

The Father's Ten Good Words: Treasure My Truth

Exodus 20: 1-2, 16; Revelations 4:1-16

Introduction

Growing up, I *loved* TV shows and movies that involved courtroom drama. I wanted to be a lawyer when I grew up—a trial lawyer, of course. To have the ears and eyes of the jury and judge on me as I made convincing arguments. To use the power of rhetoric to change the lives of people.

It's probably no surprise that I became a preacher, huh?

As I've gotten older, I'm only grown in my conviction that words matter. That language is the means by which we reach other minds and hearts, and by which other minds and hearts and lives can reach *mine*.

I've become convinced that, rather than being a courtroom lawyer, I spend my life in the witness box. Using words. In fact, I think the Ninth Good Word is here to remind us that we are all in the witness box. There is not a thing we say or a relationship we have that isn't *full* of testimony. Sometimes our testimony is technical: "mix two eggs in a bowl; add a mL of dry condensed milk." Sometimes we bear witness poetically: "Roses are red; violets are blue." Sometimes we directly bear witness about God: "The steadfast love of the LORD is sure." But whenever we speak, in whatever context, in whatever form, we are Witness-Bearers. Image Bearers *are* testimony-bearers.

So the Father's Ninth Good Word addresses our witness-bearing.

Let's take the Bible, God's own testimony in story form, as the outline of our meditation today. The Bible gives us the Father's Call. And we, in the witness box, bring forth our response.

First, we need to hear the Father's Creation Call.

Our Psalm of the Day, Psalm 145, tells us that when we experience creation all around us, two things are happening:

We are overhearing the creation as it bears witness, echoing back to its Creator praise for his majesty. God has called creation to be and to do, and the creation responds with a testimony of praise.

The Father's Ten Good Words: Treasure My Truth

Exodus 20: 1-2, 16; Revelations 4:1-16

At the very same time, when we overhear the call and response, the summons of God and the faithful witness bearing of creation, we realize that *we*, who are, after all, creatures, are *also* being called to bear witness of God's goodness and glory. We realize that we, made in God's image, are able to bear witness in a way that no other creature can: with *language*.

The Psalmist overhears this call-and-response, this testimony of creation, and realizes that he, and the whole congregation, are thus summoned to bear witness as well. This is the Father's creation call. Will we answer? We must!

Second, we must reckon with our perjury.

In Adam, all of us have borne false witness. With all the creation gathered into the courtroom, the examination of the witness, with the snake as the sleazy lawyer and God's image-bearer (Adam) as the expert witness, sounds like this:

Serpent: Isn't it true that God won't let you eat from any trees in the garden?

Adam: Well, we ... can eat, but not from *this* tree.

Serpent: But don't you know for a fact that God wants to keep you from enjoying this fruit?

Adam: I'm not sure why the Father has given us all the trees but not this one.

Serpent: Isn't it possible that God knows that if you eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, that you'll gain this secret knowledge that God is keeping for himself?

Adam: Uhh ... I suppose he might be

Serpent: And what keeps you from taking the fruit and becoming like God?

Adam: Well, he said that if we ate it, we would definitely die.

Serpent: Now, doesn't that sound like the kind of threat someone would make if they didn't love you, wanted to keep you in ignorance, and wanted to have all the power for themselves?

The Father's Ten Good Words: Treasure My Truth

Exodus 20: 1-2, 16; Revelations 4:1-16

Doesn't that threat sound like a strategy for keeping you in the role of servant and keeping God in the role of God?

Adam: I mean ... uh ...

Serpent: Isn't it true that your so-called Father wants to keep you a child? That he doesn't *love* you. You won't die, you'll start to live for the first time!

Adam: I suppose it's ... possible.

Serpent: Face the facts. Your "Father" isn't a good father. He's a ruthless tyrant. Take and eat.

Adam: I guess ... you're right.

And then he eats. The Good Father was Adam and Eve's only "neighbor," and they bore false witness against him. In Adam, we botched our witness. We testified that our Good Father, our first neighbor, was not good, not loving, not generous, but evil, manipulative, and stingy.

Then third, we need to hear the Father's redemption call.

We heard the Father's creation call, calling us to bear witness. And we botched our witness and perjured ourselves against our best neighbor. But the Good Father called us once again. This is what the Exodus is about. The Father tells Moses: "You will be my witness to Pharaoh. Go and speak my truth to power." This is what the giving of the Ten Good Words is about at Mt Sinai. It's the Father saying "I have determined that this whole family will be my witnesses again." The Good Father is in the process of nothing short of re-making humanity according to his own image. He's adopting a family to be his family, and to begin to bear the family name, tell the family's stories, and bear the family resemblance. This family is going to be the light of the world, a city set on a hill that can't be hidden. This family is going to testify with mouth and life among the nations and before all creation that God is good—full of mercy and lovingkindness; passionate about justice; a beautiful lover and a lover of beauty; a Good Father.

