

TELL THE TRUTH, EPH4:22-25, JER.9:3-9

Ten Step Program #9

◆Intro: Let me introduce you to a few different kinds of folks struggling with truth, and with whether to tell it or not.

◆**Henry Heaver:** Ol' Hank gets depressed, slouches into the couch, pouts, slams doors, and groans instead of breathing. Everyone in the house knows there's something wrong but no one says anything, especially not Hank. No one wants the chaos out in the open.

◆Is something wrong Hank?

◆"No no... It's no use anyway... just never mind."

◆**Brian Brash:** Brian says what he thinks. "My goodness your baby is ugly. He looks like a Klingon! What happened to his head anyway?" "Listen, Frank, you've got BO and everyone talks about you, you realize that don't you?" "He pal," to the neighbor over the fence, "I'm gonna shoot your dog next time he takes a break on my lawn."

◆**Sally Silent:** Sally strides firmly and rapidly through the house, making no eye-contact. Her lips are superglued together and she's now a whirlwind of activity accomplishing a lot in her energetic syndrome. But she's short, and curt with her responses to others, which come hissing from a clamped jaw like deadly gas escaping into the atmosphere.

◆**Beat-around-the-bush Beverly:** Bev eyes her lumbering husband and casually mentions, "Deb's husband has been working out lately. Sure making some progress!"

◆"What's that supposed to mean?"

TELL THE TRUTH, EPH4:22-25, JER.9:3-9

Ten Step Program #9

◆“Oh nothing.” she sings. She doesn’t want to discuss the issue, just plant a seed, you know. When Bev feels lonely she makes odd statements to the kids that are really aimed at Dad, like, “Do you think your father loves us as much as his boat?”

◆**Flattering Fred:** “Grandma, this meal is terrific! Such a delicately balanced array of nutritional value and aesthetic appeal. Kids, have some more asparagus a'la mode and tell Granny you love it.” Meanwhile he's planning a Micky D's run on the way home.

◆By now you see some similarities in all of these, don't you? There's lots of talk, even lots of truths, but not a lot of following the 9th commandment, telling the truth. The negative side of the ninth commandment is don't lie. The positive word for today is Tell.

◆First, why is this such a big deal as to make it into God’s Ten Step Program for good living? Because,

◆**1. When I lie I’m aiding the kingdom of darkness.**

◆A. Lewis Smedes writes, “All lies are the vomit of the Devil.” In a nut shell, the ninth commandment tells us not to lie. But what is a lie? Jeremiah uses the term deceit (v8). Deceit has to do not with what is actually said, but what is intended for the other person to hear or think. Deceit is a matter of intention. See, we can say something untrue without it being a lie. We could be mistaken, or just plain ignorant.

TELL THE TRUTH, EPH4:22-25, JER.9:3-9

Ten Step Program #9

◆ Once, many years ago a young boy told his parents that a girl he liked at school was promiscuous. The shock on his parents face was his first clue that promiscuous did NOT in fact mean "cute". (In that particular case I had been wrong, but I wasn't lying.) A lie is when the mouth speaks out of sync with the heart.

◆ *"Their tongue is a deadly arrow; it speaks with deceit. With his mouth each speaks cordially to his neighbour, but in his heart he sets a trap for him." Jeremiah 9:8, NIV.*

◆ You can lie even when your words are factual and true. Politicians have a reputation for this. Kids do it too. Two boys were playing in the school yard when one found a old watch with a glimmer of gold under a lot of dirt. The other, looking over his shoulder began cutting it down. "Gross. What a dirty old watch. Who'd ever want such a dumb ol' thing? Look at the band. It's broken. And it's scratched right there, see that." It was all true, but the finder was also very observant of human behavior so he said, "Yeah, you're right. Maybe I'll just throw it into the woods. Or would you like it?" "Sure!" said the other. His buddy wanted it all along. He was deceitful even though he accurately described the watch.

