



Is There a Difference Between Exaggerating and Lying?

Exodus 20:16: (NASB) *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*





Truth matters. This is something we imagine we would all agree upon, and yet, why do we seem to rarely get to the truth? Because we bicker with and debate those who see things differently based on our different versions of the truth. Enter exaggeration. It is a tool of language to make a point, sway an opinion, build up our ego and embarrass others. Exaggeration by definition has within it seeds of truth but they are suffocated by the fabrications built upon and around them. The ninth of the Ten Commandments pertains to not lying about others. It is about the necessity for truth in all of our interactions. When God said, *You shall not bear false*

witness against your neighbor, did He also mean, "You shall not exaggerate about anything your neighbor has said or done?" Do we need to be on our guard when it comes to exaggeration?



How to thrive in relation to spirituality and to who God is

Exodus 20:3-14: (NASB) Selected verses:


EPISODE 1147

You shall have no other gods before Me
THE LESSON:
GOD IS SOVEREIGN


EPISODE 1147

You shall not make for yourself an idol
THE LESSON:
THE HONOR DUE GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY IS NEVER TO BE SHARED OR DIMINISHED


EPISODE 1136

You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain
THE LESSON:
WE SHOULD NEVER REPRESENT THE HOLINESS OF GOD'S NAME CARELESSLY, FOOLISHLY OR WITH ANY HINT OF IRREVERENCE




EPISODE 1127



Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy

THE LESSON:

WE MUST REGULARLY SET TIME ASIDE TO REVERE GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

The fifth Commandment is the first step in establishing how to thrive as a physical nation in relation to one another.


EPISODE 1161



Honor your father and your mother

THE LESSON:

THIS IS THE FIRST STEP IN ESTABLISHING HOW TO THRIVE AS A PHYSICAL NATION IN RELATION TO ONE ANOTHER

The sixth and seventh Commandments are the first and most fundamental commands regarding our relationship with our entire human family and our most personal relationship within that family:


EPISODE 1168



You shall not murder

THE LESSON:

THIS IS THE FIRST AND MOST FUNDAMENTAL COMMAND REGARDING OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH OUR ENTIRE HUMAN FAMILY


EPISODE 1169



You shall not commit adultery

THE LESSON:

THIS IS THE FOUNDATION OF THE HUMAN FAMILY RELATIONSHIP, THE SACRED COVENANT BETWEEN HUSBAND AND WIFE.


EPISODE 1177



You shall not steal

THE LESSON:

THIS ESTABLISHES THE PERSONAL RIGHTS OF THOSE IN OUR COMMUNITY



The ninth Commandment is not as dramatic as the previous three "shall not" Commandments, but it certainly carries great influence in maintaining a just and respectful society:

Exodus 20:16: (NASB) *You shall not bear <6030> false <8267> witness <5707> against your neighbor.*

Bear: Strongs #6030 *`anah*; properly, to eye or (generally) to heed, i.e., pay attention; by implication, to respond; by extension to begin to speak; specifically, to sing, shout, testify, announce

False: Strongs #8267 *sheqer*; an untruth; by implication, a sham (often adverbial)

Witness: Strongs #5707 *`ed*; concretely, a witness; abstractly, testimony; specifically, a recorder

Applying these definitions seem to give the impression that this Commandment is focused on legal settings. Do not speak or testify an untruth or sham when you are testifying against your neighbor.

This legalistic approach to the ninth Commandment is its most formal application.



The Jewish Law explained it in a widely applied moral sense as well.

First, there is the legal application:

Leviticus 19:15-18: (NASB) ¹⁵You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly.

We have missed this in our world today. When someone has misfortune in their lives and suffers from poverty, we tend to say, "Oh well, we do not want to fully apply the law to them." Sometimes we look at people who are rich and powerful and we say, "Well, they may be a little bit above things." We cannot do either. Right is right; wrong is wrong.

Next is the serious reminder about always representing truth when it comes to others:

¹⁶You shall not go about as a **slanderer <7400>** among your people, and you are not to act against the life of your neighbor; I am the LORD.

Slanderer: Strongs #7400 *rakiyl*; a scandal monger (as travelling about)

The implication here is that you spread dishonest stories as you go about your business.



Check out our CQ Kids video:
WHAT IS EVIL SPEAKING?
christianquestions.com/youtube

Finally, there is the matter of core values.

