

The Top 10 For Life Series #10
Comdt #9 – “The Right Standards”

.....That is what Christmas is all about. That is worshipping the one whose name is Jesus.

A couple of years ago, during this time of the year, a young wife by the name of Sherry had been searching long and hard for a very special personal gift that she wanted to give to her husband. It seemed that everywhere she went and everything she looked at seemed to be just out of her range. Yet, she was very determined that she would find the gift that she needed for her husband.

It seems that on a particular day she walked into a store and she found the gift for which she had been searching. The cost on the present though was \$127.60. Knowing the limited nature of their income, her husband being a police officer, she knew she could not simply write a check for that amount without greatly affecting their ability to make ends meet. She decided to approach the shop owner to see whether or not he would be willing to allow her to put the gift in layaway. The shop owner said, “no, I am sorry, I cannot let you do that.” She felt so disheartened and she felt the price was getting within range but she simply did not have the money and did not know what she was going to do. As she stood there holding the gift in her hand the shop owner looked at her and said, “I don’t put in layaway but I would be glad to let you take it and let you pay me back.” A smile came across her face. She was so excited because she knew that now she would be able to provide this gift for her husband.

Several days after that experience her husband, the young police officer, was in an intersection one evening and noticed a car speeding through. He began pursuit of that car and when he finally pulled the car over and approached it a revolver appeared and gunshots were fired. Early in the wee hours of the morning a knock came at the door of the house of this young wife and the word came about the incident and the word of the gunfire and the fact that her husband was in the hospital. A smile came across her face because the fact of the matter was that the gift she had wanted to purchase was a bulletproof vest. She had just given it to him a few days before and he was wearing that vest the night of this incident and, as a result, it saved his life.

Now there is a sense in which we see or hear a story like that. We are immediately overwhelmed with the sense of timing. How significant that was! Had she walked out of that store that day without the vest, had she not gone on and given him the gift early, all of the whatifs in life could have taken over. Instead, because of the timing being so precise, bullet-point precise, she was able to spare the life of her husband.

In much the same way as I come to you this morning, I come with a sense of bullet-point precision that God has brought us to a very specific passage of scripture, on a very specific day and it all is a matter of very specific timing in our lives.

As your pastor, my first official messages with you began back in the month of September as we started studying through the Ten Commandments found in Exodus, Chapter 20. We call this series of messages God's Top Ten List for Life. Interestingly enough, in the course of this study, I have had two occasions where I have needed to be away because of commitments that were already on my calendar for this fall. I have had to adjust items within the series back from the very beginning. I could never have imagined that on this Sunday, at this time, I would be coming to this passage of scripture. It was a God thing. God knew we needed to hear this message this morning. God knew we needed to spend time in this passage of scripture today.

I want you to open your Bible to Exodus, Chapter 20, and verse 16 as we come to the ninth of the Ten Commandments, and to the ninth item that is on God's top ten list for life. Together I want us to read out loud Exodus, Chapter 20, and verse 16. Let us read it together. "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." Let us read that out loud one more time. "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." Maybe your translation says, "Thou shall not lie against your neighbor."

There is a sense this morning that as we address that subject that we are aware of the fact that it has been an inescapable issue platformed in American life and culture over these last few months. Nowhere have we seen the greater ramifications of it then we have seen in the last few days in our media and in our political process. I have to be honest this morning and tell you that while it has been easy for many of us to work our way through the last few commandments, "Do Not Murder, Do Not Commit Adultery, Do Not Steal," many of us have been able to walk in here and initially, upon hearing that commandment, we have immediately thought we were exempt, that this does not apply to me. Now we have learned that the application went a little further than maybe we initially considered. As we come together this morning, I think that every person in this building, simply hearing that statement, "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor," I believe that for every person in this building today there is a sense in which we, everyone, have to say, "Guilty as charged." Everyone of us knows that in our lives, at one time or another, we have either told an out and out lie where we said something to deceive someone or else we have tried to use the truth in our favor by telling a half-truth which is in fact, a whole lie, being able to use information in order that we might mislead others. I am very disturbed and I am very concerned, as I know you are today, about the wide range of acceptance of deception and duplicity that is in our world. We have grown to come to a place where we have a wide comfort zone with lying. The reason I believe that is true is because of the fact that it is something that applies to many of us. I believe it is very clear this morning that there is a major problem in America. There is a major problem in our day with truth decay. We have a problem with truth decay. We no longer really understand the importance, it seems, of the truth. Yet the fact of life is that regardless of what you may believe about the political process that has been playing out in front of our eyes and regardless of which party you may represent this morning, whether you are Democrat or Republican, the fact of life is that I believe every American today has to stop, has to pause, has to look at what is going on right in front of us today and say, lying is shameful. Lying is injurious and lying is inconsequential. It really doesn't matter where you stand on the issue. What really matters this morning is the

