HC LD 43; Eph. 4:25-32; John 8:39-47; 9th Commandment; You Shall not Lie I. The Foundation of this Command II. Avoiding All Lies III. Pursuing All Truth

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, what is truth? This pivotal question raised by Pilate sets the stage for our sermon today. What is truth- and why do we as Christians need to love the truth and speak it openly? As we return to the 10 Commandments today, we find our speech front and center. Currently, there is a national debate on free speech. Can you say whatever you want to say- does the first amendment guarantee the right to say whatever I want to say without consequence? More specifically today, are we as Christians free to say whatever we want? Kids, do you remember the phrase- liar, liar, pants on fire? Well, the next line goes like this- Liar, liar, pants on fire, nose as long as a telephone wire. This last part is linked to the children’s story of Pinocchio. As you will remember, every time that Pinocchio told a lie, his nose would grow. Even today, there are news organizations that credit politicians with the Pinocchio Award. But if our noses would in fact grow every time we told a lie- how long do you think your nose would be? Well, today we come to the 9th commandment dealing with truth in our speech. We consider this theme: Jesus Christ redeems us from the life of deceit so that we might be people of truth.

 **I. The Foundation of this Command**

In our first point, we look at the foundation of this command. The fact is, there are two kingdoms evident in this world. One is the kingdom of darkness ruled by trickery, darkness and deceit. The other is a place of light and truth. This division between the lie and the truth is found in our reading from John 8. John 8:44 reveals that the Devil is a murderer, and he has nothing to do with the truth because there is no truth in him. Lies are his native tongue- for he is the father of lies and deceitful in his ways. So the devil is identified as the first liar- and the source of corruption in this world. Thinking back to the fall of Adam in the garden, you will remember that the devil contradicted God’s Word. “You will not surely die” the devil said. Herein, the devil told a lie and deceived man- leading to the death of all of mankind. So the devil and the kingdom of darkness are known for their deceit- lying leads to bondage and death. Lying is at is core using words to rebel against God. That is because God is the God of truth- and His word is truth as John 17:17 states. The other kingdom is the kingdom of truth. Back in our reading from John 8:32, Jesus says that his disciples will know the truth and the truth will set them free. So knowing the truth is to know God and His word- and in this truth there is liberty and life. So to summarize these points, the contrast between the lie and the truth is clear to see. It is a contrast between death and life, between the devil and God, between darkness and light! How you speak is a sign of which kingdom you are a part of- a sign of whose word you know and believe. And one of the reasons that the truth is so important is because it is the truth that sets you free. What do I mean? Well, what is the truth? Well, the truth is that you are a sinner and that Jesus came to die for you. Knowing the truth about yourself sets the stage for truth faith! Knowing and believing the truth about Jesus Christ is the core of the gospel! And since our God is the God of truth, we are to be known as people of truthful speech. And specifically, this commandment calls us to be speak the truth to and about our neighbor. Do not bear false witness has to do with speaking the truth when it counts the most. In the court of law, on the stand and before the judge, the truth with either convict the guilty or vindicate the innocent. Without truthful witnesses, the judicial system does not work. We find an example of this in I Kings 21 with Naboth and his vineyard. Naboth had a vineyard close to the palace of Ahab- and since Naboth would not sell this land to King Ahab, his wife Jezebel hired false witnesses to accuse and condemn Naboth. Naboth was wrongly convicted and killed because of these false witnesses- at the instruction of Jezebel. As you can see- the tongue is a powerful thing. A powerful force for good or ill. So as God’s people, we are to be people of truthful speech. We show the character of God when we speak the truth.

