In the Bible, the first time the phrase “false witness” is used is in the Decalogue—the Ten Commandments. Exodus 20:16 says, *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*” The last time the phrase is used is in Paul’s epistle to the Romans (13:8-9): "Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, You shall not covet,’ and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.”

Harm, hurt and pain is exactly what happens when lies are told about a person. Proverbs 25:18 (NLT) says, *Telling lies about others is as harmful as hitting them with an ax, wounding them with a sword, or shooting them with a sharp arrow.*” The Talmud teaches that, *The slanderous tongue kills three; the slandered, the slanderer, and the person listening to the slander.*”

David was lied about terribly, and responded with these words in Psalm 52:2-4 (NKJV). *Your tongue devises destruction, like a sharp razor, working deceitfully. You love evil more than good, lying rather than speaking righteousness. You love all devouring words, you deceitful tongue.*”

Charles Spurgeon reminded us that godly leaders should realize that facing criticisms and even falsehoods are not uncommon. He said, *“God had a Son that had no fault, but He never had a son that was not found fault with. God Himself was slandered in paradise by Satan. Let us not expect, therefore, to escape from the venomous tongue.”*
I recently heard of a pastor who had been criticized harshly in an internet article. The blogger spoke of attending a specific service at that man’s church and watching him in the lobby as he (the pastor) interacted with people. The blogger went into detail about the pastor being disinterested in people, and about how uncaring and aloof he was. His “pastor’s heart” was called into question along with his sincerity and character. It was a complete smear job.

What’s amazing is that the pastor—a very good and godly man—who was being criticized was traveling that particular Sunday. He wasn't even in the church service where his alleged unloving conduct was “observed” and besmirched. Hundreds of people read that blog, and I wonder how many of them just assumed that the information was the truth. How many people could have accepted the inherent offense in that article, and quit attending that church? Or if they had considered going there, decided never to attend?

This kind of occurrence makes me wonder how many good men and women have been trashed by people who lack morals, ethics, and integrity. Edgar Allen Poe said, "To vilify a great man is the readiest way in which a little man can himself attain greatness."

Modern technology has exponentially raised the potential damage from people who bear false witness. People today can hide behind their computers and completely manufacture and fabricate complete falsehoods of every kind.

John Calvin said, "It is a sign of a perverse and treacherous disposition to wound the good name of another, when he has no opportunity of defending himself.”

Likewise, A.B. Simpson commented, "I would rather play with forked lightning, or take in my hand living wires with their fiery current, than to speak a reckless word against any servant of Christ, or idly repeat the slanderous darts which thousands of Christians are hurling on others, to the hurt of their own souls and bodies.”

Those are powerful statements, but far more important is what Jesus Himself said, “But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:36-37, NLT)

We understand that bearing false witness against a neighbor is just one form of lying, and the Bible, including the New Testament, addresses the overall topic of lying very specifically. Ephesians 4:25 says, "Therefore, putting away lying, let each one of you speak truth with
his neighbor...” The Amplified renders that, “Therefore, rejecting all falsity and being done now with it, let everyone express the truth with his neighbor...”

We need to make sure that we understand that it’s not simply a blatant lie that is wrong, but we should avoid any communication or expression that is misleading or misrepresentative of the truth. This would include exaggeration or embellishment to “paint a picture” in the mind of a listener that does not reflect reality.

Speaking of Satan, Jesus said that he, "...does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44, NKJV). The Apostle James acknowledged the universal problem: "...the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself” (James 3:6, NLT).

Ephesians 4:29 in the Amplified Bible provides a great guideline for how we are to speak. "Let no foul or polluting language, nor evil word nor unwholesome or worthless talk [ever] come out of your mouth, but only such [speech] as is good and beneficial to the spiritual progress of others, as is fitting to the need and the occasion, that it may be a blessing and give grace (God’s favor) to those who hear it.”

Peter presents Jesus as our model to follow... “He is your example, and you must follow in his steps. He never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone. He did not retaliate when he was insulted, nor threaten revenge when he suffered” (1 Peter 2:21-23, NLT). Peter then proceeds to prescribe the path of life for the believer, and much of this “prescription” involves our words.

1 Peter 3:9-10 (NLT)
9 Don’t repay evil for evil. Don’t retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God has called you to do, and he will bless you for it. 10 For the Scriptures say, “If you want to enjoy life and see many happy days, keep your tongue from speaking evil and your lips from telling lies.”

We know from many, many passages of Scripture that our tongue can be used constructively or destructively. Proverbs 12:18 (NKJV) says, “There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword, But the tongue of the wise promotes health.” May those of us who belong to the Lord always be able to say with Proverbs 8:8 (NKJV), “All the words of my mouth are with righteousness; Nothing crooked or perverse is in them.”