



THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, or give him a bad name, but defend him, speak well of him, and take his words and actions in the kindest possible way.



You shall bear false witness against your neighbor.

Over and above our own body, spouse, and temporal possessions, we still have another treasure—honor and good reputation [Proverbs 22:1]. We cannot do without these. For it is intolerable to live among people in open shame and general contempt. Therefore, God does not want the reputation, good name, and upright character of our neighbor to be taken away or diminished, just as with his money and possessions. He wants everyone to stand in his integrity before wife, children, servants, and neighbors. In the first place, we must consider the plainest meaning of this commandment, according to the words “You shall not bear false witness.” This applies to the public courts of justice, where a poor, innocent man is accused and oppressed by false witnesses in order to be punished in his body, property, or honor.

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Therefore, this commandment is given in the first place so that everyone shall help his neighbor to secure his rights and not allow them to be hindered or twisted. But everyone shall promote and strictly maintain these rights, no matter whether he is a judge or a witness, and let it apply to whatsoever it will. A particular goal is set up here for our jurists that they be careful to deal truly and uprightly with every case, allowing right to remain right. On the other hand, they must not pervert anything by their tricks and technical points, turning black into white and making wrong out to be right [Isaiah 5:20]. They must not gloss over a matter or

keep silent about it, regardless of a person's money, possession, honor, or power. This is one part and the plainest sense of this commandment about all that takes place in court.

Next, this commandment extends very much further, if we are to apply it to spiritual jurisdiction or administration. Here it is a common occurrence that everyone bears false witness against his neighbor. For wherever there are godly preachers and Christians, they must bear the sentence before the world that calls them heretics, apostates, and indeed, instigators and desperately wicked unbelievers. Besides, God's Word must suffer in the most shameful and hateful manner, being persecuted, blasphemed, contradicted, perverted, and falsely quoted and interpreted. But let this go. For this is the way of the blind world, which condemns and persecutes the truth and God's children, and yet considers it no sin.

In the third place, which concerns us all, this commandment forbids all sins of the tongue [James 3], by which we may injure or confront our neighbor. To bear false witness is nothing else than a work of the tongue. Now, God prohibits whatever is done with the tongue against a fellow man. This applies to false preachers with their doctrine and blasphemy, false judges and witnesses with their verdict, or outside of court by lying and speaking evil. Here belongs particularly the detestable, shameful vice of speaking behind a person's back and slandering, to which the devil spurs us on, and of which much could be said. For it is a common evil plague that everyone prefers hearing evil more than hearing good about his neighbor. We ourselves are so bad that we cannot allow anyone to say anything bad about us. Everyone should much prefer that all the world should speak of him in glowing terms. Yet we cannot bear that the best is spoken about others.

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There are included, therefore, in this commandment quite a multitude of good works. These please God most highly and bring abundant good and blessing, if only the blind world and the false saints would recognize them. For there is nothing on or in a person that can do both greater and more extensive good or harm in spiritual and temporal matters than the tongue. This is true even though it is the least and weakest part of a person [James 3:5].

Large Catechism, I:254-57, 260-64, 290-91

- *“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother” (Matthew 18:15).*
- *“Pay attention to yourselves! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him” (Luke 17:3).*

4. Explain the following passages. Give an example of the first. Why is it so difficult to keep one’s “whole body in check,” as mentioned in the second passage?

- *“Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ” (Ephesians 4:15).*
- *“If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle his whole body” (James 3:2).*

5. 1 Peter 2:22,23 reads: “He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.” What did Jesus do to save us from our sins against the Eighth Commandment?

Family Prayer

Lord, keep us from sins of the tongue into which we so easily fall. Where we have failed, forgive us. Empower us to use the gift of speech in ways that glorify you and benefit others. In our Savior’s name we ask this. Amen.

*Answers to these questions can be found at
www.goodshepherdkearney.org/summer-catechism-series*