“Law of Love and Liberty: Words as Weapons and Witness”

Exodus 20:1-16; James 3:8-10

(notes based on the sermon by Pastor Steve Massey, Hayden Bible Church, 9/13/20)

“Sticks and stones may break my bones,

but words will never hurt me.”

This childhood rhyme just isn’t true. All of us have felt the sting of hurtful words. All of us have been the source of hurtful words. This 9th commandment tells us not to bear false witness against a neighbor. It is juxtaposed with God’s words, words that are true and edifying and necessary. We are His image bearers, so our words should do the same. We love our neighbors when we use words that are true and edifying and necessary. (Q1) Read Prov. 25:18 with me. Bearing a false witness against a neighbor includes gossip, that crushes like a club. It includes slander, that slashes like a sword. It includes lying, that pierces like a sharp arrow. (Q2)

The first 4 commandments all have to do with love toward God, including loving His good name (see Mark 12:30). The next 6 commandments have to do with loving our neighbor, including our neighbor’s good name (see Mark 12:31). The 9th commandment forbids speaking evil of our neighbor. Now, the letter of the law is restricted to the courtroom application of this commandment. In reality, it goes much deeper than that. God is true. God is truthful. He is always pure. We are to reflect His image. We are to be true, truthful, and pure. God hates and forbids untruthful or insincere speech that harms others. God’s people are to love truth and speak truth and refrain from speech that is evil and unneedful to others (Q3). Now read James 3:8-10. That old tongue is hard to tame!

God directs His wrath against all lying, gossip, slander, flattery, and untruth to others. (Q4) Gossip is saying behind someone’s back what you wouldn’t say to them face to face. Spurgeon, in talking about others, said, “Believe not half of what you hear, repeat not half of what you believe.” We live in a culture of false witnessing: FAKE NEWS! But it’s not just in our culture; it’s actually in us. These half-truths, untruths, and words that injure come out of all of us, at one time or another. Why? It’s not so much the tongue… it’s a matter of the heart (see Matt. 12:34-35). What motivates us to be this way? It goes back to our sin nature, back to the Garden of Eden. Satan bore false witness against God Himself. Satan still hates God and those who are created in God’s image. But God’s people are to love the truth and spread the truth and refrain from speech that is evil and unneedful to others.

Pride and malice (intent to commit harm) are the root sins of bearing false witness. God wants nothing to do with those. He will not accommodate Himself to man’s untamed heart and untamed tongue. God alone sets the standard (see Matt. 12:36-37). The law is a window through which we see the nature of God, and then can face the truth about ourselves: we are fallen. We are lawbreakers by nature. BUT THERE IS GOOD NEWS: The conviction we feel is a gift from Him to lead us to repentance (see Rom. 3:20-22). The law will never be our ladder to Heaven. We need a righteousness outside of ourselves. This can only be found in Jesus Christ. Turn to the One who is the way, the truth, and the life. Turn to the One who allowed Himself to be accused by false witnesses. He was punished for our gossip and slander. He spoke not a word because He came to take our place. He was our substitute so that we could be made righteous through Him.

Truthful, needful words, especially our words about others, are a primary part of our witness to the world. These words are expressed in the way we talk about others and in the way we not talk about others. The 9th commandment is more than just a prohibition against bearing a false witness. God calls us to value, build up, and even defend the reputation of our neighbors. Don’t excuse yourself by saying, “I can’t help it. That’s just the way I am.” No. You are a new creation in Christ. Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth. Let your words impart grace to others. (Eph. 4:29) (Q5)

**QUESTIONS**

1. Necessary… Hmmm… When is it necessary to talk?
2. Besides gossip, slander, and lying, how else might we “bear false witness against our neighbor”?
3. “Refrain from speech that is unneedful…” When are the times you should just keep your mouth shut?
4. Pastor Steve suggested this experiment: try to go one whole day without disparaging another person. Good luck.
5. Who do you know that needs building up? What words of encouragement can you give them? What mode of communication will work best for doing this?

“Tis so Sweet to Trust in Jesus” (Stead)

'Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus,  
Just to take Him at His Word  
Just to rest upon His promise,  
Just to know, "Thus saith the Lord!"

Jesus, Jesus, how I trust Him!  
How I've proved Him o'er and o'er  
Jesus, Jesus, precious Jesus!  
Oh, for grace to trust Him more!

I'm so glad I learned to trust Him,  
Precious Jesus, Savior, Friend  
And I know that He is with me,  
Will be with me to the end.

Yes, 'tis sweet to trust in Jesus,  
Just from sin and self to cease  
Just from Jesus simply taking  
Life and rest, and joy and peace.