◆ God wants his people NOT to misrepresent reality. That's what lying does and with intention. Jeremiah says it's just like putting

TELL THE TRUTH, EPH4:22-25, JER.9:3-9

Ten Step Program #9

an arrow on the bow and taking steady aim, and releasing at just the right moment. (a fully deliberate action)

◆ *“They make ready their tongue like a bow, to shoot lies; it is not by truth that they triumph in the land. They go from one sin to another; they do not acknowledge me,” declares the LORD.” Jeremiah 9:3, NIV.*

◆ In fact, in Scripture, one of the Devil’s primary descriptions is “deceiver”. God’s way is truth, his laws are reality. Good is by definition all that God does. Satan and evil are by definition opposed to what is true and good.

◆ *“You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” John 8:44, NIV.*

◆ Lies, or untruth is really at the heart of all sin, when you think about it. Let’s go backward through the commandments we’ve thought about in the last weeks:

◆ #8 Stealing: is the lie that stuff will secure us.

◆ #7 Adultery: is a lie that sex will fix our emptiness and that people are bodies, not persons!

◆ #6 Murder: is a lie that people are disposable and not sacred to God.

◆ #5 Dishonor of parents: is a lie that we are autonomous, and ought answer only to ourselves.

TELL THE TRUTH, EPH4:22-25, JER.9:3-9

Ten Step Program #9

◆ #4 Ignoring a day of worship and rest: is a lie that we are the providers of life and only get by our own hands.

◆ **Q. What is the aim of the ninth commandment?** A. That I never give false testimony against anyone, twist no one's words, not gossip or slander, nor join in condemning anyone rashly or without a hearing. Rather, in court and everywhere else, I should avoid lying and deceit of every kind; these are the very devices the devil uses, and they would call down on me God's intense wrath. Ok, that's the prohibition side of the command. What about the other side?

◆ **2. When I speak truth in love, I'm building the Kingdom of God.**

◆ *"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbour, for we are all members of one body." Ephesians 4:22-25, NIV.*

◆ *"Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ." Ephesians 4:15, NIV.*

◆ A. I want you to note that in these verses from Paul's letter "truth" is defined with additional ideas like "love" and "righteousness", and "holiness". These are by definition the nature of God. Where "deceiver" is the descriptor of Satan, "truth and love" is the descriptor of God. For example

TELL THE TRUTH, EPH4:22-25, JER.9:3-9

Ten Step Program #9

◆“And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness,” Exodus 34:6, NIV.

◆Love and faithfulness/truth (same word). When I deceive I’m holding hands with the devil. When I speak the truth in love , I’m holding hands with God. God's character is reality, truthfulness colored by righteousness and love. This is what it means to be righteous! Righteousness is more than just being right. It is being right in a good/godly way. In the same way, real “truth” is more than just reality; it is reality that is as it ought to be, as God intended it.

◆Let me explain briefly. Some folk justify horror films, or explicit sexual activity on film as being legitimate practice because it’s telling the truth; ie, people do this. It’s reality. But this is truth telling without love. It is not good reality, or helpful reality. It is rather destructive and damaging reality. People also defecate. We have no valuable reason for needing to display that. Lets not applaud films for scandalizing our minds in the name of supposed “truth telling.”

◆The truth that God wants of me in this world is the “truth in love”. Lets go back to our group of truth challenged individuals we started with:

TELL THE TRUTH, EPH4:22-25, JER.9:3-9

Ten Step Program #9

◆ **Henry** the Heaver makes plain to the world that there are problems afloat, but Henry isn't seeking harmony or peace for those problems. He's just heaving on everyone.

◆ **Sally** the Silent is passive-aggressively presenting to all around that she is angry, and hurt. She wants everyone to know the truth that she feels bad but she doesn't care to relate to anyone lovingly. She actually pretends that she's loving because she isn't blowing up at anyone.

◆ **Bev** who beats around the bush, is also revealing reality/truth. She's lonely for attention. She wants to feel close to her husband. She's worried about his health. But she's sharing that through shame and comparison, not love.

◆ Sometimes if I intend to love my neighbor it will mean I don't say some things, because the truth is tempered by my love. Or I will be very careful about how I say it.