clear understanding that for every one of us it is shameful, it is injurious, and it is consequential.

It is interesting that Dr. Leonard Keeler, the inventor of the lie detector, tested over 25,000 people in the process of the development and ultimately the initial implementation of the use of the lie detector machine. At the end of all of his studies and technological advancements Dr. Keeler said this, "I have come to the firm conclusion that human beings are basically deceptive." He said, I tell you, everything that I see about human nature tells me that we have a problem with having bent away from the truth. Obviously, it is something God means business about because God, Himself, says this morning; "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor."

I don't know that there is a whole lot of margin for discussion about that this morning is there? I mean, I don't know that I could spend the next 30 minutes talking about all of the different ways that we lie, because we know there are so many ways to do so. We have all become very good at it at times when it is to our advantage to do so.

What I really want to do is just let us stop this morning and say, God has drawn a line. God has hung a plumb line and said, anything that is willful intent to deceive comes under that banner of lying against your neighbor. Consequently what God wants us to do is to step into the positive arena of life and God wants us to understand the importance of truth and the use of truth in our life and in our human relationships. So, beginning with simply that axiom, "You shall not bear false witness," let us simply take that this morning and say, what does God want us to do? What is the intent of the presence of this commandment to my life and to your life today? I think it is several fold and I would simply point out some of these things to you this morning.

First and foremost, by the fact that God says, "You shall not bear false witness," I believe that God is echoing something very clearly and it is this, we are to take the truth seriously. God wants us to take the truth seriously. God is serious about the matter of truth because God in His very essence, in His very nature, is a God who is unchanged and He is a God who is unchanging. Therefore, He establishes Himself. He reflects of Himself, that it is His very character and His very nature to be true. Because it is the nature of God to be true, He wants us to understand that everything that gets out from under the umbrella of truth is foreign to Him. You can begin in the Book of Genesis and you can go through the Book of Revelation and you will find it reflected over and over in the portrait of the character and attributes of God that God is true. But specifically if you go to the Gospel of John, let me just take that one book and just highlight some quick verses to you from that book, you find that God wants us to understand that He is serious about this matter of His character and nature being true.

In John 17:3 the Bible says, speaking of God, that He is the only true God. In John, Chapter 14, verse 6, speaking of Jesus Christ, the Bible says He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Speaking again in John, Chapter 14, verse 17, speaking of the work of the Holy Spirit, the Bible speaks of the Spirit as being the Spirit of Truth. In John, Chapter 17, referring to this book that I hold in my hand, the Word of God, the Bible says of

itself, thy Word is Truth. Then in John, Chapter 4, verse 23, when Jesus was talking about what worship is, what real worship is all about, the Bible simply says that we are to worship God in Spirit and in Truth. God is not interested in any pretense. God does not want us to show up with our Sunday game face on. God doesn't want us just to come and look religious or pious. God says, I want people who will come and worship me in spirit and in truth because the very nature of God is that He is true in all of His essence and in all of His being. What the Bible is telling us is that God is the truth source in all of life. Whenever you need to know what is right or wrong, good or bad, wise or unwise, profitable or unprofitable, you can go to God because the nature of God is that He is the Truth and He is the truth source in all of life.

Now the contrary of that is true as well. Just as God is the truth source in all of life it is the enemy of God who is the deceit source in all of life. It is Satan. It is the adversary of God and of God's creation who has sought to twist and to connive and to misrepresent the truth. God, therefore, hates every thing, every thing that would in some way misrepresent the truth.