**II. Avoiding All Lies**

Moving on, we consider in our second point what kind of speech we are to avoid. What speech patterns are contrary to truth? Well, our QA 112 says that we are to never give false testimony or twist someone’s words. Our reading from Eph. 4 gives us 3 very clear kinds of speech that are condemned. So in Eph. 4:25 we find these words- put away falsehood. Put away all fake speech- put off all lying and deceiving. The word in the Greek here is “Pseudo” as in Pseudo science. Pseudo-science is where quacks sell you snake oil- fake solution to your problems. So then, pseudo words are deceit- fake- and they lead away from reality. Calling black white or calling iniquity good. Clearly wrong. Added to this falsehood, we find corrupting talk in v. 29. Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouth. Corrupting talk is the same as rotten words. Words that are useless- unprofitable and unfit. Corrupting talk is the smell of death. Your words smell like a dead animal. We could call it skunk speech. Words unfit for use- having no place in our lives. Interestingly, the corrupting talk of v. 29 comes in the context of anger- as found in v. 26. Be angry and do not sin. The fact is, many of the sins that we commit when we are angry are in fact sins of speech! In anger, we say mean, harsh and cruel things. In anger our mouth runs wild- and we even curse and swear. But rather, we are to avoid all corrupting talk. As most moms have said- if you don’t have something nice to say, don’t say anything at all. Continuing on- in v. 31 we are told to put away all wrath, anger, clamor and slander. So what is slander? To slander is to blaspheme. Now normally when we speak of blaspheme, we are speaking about the name of God. We are not to belittle the name of God- or drag God’s name through the mud. But here we find slander as applied to our neighbor. Do not drag your neighbor’s name through the mud. Do not injure your neighbor or his name. Connected to slander is gossip. As QA 112 reminds us- we are not to gossip or slander. If slander is saying something that is not true about your neighbor- gossip is saying something that is true for the wrong reasons. Gossip betrays confidence- gossip shares information that is not yours to share. Prov. 26 says that gossip is like a delicious morsel that is taken into your belly. It is whisper that betrays trust. Have you ever heard someone way- “I’m not sure if I should say this, but…” That is almost always gossip. Gossip is one of those sins that we don’t really think about- or we do not view it as serious. Everyone likes a good story and everyone likes to share new information. But if the intent is to harm or discredit your neighbor without cause- without your neighbor’s good in mind- then those words must not be spoken. As Psalm 34 puts it- keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking lies. So this commandment is focusing on sins of the mouth- the mouth that we praise God must never be used to curse fellow man whom God has created in His image. Lies create division- sowing the seeds of chaos. Lies come from a heart that is selfish- when the truth is inconvenient I tell a lie in order to make myself look good. Lies come from a heart that fears man- afraid of what others will think of us. So we must avoid the lie in all its parts because God has set us free from the kingdom of the father of lies.

**III. Pursuing All Truth**

Rather, we must learn to be people who pursue the truth. As QA 112 put it- love the truth and speak it freely! So as God’s people, we will speak the truth even to our own hurt. As Psalm 51 puts it, God desires truth in the inmost part. Speaking the truth sounds easier than it is. Most people don’t want to know the truth- as they suppress the truth in unrighteousness. Others, like Pilate, question the very existence of the truth. What is truth? What is a woman? But as Christians, we are to love the truth and speak it openly. God’s people are not confused, nor are they afraid. We know the truth- we know where we came from and where we are going. We know who made the world and we know the solution to man’s deepest problem. So we are ready to give our defense and to speak the truth. But God’s Word not only tells us what we say- but how we say it as well. Eph. 4:15- speak the truth in love. Yes, bold in the truth and courageous. God did not give us a spirit of fear but of power and love. So we speak the truth- in love. Loving our neighbor. Not unnecessarily harsh- not abuse with our words. But loving. And again in I Peter 3- be ready to give your defense with gentleness and respect. Our words are to be respectful and gentle. Like a parent to their child- explaining what is true and why it is important. Look again at Eph. 4:29- words that are good for building up, that it may give grace to those who hear. Even when you are deconstructing false narratives, your words are to be useful for building up. Or as Col. 4 puts it, let your speech be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person. Gracious words are like the sugar that helps the medicine of truth go down.

The fact is, we have a message that the world needs to hear. Why is truthful speech so important? Well, if people do not view you as trustworthy, why would they listen when you tell them about Jesus? Those who often tell lies are like the boy who cried wolf- soon no one would believe him even when he told the truth. So it is, as Christians we are to be so truthful, honest and sincere that people are prone to listen when we speak. The character trait here is that of integrity- we mean what we say and say what we mean. Added to that, speech is the chosen instrument by which Thee truth is known. John 4 says that we are to worship in Spirit and in Truth. Jesus himself is the way, the truth and the life. How will the nations and our neighbors hear this message of salvation if we do not open our mouth and speak? Why would they listen if we were not known as people of truth? As the truth- Jesus sets us free! Believing the truth of the gospel is the way in which we are set free from slavery to sin, death and hell. The truth sets us free from the kingdom of the devil- who is the father of all lies!

To conclude, speech is a powerful tool and dangerous weapon. The tongue, like a spark, can set a whole forest on fire, or as a rudder it can steer a ship safely to harbor. Our speech can tear down or it can build up. By our speech, we are to praise God and speak the truth in love to our neighbor. Jesus Christ redeems us from the life of deceit so that we might be people of truth. Even though we live in a country with free speech, that does not mean that we are free to say anything we want. God has sanctified our speech! So may we all learn to love and speak the truth as we reflect the God of all truth!