You can have disagreements with your neighbor but you are not to take matters into your own hands externally or internally:

¹⁷You shall not hate your fellow countryman in your heart; you may surely reprove your neighbor, but shall not incur sin because of him. ¹⁸You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.



Why are we in the book of Leviticus when the commandment was in Exodus?

Leviticus provides the interpretation of the Law. It takes the basics and expands on it to provide the practical application.

Our objective is to strive to speak unexaggerated truth. To do this, we need to understand the struggle involved.



JUST AS THE STEALING FORBIDDEN BY THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT USUALLY INVOLVES DECEPTION WHILE PHYSICALLY TAKING WHAT IS NOT YOURS, BEARING FALSE WITNESS IS ALSO AN ACT OF DECEPTION TO MISREPRESENT THE LIFE, WORDS OR ACTIONS OF ANOTHER PERSON.

Being untruthful about others has never been a good thing whether we look at it from a legal perspective or how it is viewed in a community.



What was the Jewish Law's penalty for bearing false witness against another? How serious was it?

As we have seen so many times before, penalties for breaking God's Old Testament Law were no-nonsense and severe. We will take a look at an example of giving a false testimony before the Law was written. This example shows us a subtlety similar to that of exaggeration.



I have never imagined exaggeration could be part of bearing false witness. We do it all the time without realizing it. Let's say I am telling my sister about the time I went to the grocery store and chose an orange from the bottom of the display and several oranges rolled to the ground. I am going to make the story funny and tell her that 100 oranges came piling down on top of me and bonked me on the head just to make her laugh and make myself look silly. Is that a sin?

If our objective is to make her laugh and she understands you are going to fabricate and embellish the story for effect, that is acceptable. We have to be careful though when exaggeration has to do with the facts of a matter about another person.

Let's look at the account of Joseph being sold into slavery by his brothers. This occurred in the absence of the oldest brother Reuben.

First is the dilemma that will lead to the false testimony:

Genesis 37:29-36: (NASB) ²⁹Now Reuben returned to the pit, and behold, Joseph was not in the pit; so he tore his garments. ³⁰He returned to his brothers and said, the boy is not there; as for me, where am I to go?

Next is the plot unfolding to hide their wrongdoing. This is a major deception in the making:

³¹So they took Joseph's tunic, and slaughtered a male goat and dipped the tunic in the blood;

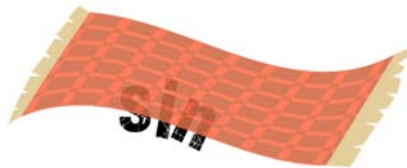
Now we have the false testimony, but notice the extreme subtlety of that testimony:

³²and they sent the varicolored tunic and brought it to their father and said, We found this; please examine it to see whether it is your son's tunic or not.

The result? A despicable lie, a horrible false witness was given without a lie being spoken:

³³Then he examined it and said, It is my son's tunic. A wild beast has devoured him; Joseph has surely been torn to pieces! ³⁴So Jacob tore his clothes, and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. ³⁵Then all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. And he said, Surely I will go down to Sheol in mourning for my son. So his father wept for him.

They bore false witness without *speaking* a lie. They allowed Jacob to draw a false conclusion and mourn the horrible death of his son for days. No one comforted him or told him the truth because they were covering their sin.





TO SPEAK UNEXAGGERATED TRUTH IS TO SPEAK WHAT NEEDS TO BE SPOKEN, EVEN IF IT IS AN UNCOMFORTABLE ADMISSION OF GUILT.

WE CAN "EXAGGERATE" BY EMBELLISHING A STORY, AS WELL AS BY EMBELLISHING THE THOUGHTS AND REACTIONS OF THE ONE WE ARE DECEIVING.

The exaggeration does not have to come through words, but we can embellish the thoughts and reactions of the ones we are deceiving by what we show them.

This includes telling of a partial-truth - it was Joseph's coat and he was missing. The brothers let their father live with this false conclusion for decades. It is wrong to hold back information that would allow someone to reach the right conclusion.

We need to ask ourselves if we have ever told partial truths.

Of course, we know the end of the story - Joseph is spared and will save them all much later:

³⁶Meanwhile, the Midianites sold him in Egypt to Potiphar, Pharaoh's officer, the captain of the bodyguard.

