

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Trinity, November 6, 2016

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 395:1-5, 287:9, 398, 409, 400:1-3.

Lessons: Genesis 3:1-15, James 3:1-18, John 8:31-47.

Sermon Text: Exodus 20:16.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltritt

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

In our epistle lesson we heard of the power of the tongue and the kind of words it can use. *“With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be.”* James 3:9-10 (NIV) But remember that the words which come out of the mouth find their root and source and ideas in the heart.

Words can build up or destroy. In this commandment God commands and guides men in the use of words to protect the reputations of men.

Our children in Catechism Instruction are memorizing these words: **“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.”

Many of you memorized these words: **“Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.** *What does this mean?* We should fear and love God that we do not deceitfully belie, betray, slander, nor defame our neighbor, but defend him, speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything.” Today, let's look at

THE EIGHTH COMMANDMENT

- 1. Thou shalt not bear false witness.**
- 2. You shall defend your neighbor, speak well of him, and take his words and actions in the kindest possible way.**

In this Commandment God protects our and our neighbor's good name and reputation, because by nature we are inclined to bear false witness. A good name is important because it determines whether or not other people will respect us or trust us. When this commandment speaks of witness or testimony, it refers to anything we may say about our neighbor, be it good or bad, true or false. False witness is every untrue or unkind statement about our neighbor, whether it happens in a court of law or in daily life.

In court this can happen by making a false accusation, or when a witness lies or withholds the truth, or when a judge knowingly passes an unjust sentence. In daily life this happens when we lie about our neighbor, betray him, or injure his reputation by slander or idle gossip. When we use the word ‘gossip’ we must ask what is gossip? We use the word today to mean malicious talk or rumors, especially of private matters.

All this can happen when we are making an untrue statement about him, and if it is true, making it with the intention of harming his reputation. These kinds of things are said to his harm, ruining the good opinion people have of him. Our neighbor may not hear what we say about him, but God does.

False witness, false testimony is all talk that comes out of a false heart.

Let's talk a little more about what God forbids in the Eighth Commandment. When God forbids false testimony this means all talk, whether true or untrue, that comes from a heart with evil intentions. This includes lying to another person or about him and to make any untrue statement against our neighbor in court.

Christians should not go to court and quarrel before worldly judges, but settle their difficulties in a brotherly way among themselves. Listen to what God says: ***“If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? But instead, one brother goes to law against another--and this in front of unbelievers! The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?”*** 1 Corinthians 6:1-7 (NIV)

God forbids lying. That means everything that proceeds from a wicked heart and is intended to deceive or harm our neighbor. We must not lie to his face, nor withhold from him the truth he has a right to know, nor withhold from him the truth in order to harm him.

We must also beware of hypocrisy and flattery, which is also a form of lying, when we praise someone with our mouth but do not mean it in our heart. Beware of broken promises. Instead speak the truth in love with our neighbor.

Sometimes we think of children as being more guilty of lying than adults. But while children may be more naïve in some ways, adults are just as guilty of lying as children. Scripture makes it clear that liars are children of the devil and God will punish liars. Jesus spoke this way to unbelieving Jews: ***“You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”*** John 8:44 (NIV)

God forbids us to betray our neighbor; that is, to reveal his secrets. We read in Proverbs: ***“A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret.”*** Proverbs 11:13 (NIV) ***“A talebearer revealeth secrets; but he that is of a faithful spirit concealeth the matter.”*** (KJV)

Whatever our neighbor has confided to us, or whatever secrets we may otherwise know about him, we must not make known to others especially if it is likely to ruin his good reputation or to do him other harm. But there are situations when we must reveal secrets, as when parents, governments, or teachers demand information of us to correct an evil, or when the welfare of our neighbor requires it.

God forbids us to slander or defame our neighbor; that is, to speak evil of him and thus to say anything that will give another person a bad name or destroy his good name.

Slander is to speak evil about our neighbor behind his back, to gossip, spread false reports and hearsay, talk about his faults, defame him, “run him down”. Do not say behind his back what you do not dare tell him to his face. Even if the evil we know of our neighbor is true, we have no right to broadcast it, but we have the responsibility to go to him and tell it to him alone. Scripture is very blunt about that. ***“If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over.”*** Matthew 18:15 (NIV) How much more peace there would be in the world if we would only remember to approach our brother first instead of telling someone else! We must not rashly judge and condemn him on hearsay.

While in this Commandment God forbids especially the sins of the tongue, he also forbids evil thoughts against our neighbor, imagining evil without proof. God forbids us to even have evil thoughts against our neighbor or to plot against him. ***“Let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbor.”*** Zechariah 8:17 (KJV) Suspicion is the false witness of the heart. Nor may we plan or plot evil against him in our hearts. Oh, how guilty are we all under this Commandment!

On the other hand, what does God require of us in the Eighth Commandment? We must always be truthful and sincere toward our neighbor. We must defend the good name of others. We should take his part and shield him against false accusations. We should speak well of our neighbor; that is, we should praise his good qualities and deeds so far as it can be done in keeping with the truth. We should put the best construction on everything; that is, we should take the words and actions of others in the kindest possible way.

When someone who is accused of evil is not present, he cannot speak for himself. Then we should speak for him, take his part, and defend him against false accusations. But we may not defend a sin or a wrong he has actually committed. We may not ***“call evil good, and good evil”***. Isaiah 5:20 (NIV)

When true accusations are raised against our neighbor, or real faults are pointed out, we should neither magnify nor continue any discussion about them, but explain them as best we can, speaking well of him, saying, for example, such things as ‘he did not know better, did not mean it that way’, and so forth. We should not accuse him of wicked motives and purposes, but explain in his favor whatever can be so explained. True love for our neighbor will cover his sins, not speak of them to others, but will believe and hope the best of him. We are to excuse him as far as the truth will permit,

Is it possible to speak about our neighbor’s sins without bearing false witness against him? What does God want us to do when we know about another person’s sin? We must repeat what we just said: Go to him and show him his sin in order to lead him to repent. Admonish him in a brotherly manner, when concern for the truth and our fellowman requires that we speak to our neighbor or even the proper authorities about his sins. In Genesis 37 Joseph brought an “evil report” to his father, but it was the truth and had to be told.

We must admit that we have not always honored God’s gift of a good name as he wants us to. We are guilty of breaking this commandment daily, if not in words, then in our evil thoughts and hatred toward others.

Peter reports that Jesus kept this commandment perfectly: ***“He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.”*** 1 Peter 2:22 (NIV) This he did in our place, for us, and God then imputes or chalks up to our account the sinlessness of Jesus.

Jesus himself defended his disciples. We read of the occasion when ***“Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, ‘Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.’ He answered, ‘Haven’t you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread--which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. Or haven’t you read in the Law that on the Sabbath the priests in the temple desecrate the day and yet are innocent? I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. If you had known what these words mean, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice,” you would not have condemned the innocent.”*** Matthew 12:1-7 (NIV) Even on the cross when Jesus was being punished for our sins, he said ***“Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”*** Luke 23:34 (NIV)

Paul writes of how we believers use this commandment as a guide: having put on the new man, he says ***“Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.”*** Ephesians 4:25 (NIV)

Using this commandment as a guide shows us that God wants us to thank him for his goodness by the way we speak about the good name of other people.

Having heard the Word of truth, the Gospel of Christ, we should always be truthful. May that be our lives, our words, and our hearts! Amen.