

ILLINOIS LUTHERAN CONFERENCE

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This month's topic for consideration is the 8th Commandment: **"Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour." (Exodus 20:16)** To bear false witness against one's neighbor is to testify falsely about one's neighbor, to speak lies about one's neighbor or to one's neighbor, or to speak truths about one's neighbor or to one's neighbor but from a false heart— that is, speaking that which we do not really mean or believe in order to deceive. God has not rescinded the 8th Commandment: it remains valid because Jesus repeated it in the New Testament when He said, "...Thou shalt not bear false witness." (Matthew 19:18)

Therefore, in accord with Holy Scripture, Luther's Small Catechism states:

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

GOOD REPUTATION

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

What does this mean? We should fear and love God that we may not deceitfully belie, betray, slander, nor defame our neighbor, but defend him, speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything.

God forbids all types of lying against our neighbor in the 8th Commandment, as the following Bible passages clearly illustrate:

"These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren." (Proverbs 6:16-19)

"A faithful witness will not lie: but a false witness will utter lies." (Proverbs 14:5)

"A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape." (Proverbs 19:5)

Comment: Observe that bearing false witness is lying and is sinful since it is hated by God and is punishable by God. Hence, perjury – lying in court – is also sin and is forbidden by God.

"Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another." (Ephesians 4:25)

"Lying lips are abomination to the LORD: but they that deal truly are his delight." (Proverbs 12:22)

"Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it." (John 8:44)

“Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him.”
(Colossians 3:9-10)

Comment: God desires that we be truthful with one another. Lying is abominable in God’s sight since the devil is in fact the father of lies.

“A talebearer revealeth secrets: but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.”
(Proverbs 11:13)

“He that goeth about as a talebearer revealeth secrets: therefore meddle not with him that flattereth with his lips.” (Proverbs 20:19)

Comment: Being a tattle-tale is sinful and forbidden by God because such behavior betrays our neighbor and can harm our neighbor by revealing our neighbor’s secrets. For example, consider how Judas Iscariot sinfully betrayed Jesus by informing Jesus’ enemies as to where they could capture and falsely arrest Him. Yes, “Satan” had entered “into Judas surnamed Iscariot, being of the number of the twelve. And he went his way, and communed with the chief priests and captains, how he might betray him unto them. And they were glad, and covenanted to give him money. And he promised, and sought opportunity to betray him unto them in the absence of the multitude.” (Luke 22:3-6)

“Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.” (James 4:11)

“But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction, and castest my words behind thee. When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers. Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother’s son. These things hast thou done, and I kept silence; thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver.” (Psalm 50:16-22)

“Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.” (Luke 6:37)

Comment: God forbids gossip and the spreading of harmful rumors, for such evil speech slanders and defames one’s neighbor, being condemnatory judgment upon one’s neighbor. Slanderous speech put in writing is known as libel, and is also sinful.

“These are the things that ye shall do; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD.” (Zech. 8:16-17)

Comment: Note that God also forbids us to have evil thoughts against our neighbor, or to plot against our neighbor in any way or form. Additionally, God desires that we keep our promises, that we keep any oath we make, for God hates all lying since all lying is sinful.

God requires certain things of us in the 8th Commandment. We've already seen Scripture proof that we are to speak truthfully to our neighbor. The following Bible passages give us further information regarding God-pleasing behavior that is required of us.

“Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction. Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.” (Proverbs 31:8-9)

“Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment.” (John 7:24)

“And Jonathan spake good of David unto Saul his father, and said unto him, Let not the king sin against his servant, against David; because he hath not sinned against thee, and because his works have been to thee-ward very good: For he did put his life in his hand, and slew the Philistine, and the LORD wrought a great salvation for all Israel: thou sawest it, and didst rejoice: wherefore then wilt thou sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause? And Saul hearkened unto the voice of Jonathan: and Saul sware, As the LORD liveth, he shall not be slain. And Jonathan called David, and Jonathan shewed him all those things. And Jonathan brought David to Saul, and he was in his presence, as in times past.” (1 Samuel 19:4-7)

“Defend the poor and fatherless: do justice to the afflicted and needy. Deliver the poor and needy: rid them out of the hand of the wicked.” (Psalm 82:3-4)

“Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican.” (Matthew 18:15-17)

Comment: God would certainly have us defend our neighbor, speak well of our neighbor, and put the best construction on everything— as far as we can do so in keeping with the truth. Furthermore, when dealing with a fellow Christian member of one's congregation, we are to observe the proper steps of admonishment as directed by Jesus Christ who is the head of the Church.

“Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.” (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

“And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.” (1 Peter 4:8)

Comment: Observe that in accord with God's Word, Christian-love toward our neighbor will move us to hush-up our neighbor's faults whenever possible in keeping with the truth.

It's quite obvious that we've all broken the 8th Commandment, "For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not." (Ecclesiastes 7:20) Furthermore, James 3:4-10 reports: "Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind: But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be."

Accordingly, we ALL need the forgiveness of sins which Jesus Christ has earned for us with His perfect life and atoning death on the cross, for it is written: "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." (1 John 1:9-10; 4:9-11)

m.e.l.