Episode 1181
Can I Get What I Want Through Seduction?
 The trials of Joseph in Potiphar's house

COMING SOON

The English language has 112 words for deception, according to one count, each with a different shade of meaning: collusion, fakery, malingering, self-deception, confabulation, prevarication, exaggeration, denial. – Robin Marantz Henig

What about using hyperbole? This is using exaggerated statements or claims that are not meant to be taken literally, like, I love you so much I would climb the highest mountain and swim the deepest sea. Even Jesus used hyperbole in [Matthew 5:29-30](#) when he said, if your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away.

When expressing love for our spouse it is wonderful to say those things, but it is wrong when we are talking negatively *about* someone, and we begin to blow up the truth into something bigger.



Let's discuss the penalty in the Jewish Law for bearing false witness. First, the Law was emphatic regarding the necessity for more than one witness.

This would minimize the temptation to make trouble for those we do not like by spreading false or exaggerated statements:

Deuteronomy 19:15-21: (NASB) ¹⁵*A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed.*

In the case where there was a malicious witness:

¹⁶*If a malicious witness rises up against a man to accuse him of wrongdoing, ¹⁷then both the men who have the dispute shall stand before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who will be in office in those days. ¹⁸The judges shall investigate thoroughly, and if the witness is a false witness and he has accused his brother falsely, ¹⁹then you shall do to him just as he had intended to do to his brother. Thus you shall purge the evil from among you.*

One of the ways God incorporated justice into the Jewish Law of the Old Testament was to make the penalties severe to get the attention of the people. If we purposefully misrepresent our neighbor, we run the risk of suffering the exact consequences we wanted them to suffer.

There was a harsh and yet just penalty for purposefully dishonest representation of your neighbor:

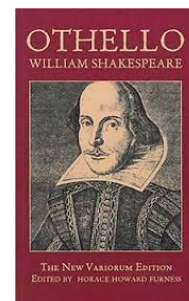
²⁰*The rest will hear and be afraid, and will never again do such an evil thing among you. ²¹Thus you shall not show pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.*

God took honesty between His people seriously. His Law and its penalties were there to make people think before they acted! There is a strength in that type of justice in the Old Testament.

At the very least, bearing false witness can damage another. In the extreme, it can assassinate the character of another.

Shakespeare's Othello: (Act 3, scene 3, lines 157-61)

*Who steals my purse steals trash; 'tis something, nothing;
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to thousands;
But he that filches from me my good name
Robs me of that which not enriches him
And makes me poor indeed.*



Assassination is a deliberate taking of a specific life, and it is also a deliberate taking of one's character.

Writers use exaggeration as a creative literary technique that describes things as being better or worse than they are in reality. American Author John Steinbeck wrote in *Of Mice and Men*, "Guys like us, that work on ranches, are the loneliest guys in the world." This emphasizes what extreme isolation they felt. The audience knows exactly what is meant.

The key is - when do we exaggerate and for what purpose?

Psalms 5:4-6: (NASB) ⁴*For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; no evil dwells with You. ⁵The boastful shall not stand before Your eyes; you hate all who do iniquity. ⁶You destroy those who speak falsehood; the LORD abhors the man of bloodshed and deceit.*



An exaggerator might mix truths and lies to look impressive to others, which causes confusion. Here is another issue we hear a lot about today - the term "gaslighting." It is a form of psychological manipulation that causes someone to doubt their memory, perception or judgment. It often involves exaggeration and false assumptions and accusations. It is traumatizing and impacts the self-worth of others. Here exaggeration is intentionally misleading and is used in a sinful way.



Our objective is to speak unexaggerated truth, but we need to understand the struggle involved.



EXAGGERATING AND LYING REGARDING OTHERS ARE SYMPTOMS OF POWERFUL PRIDE.

BY ENGAGING IN THESE THINGS, WE ARE DISPLAYING TO THE WORLD THAT WE, AND OUR EMOTIONS, ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN GOD'S REQUIREMENT FOR HONEST REPRESENTATION OF TRUTH.

When it comes to lying or exaggerating that hurts others, God's justice was and is a force to be reckoned with.

The Jewish Law was firm in response to bearing false witness. How about the response of Christianity?

The response from Jesus and the apostles regarding truth telling is also firm. Our words regarding our "neighbor" must always reflect the facts of any matter. We should not use partially-stated facts or facts conveniently out of context to prove our point. We should speak words that explain simple truth.

Exaggeration often involves exasperation when we feel like we are not being heard. This is when our endless supply of "NEVERS" and "ALWAYS" comes out. Telling your roommate or spouse, "You never pick up your clothes and I can't take it anymore!" is exasperation, not strictly factual. But it SEEMS like he or she always leaves their clothes on the floor.

