

Behaving honestly (Leviticus 19:11-12)

The commands in Leviticus against stealing, dealing falsely, lying, and violating God's name by swearing to false oaths all find more familiar expression among the Ten Commandments of Exodus 20. (For more on honesty, see the sections "[Truth-telling in the Bible](#)" and "[There may be exceptions to truth telling in the workplace](#)," in the article [Truth and Deception](#) at www.theologyofwork.org.) Unique to Leviticus, however, is the Hebrew wording behind "you shall not lie *to one another*" (Lev. 19:11). Literally, it says "a person shall not lie to his *amit*," meaning "companion," "friend," or "neighbor." This surely includes fellow members of Israel's community, but based on Lev. 24:19 in the context of Lev. 24:17-22, it also seems to take in the resident alien. Israel's ethics and morality were to be distinctly better than the nations around them, even to the point of treating immigrants from other nations the same way they treated native-born citizens.

In any case, the point here is the relational aspect of telling the truth versus lying. A lie is not only a misstatement of cold fact, it is a betrayal of a companion, friend, or neighbor. The things we say to each other must truly flow out of God's holiness in us, not merely out of a technical analysis of avoiding blatant lies. When US President Bill Clinton said, "I did not have sex with that woman," he may have had some tortuous logic in mind under which the statement was not technically a lie. But his fellow citizens rightly felt that he had broken trust with them, and he later recognized and accepted this assessment. He had violated the duty not to lie *to another*.

In many workplaces, there is a need to promote either the positive or negative aspects of a product, service, person, organization, or situation. Christians need not refuse to communicate vigorously to make a point. But they must not communicate in such a way that what they convey *to another* is false. If technically true words add up to a false impression in the mind of *another*, then the duty to tell the truth is broken. As a practical matter, whenever a discussion of truthfulness descends into a technical debate about wording, it's wise to ask ourselves if the debate is about whether to lie *to another* in this sense.
