

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.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, [*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hzgzim5m7oU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hzgzim5m7oU))

Words are powerful. *Let's watch this short video.**

In this video everyone is ignoring the blind man. A woman writes similar yet different words which bring power to a blind man's situation. The woman changed the words "Help me. I am blind." To "It is a beautiful day and I can't see it." Suddenly, people noticed the man and would give to him generously to help his situation. A few good words made a difference.

Words are so powerful that God gave us a commandment warning and encouraging us in our use of words. We are to be careful how we speak of our neighbor. The wrong words can hurt and destroy. The right words can heal and give life. The Lord God is protecting his gift of a good reputation.

We have a word of forgiveness in Jesus Christ. He continues to heal and give life through his powerful words in the Bible. This moves us to keep this commandment. **A Kind Word from Christ Moves Us to Speak Kindly** of others.

1. A good reputation is a gift from God.

James writes in his New Testament letter, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights." (1:17) This includes God's gift of a good reputation.

A. Most of us probably understand that a good reputation is important and necessary. However, let's review why this is the case.

1. First of all God says a good reputation is valuable. In Proverbs 22:1 Solomon writes, "A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold." In saying this, the Lord is saying we should take care of our reputation and we should also protect and uphold the reputation of others. This is the intent of the Eighth Commandment.

2. Children and young people would not necessarily understand this because they don't live on reputation, but on the love of parents and those around

them. When we step out of the house in our high school years, people will begin giving us more responsibility. As we step out of our home and go to college and work, there are many responsibilities we must take on.

But people will not give us responsibility, if they don't trust us. How many people would hire me to work their cash register if I had the reputation of a thief? Will my parents help me to purchase a brand-new car when my nickname is "lead foot Louie"? How many guys would be willing to date a girl whose nick name is "smelly Samantha"? When our reputation takes a hit we tend to minimize the worth of a reputation. But the Lord God wants us to know that reputations are valuable.

B. We have example of this in the Bible.

1. In the Old Testament lesson Jonathan's words about David's reputation saves David's life. King Saul had ordered his attendants to kill David. Jonathan risks his life to argue with his violent tempered father, King Saul. He reminds his father that David has been a loyal and even risked his life for his king in military action. His urgent plea worked. Saul was persuaded to spare David's life for a time.

2. We have a negative example in the book of Genesis. When Joseph refused to have relations with Potiphar's wife, she accused him falsely of rape. And she destroyed Joseph's reputation, his career and took away what little freedom he enjoyed.

2. We are to avoid destroying someone's reputation.

I tell a story in youth confirmation that goes like this. A young boy, we will call him Johnny, shows us to the first day of school as a new student. The teacher introduces Johnny to the class. One of the popular young ladies in the class raises her hand and says, "*I know Johnny. He was the one who threw up on the bus on the way to summer camp.*" Johnny did not need that hit on his reputation on his first day in a new school. So the Lord tells us we are to avoid destroying someone's reputation.

A. In Martin Luther's Small Catechism under the Eighth Commandment we are provided with a list of things we should avoid. We are to avoid **lying** about our neighbor. We are to not **gossip** about our neighbor. And we sin if we **betray** our neighbor's secrets. In summary, we are not to say anything that will cause unnecessary **pain or trouble** to our neighbor.

B. God's word speaks of the guilt we have in connection with this commandment.

1. James in his New Testament letter, chapter 3, accuses us, "**2 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. 6 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.” (2&6)

2. Notice that James says, **“We all stumble.”** No one is perfect. Every one of us lets words out that we shouldn't. It may be accidental. It may be on purpose. We are guilty of sinning before God because we have hurt someone's reputation. The result is that we deserve to hear God's word of condemnation. We can't say that God is speaking badly of us, because he judges in righteous anger and we deserve to be punished for our words that have hurt and ruined others.

3 . Jesus speaks a kind word of forgiveness on our behalf.

We don't despair. We don't have to be afraid of God because Jesus speaks a kind word of forgiveness on our behalf.

A. In Galatians 4 we hear that Jesus lived under the law to redeem us who are under God's commandments. What he did, first of all, was keep the Eighth Commandment for us. We see in the Gospel reading that the people at the home in Bethany, including the disciples, were speaking badly of the woman who was pouring expensive perfume on Jesus' feet. Jesus does the hard thing and takes a stand that would not make him popular. He defends the woman's actions and speaks well of her. In doing this Jesus was doing the right thing and keeping the Eighth Commandment. (Matthew 26:6-13)

B. Today Jesus, our perfect Savior, speaks to the Father in our defense. In Jesus we have forgiveness and peace with God. St. Paul writes in Romans 8:34 (NIV84) **Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.** St. John writes in 1 John 2:1, **“My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One.”** (NIV84)

C. Some people might take the view that this is the easiest commandment to break, because it is so easy to drop a careless word. What comfort we have that Jesus kept this commandment and paid with his death for our sins. We may struggle with our words, but we have peace with God and salvation.

4. In Christ we work to uphold reputations and to speak well of others.

Knowing that Jesus is speaking a good word for us before our heavenly Father, we are empowered to do what Jonathan did in the Old Testament lesson and that is to defend and uphold the reputations of others.

A. The Holy Spirit gives us guidance in the Scriptures.

Ephesians 4:15 Speak the truth in love. Sometimes the truth hurts, but we can deliver it in a way that shows we have Christian love for the person.

Ephesians 4:25 Don't lie. We lie when we don't trust God to work things out. He promises to help. We don't have to lie.

1 Peter 3:8-10 Don't insult people, but be sympathetic and compassionate. Take people's words in the kindest possible way.

Proverbs 31:8-9 Speak up the defenseless and the destitute.

Colossians 4:6 "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone." Salt your everyday conversations with the name of God, Jesus and spiritual truths.

B. Jesus also guides us to go to our brother and sister if they speak wrongly of us. (Matthew 18:15) He want us to forgive them. He does not want us running around speaking badly as payback.

Conclusion: Words are powerful. So the Lord wants us to watch what we say. A poem:

A careless word

May kindle strife;

A cruel word

May wreck a life;

A bitter word

May hate instill;

A brutal word

May smite and kill;

A gracious word

May smooth the way;

A joyous word

May light the day;

A timely word

May lesson stress;

A loving word

May heal and bless. *Anonymous*

Jesus has spoken a kind word of forgiveness about you. Speak kindly and defend other people's reputations as much as you can. Amen.