In the case of my husband, he always leaves lights on. He does not know where the off switch is even though it is the same as the on switch.



(Source: Wikipedia) Exaggeration is the representation of something as more extreme or dramatic than it really is. Exaggeration may occur intentionally or unintentionally. The exaggerator has been a familiar figure in Western culture since at least Aristotle's discussion of the alazon: (In ancient Greek theater, the alazon was one of three stock characters in comedy. He is a braggart who sees himself as greater than he actually is.) "the boaster is regarded as one who pretends to have distinguished qualities which he possesses either not at all or to a lesser degree than he pretends...exaggerating. It is the opposite of minimization."



A biblical example of minimizing is Ananias and Sapphira. Christians at that time were pooling their resources to support one another in order to further advance the gospel message.

They underreported the profit they received from the sale of their property and proclaimed a support for Christianity that was untrue:

Acts 5:1-4: (NASB) ¹But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, ²and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet. ³But Peter said, Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the holy spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? ⁴While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.



Check out our CQ Kids video:

IS IT EVER OKAY TO LIE?

christianquestions.com/youtube



TO UNDERREPORT ANY MATTER CAN BE AS THOROUGHLY DAMAGING AS EXAGGERATING IT.

ENGAGING IN AN ACT OF MINIMIZATION CAN EASILY BECOME A TOOL OF EXAGGERATION, A TOOL THAT FALSIFIES OUR THOUGHTS OR POSITION TO APPEAR GODLIER THAN WE ARE.

Minimization is negative exaggeration. Ananias and Sapphira wished to appear holier than others by giving the proceeds from the sale of a piece of property to the communal coffers. This was, however, just a “show” of humility and humble giving. In reality, they *kept back* some of the money. The sin here was not that they did not give all the proceeds, but that they *said* they did. There was no insistence by the apostles that the property be sold. There was no shame in giving just a portion of the sale to the communal funds. But lying to God *is* a grave sin and they paid for it with their lives.

Making a show of how we are humble or holy is also an exaggeration by minimizing for showy motives. When we put on a show of reverence or piety without truly feeling it in our hearts, we are using a negative exaggeration that grieves God. We have to be careful to not be too big OR too small! Ananias and Sapphira were exaggerating their dedication to Christ and to God. They wanted the attention; *look at what we have done!* This was lying!

We can fall into this too. We might put on a humble demeanor just for attention or to fit in. This is falsely minimizing our pride by exaggerating our piety when, in fact, we are being very *proud* in saying how humble we are! This is not an easy thing to correct.



We must work to instruct our hearts to truly *feel* humble and pious. God will give us the experiences to teach us. The sin here is when we pretend this behavior is acceptable in order to seek attention.

Can we escape exaggeration? No, so we must learn to approach, deal with and cope appropriately.

Jesus nails down the principles of Christian communication in a simple way.

Simple speech portrays a clear message and a righteous conscience:

Matthew 5:33-37: (NASB) ³³Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, you shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the Lord. ³⁴But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, ³⁵or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING. ³⁶Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷But let your statement be, Yes, yes or No, no; anything beyond these is of evil.

We are to say what is clear to us. There is no need for being overly dramatic; simply be a Christian of integrity. Example: "I am going to do this thing for you and swear on my mother's spaghetti and meatballs." If we have to go to the level of such dramatic exaggeration, we might be revealing a lack of integrity.

Jesus is saying we are to be a person of our word. Speak the truth, be it "yes" or "no," as it applies to others.

Exaggeration is a blood relation to falsehood and nearly as blamable.

— Hosea Ballou



My husband and I are in the market for a new car. The car dealer looked at our trade-in vehicle and said they would give us - these are not real numbers - let's just say \$5,000 to make it simple. I already had an online offer for \$6,200, so I knew they were low and told them we had a higher offer. I didn't want to tell him what the offer was because I didn't want to bid against myself - I just wanted a fair deal. The salesman asks me, "What was your other offer?" I told him, "I don't remember." Well, that was a lie. So, that's not good that this came out of my mouth. I followed up with a stumbling, "Uh, around \$7,000." Well, that's just an exaggeration. It is true that \$6,200 is around \$7,000, but not really. Being a woman of integrity, I should have said, "Just give me your best offer because it is too low." We're proven in the pressure of the real world, and I failed on this one and asked God to forgive both my lying AND exaggeration.

