

TEACHING GOAL

To study a special application of the ninth commandment namely that of truthfulness and espionage.

DOCTRINAL STANDARDS

- Q. Which is the ninth commandment?
- A. The ninth commandment is, Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.
- Q. What is required in the ninth commandment?
- A. The ninth commandment requires the maintaining and promoting of truth between man and man, and of our own and our neighbor's good name, especially in witness-bearing.
- S.C. 77-77, L.C. 143-144, W.C. of F. XIX, Savoy 19, Young 99-100

SCRIPTURAL BASIS

Study Passage: Exodus 1:8-22

Support Passages: Genesis 20; Genesis 27:1-27; Proverbs 11:13; Joshua 8:3-29; Hebrews 11:31; James 2:25; I Samuel 16:1-13; II Kings 6:8-23

BIBLE STORY

Joshua 2; Rahab and the spies.

MEMORY ASSIGNMENT

I John 2:21

21 I have not written to you because you do not know the truth, but because you know it, and that no lie is of the truth.

APPLICATION

Given that truthfulness is the hallmark of godliness how shall we deal with acts of espionage? We must realize that concealment of the truth is not necessarily an act of lying. Neither is deceiving the enemy in warfare disobedience to the ninth commandment.

SUMMARY

In the previous lesson we studied the necessity of being truthful as demanded by the ninth commandment. Indeed we studied the very sanctity of truth. The apostle John writes, "for I was very glad when brethren came and bore witness to your truth, that is, how you are walking in truth. I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth."¹ But the question of truthfulness, as it turns out, is not all that easy.

Some commentators believe that we may never tell a lie and they quote the very passages that we studied previously. However, we are informed by the Bible passages that support this lesson that concealing the truth does not necessarily implicate us in lying. For example I Samuel 16:1-13 is the account of David's anointing. Samuel was very apprehensive of going to the house of Jesse for that purpose for fear that Saul would kill him. So the LORD told Samuel to take a heifer with him and inform Jesse that he came to "sacrifice to the LORD." To the contrary, Samuel went to Jesse's house to anoint David and the sacrifice would appear to be an evasion of the truth. The true reason for Samuel's visit was suppressed. Since this was done at God's command we must conclude that concealment of truth is not a breaking of the ninth commandment.

Another example is seen in the account of the midwives of Israel during their bondage in Egypt.² Intent on murdering the male babies to control the population growth and leadership of Israel, the king of Egypt commanded the midwives to kill these babies when they were born. The midwives refused to do this and when called to account for their disobedience they gave the following reason, "The Hebrew women are not as the Egyptian women; for they are vigorous, and they give birth before the midwife can get to them."³ At best this reason was partially true for no doubt some Israeli women gave birth without the help of a midwife. However, the compelling reason was simply that they obeyed God rather than men and would not do murder. God rewarded the midwives for their act of disobedience and from this we conclude that we are under no obligation to tell the truth to an enemy intent on murdering us.

Elisha deliberately deceived the Syrians intent on capturing him by telling them that they had come to the wrong city, for they thought (correctly) that Elisha was in Dothan. They were smitten with blindness and while in that condition Elisha took them to Samaria into the hands of the king of Israel. This was accomplished by deceiving the enemy and again Elisha was under no obligation to inform them while they were blind that he was the man that they sought. It must be noted that this deception was not based on a lie but on the concealment of truth and there is indeed a difference between the two.

Now we come to Rahab who hid the Israeli spies on her roof top and sent

¹ III John 3-4

² Exodus 1:8-22

³ Exodus 1:19

the authorities of Jericho away to search in the wrong direction.⁴ She is commended by God for welcoming the spies in peace⁵ and for sending them out another way. ⁶ This obviously involved deception of the enemy. If viewed in the context of the impending war against Jericho her deception was an act of espionage and not an act of bearing false witness against her neighbor. If viewed otherwise we could say that God simply commended her for protecting the spies and not for her deception. Even so, she could not have protected the spies had she not been deceptive. When the king of Jericho asked her concerning the spies that came to her house she answered, "Yes the men came to me, but I did not know where they were from. And it came about when it was time to shut the gate, at dark, that the men went out; I do not know where the men went."⁷ This was clearly not true. She did know who they were and where they were from and in fact they were hidden under stalks of flax on the roof of her house. Should she have said, "I am glad you asked! They are up on my roof." Perhaps she should have remained silent. If so would not her house have been searched given that the enemy knew that the spies had gone to the house of Rahab? We conclude, therefore, that deception of the enemy in warfare is not lying just as killing the enemy in warfare is not murder.⁸

We may never bear false witness against our neighbor that is to say that truth is indeed the hallmark of godliness. We are to promote the good name, the reputation of ourselves and our neighbor. The deception of an enemy in warfare does not violate this principle but in fact preserves our integrity and our lives.

⁴ Joshua 2

⁵ Hebrews 11:31

⁶ James 2:25

⁷ Joshua 2:4-5

⁸ Robert L. Dabney, Lectures in Systematic Theology, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Zondervan Publishing House, 1972, pp 425-426.