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If lying hurts nobody then is it OK?



In the Judaeo Christian traditions the 10 commandments are the commands from God to all of us.

You can find all of the 10 commandments in Exodus chapter 20. The ninth commandment is at verse 16 and it says:

¹⁶ "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour".

This commandment tells us to never lie and, in this verse, our neighbour is everyone.

Our Lord Jesus Christ himself was once asked "Who is my neighbour?" and this is the story he told in Luke's gospel at chapter 10, and we know his response as the story of the Good Samaritan:

²⁵ On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. "Teacher," he asked, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?"

²⁶ "What is written in the Law?" he replied. "How do you read it?"

²⁷ He answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.'"

²⁸ "You have answered correctly," Jesus replied. "Do this and you will live."

²⁹ But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbour?"

³⁰ In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.

³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next

day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

³⁶ "Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?"

³⁷ The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him."

Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

So a neighbour is not someone you necessarily know, nor someone who must live next door, nor even someone from the same community or any like-minded person. A neighbour is, in fact, everyone.

Here our Lord Jesus Christ was telling a story to answer the "*expert in the law*" in response to the question "*And who is my neighbour?*". None of the people in the story are real people. They are caricatures. We know this because, in fact, priests, pharisees and levites could always have come to the aid of anyone in such trouble even on the Sabbath day. Yet, as a caricature, we too can think of people who do not want to "get their hands dirty" by intervening and would rather pretend they had not seen. The story has even greater significance by the fact that the "Samaritan" in the story was thought of by Judeans as a foreigner. It is as if a foreigner or immigrant helps us and shows us full compassion and so the story is a lesson to us all.

Therefore when we read the ninth commandment that commands each of us that "*You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour*", it actually means we should never lie, but always tell the truth to, and about, anyone and everyone.

The difficulty now arises when we tell, what our society all around us calls a "white lie". This is a lie that is not intended to hurt anyone, but rather to help them. So the intention is goodbut here lies the problem; this all pre-supposes that we have a "crystal ball" and we know the future and what is going to happen perfectly.

Earlier this year (July 2019) Piers Morgan and Susanna Reid interviewed Dr David Mackereth. Piers Morgan called Dr Mackereth a bigot, claiming that if Dr Mackereth were a good Christian he should be tolerant of everything even if the Doctor is made to talk in untruths, i.e. to lie (to be dishonest). The case in point was - would Dr Mackereth treat a trans-man as a man or a woman, and Dr Mackereth could not tell the trans-person (born a man) his diagnosis without treating him as male.

The truth here is that a white-lie might be perceived as being nice to the person but medically there are clear significant differences between a male and a female and any diagnosis, if you really care about the person, has to also recognise that they are actually male, no matter what they think about themselves, or, equally, actually female no matter what they think about themselves. If you really care about someone you have to tell the truth to them. A white-lie would, in the long term, actually be clearly bad for them as it would be a dishonest, and unhelpful, diagnosis for them. So the real question is: Do you care for them or not?

I believe that there is NO example anywhere in the Bible of our Lord Jesus Christ lying to anyone with the idea it was being nice to them! NO example at all. Jesus Christ not only keeps all of these commandments for us all he additionally adds that we should LOVE our enemies.

In the Gospel of Matthew chapter 5 Jesus says to us:

“...But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven, for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.”

So this is going even further by saying to Christians that we are not only commanded not to disregard or hate people, we are also commanded to LOVE our enemies. So we should pray for those who persecute Christians (and therefore we should pray for people like Piers Morgan).

Love in this case, as in most of the New Testament, means to care for others.

In Romans chapter 13 St Paul talks of the law (i.e. the Judaeo-Christian law) and says the law is summed up in this sentence,

“You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

December 2019