We have all gotten involved in circumstances where in the heat of the moment, we jump to exaggeration or even lies. We can do better!



In preparing for the episode this week, I have caught myself 20-30 times (no exaggeration!) where I had to think, wait a minute, you can't say that because you are adding your perspective to what should simply be a fact. Back up and start again. We all fall into this. We need to realize it and ask sincerely for forgiveness, then live in a forgiven way.



Those who stood against Jesus during his trials blatantly defied the ninth Commandment:

Matthew 26:59-63: (NASB) ⁵⁹Now the chief priests and the whole Council kept trying to obtain false testimony against Jesus, so that they might put him to death. ⁶⁰They did not find any, even though many false witnesses came forward...

They would not have just stumbled upon false witnesses; they would have had to find them. To speak a false witness is one thing - to recruit others to speak a false witness is another.

Do we ever do this in our exaggerated conversations with those on our side of an issue? Do we spread an oversized story that enflames their passion and encourages their exaggeration so they become even bigger false witnesses?

The Jews were under Roman law during the time of Jesus. How easy was it for the false witnesses to give a testimony, knowing they would not be held to the consequence of bearing false witness under the Jewish commandment? It is easier to sin when there are no real consequences.

...But later on two came forward, ⁶¹and said, this man stated; I am able to destroy the temple of God and to rebuild it in three days. ⁶²The high priest stood up and said to him, Do you not answer? What is it that these men are testifying against you? ⁶³But Jesus kept silent. And the high priest said to him, adjure you by the living God, that you tell us whether you are the Christ, the son of God.

Jesus simply remained silent. The high priest was then forced to change the question. Even the false witnesses were not able to sentence Jesus with crucifixion.

He had to “help” them by giving the evidence they were looking for:

Matthew 26:64: (NASB) *Jesus said to him, You have said it yourself. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.*

Here is the process by which we rationalize bearing false witness and recruiting others to do so:



We have a passionately held position that we believe to be unshakable:

Acts 6:8-15: (NASB) ⁸And Stephen, full of grace and power, was performing great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹But some men from what was called the Synagogue of the Freedmen... rose up and argued with Stephen.

Stephen was so persuasive that their leadership positions were being threatened and they could not answer the arguments.



When met with overwhelming resistance and logic, we stoop down to defend rather than stand up to discuss:

¹⁰But they were unable to cope with the wisdom and the spirit with which he was speaking. ¹¹Then they secretly induced men to say, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God.

Were they induced by a threat? A pay-off? Something enticed the false witnesses to break the ninth Commandment.



We take the exaggerated and false statements we have encouraged and fuel the fire of our threatened position to create frenzy:

¹²And they stirred up the people, the elders and the scribes, and they came up to him and dragged him away and brought him before the Council. ¹³They put forward false witnesses who said, This man incessantly speaks against this holy place and the Law; ¹⁴or we have heard him say that this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us. ¹⁵And fixing their gaze on him, all who were sitting in the Council saw his face like the face of an angel.

Mob mentality overruns sensibility.



The result of this unrighteous exercise is a complete abandonment of integrity for the purpose of extinguishing a legitimate question or perspective.

They stoned Stephen. They extinguished the “problem” because they could not overcome it.

Imagine how these false witnesses against Jesus and Stephen will feel when they are resurrected in the future kingdom.

It is like all these spider legs that come out of this monster of lying and exaggeration. Perhaps it is easier to exaggerate with serious matters. The more important it is, the more we need to watch out for exaggeration. We challenge our listeners to closely watch this upcoming week to see under what circumstances you exaggerate.



filter our words

Put a filter on it! We like to drink coffee, but we do not like to eat the coffee grounds. Water filters through the grounds to make coffee. May it be the same with our words - improper exaggeration is like chewing on coffee grounds!



NO MATTER HOW IMPORTANT WE THINK OUR POSITION MIGHT BE, SPEAKING FALSEHOODS AND EXAGGERATIONS ABOUT THOSE WHO DISAGREE WITH US IS DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSED TO ANY HINT OF A GODLY CHARACTER.

LET US CEASE AND DESIST IMMEDIATELY!

When it comes to honest representation of others, the contrast between Jesus and the Pharisees is dramatic.



How do we go about recognizing, repenting for and stopping our exaggerated approaches to others?

