

“Our Speech”

God Almighty is concerned with our speech: “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor” (Ex. 20:16). While the commandment narrowly addresses the requirement for speaking the truth in a courtroom, the ninth commandment broadly includes the need to promote and protect the good name of our neighbors. It also condemns slander and an unwillingness to admit an unsubstantiated evil report. Now, the reason He cares about our speech is because we are made in His image. Because every word of God is true, we are to reflect truth in our speech.

Unfortunately, truth suffers when allegiance to a side is more important than speaking truth. We can selectively quote someone or distort words to strengthen our position. By doing so, we break God’s ninth commandment.

Recently, a professor published a list of rules concerning the ethics of speech. There are a few nuggets worth sharing. First, any distortion of a person’s position that substantially differs from the original breaks the commandment. A person must accurately represent the position of someone else. Second, motives are notoriously difficult to discern because they are internal and often hidden. Be cautious of dismissing a claim based on an accusation of bad motives unless the motives are clear. Third, slandering someone online is no less reprehensible than slandering a person to his face. The reach of the ninth commandment extends to the written word of the fingertips. Fourth, the truth of claims should be evaluated on the merits of the claim. Just because a person believes “P” doesn’t mean that they also believe “Q”, even if “P” and “Q” are closely related. The reason is because “Q” may not necessarily follow. The case must be made.

In 1974 Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote and published an article titled “Live Not By Lies”. By “lies”, he meant a political regime’s ideology that reshapes human nature and society for predetermined ends. The background of the essay was the Soviet regime. The day following its

publication he was exiled. He knew living by the truth was a costly choice. He also knew that it was a matter of the soul: “It will not be an easy path, perhaps, but it is the easiest among those that lie before us. Not an easy choice for the body, but the only one for the soul. No, not an easy path, but then we already have among us people, dozens even, who have for years abided by all these rules, who live by the truth.”

The church must be a people who live by the truth. This requires her to live under this commandment by avoiding the distortion of words and promoting the good name of our neighbor. This hard work of pruning our speech is designed for the church to grow up into Christ in every way, who is the way, the truth, and the life.

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