmly and with much teaching about truth and the importance of our word. Lying begins at a very early age and must be dealt with at a very early age. Don't think it's cute or let it slide.

Parents must set the example in truthfulness. Keep your promises and do what you say you will do, keep your commitments at all costs. Don't make general promises, or announce vague intentions. Don't utter threats you won't carry out.

Application and conclusion:

I am guilty of breaking this commandment and more times than I know or am aware of. I ask you to help me and any time I cross this line and you are aware of it, stop me and flag it. Or at the very least ask the question, "Is this gossip or malice or slander or idle talk or unloving toward my neighbor?" Help me as your brother to live according to this commandment in a way that glorifies the Father and builds up and edifies my neighbor. Let's help each other.

Each of these commandments is a call to repentance and to seeking after forgiveness from God and from our neighbor. I call us to truth and to truthfulness. May we be full of the truth and speak the truth in love.

We will close with some *silent prayer* at you seek God and let the Holy Spirit convict you of any sin in this regard, and repent and resolve by the help and power of the Holy Spirit to turn from all gossip, slander, lies, and falsehood, large or small.

Prayer: Father, thank you for Jesus who shows us the way of honestly and simplicity, speaking the truth in love. Thank you that His words are full of grace and full of truth. Father, in this day and age of lies, deception and spin, enable us to be yes and no people, people whose word is consistent with the name that we bear. Father, we confess our sin of duplicity, lack of integrity and failing to keep our word. Your words to us are always true, make our words be true to you. We pray for and depend on your grace and your Spirit in us to walk in your ways for your glory, in the name of Jesus we pray. Amen.