Do you remember what happened in the Garden of Eden, a perfect place where a perfect man and a perfect woman were living in a perfect environment with everything perfect? But there in that perfect place God said to them, of this garden you shall eat of every tree that provides food, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat thereof, for in the day that you eat thereof you will surely die. God made it clear. Here is the way to health and happiness, right here but there is something that is forbidden. There is something that you are not to touch. Yet we know that one day Eve was there in the garden alone, that Satan the adversary slithered his way into the garden and engaged Eve in a conversation. Do you remember what Satan did when he engaged Eve in that conversation? He began with a question mark. He began by investigating but in particular the way of investigation was put a question mark where God had put an exclamation point. He came and he asked her this question, has God said? He brought deception. He brought misrepresentation of the truth. Rather than honoring the truth and honoring the authority of truth and the character of God, which is truth, what Satan did was question the character of God. Satan brought twisting and deception into the mind of Eve and the result of all of that was that deception entered into the world and we have followed the deceit source rather than the truth source of life. You see, sadly, we all want to see this as sort of a minor traffic violation. We always want to see lying as sort of a misdemeanor offense. I want you to clearly understand this morning that because of who God is, what His character and what His nature is, that anytime we engage in any activity that is in some way involved in deceit or in some way involves lying, that we are far removed from God and what He is like. God is serious about the matter of truth. It is the very constitution of His nature. So take the truth seriously.

The Bible says you shall not bear false witness. That is what God means. Take the truth seriously.

There is something else though that it means this morning. That is, not only are we to take the truth seriously but I believe that as we are engaged in this gathering this morning

called church and worship and coming together as the Body of Christ, as we are seated here we are sitting together as families and as friends, there are smaller relationships within the larger relationship represented here. But whether you are a part of the large group or smaller groups within this group, one thing is clear, we are to teach the truth faithfully.

As individual believers and followers of Jesus Christ we have a responsibility and obligation to take the truth seriously and then to teach the truth faithfully, to uphold the high standard of truth, and to establish the importance of truth in all of life and in all of society. If you were to turn a few pages from the Book of Exodus over to the Book of Deuteronomy, we don't have time to go there this morning, you would find in Deuteronomy, Chapter 6, verse 4, the core passage of life, of faith, and of family for the Jewish person. What you would find there the word shamah. The word Shamah is nothing more than the Hebrew word, "hear." The passage of scripture begins, hear, O Israel, the Lord your God is one and you shall love the Lord your God. It talks about loving God. Then it says, after you focus on hearing God and loving God, then it says to families and to fathers, you are to teach these things diligently to your children. Whether you look at the shamah in the Old Testament or whether you go to the great commission in the New Testament where Jesus, before He ascended into heaven, said all authority is given to me on heaven and earth and it says, go therefore, preach the gospel, baptizing them, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.

You see, the Bible puts a great emphasis on teaching truth. I don't know that there is anything that we need more of today than a fresh resolve among the people of God and the people who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ that they will confront the primary ideology of our world which images everything with a clear platform that says truth is everything. Image is really nothing more than fantasy and distortion of perception. Satan had a good image in the garden. It was good enough to trick Eve. The sadness is that there was bitterness on the other side of that image. What we need to understand this morning is that there is a fresh need, beginning in the pulpit, of going to Bible study classes, and going to every home, that there would be within our hearts a spirit of honor, of truth, and that the goal of everything we would do as families and as followers of Christ, is that we would seek to apply the truth of God to life. I want you to know that if that is not what this is all about, if this is just about some kind of a big spectator sport on Sundays where we just come and listen and hope we will get a little bit of entertainment, and hope the image is good, frankly, folks, we would just need to close our Bibles and go home and quit coming to church because the only purpose of this gathering is that the truth of God would begin to have bearing on our lives. The only purpose of adult Bible fellowship classes is that within the relationships that we share that we would grow in knowledge of the truth and that the truth would take roots and grounding and that our lives would be more fruitful and productive and the only thing that really matters in our families is that families come together in loving relationships so that within that context of love, security, and acceptance there can be the transference of truth that matters in life, because, without that clear mission, everything else in life is blurred. You see, we have to understand that what God is saying is that He wants us to take truth seriously and that He wants us to teach truth faithfully.