◆ [A wife called home to check in from out of town. Her husband said, "Oh hi honey. Things are ok, but the dog was hit by a car and is dead." Appalled, the wife said, That's no way to tell me bad news. "Well what am I supposed to say." "You need to prepare people for bad news. You say something that hints at something being wrong. Like, "Skippy was up on the roof." Then I know something is up. Then you lead up to hard truth with something like, "Skippy isn't his barking self these days." And then you could have said he's not doing well. And then eventually you tell me poor Skippy has passed away."

◆ "Sorry, dear. I'll be more careful next time."

TELL THE TRUTH, EPH4:22-25, JER.9:3-9

Ten Step Program #9

- ◆ "Ok, So enough about that. Hows my mother doing?"
- ◆ "Grandma? oh ah, well, lets just say, she's on the roof."]
- ◆ The Heidelberg Catechism calls us to "guard" and "advance" our neighbor.
 - ◆ *Q112 ... I should love the truth, speak it candidly, and openly acknowledge it. And I should do what I can to guard and advance my neighbor's good name.*
- ◆ Lets acknowledge this is the harder way. Facing truth and telling truth is right but not easy. Often we can get hurt telling the truth. People often don't like the truth and react violently to it. Truth can make your boss defensive, or your spouse angry. Truth can disappoint your parents. Truth can be told at the wrong time (such as when parents disagree in front of the child they are disciplining.)
 - ◆ I read of a boy back in earlier America who pushed over the family outhouse just for fun and then ran off lest he be caught. When the father later confronted him he said, "Like the famous George Washington, I cannot tell a lie. I did it." He was immediately spanked within an inch of his life. This confused him greatly, for George by all accounts was not punished for honesty about chopping down the cherry tree. "Ah, said the father. But George's father was not in the cherry tree."
- ◆ Nonetheless, ultimately for life and love, community and relationship we all depend on truth. Without truth there is no

TELL THE TRUTH, EPH4:22-25, JER.9:3-9

Ten Step Program #9

such thing as trust. Without trust we can have no banks, for example. We'd have to each carry all our gold coins with us, and hide them in places no one can reach. Without trust and laws that assure our trust, you could never know for certain what might be inside your cereal box. Without trust only the people who have been to Africa could know for sure it's there. Without truth and trust, the world of medicine would be impossible, and we'd live in constant fear and hopelessness. So we tell the truth for the sake of having friends, and a safe town, and a prosperous nation.

◆**Conclusion:** Years ago I was reading a story of a missionary in the Congo. I had young sons at the time. This missionary did too. One afternoon the father spotted his son playing under a tree. The father in a calm, stern voice commanded his son to quickly lie flat on the ground and crawl in the dust toward him. After about 10 yards he told him to stand up and run to him. The child did exactly as he was told. In the tree above the boy there was a python preparing to drop onto him. (You probably know such a snake will wrap around it's victim until it is strangled and can swallow even a donkey whole.) Crawling away flat kept the boy from being a likely target and made the python wait.

◆My heart skipped a beat I think, when I read that tale. I thought of my own sons. I wondered if they would have so trusted in me so as to obey my words in an urgent instant. I wondered what would have happened if they had replied, "Why? Dad? How come? Do I have to right now? In just a sec.!"

TELL THE TRUTH, EPH4:22-25, JER.9:3-9

Ten Step Program #9

◆ When you and I live and tell the truth, we create a trustworthy world. A godly world. A safe world where instead of heaving, and making everyone in the room uncomfortable, Henry is pleasant to be around. And Brian doesn't have to be brash. And Sally doesn't give anyone the silent treatment. And Bev can get right to the point without beating around the bush (which will make her male-minded husband comfortably grateful). And instead of flattery, Fred gives honest, and generous compliments to the warming and appreciation of many.

◆ Finally, where is Gospel in all this? The One who is the center of the universe must be part of God's preference for truth. Indeed Jesus said "I am the Way. I am Truth. I am Life. No one finds God the Father without going through me." There is evil reality, and there is good, saving reality. Hence God's Ten Commands! There is a "reality" that leads to destruction and death. And there is reality that leads to life and love, even eternal life. Which one are you choosing?