

Sermon Outline: “You Shall Not Bear False Witness”

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1. Introduction: What Does This Commandment Mean?

- Acknowledge that “bearing false witness” isn’t everyday language
 - Common understanding:
 - Usually taken as “don’t lie”
 - Especially: don’t lie about other people
 - Courtroom image:
 - Giving false testimony against someone
 - Transition:
 - This commandment is deeper than just “don’t lie”
 - It has to do with how we *see and judge other people*
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2. The Story: False Witness Against Jesus (Mark 14)

- Set the scene:
 - Jesus brought before the Sanhedrin
 - Goal: find a reason to condemn Him
 - Key detail:
 - Many give false testimony—but it doesn’t agree
 - Final turning point:
 - They stop needing witnesses altogether
 - They’ve already decided He is guilty
 - Emphasize:
 - The trial is a *formality*—a façade
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3. The Deeper Problem: Judgment Before Evidence

- Important insight:
 - The issue wasn’t just that they lied
 - The issue: they had already condemned Him in their hearts
- They *knew* (or thought they knew):
 - “He is wrong”
 - “He is dangerous”

- “He deserves to die”
 - Therefore:
 - They looked for evidence to support their conclusion
 - Transition:
 - This is where the story becomes about *us*
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4. Application: How We Do the Same Thing

- Bring it into everyday life:
 - People we dislike personally
 - Family members or former friends
 - Public figures (politicians, celebrities, etc.)
 - Pattern:
 - We decide who someone is
 - Then interpret everything through that lens
 - Key idea:
 - We aren’t just observing—we are *constructing a version of them*
 - Core claim:
 - This is “bearing false witness in our hearts”
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5. Spiritual Judgment vs. Natural Judgment

- **ML 523:** The Lord says, "Judge not, that you be not condemned." (Matthew 7:1)
This cannot in the least mean judging of someone's moral and civil life in the world, but judging of someone's spiritual and heavenly life. Who does not see that if people were not allowed to judge of the moral life of those dwelling with them in the world, society would collapse? What would become of society if there were no public courts of law, and if no one was permitted to have his judgment of another? But to judge what the inner mind or soul is like within, thus what a person's spiritual state is and so his fate after death - of this one is not permitted to judge, because it is known to the Lord alone. Nor does the Lord reveal it until after death, in order that everyone may do what he does in freedom, and that good or evil may consequently be from him and so in him, and the person thus live his own life and be his own person to eternity.
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- Introduce distinction:
 - We *must* judge actions (what people do)
 - But we must not judge spiritual character

- Common misconception:
 - “As long as I don’t say they’re going to hell, I’m fine”
 - Clarify:
 - Spiritual judgment is more subtle than that
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6. The Key Danger: Deciding Someone Cannot Change

- Central insight:
 - One of the most common spiritual judgments:
 - “This is just who this person is”
 - “They will never change”
 - Why this matters:
 - It closes us off to them
 - Prevents understanding, compassion, and support
 - Tie back:
 - This is exactly what the crowd did to Jesus
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7. The Role of Charity

- Transition to solution:
 - What is the antidote to bearing false witness?
 - Teachings on charity:
 - Without charity:
 - We see only the negative
 - We reinterpret even good things negatively
 - With charity:
 - We look for good
 - We give the benefit of the doubt
 - Reconnect to story:
 - The crowd interpreted everything Jesus did as evil
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8. Practical Application: How to Avoid False Witness

- Two-part approach:
 - **Judge actions, not character**
 - Stick to observable facts

- Avoid conclusions about who someone is
 - **Put on our “Charity Glasses” and Assume the possibility of good**
 - Give the benefit of the doubt
 - Stay open to change
 - Clarify:
 - If we’re wrong in charity → no harm done
 - If we’re wrong in judgment → we’ve borne false witness
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9. Conclusion

- Restate the deeper meaning:
 - This commandment is not just about lying
 - It’s about how we hold others in our hearts
- Final encouragement:
 - Resist the urge to “decide” who people are
 - Look at others with charity
 - Stay open to the Lord’s work in them