I love what the Bible says what John the Apostle said over in the Letter of Third John, verse 4. He said, I have no greater joy than to hear my children walk in the truth. I tell you that as a Pastor that is the great joy of ministry. It is that when you engage in a teaching ministry like this and you find that people who are associated in relationship, part of the family of God, that they begin to walk in the truth. So we are to teach the truth faithfully.

There is something else I believe the Bible is telling us here this morning and that is not only that we need to take the truth seriously and teach the truth faithfully but it is a real simple thing. We need to tell the truth consistently. Let's get beyond talking about how God feels about it and our relationship with Him. Let's get beyond talking about what the church needs to do about it. Let's just talk about you and me. What does the Bible tell us this morning? God says I want you to tell the truth consistently. I want you, because I am the true source, to be a truth bearer and that in life you bear truth wherever you go. Basically, every day when you get up you live by this axiom, today I will tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God because the most important thing in life is learning the value of truth. You see, truth more than anything else, has bearing on our human relationships. The strength of every human relationship is based on the amount of truth that is infused and interwoven into that relationship.

You go here from the Book of Exodus over to the New Testament to the Book of Ephesians, Chapter 4. You might want to turn over there just for a moment. Ephesians, Chapter 4, verse 25. The Bible starts talking about the implications of the new light and how there are some things that we put off from the past and some things that we put on in the present and that a part of that which we put on, as new followers of Christ, is a new standard, a new relationship with truth in our lives. It says here in Ephesians, Chapter 4, verse 25, "Therefore, putting away lying let each one of you speak truth with his neighbor for we are (listen to this) members of one another." You see, the only way that my body can really operate in unity is when every member is telling the truth to the other member. It would be a very bad thing if when I pass through the threshold of a doorway, I slam the door on my arm and the pain sensors don't tell the rest of my body, "hey, part of you is still hanging out back there." You see, the body has to have members that are connected and that in truth represent both pleasure and pain, coordination, and integrity rather than duplicity. The Bible is telling us that within our lives, in our relationships, because we belong together, the most important thing in that relationship is the honor of truth. Therefore, we will put away falsehood. We will put away lying. That is what the Bible is telling us. Get the trash talk out of your mouth because what is needed to build relationships is truth.

I have often told couples when I was speaking with them about marriage that in order to have a great marriage, there are at least two pedals that have to be present on the bicycle. Now you do all know that it takes two pedals to pedal a bicycle? Do you all know that? Okay. Did you ever try to pedal a bicycle with just one pedal? It is very difficult to balance. It is very hard to go anywhere. But in a human relationship the pedals that make that relationship work are these: Truth and trust. Because, you see, as truth comes

into a relationship and the more truth and integrity and honesty is providing a sense of revealing and of laying down the walls and not living in deceit, the more truth comes into a relationship then the greater trust can be added to that relationship. Then there is this cycle that begins to happen. Truth and trust, truth and trust, truth and trust. As those things are working together there is a balance and that relationship can stay on course. In our human relationships there is this vital need to be truthful with one another because without truth then everything else that is the essence and the character of friendship is out of balance. You cannot have a friendship. You cannot have a marriage. You cannot have a working relationship with someone where there is not truth. You have to have truth because truth provides the foundation for trust.

Now it can't be truth alone. Have you ever known anybody who simply says, "I always tell the truth? I just tell it like it is?" Do you know anybody like that? Let me just tell you the Bible is real clear again, here in Ephesians, Chapter 4, verse 15. It says, "Speak the truth in love." You may tell the truth but what you are telling may be things that are destructive and things that are injurious and things that are harmful. Now when I am telling you to tell the truth I am not only talking about doing it consistently but I am talking about doing it constructively and using the truth positively in your life.

