

## 91. The Eighth Commandment.

**A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape.** *Prov. 19, 5.*

Besides body, wife or husband, and temporal possessions we have yet another treasure, namely, personal honor and good report, with which we cannot dispense. In order to protect our good name, God has given the Eighth Commandment: "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." A good reputation is an asset we cannot afford to lose, for it is intolerable to live among men in open shame and general contempt. God does not want the reputation, character, and honor of our neighbor to be assailed and dragged into the mire.

The Eighth Commandment prohibits fastening guilt upon the innocent or clearing the guilty; it points a lesson particularly for courts of justice, where the poor, innocent man is often accused and traduced by false witness. God says that a false witness shall not be unpunished, but that he shall perish. A false witness is the accused if he denies a truthful charge. A false witness is an attorney who defends an unjust cause and prosecutes an innocent man. A false witness is a judge who condemns the just and justifies the wicked. *Prov. 17, 15.*

It is not in court only, however, that false witness is forbidden. The divine prohibition is directed also against the many sins of the tongue. "The tongue is a little member and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!" *Jas. 3, 5.* It is related of Peter the Great that whenever anyone spoke evil of another in his presence, he would interrupt him and say, "Well, now, has he not a bright side? Come, tell me some of his excellent traits which you have noticed. It is easy to splash mud, but I would rather help a man to keep his coat clean." Do not associate with those who are continually doing and saying evil things.

## Prayer.

O almighty God, faithful Father, who besides our other faculties hast given us the power of speech to the end that we should therewith praise Thy name and serve men, we beseech Thee for Thy dear Son's sake, who did no sin and in whose mouth no guile was found, remember not against us the manifold misuse of our tongue in violation of truth and brotherly love, but direct our hearts so to fear Thee and to love our fellow-men that we bridle our tongue and not deceitfully and uncharitably belie, betray, slander, or defame our neighbor. Let us bear in mind that on Judgment Day we must render account of every idle word. Grant us grace ever more to fight against the sins of the tongue. Amen.

Just as I am and waiting not  
To rid my soul of one dark blot,  
To Thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,  
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

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