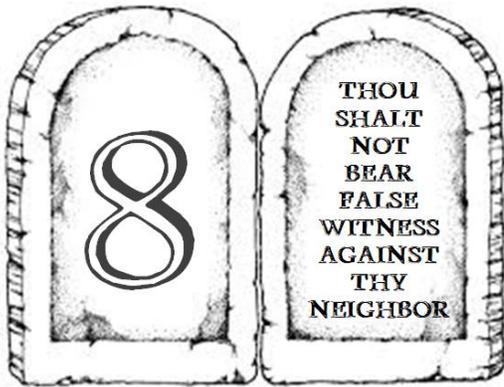


# TEN COMMANDMENT ARTICLE SERIES

BY FR. BRIAN



Just before my ordination my Mom asked me if I would be willing to tell her what I thought about the dress she bought for my first Mass, and then the suit. She was very excited about the dress and wanted to show it off. I asked, “Are you sure you want my opinion?” And she was emphatic that she did. Now you also need to know that my Mom had the dress altered right after she bought it and then lost some weight. She put the dress on, came out, and said, “So, what do you think?” My response was simply, “It falls on you the wrong way, the colors are not flattering, and it makes you look fat. Outside of that, it’s fine.” My Mom was not happy with my response,

but it was the truth.

The reality is that my family knows not to ask my opinion because if they do, they will hear exactly what I think. I try not to be mean in what I say to people; I just tell them what I believe they need to hear. At the same time, I generally do not give my opinion unless I am asked, as I have gotten into trouble with people over this. I actually do not have a problem with people getting angry with me if I am speaking the truth. I always tell people—do not ask me if you do not want my honest opinion because I will not sugarcoat what I really think. I also can be honest with people if they ask a question that I do not want to answer—for whatever reason. I simply tell them I will not answer the question, and so people, at times, will get upset with me. But, just because a person wants an answer does not mean they have the right to expect one.

The Eighth Commandment says, “You shall not bear dishonest witness against your neighbor.” Many people interpret this commandment to mean that you shall not tell a lie. But the truth is that there is more to this commandment than telling a lie. The commandment is speaking to a deeper sense of how we make use of our tongue, particularly in regard to other people.

Many people will tell me that they just told a little white lie because they did not want to hurt the other person’s feelings, deal with their reaction, or some other excuse. The idea is because the lie is “small” it does not really matter—it is not really a problem. Jesus tells us something very different: “Let your ‘Yes’ mean ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No’ mean ‘No.’ Anything more is from the evil one.” (Matt. 5:37) Speaking the truth is not an option, but at the same time we do not have to tell everyone what we are thinking even if they ask. I really believe people tell lies of any kind, even little white lies, because it makes life easier for them. If they are at all honest with themselves, it rarely is about the other person. Anytime we are not speaking the truth, we are bearing false witness. We are giving false information, false comfort, false hope, false sense of peace, and so forth. By not confronting issues head on, and by avoiding what needs to be said, we are doing harm—no matter how insignificant. Christ came to set us free, and we are told that the truth will set you free. (John 8:32) There is nothing in the teaching of Christ that grants an exception. Yes, people can get angry overhearing the truth, and yes, they got angry with Christ overhearing the truth, but He still told the truth. And we must do the same.

Another issue that this commandment covers is gossip. Many people believe that gossip simply entails passing on false information about another person. But that is not the true extent of gossip. Gossip is passing on any unnecessary information about another person that may do harm to their reputation. The information may be true but if it is something that another person does not need to know, then we should not share that information. Hence, passing on true as well as false information about another person would be breaking this commandment.

Does this mean we can never talk about something another person did? No, it does not. There will be situations that arise in our lives when we need the objective perspective of another person—someone who can help us discern the meaning of an event or help us determine the right course of action to take. Hence, we turn to someone we trust and tell them what happened. If we are doing this, not to pass on information or make the person look bad, then no gossip exists. Motivation is a key component in determining whether it is gossip or not. And it is important to know who we are speaking with and how they will handle the information we are

passing on to them. (Obviously, if the person has been abusive or doing something illegal, then the proper authorities need to address that situation.)

We are simply reminded by this commandment that our mouths are intended for only one thing: proclaiming the kingdom of God. We are called to build people up and sometimes that will entail saying something they do not want to hear. At other times it may mean keeping our mouths shut. The real litmus test is: how is Christ calling me to speak to this moment? How will my words bring Christ into this moment? Will my words hurt or heal? However, we need to remember that sometimes hurtful words will—in time—bring healing.

Our words are important and can either further the message of Christ or impede that message. This commandment reminds us of that truth.