One day a couple of pastors were out together in a boat. They were fishing, taking some time off, and trying to build some relationships and having one of those transparency sessions of kind of talking about needs in their life, praying for each other. The guy at the end of the boat with a fishing pole laying out the side said, guys, I have to tell you something. I am really struggling with something in my life. I don't know why this has happened to me. If people knew they would be so frustrated and embarrassed by me but I have just found that every time I walk into a convenience market lately I am buying lottery tickets. He said, I am playing the lottery. I told myself it wasn't a big deal I could try it one time and maybe win something for the church. He said, I tried it and now I just seem to be doing it all of the time. The guy at the front of the boat said, man, I know what you mean. I am struggling with something. He said, I have started drinking, I can't believe it. I am so stressed, I am so tired, and I am so frustrated. I can't seem to calm down. I have just found that I go in at night and I have just found a way to start slipping something to just try to relax. The guy sitting in the middle of the boat said, guys, I am feeling so vulnerable right now. He said, I have this terrible problem with gossip. You know I really can't wait to get back.

You know, the fact of life is, many of us tell the truth but we don't do it constructively do we? You see, you can many times use the truth but you use it injuriously. Did you know that most of the stuff that we gossip about is true? You know we tend to think of gossip as just being something that is not true and we can do that, we can be slanderous by taking half-truths or non-truths and passing it around. But, frankly, a lot of the injury that comes in our life through our tongues comes when we take things that are true and keep repeating them and scattering them and moving them around and what we do is use the truth in a fashion that is not constructive. Lord only knows how many church fights have been caused because people were saying things. Maybe they were even true things but they would not let it go. They just had to keep talking about it, keep nicking at it, keep

darting with it. The result ultimately is injury and division. God says, I want you to speak the truth consistently.

There is one final thing that I want you to see this morning from this passage. That is not only that we are to take the truth seriously and to teach the truth faithfully and to tell the truth consistently but more important than any of these things, as good as they are, as important as it is for us to have a standard, the greatest thing I need to bear witness to you about this morning is that we need to testify to the truth personally. What I mean by that is that every one of our lives needs to become a living testimony of the truth that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners and that I am a sinner who needs to be saved. You see, the greatest deceit in all of the world is the deceit that if I simply do my best, live a good life, do everything that I can to be fair and faithful to everyone else, in the end I will stand before God and God will say, great job, buddy, you made it. I want you to know that that is a lie. No one will ever go to heaven, no one will ever be right with God, no one will ever really have wholeness and completion in life as long as what they try to do is live a life good enough to be worthy of God and worthy of others because that is the greatest lie. It is the lie that keeps us from seeing how damning and how deceitful our sinfulness really is. What God desires and what God has called for in every life is that every one of us would bear witness to this truth, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God Who came to save us from our sins. This is what Christmas about. Christmas is not just about a baby who ought to be fondly remembered during this season of the year, it is about the fact that God became flesh and dwelt among us taking on the human body, taking on human form, coming and suffering, dying by being nailed to a cross in order that He might pay the price as a substitute for our sins and that He, through his death, his burial, and resurrection might open the door of heaven for us. That is the message of the Bible. It is the message of truth, that there is life, and there is forgiveness in Jesus Christ.

The Bible simply says this; he who has the Son has life. He who does not have the Son does not have life. It says that if we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater. For if anyone believes that he can be saved apart from the Son of God, he makes God a liar. The Bible says, for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. It is not enough to say I am as good as the next guy. No, you are as bad as the next guy. The fact of life is that we are sinners. That is the truth. The Bible tells us that unless we deal with this truth we are standing in very vulnerable territory.

The second truth is that we will all stand before God and give account for our sins. The Bible makes it clear that we must all one day appear before God. The truth is that one day every person here today hearing my voice, either in this building or by tape, someday will stand before God and give account for your sins. The truth is that we will spend eternity in hell if we refuse to admit our need for salvation. We will spend eternity in hell if we refuse to admit our need for salvation. But the good news is, and the truth is, that we can be forgiven of our sins. We can be cleansed from sin. We can escape the judgement of hell by receiving Jesus Christ as the free gift of eternal life. The greatest thing that can happen in any human heart or any human life is to receive Jesus Christ. It is to become a personal testimony of the truth that Jesus saves, you saw it in the life of Dustin and Orris as they stood and proclaimed it this morning. You can hear it and see it

in the lives of many that are in this building today but I wouldn't be so foolish as to assume that everyone knows and has accepted this truth. During this Christmas time I think the greatest tragedy of all would be for you to come near the manger, to have a tree, to have lights, and to sing carols and songs, to share the celebration but fail to do the most important thing, and that would be to unwrap the present called the gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ. For you see, Jesus hung on a tree called a cross that He might provide that gift for you and for me, free. I cannot think of anything worse than leaving that gift under the tree.

