

# IT IS A SIN TO TELL A LIE; THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Edward H. Schroeder

[n.d. Possibly in response to Sidonie M. Gruenberg, "When Your Child Lies or Steals," The Gary Post-Tribune Family Weekly, February 28, 1960]

## PROBLEM OF HONESTY AND TRUTHFULNESS

Rigged Quiz Shows

Payola

Election Year

Doesn't affect us

## WHAT DOES HONESTY AND TRUTHFULNESS MEAN IN COLLEGE LIFE?

When is my witness-bearing true, when is it false?

What makes it true of false?

Is truth more than correct facts, falsehood more than incorrect facts?

---

Any human life is a life of witness—not merely Christian.

Witness reveals on the outside what you are on the inside. Cf. I Peter. Be ready at all times to give a reason.....

Show what's inside us by what we say or do, by the attitude we create; not so much our evaluation of ourselves, but our evaluation of neighbors. The sort of witness we bear (carry) against him. We carry a lot of things for the neighbor, books....torch....grudge. Above all we carry ourselves to the neighbor and in so doing we let him know what we really think of him.

**II. If the witness we bear is finally bearing our own selves, then our witness is true or false depending on whether we are true or false.**

A. True and false is not the same as true and false test, correct or incorrect. 8th commandment is not concerned about accurate information.

B. Luther's explanation – Fear and love God so that we may not deceitfully belie, betray, slander, or defame our neighbor. You could actually commit all these by telling the truth, conveying accurate information. Belie – running down my wife in public, i.e., “we've been eating beans all week, she knows 6 different ways to open a can of beans. It's true; belies our marriage vow, breaks the 8th commandment. Betray a confidence. Roommate has revealed his soul to us, somewhere along the line we blab about it. We tell the truth and betray our neighbor. Slander and defame are the same (parents, housemother, prof – pecking order session). Moral or unmoral, all of these are cases of accurate information, but they break the 8th commandment.

A. Show what we are, full of deceit; not inaccurate information, but an evil heart. Full of the devil, i.e., on the inside. Not because we practice false witness do we finally become full of deceit. As though my heart were empty – zero, neutral, neither +

or -; then was filled from the outside by my environment. Bad environment filled me with bad things. Good with God.

Jesus said No! Not what goes into a man defiles him, but what is already there and comes out. Not a wicked environment or wicked opportunities will fill my heart with deceit, but a heart that is full of deceit will show itself, bear witness when it gets the chance. It will show what the person has been full of all along. Out of the heart, i.e. The already deceitful heart proceeds evil thoughts, murders, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, blasphemy.

B. Shows what we are not full of. "Fear and love of God." First commandment breakers – God- haters, idolaters.

Lie = not inaccuracy, but wicked use of truth to destroy someone else. Cf.. *Invocavit*

It is not be accident that men succumb to the lie, ie., wickedly destroying someone else. It's not the exception. That by accident I slipped into temptation. The tempter operates on the conviction that within us there is a radio receiver already tuned to his frequency. All he has to do is send the signal and we respond "naturally" and play his music, sing his tune, dance his jig.

Quote Thielicke p. 75

"Not bear false witness" = "not being a false person"

8th commandment is the impossible command for me to be a different person, not different habits, different ideas, different prejudices, but different person, "new heart" (destruction involved)

Above not accepted by all. Some of you. . Article in Family Weekly, p.15, 2/28/60

If there is anything wrong with this article, it is not just the author's opposition to a "basic" doctrine—original sin, but ignoring the fact that we live in a fallen world.

Living in a fallen world is basic to understanding the 8th commandment. Actually the 8th commandment says "put a limit on your truth-telling. In a fallen world God doesn't want you blabbing everything you know. In the first place God does this for our neighbors' sake. In a fallen world sinners cannot live with all their secrets exposed to their fellowman. In paradise it was possible for people to exist completely exposed to each other. Because Adam and Eve were "true" man and woman, they bore true witness to each other. Their physical nakedness is a manifestation of God's original plan – people bearing and baring themselves to one another because there was no barrier, no deceit, no evil heart in anybody. No cause for fear that some other person will take advantage of my weakness, and use it to destroy me.