Now we come to the core of the matter. At this point, many of us probably feel like we have too easily fallen into the exaggeration trap. To get out of such a trap requires several things, not the least of which is a replacement behavior. Learning a new habit will, over time, crush an old one!

Let's begin with some "mirror" questions about our motives:

- WHY DO I EXAGGERATE?
- WHAT AM I TRYING TO PROVE?
- WHAT AM I TRYING TO HIDE?
- WHAT DOES MY EXAGGERATION SAY ABOUT ME?



I just want to look at exaggeration from a different perspective. I have five grandchildren. They are THE best, most beautiful grandchildren you have ever seen. As a matter of fact, in my office there is a wall where I have a picture of each of those kids, and I invite any of you to come and see that what I am telling you is absolutely the truth.



Yes, grandparents get a free pass... they ALL have the world's best grandchildren!

Resume: a written exaggeration of only the good things a person has done in the past, as well as a wish list of the qualities a person would like to have. — Bo Bennett



I remember when I was discussing with someone how I swim 50 laps a few times per week for exercise and realized later that I was only really swimming 44 laps. I used to do 50 when I was younger. Because I realized that wasn't honest, the next time I swam, I made myself do 50 laps which just about killed me! Oops, was that an exaggeration? This lesson has really awakened me to how often I speak this kind of exaggeration.



To break these old habits of bearing false witness and exaggeration, we need to start with this basic principle:

Always seek out and hold fast to righteousness:

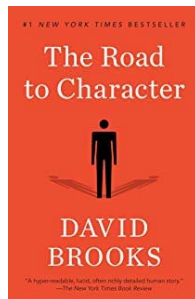
1 Thessalonians 5:15,21-22: (NASB) ¹⁵See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people. ²¹But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; ²²abstain from every form of evil.



To accomplish this, we must look at life with the perspectives listed in these verses:

- *do not repay evil with evil* (we can do this by exaggerating)
- *always seek after that which is good* (the truth, not exaggeration)
- *examine everything carefully* (especially our own words)
- *hold fast to that which is good* (not that which is exaggerated)
- *abstain from every form of evil* (exaggeration can be desperately evil)

The following is a great example of how a true Christian should come across to those around them:



In his book, *The Road to Character*, author David Brooks says, "Occasionally, even today, you come across certain people who seem to possess an impressive inner cohesion. They are not leading fragmented, scattershot lives...Their minds are consistent, and their hearts are dependable. They are trustworthy."

Such people are trustworthy because they always deal with the plain truth without exaggerating it to fit their ideas and ideologies. We must always make sure - especially when talking about another individual - to leave exaggeration behind. The facts need to be just that, facts. How do we become this kind of person?



We have seven steps that come from Ephesians 4. These will help us put this in order.



First, we need to decide to change our ways:

Ephesians 4:25: (NASB) *Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another.*

Clear speech and accurate representation of my thoughts, *especially* when angry or in an argument is a clear and necessary objective. Decide to change our ways!

When we are angry or passionate about something, it is easy to speak only the *convenient* parts of the truth - the parts that make our side look better.



Second, we need to acknowledge our weaknesses and reactions with the objective of taming them in a timely fashion:

Ephesians 4:26: (NASB) *Be angry, and yet do not sin: do not let the sun go down on your anger,*

It is okay to be angry; it is *not* okay to sin in that anger! “You always...” and “You never...” type statements are exaggerations and are not clear or helpful expressions of accusation. They overstate the frequency of the problem and make the recipient resentful and defensive since they feel this misrepresents them. This makes the problem even bigger. In order not to sin when angry, we need to take exaggeration completely out of the picture.



Third, we need to be aware of how easily Satan can and will exploit our earthly mind:

Ephesians 4:27-28: (NASB) ²⁷*and do not give the devil an opportunity.* ²⁸*He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.*

Satan is watching and he is ready! When we bear false witness, when we exaggerate, we *steal goodness* from our neighbor. We take their goodness away by misrepresenting them. Rather than taking from them, let us instead be engaged in productive behavior so we can give to them in love, so we *will have something to share with one who has need*. Do not give the devil an opportunity to turn a conversation into an attack fueled by exaggeration.



Fourth, we need to replace our words of untruth and exaggeration with words that build up in truth:

Ephesians 4:29: (NASB) *Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.*

Replacing words *of untruth* with words that *build up in truth* sounds very simple but is very difficult to do. Replace “You always...” and “You never...” with “It seems like you always...” “It feels like you never...”. These are more accurate ways to express how we feel, and they signal that we are talking about how this situation makes us feel emotionally. Try these: “It seems to me...” or “From where I sit it looks like...” or “My perspective is...”. This is a very different approach that can actually stimulate a conversation rather than just create defensive feelings in the person with whom we are talking.

