

The Ten Commandments

A Study in Luther's Catechism¹ - Lesson 9

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.

Reputation

Defend and Protect the Reputation of Others

What is your most valuable possession?

God answers that question for us: "A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold" (Proverbs 22:1). What makes a good name worth so much? The reputation we have affects almost everything we do with other people.

God doesn't want us to lose our good name, and God doesn't want us to hurt the good name of others. The Eighth Commandment protects reputations—our own and those of others (p. 97).

Consider and discuss:

- What comes to mind when you hear certain names?
- What responsibility do we bear in regards protecting our neighbor's reputation?
- What responsibility do we bear in regards to protecting our own reputations?

84. Why is a good name an important blessing?

Genesis 39:16–20 (Joseph was thrown into prison because of a lie Potiphar's wife told.)

1 Samuel 19:1–6 (Jonathan defended David's life by speaking well of him.)

1 Samuel 20:18–42 (Jonathan defended David again.)

Consider and discuss:

- In the specific cases above Joseph and David acted rightly and did nothing to jeopardize their own reputations. Nonetheless, their reputations were very much at risk of great damage. If one's reputation is damaged through no fault of their own, what steps can be taken to restore the reputation?
- In another case, David acted in a sinful way thus bringing disgrace to his name and to the name of the Lord. In such cases, can a reputation be restored?

85. When God forbids false testimony, he reminds us that anything that hurts a person's good name is sin. **How does the Eighth Commandment serve as a mirror, showing us that we also sin against God when we fail to respect our neighbor's good name?**

Leviticus 19:16 Do not go about spreading slander among your people. Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor's life. I am the Lord.

Proverbs 19:5 A false witness will not go unpunished, and whoever pours out lies will not go free.

Colossians 3:9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices.

We sin by lying to or about someone. This includes everything from lying in our daily conversations to lying as a witness in court (perjury).

Consider and discuss: "What about Rahab and the spies? Wasn't she lying and giving false testimony? Or what about the Hebrew Midwives?"

¹ This study will use *Luther's Catechism* (Northwestern Publishing House, 2017). You may purchase a copy at nph.net.

Proverbs 11:9 *With their mouths the godless destroy their neighbors, but through knowledge the righteous escape.*

Proverbs 16:28 *A perverse person stirs up conflict, and a gossip separates close friends.*

Proverbs 17:19 *Whoever loves a quarrel loves sin.*

2 Samuel 15:1-6 (Absalom said bad things about his father in order to give David a bad name and turn people against him.)

1 Timothy 5:13 *They get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also busybodies who talk nonsense, saying things they ought not to.*

We sin by spreading gossip or by saying anything that will give a person a bad name.

Consider and discuss: When is ok to talk about someone when they are not present? When is it not ok?

Proverbs 11:13 *A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy person keeps a secret.*

Proverbs 25:9 *If you take your neighbor to court, do not betray another's confidence.*

We sin when we betray a person's confidence (reveal private information that could hurt the person).

Proverbs 6:16-19 *There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community.*

We sin against the Eighth Commandment when we use our words to cause pain or trouble for others.

Consider and discuss: Agree or disagree—*"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me."*

86. Sins against the Eighth Commandment are so common that we may not even realize we are sinning with our words. How does God emphasize that our speech can make us guilty of sin?

Romans 1:29-32 *They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers.... Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.*

James 3:2, 6 *We all stumble in many ways. Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole body, sets the whole course of one's life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.*

Consider and discuss: See James 3:3-6. The tongue, though small is very powerful. How can our words have such a huge impact?

87. How can we be sure that our sins against the Eighth Commandment are forgiven?

Isaiah 53:9 *He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.*

1 Peter 2:22, 23 *"He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.*

Romans 5:8, 10 *God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life!*

88. Though our sinful nature is hostile toward God, Jesus kept this commandment and all others perfectly in our place. Because of his love for us, we want our words to others and about others to honor God. How does the Eighth Commandment guide us in the way we speak about others?

Ephesians 4:15 *Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.*

Ephesians 4:25 *Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body.*

1 Peter 3:8–10 Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. For, “Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech.”

Proverbs 31:8, 9 Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy.

1 Corinthians 13:5–7 [Love] does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

Matthew 26:6–13 (Jesus defended Mary and modeled what it means to take someone’s words and actions in the kindest possible way.)



89. How does God want us to show love to those whom we have sinned against?

Matthew 5:23, 24 If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

90. How does God want us to show love to those who have sinned against us?

Matthew 18:15 If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over.

Luke 17:3 If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them.

Connections

We are guilty of sin like all others, but God has brought us to repentance, forgiven our sin, and helped us to resist sin. We have the responsibility to warn others who continue in their sins without repentance. We can warn them and urge them to repent rather than continue and then suffer the consequences of their disobedience. As we do this, we pray that God would lead them to repentance. Speaking to another about sin is not easy, but it is a true act of love.

Nathan, a prophet, once had to confront David, a king of Israel, with David’s sin. Read about how Nathan boldly confronted David’s sin and about how God blessed the results.

2 Samuel 12:1–14

Nathan’s bold rebuke was followed by a joyful sharing of God’s forgiveness. Nathan’s goal was to bring David to see his sin, to repent, and to trust God’s forgiveness again. Before Nathan’s rebuke, David showed no repentance. Consider how you can warn someone and help him or her repent and trust God’s forgiveness. Explain how speaking a humble rebuke is similar to being a doctor.

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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.... 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 would much prefer that all the world should speak of him in glowing terms. Yet we cannot bear that the best is spoken about others. (Large Catechism, I, par. 263, 264)