

TELL THE TRUTH

Small Group Study Guide | July 7, 2024

GRACE
FELLOWSHIP

Discuss: Have you ever been lied to? How did it make you feel?

Key Text: “*You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*” (Deuteronomy 5:20)

In Commandment #9, God forbids breaking trust (bearing “*false witness*”) with a person (“*your neighbor*”) when we have the duty to tell the truth. The way God defines lying in Deuteronomy 5:20—breaking trust with a person when we have the duty to tell the truth—is very important as it informs us that while all lying is deception, not all deception is lying. In fact, deception is justified by God in special, limited circumstances:

- *To prevent criminal activity or oppression.* Criminals, terrorists, etc. forfeit their right to truth by violating the rights of others. No trust is broken if we must use deception against them to save lives. For example, we see God’s justification of the Hebrews midwives’ deception to protect Hebrew male babies (see Exodus 1:15-21), Rahab’s deception to hide two Hebrew spies (see Joshua 2:1-24), and David’s deception of acting insane to protect himself (see 1 Samuel 21:13). More modern examples of justifiable deception include Corrie ten Boom’s deceiving the Nazis to protect the Jews she was hiding in her house, legitimate police tactics to catch criminals, and our leaving our lights on at home at night when we leave town to give the impression that someone is home to prevent burglary or vandalism.
- *In warfare.* God often helped Israel with deceptive military actions such as the ambush at Ai (see Joshua 8:1-8) and a surprise attack (see 2 Samuel 5:22-25).

Justifiable deception in the special and limited situations mentioned above have the overarching aim of setting or restoring an environment of truth-telling. In each case, truth was suspended in a time of moral or military emergency to work toward a just and peaceful environment in which trust could exist and truth could be spoken freely again. God considers the person’s character, motive, and context involved in truth-telling. This is not the same as “*situational ethics*,” which is the idea that there is no absolute moral guide (God); thus, one’s own subjective feelings or preferences in a situation are authoritative. Rather, God is our ultimate authority, and while He commands us to not break a trust with another when we have the duty to tell the truth (the definition of Commandment #9 according to Deuteronomy 5:20), we are also to wisely recognize that deception toward others—such as criminals, Nazis, etc.—can be justifiable.

- *Games and jokes.* There is no moral problem with deception in sporting events (e.g., a quarterback fakes a pass then runs with the ball), board games, or harmless jokes since there is an agreed-upon convention built into these activities.

1. Revelation – What is God teaching us about Himself in Commandment #9?

In Commandment #9, God is teaching us that He loves the truth and disapproves when we misrepresent Him as His image-bearers (Gen.1:26-27) and harm others by breaking their trust when we have the duty to tell the truth.

Discuss: How do these verses associate God with truth: John 1:14; 14:6; 17:17?

Discuss: How has the lesson so far affected your understanding of lying?

2. Introspection – What is God teaching us about ourselves in Commandment #9?

God is teaching us in Commandment #9 that our words have great effect on others. If we break Commandments #9 by lying—that is, by breaking a person’s trust when we have the duty to tell the truth—we can do great damage to others and ourselves. We can build up or tear down with our words.

Discuss: According to these verses, what should be our attitude toward truth: 1 Kings 2:4; Psalm 15:1-2; Zechariah 8:19; 1 Corinthians 13:6; Philippians 4:8?

Discuss: According to Proverbs 15:2, what is the difference between the words of a wise person and the words of a foolish person?

Discuss: How does Proverbs 25:11-12 describe our words?

Discuss: According to Proverbs 10:19, what is a major cause of sin?

Discuss: According to Proverbs 11:13, what is a mark of a trustworthy person?

Discuss: According to Proverbs 12:25, what can cheer up a person who is weighed down with anxiety?

Discuss: When has a person’s words built you up and put courage into you?

3. Transformation – How does God want us to live per Commandment #9?

James tells us the tongue may be small, but it has the power to direct our lives and determine our destiny like a bit in a horse’s mouth directs the horse: *“If we put bits into the mouths of horses so that they obey us, we guide their whole bodies as well”* (Jms.3:3) or a rudder directs a ship: *“Look at the ships also: though they are so large and are driven by strong winds, they are guided by a very small rudder wherever the will of the pilot directs”* (Jms.3:4).

Discuss: What else does James tell us about our words in James 3:7-12?

Discuss: How does Ephesians 4:15 instruct us to speak? What do you think it means to “speak the truth in love”?

Discuss: What does Ephesians 4:25, 29 say about our words?

Discuss: What does Colossians 4:6 say about our words? What do you think it means to “season our speech with salt”?

Discuss: What does Solomon say about the power of the tongue in Proverbs 18:21?

Discuss: What does David request in prayer regarding His words in Psalm 141:3?

For Further Study:

Free online study tools (commentaries, dictionaries, etc.) at blueletterbible.org

Ten Secrets of Successful Living: A Perfect 10 for Families That Win by Adrian Rogers

“What Are Some Bible Verses about Words?” article at gotquestions.org