Watch out when we start getting emotionally charged and want to make a point or feel like we are not being heard. When we feel like we are not being heard we tend to use exaggeration, and then we move into overdrive and become dramatic. We are getting emotional in our statements instead of allowing the facts to speak. If we need to use emotion, we need to temper it so that we signal the other person that our emotions are involved. “From where I sit...”, or “I feel like...” type statements let the other person know we admit this is from our perspective and not necessarily stating facts.



Fifth, we must be aware that our standing with God very much depends on how we treat and speak about others:

Ephesians 4:30: (NASB) *Do not grieve the holy spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.*

Do not grieve God's spirit! If we are grieving God's spirit, we are not listening to it. But instead, we are following our flesh rather than the spirit of God that works within us. This creates a big problem because it drives a wedge between God and us.

Grieving means to make sad or sorrowful, to cause sorrow, pain or distress. Faithful Christians are given a measure of the holy spirit - God's power and influence - so we should not be doing anything that would cause grief to our new minds or that should bother our conscience. This exaggeration is bearing false witness, even if "it is only a little bit." If it is wrong, it is wrong.

Sixth, we must "pull the plug" on our slanderous and exaggerating habits of thinking. Drain them away:

Ephesians 4:31: (NASB) *Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice.*

We do not want to be part of any of these things, but this requires conscious and disciplined effort. Let them flow down the drain and do not follow them down. Intentionally put these things away!



Seventh, as habits of slander and exaggeration drain away, we must fill ourselves with the *simplicity* of kindness, the *compassion* of tenderheartedness and the *mercy* of forgiveness:

Ephesians 4:32: (NASB) *Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*



Simply be a genuine disciple of Jesus!

So, what is the difference between exaggeration and lying? Exaggeration may have a place when we are telling a story or joking about our experiences. However, it has no place when we are purporting to be stating fact. In those circumstances, exaggeration becomes a “false witness.” Once we are aware of this, we will need to look at whatever comes out of our mouths and be very careful to evaluate what we say, removing the exaggeration.



THE ABILITY TO SPEAK THE TRUTH IN LOVE CAN BE ELUSIVE. TO DO IT WE NEED TO RECOGNIZE ITS GOD-HONORING PLACE IN OUR LIVES.

WE THEN MUST DESIRE ITS PRESENCE, WEED OUT WHAT STANDS IN ITS WAY AND PRACTICE ITS DELIVERY. THEN AND ONLY THEN CAN SPEAKING UNEXAGGERATED TRUTH BEGIN TO BECOME A LIFE-CHANGING HABIT!

We are talking about something that is so common that it is part of our everyday lives. We exaggerate! We need to examine what and why we are exaggerating. If we misrepresent the facts of a matter or of another person, perspective, or circumstance, we are bearing false witness with our exaggeration. If we are having fun with family or friends, such as telling a humorous story, exaggeration is harmless. However, make sure it is used appropriately and in a God-honoring way.

We cannot bear false witness. Both God and Jesus have stated this clearly. Let us speak facts clearly and succinctly, without exaggeration and with words that honor God.

*So, is there a difference between exaggerating and lying?
For Jonathan, Rick and Julie and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!*



Join us next week for our podcast on May 24, 2021
Ep. 1179: Can Humility Keep Me From Success?

Bonus Material and Study Questions



Exaggeration is truth that has lost its temper. – Khalil Gibran

All cartoon characters and fables must be exaggeration, caricatures. It is the very nature of fantasy and fable. – Walt Disney

There is no one who does not exaggerate! – Ralph Waldo Emerson

Here are a few more Scriptures regarding the need for pure communications coming from our lips:

Romans 12:9-21: (NASB) ⁹Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; ¹¹not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; ¹²rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, ¹³contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. ¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. ¹⁷Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. ¹⁸If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. ¹⁹Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord. ²⁰But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink, for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head. ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Proverbs 16:27-28: (NASB) ²⁷A worthless man digs up evil, while his words are like scorching fire. ²⁸A perverse man spreads strife, and a slanderer separates intimate friends.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7: (NASB) ⁴Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, ⁵does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, ⁶does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; ⁷bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

The following is the beginning of a great article that enhances our understanding of exaggeration:

(Source: <https://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/article/when-do-exaggerations-and-misstatements-cross-the-line/>) When public figures are caught embellishing their accomplishments or qualifications, whether by exaggeration or misstatement, people everywhere express outrage. Indeed, as more and more politicians, CEOs and other big names these days try to make amends for fudging their resumes, incorrectly relating the details of a story or otherwise playing fast and loose with the facts, the general reaction from an increasingly jaded public is: "What were they thinking?"