But as soon as man becomes a sinner, he has to cover up—not just a naked body, but even more so his naked soul. . . ala Bible his heart, his inner-man. In commandment 8 God is making concessions to his fallen creation – on behalf of the neighbor I dare not reveal all I know even if it is true. For truth too is infected by the fallen world and can be used to destroy – belie, betray, slander, defame.

Not only a pastor is bound to silence when a person has confessed to him, but every Christian is bound to silence when he learns of the naked secrets of his neighbor, bound to silence. How long? Forever? Maybe. At least he does not break the silence until he is sure that he will not belie, betray, slander, or defame. And then not merely because he thinks it will no longer cause any harm, but because it will concretely cause some good. God's commandments protect my neighbor from me

in a fallen world.

Secondly, God's 8th commandment is designed to protect me from myself in a fallen world. It puts the bridle on my ego, not just my prevaricating ego which might enjoy manufacturing falsehoods, but my pious Pharisaic ego which wants to drag out my neighbor's dirty underwear – when they actually are dirty and publicly point to them and say, "Look, it's the Gospel truth." What my Pharisee ego says is an accurate description of the facts, but it's far removed from the Gospel. God's plan for men in this world is not merely that they tell the truth. In Paradise that was enough, but in a fallen world it isn't. Because the people are different. In Paradise man is truth-ful, faith-ful. In our fallen world deceitful, unfaith-ful. Therefore God's admonition to us is "Speak the truth in love."

But I can't be in love with everybody that I talk about, especially so-and-so whom I detest and despise. Why I can't even speak the truth in love about those people whom I really do love – parents, fiance, spouse, best friend – every now and then I find myself belie, betray, slander, or defame them if not vocally, then at least in my mind.

Here we arrive at the chief function of commandment eight for me in a fallen world. It tells me ultimately that I am part of the fallen world. It tells me about fallen me. In commandment 8 God rips off all the clothes that I have put on to hide myself from him and lays me bare. He shows me what I am full of – deceit and what my real attitude toward him is, i.e., that despite my pious proclamations I don't fear, love, and trust in him above all things. And that I demonstrate this in the kind of witness I carry to the neighbor – what I think of myself – world rotates around me – and what I think of a neighbor – not really a child of God, but "culture- building animal" for me to use for my own purposes and enjoyment.

When God's 8th commandment knocks men, even Christian men, down again then they are ready, maybe even ready once more for God's answer to the whole fallen world – His Son. The Gospel according to St. John talks to our problem here. Pairs of opposites: Love – hate, truth – lie. John describes our fallen world as populated by men full of deceit and hateful. His remedy is Jesus Christ who is Truth and Love. Not truth as accurate information, but God being truthful, trustworthy, faithful. God being true to Himself. Here in God truth and love merge. God's being truthful = God being loving to a fallen world which doesn't love him and sending His Son to die for it. In the process of redemption God engages in something like a divine Fib. He looks at forgiven sinners as though they were no sinners at all. He looks at forgiven sinners and sees Jesus Christ the sinless son of God. This divine Fib which God pulls has its human counter-part. Christians do not see and advertise the sins of the brother. St. Paul, "We no longer regard anyone from a human point of view." Christians regard and report of their neighbors from God's point of view. From the viewpoint of love. Therefore I suggest that a Christian fulfilling the eighth commandment may sometimes have to tell a lie, a lie from the human point of view, i.e., in terms of accurate information. He'll have to do it because the love of Christ constrains him to love the brother. Remember bearing true or false witness is not a matter of my relationship with facts, but with people. The issue is really one of love or unlove.

One case I know of where a man was pumping another man's son on intimate problem in the son's home, in order to use it against the son's father. I would suggest that here was a case where the boy's love for father and family called him to refrain from telling the truth to the questioner in order to be true to his father and family.

I close and you can argue it farther. Christianity cannot accept

the statement: It's a sin to tell a lie. Sometimes it's a sin to tell the truth. Sometimes it's a sin not to tell a lie.

[ITISASINTOTELLA \(PDF\)](#)