

Biblical Topics

Ten Commandments - Eighth Commandment

You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him, or hurt his reputation, but defend him, speak well of him and explain everything in the kindest way.

What does God forbid in the Eighth Commandment?

God forbids us to make any untrue statements against our neighbor in court. Christians should not go to court and quarrel before worldly judges. They should settle their difficulties in a brotherly way among themselves.

- Proverbs 19:5: A false witness will not go unpunished.
- 1 Corinthians 6:1-7: If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? ² 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? ³ Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! ⁴ Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! ⁵ I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? ⁶ But instead, one brother goes to law against another—and this in front of unbelievers! ⁷ 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?

God forbids us to lie about our neighbor and in that way harm our neighbor. This includes lying to his face or withholding from him the truth he has a right to know. It also includes any kind of hypocrisy and flattery which does not come from the heart.

- Proverbs 19:5: He who pours out lies will not go free.
- Ephesians 4:25: Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to his neighbor, for we are all members of one body.
- Proverbs 26:28: A lying tongue hates those it hurts, and a flattering mouth works ruin.

God forbids us to betray our neighbor by revealing secrets that might likely ruin his good reputation. BUT, there are cases when we must reveal secrets, as when parents, government, teachers demand information of us to correct an evil. ALSO, when the welfare of our neighbor requires it.

- Proverbs 11:13: A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret.
- Acts 23:16: But when the son of Paul's sister heard of this plot, he went into the barracks and told Paul.

God forbids us to speak evil about our neighbor behind his back, to gossip, spread false reports and hearsay. We are not to talk about his faults or “run him down” in any way. We are not to say behind his back what we do not dare to tell him to his face. Even if the evil we know is true, we have no right to broadcast it, but go to him and tell it to him alone. We must not rashly judge and condemn him on hearsay.

- James 4:11: Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it.
- Psalm 50:19-21: ¹⁹You use your mouth for evil and harness your tongue to deceit. ²⁰You speak continually against your brother and slander your own mother’s son. ²¹ These things you have done and I kept silent; you thought I was altogether like you. But I will rebuke you and accuse you to your face.
- Luke 6:37: Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.
- Matthew 18:15: 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.

God forbids us to have evil thoughts against our neighbor or to plot against him. He also forbids imagining evil without proof. Suspicion is the false witness of the heart.

- Zechariah 8:17: Do not plot evil against your neighbor, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this,” declares the LORD.
- Job 15:35: They conceive trouble and give birth to evil; their womb fashions deceit.

What does God require of us in the Third Commandment?

There are two things to know before going into this part of each commandment:

First, one of the best ways to move away from wrong behavior or habits is to do the very opposite actions. Each of the commandments asks the question: What does this mean? Following that question and near the end of the explanation, Luther offers positive behaviors that would aid in doing a better task of following God’s direction in this commandment. Work at practicing these.

Second, right after the question comes the statement, “we should fear and love God.” In the commandments to “fear God” means to “stand in awe of Him,” to revere, respect, esteem, and honor Him. We are NOT to shake in our boots from fright.

God requires that we should defend our neighbor. That is, we should take his part and shield him against false accusations. A person that is absent when he is accused cannot speak for himself. Then we are required take his part and defend him as best as we can until he can deal with the charges personally.

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

God requires that we should speak well of our neighbor. We should praise his good qualities and deeds so far as it can be done in keeping with the truth.

- 1 Samuel 19:4 - : Jonathan spoke well of David.

God requires that we should speak well of our neighbor. We should praise his good qualities and deeds so far as it can be done in keeping with the truth. When true accusations are raised against our neighbor, or real faults are pointed out, we should neither magnify nor extenuate them, but explain them as best we can.

- 1 Peter 4:8: Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.
- 1 Corinthians 13:6-7: Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

The above information is taken from: "Luther's Small Catechism" annotated by Edward W. A. Koehler.