As it turns out, what they were thinking isn't much different from everyone else. Embellishment is part of human nature, experts say, and almost everyone is guilty of it at one time or another. Left unchecked, however, exaggerations that seemed innocuous at first could result in serious, potentially career-ending consequences. "[Getting caught] can be devastating; I think it can ruin a person," says Alan Strudler, a professor of legal studies and business ethics at Wharton. That's unfortunate, he adds, "because embellishment is just a human frailty. But once you're caught in a deception, even if it's a common deception, people won't trust you. And once the bond of trust is lost, it's terribly hard to recover."

In today's work environment, where no one comes in for a job interview without being Googled first — and where small talk in the elevator or comments made at a staff meeting are just a Twitter post away from reaching a global audience — it's easier than ever to get caught in an exaggeration, Wharton experts and others note. But the temptation to embellish has also never been greater, they say, as recession-weary workers feel pressured to justify their worth and a 24-hour news cycle demands that leaders have an immediate, sound-bite-ready answer for everything.



“The questions come when something happens that breaks the social facade that we’re all honest and we’re all trustworthy,” says G. Richard Shell, a legal studies and business ethics professor at Wharton. “When someone is revealed to have done something selfish, there’s a crack in the facade and then everyone has to figure out what that means. Does the crack reveal some sort of venal person, or does it reveal the same sort of hapless person we all are underneath?”

Christian Questions Weekly Newsletter

CQ Rewind Show Notes and Study Questions

Text

CQREWIND

to **22828** to get started.



christianquestions.com



Study QUESTIONS

Ep. 1178: Is There a Difference Between Exaggerating and Lying?

<https://christianquestions.com/character/1178-exaggeration/>

See:  CQ Rewind
SHOW NOTES

1. How does the ninth Commandment relate to the other commandments?
To what aspect of life does it apply and how does it help to govern society? (See Exodus 20:16)
2. What does the Jewish Law say about bearing false witness? What are the legal and moral applications? Why are we using Leviticus? How does the eighth Commandment on stealing bear on the ninth Commandment? (See Exodus 20:16, Leviticus 19:15-18)
3. How did Joseph's brothers lie without even speaking? What lessons can we learn from their example and how can we apply them to our lives today? (See Genesis 37:29-36)
4. Are exaggeration and hyperbole always considered being a false witness? If not, under what circumstances do they become so? (Psalms 5:4-6)
5. In the Jewish Law, what was the procedure to prevent witnesses from spreading false or exaggerated statements against those they did not like? What was the penalty for purposefully representing someone else dishonestly? Why was it so severe? (See Deuteronomy 19:15-21, Psalms 5:4-6)
6. In what way were Ananias and Sapphira guilty of bearing false witness? What was the *purpose* in their lie about the sale of their property? Could we be guilty of this kind of exaggeration in our lives? (See Acts 5:1-4)
7. What did Jesus teach about how to effectively communicate as Christians? Why can dramatizing a situation be counterproductive? Is this always so, or can we tease and joke with friends and family at times? (See Matthew 5:33-37)
8. How did Jesus handle those who stood against him at his trial? By using Jesus' own statements, how did the "witnesses" against him seek to discredit him? Have you ever used someone else's words out of context to undermine their position? (See Matthew 26:59-64)
9. What were the stages the leaders took to incite the mob that stoned Stephen? Have you seen or participated in anything that used these tactics to change people's opinions of something that threatened their position or beliefs? (See Acts 6:8-15)
10. What must we do when we break old habits? To break these habits of bearing false witness and exaggerating, what are the 5 precepts listed in 1 Thessalonians 5? (See 1 Thessalonians 5:15, 21-22)
11. What are the 7 steps we can follow to build a dependable and trustworthy Christian life? (See Ephesians 4:25-32)
12. Do you ever bear false witness or exaggerate? Is this always a poor behavior? When is exaggeration acceptable? How are you going to combat the bad aspects of exaggeration and false witnessing in your life?