It was a year ago this time, right now, when I walked with a dear lady through the death of her husband. They had been married for over 50 years. They had had good days and they had had some hard days. They had some children who had struggled with responsibility. In their senior years of life they had taken on their granddaughters to raise them as a family. Not only had they raised their own children but then they raised three grandchildren and saw to it that each of those girls got an education and had everything they needed. It was such a tender thing and such a painful thing to walk through the death of this man. He had actually gone through about a two-year battle with cancer and then went through a season of remission and then, suddenly, a diagnosis said, no, the cancer is back. From there, there was an injury in his life that quickly took him. I remember praying for that family through the holidays and sharing the confidence we had in faith but also the pain that came through separation. I remember calling her and talking to her during the Christmastime, during the break from school. She was struggling. I remember two weeks after Christmas coming back to the office and going over to the school office where she was working; she met me in the hall. She had a big smile on her face and she said, pastor, look, and she reached toward her neckline and when she did I could see a beautiful heart there that said, "My love." She said I want you to know that when we unwrapped everything else under the Christmas tree he had seen to it that this gift would be there for me on Christmas morning. She said, I opened this gift and he gave it to me! He knew he was going but he got it for me and he gave it to me! Everywhere she went she would just say, look, look! Wouldn't it have been a tragedy if they had done all of that and that one box would just sort of gotten overlooked. Or that one box had just kind of been left there. Maybe she would have just said, you know I guess he did something, I don't know. You know, she might have just left it under the tree. You say, well that would have been foolish. You are right. It would have been foolish to leave it under the tree. But I want you to know that every Christmas people come near the manger. People gather around the tree but leave never having opened the gift of what Christmas is all about and it is life in Jesus Christ. You are His love. Jesus loved you so much that He died to save you. The message of Christmas is that you need to open your heart and your life, you need to admit the truth that you are a sinner. You must open your heart and by truth receive Jesus Christ who is the Son of God. This is the confidence we have in Him. This is the confidence that if we ask anything according to His will, He will hear us. These things, that is this Word, these things are written that you might know that you have eternal life and that this life comes by believing on the name of the Son of God.

Have you believed on the name of Jesus? Have you received the gift of Christmas, which is eternal life in Christ? If not, I want to give you an opportunity to do that right now.

Heads are bowed and eyes are closed. Father, this morning I thank you for the testimony of the love of Jesus Christ for us. I thank you for the power of your word and for the way that somehow you brought us to this whole issue of truth bearing and truth telling today. I know that it is by appointment and so I give you thanks for it. Father, I believe that appointment may be that someone in this room today, right now, would pray and receive Christ. So, friend, if you are here today and you have never done it, in the quietness of this moment while heads are bowed and eyes are closed and no one is looking, I want to invite you to just join me in a prayer. I want you just to pray quietly there in your heart. It is not so much the words you say as it is the attitude of your heart. God sees your heart. This morning, if you want to know Christ and trust Him, I invite you just to privately and personally say, Dear Jesus, today I know that I am a sinner. Lord, I know I cannot save myself. Jesus, you came in order that you might die for my sins. Today, Lord Jesus, I receive what you have done for me. Come into my heart, dear Jesus. Forgive me of my sins. Help me to be the person that you want me to be and to live my life to bear testimony of Jesus Christ. Lord, I thank you this morning for what you have done through the simple prayer of hearts in this building, the miracle work of salvation, and the truth of the gospel. Lord, I just rejoice in what you have done. Lord, I pray that not only these who have prayed but others who possibly have at another time, that today at this moment, would just be a moment in which they would say, I do belong to Christ and I want it to be known that I belong to Him. Father, even in these moments of decision, openly, that you would move and work in Jesus' precious name. Amen.

Sermon by David McKinley
12/20/98