"I am the LORD your God. I brought you out of slavery in Egypt. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." This is a new-creation good word. We have to hear the Father's Redemptive Word in the Ninth Good Word.

The Father's Ten Good Words: Treasure My Truth

Exodus 20: 1-2, 16; Revelations 4:1-16

So, we hear the Father's Creation Call; we reckon with our perjury; we hear the Father's Redemption Call.

Fourth, we have to acknowledge our sloppy testimony

We continue to struggle and fail to bear true testimony: about God and our neighbor.

This is a courtroom commandment. But it applies outside of court, too. Luther's catechism says it prohibits betrayal, slander, and spreading evil rumors. We are called to refrain from gossip—which means we can break the 9th Word even when we say *true* things. We can say true things *falsely*. We can say true things too fast, too carelessly, unwisely.

Sometimes we make our speech sweetly seductive (Prov 5:3), or sweetly persuasive (Prov 16:21). Are we prone to engage in “smooth talk and flattery (Rom 16:18)?

Are we “putting the best construction on things” (Luther)? Do we interpret others' words with suspicion, or with charity? Do we really listen to what someone is trying to say?

Are we always out to “dunk” on people? Are we (Leithart) exaggerating “the stupidity or malevolence of ideological adversaries?”

Tim Keller asks: Can we articulate the actual position of the people who hold positions with which we disagree, and do it in such a way that they would be able to say: “Wow, you really do understand my view, rather than a caricature of it!”?

Leithart asks: Are we *aware* that social media is *designed* to get us branding ourselves through the use of posturing, virtue signaling, canceling, and assuming the worst of everyone else? Are we conscious of the fact that controversy makes money for Google through YouTube ads? Are we more concerned with being “nice” than with bearing true witness? Leithart observes the striking way that three commands are given in Leviticus 19:

(17) “Don't hate your fellow Israelites”

(18) “Reprove your neighbor”

(19) “Love your neighbor as yourself”

The Father's Ten Good Words: Treasure My Truth

Exodus 20: 1-2, 16; Revelations 4:1-16

He says: "If you tell the truth, you will create conflict, and then you are called to be a peacemaker. But true peace can only be won if the truth shatters the false peace of the lie."

Let's ... ahem ... be honest. As witnesses, we continue to fail to tell the truth in a way that our Good Father would say "Amen!"

But thankfully, we have, fifth, our Father's Faithful Witness

When our kids were little, one of the first Bible verses we taught them was Proverbs 15:1 — "A soft answer turns away wrath." I remember the boys trying to pronounce those words.

The reality is that God is a good and fair and just judge. And it would be just for God to charge and convict us with perjury for our false witness. But the Father does something amazing. He sends his Son to bear witness. In our flesh, Jesus speaks the truth to neighbor, friend, enemy, stranger. He says what's true of God and true of us. With language he bears life-changing witness to the Father's faithfulness in the midst of our false witness. If God calls us to witness-bearing, and God condemns our false testimony as evil, then the Father's Son, Jesus, is the Father's soft answer that turns away wrath. The Father provides the very witness he calls for. In Jesus.

In the beginning of the last book of our Bibles, Jesus bears witness once more to us. In fact, he calls himself The Faithful Witness (1:5). He was put to death for speaking the truth in love; for speaking the truth to power. For his witness-bearing. But he told the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, with his human hand on the Bible, so help him God. And the Father generously poured out his Spirit on his Son so that he would be empowered and emboldened to be the Faithful Witness that, in fact, he was. In our place. For us.

Have you *heard* the Son—who is the Father's soft answer to our false testimony—speaking truth and grace? To you? For you? Has his faithful witness become *yours*?

If so, then

Sixthly, you and I become bold, kind truth-tellers

All those dimensions of witness-bearing that we looked at a few moments ago, all those areas in which we still fail to bear true testimony, now become for us areas of growth. We look at the

The Father's Ten Good Words: Treasure My Truth

Exodus 20: 1-2, 16; Revelations 4:1-16

scope and the significance of the Ninth Good Word not as a word of condemnation, but as a loving challenge from our Good Father to speak the truth-telling language of Jesus the Son.

Without fear, we can now ask ourselves questions like this, prayerfully:

What's the one area of my witness-bearing that needs to be more truthful, more gentle, more courageous, more Christian? What am I going to say this week, and how am I going to say it, so that what comes out of my mouth is full of grace and truth?

With all the confidence that Jesus has definitively spoken the truth of God's love to us, and to our neighbor, let's imitate Jesus with courage in the days ahead, that we might become true and faithful witnesses. Amen.