

Readings from The Large Catechism

of Dr. Martin Luther

Palm Sunday – Palmarum

LC Part 1, ¶¶ 255-258

LC Part 1, ¶¶ 271-274

LC Part 6, ¶ 25-27



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The Eighth Commandment.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

255] Over and above our own body, spouse, and temporal possessions, we have yet another treasure, namely, honor and good report [the illustrious testimony of an upright and unsullied name and reputation], with which we cannot dispense. For it is intolerable to live among men in open shame and general contempt. 256] Therefore God wishes the reputation, good name, and upright character of our neighbor to be taken away or diminished as little as his money and possessions, that every one may stand in his integrity before wife, children, servants, and neighbors. 257] And in the first place, we take the plainest meaning of this commandment according to the words (Thou shalt not bear false witness), as pertaining to the public courts of justice, where a poor innocent man is accused and oppressed by false witnesses in order to be punished in his body, property, or honor.

258] Now, this appears as if it were of little concern to us at present; but with the Jews it was quite a common and ordinary matter. For the people were organized under an excellent and regular government; and where there is still such a government, instances of this sin will not be wanting. The cause of it is that where judges, burgomasters, princes, or others in authority sit in judgment, things never fail to go according to the course of the world; namely, men do not like to offend anybody, flatter, and speak to gain favor, money, prospects, or friendship; and in consequence a poor man and his cause must be oppressed, denounced as wrong, and suffer punishment. And it is a common calamity in the world that in courts of justice there seldom preside godly men.

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evidence no one shall make public or declare for truth; and, in short, whatever is secret should be allowed to remain secret, or, at any rate, should be secretly reprov'd, as we shall hear. 273] Therefore, if you encounter an idle tongue which betrays and slanders some one, contradict such a one promptly to his face, that he may blush; thus many a one will hold his tongue who else would bring some poor man into bad repute, from which he would not easily extricate himself. For honor and a good name are easily taken away, but not easily restored.

274] Thus you see that it is summarily forbidden to speak any evil of our neighbor, however, the civil government, preachers, father and mother excepted, on the understanding that this commandment does not allow evil to go unpunished. Now, as according to the Fifth Commandment no one is to be injured in body, and yet Master Hannes [the executioner] is excepted, who by virtue of his office does his neighbor no good, but only evil and harm, and nevertheless does not sin against God's commandment, because God has on His own account instituted that office; for He has reserved punishment for His own good pleasure, as He threatens in the First Commandment, just so also, although no one has a right in his own person to judge and condemn anybody, yet if they to whose office it belongs fail to do it, they sin as well as he who would do so of his own accord, without such office. For here necessity requires one to speak of the evil, to prefer charges, to investigate and testify.

A Brief Admonition to Confession

25] In just this way the pope's preachers kept silent in the past about the splendid gift and inexpressible treasure to be had through Confession. All they did was to drive people in crowds to Confession, with no further aim than to let them see what impure, dirty people they were. Who could go willingly to Confession under such circumstances? 26] We, however, do not say that people should look at you to see how filthy you are, using you as a mirror to preen themselves. Rather, we give this counsel: If you are poor and miserable, then go to Confession and make use of its healing medicine. 27] He who feels his misery and need will no doubt develop such a longing for it that he will run toward it with joy. But those who pay no attention to it and do not come of their own accord, we let them go their way. Let them be sure of this, however, that we do not regard them as Christians.



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