

**Basic Training # 9:
A Matter of Integrity**
Exodus 20:1-2; 16

November 15, 2015

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About a month ago, the weekend of our rummage sale to be precise, I attended a worship conference in Newark, New Jersey. The worship was amazing, as were the speakers. My favorite was Christine Cain who delivered a powerful message, a challenge based on Joshua. She began by reading the first chapter of the Book of Joshua. Allow me to share a few verses from Joshua Chapter 1:

“After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua, son of Nun, Moses’ aide: ‘Moses my servant is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan River into the land I am about to give them - to the Israelites.’”
Joshua 1:1-2

“Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you?”
Joshua 1:6-9a

Because we are engaged in this study of the Ten Commandments, I was especially attentive to any mention of God’s law.

- Be very careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you.
- Do not turn from it to the right or the left.
- Do not let this book of law depart from your mouth.
- Meditate on it day and night.
- Then you will be prosperous and successful.

Remember the law, know the law, obey the law. Then you will be prosperous and successful. When God spoke these words to Joshua, the Israelites had been in possession of the Law for 40 years. It was basic to their understanding of God and

community. It was and is basic training for the people of God in order to be the people of God.

Then you will be prosperous and successful. Because prosperous and successful may imply something entirely different in our day, perhaps some clarification is needed. In Joshua's day, prosperous and successful meant that they would have enough food to survive, enough food that they wouldn't have to constantly worry about their next meal. Successful meant that the mission to establish the people of God in the world so that "all the peoples on earth will be blessed through them," as God first spoke to Abraham, would occur; that it would steadily move toward completion; that they would live into God's dream for them.

You may hear what I just said and want to challenge the truth of prosperity by recalling a time of severe famine during the time of Elijah. It's true, severe famine was in the land. It was declared by God to Elijah - neither rain nor dew in the land for the next few years. Their reason was that King Ahab of Israel did evil in the eyes of the Lord marrying Jezebel and introducing Baal worship to Israel.

The people of Israel were worshipping the gods of Baal and Asherah. They were beginning to believe in these false gods because their king began to worship them. They worshipped the gods of Baal and Asherah at the expense of their worship of the one true God of Abraham, Isaac and Moses. It was so bad in Israel that Elijah himself feared that he was the only person in all of Israel who still worshipped the one true God.

The people of Israel were failing to obey the laws of God. They were not loving the Lord God with all their heart. They were worshipping false gods, other gods, and were erecting monuments to them. They were turning away from God's law to the right and to the left.

God could not allow them to remain there. God sent Elijah to the king, King Ahab, to speak sense into him. God sent famine into the land to gain the attention of his wayward people so they would get back on track. Then God sent Elijah to King Ahab to have a showdown between the prophet of God - Elijah, and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah.

It's an incredible story, one of the best in the entire Old Testament. You can read it for yourself in 1 Kings 18 - Elijah on Mount Carmel; Elijah and the prophets of Baal. Would you like to guess who wins the showdown? Well, we are here, aren't we?

When the Israelites were worshipping the Baals, they were unable to be successful in their mission to enable the world to be blessed through them as they told others about the one true God, so God acted to bring them home to him.

God intended that the people of God avoid such experiences. That's why he told Joshua,

- Be very careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you.
- Do not turn from it to the right or the left.
- Do not let this book of law depart from your mouth.
- Meditate on it day and night.
- Then you will be prosperous and successful.

One of the best things about having a Bible is that you can read it for yourself. And you can read it over and over again. Another best thing about reading the same scripture more than once is that you can get something new, something more, each time you read it.

The Ten Commandments have been around for a long time, 3400 years. You've read them before. Maybe you studied them before. But when you read them and study them again, there's more there!

You shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make idols in the form of anything.

You shall not misuse the name of the Lord.

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

Honor your father and your mother.

Do not murder.

Do not steal.

Do not give false testimony against your neighbor.

Do not covet what belongs to your neighbor.

“Be very careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave to you. Do not turn from it to the right or to the left. Then you will be prosperous and successful. You will live into the plans I have for you.”

So when you reflect on the 10 Commandments, how well are you able to obey them? Have you ever broken any? That's a silly question. Of course we have. We

are not perfect. We are not expected to be perfect. Jesus came to give his life to pay for our sin and provide forgiveness for our sin. God still loves you, loves us.

But just for fun, do a quick review of your life and try to identify the ones you have failed to keep flawlessly. Which ones are they? Want my help?

Have you always, always honored your mother and your father?

Have you ever stolen something or cheated someone, the IRS?

Have you always remembered the Sabbath Day by keeping it holy? Every single Sunday?

Have you never, ever misused the name of the Lord?

Have you ever placed someone or something before God in your life?

I did a quick audit of my life this week and was immediately reminded of my humanity, my imperfect humanity. I realized I've violated just about all of the commandments. But I haven't committed adultery and I never murdered anyone.

But then I reflected on Jesus' words on these two commandments and I had second thoughts.

“But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgement; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say raka you fool, if you curse someone you will be liable to the hell of fire.”

“You have heard that it was said ‘Do not commit adultery’. But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

The Ten Commandments are harder to keep than we think. We violate them more often than we realize. We need to study them, review them, hold them in our hearts and obey them as best we can, as best we can.

So we come to this ninth commandment,

“You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.”

Are you ready for the bad news? We have all violated this commandment. If your record is perfect on the first 8 commandments, which I doubt, you lose your perfect record on this one.

For a more complete appreciation for what God intends in this commandment, let me give you four English translations:

- NIV – “You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.”
- Common English Bible – “Do not testify falsely against your neighbor.”
- Message – “No lies about your neighbor.”
- Amplified Version – “You shall not testify falsely – that is lie, withhold or manipulate the truth.”

Maybe you have never been called to testify in a court of law about the character or behavior of another, so how could you have violated this commandment? You violate this commandment any time you say something that is untrue in a setting where you can influence the thoughts and opinions of others.

False witness comes in many forms. One of the most subtle forms of false witness is inappropriate silence. The Jewish Law condemned the person who gave false evidence as well as the one who, having evidence to the contrary, refused to give it.

A close kin of silence of this type is the person who doesn't slander but simply raises questions. Someone says of a person, “She's a kind, loving human being,” and the questioner asks, “Really? I doubt that. I can just tell that there's another side to her of which we aren't aware!” And the seed of doubt and the challenge to integrity is planted.

Slander, making defamatory statements injurious to the reputation or well-being of a person is never worse than when we purposely intend to hurt or destroy another. It may be a matter of getting even, of wanting to cut someone down to size. It is often an act of jealousy. Slander is one of the most tragic of our human practices because its influence is so far-reaching.

Gossip is also a way we violate this commandment. It's an example of where truth, improperly used and stretched and distorted can be as deadly as slander. We are often anxious to share what we know, sometimes too eager to break the story. We must be careful not to create doubts, second-guessing, or character assassination, which is what gossip does.

This ninth commandment is not a restriction on life, on social conversation and caring for and about others. Rather it gives a foundation for all that is best in human communication.

Remember, these commandments are basic training for us to be God's people, the church. They shape us and form us and guide us. They enable us to build, strengthen and maintain our faith community. They exist to edify us as a fellowship of believers. They are given to us to make us better people, to make life better for us and for others. That includes this 9th commandment, "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor."

"Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if anything is worthy of praise, think about these things."
Philippians 4:8