

## 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.

1. How does Christ instruct us to deal with sin in a way that protects the reputation? Does he mean for us to stay entirely "out of one another's business?" *Matt 18:15–22; Gal 6:1–5; Luke 17:1–5.*
2. What two purposes must we have when we find out our neighbor's evil deeds, or a rumor about them? *Eph 4:25; 1 Pet 4:8; James 4:11; 5:19–20.*

### From Luther's *Large Catechism* (I: Ten Commandments)

<sup>255–256</sup> 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. <sup>256</sup> 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...

<sup>260</sup> Therefore this commandment is given first of all that every one shall help his neighbor to secure his rights, and not allow them to be hindered or twisted, but shall promote and strictly maintain them, no matter whether he be judge or witness, and let it pertain to whatsoever it will...

<sup>262</sup> Next, it extends very much further, if we are to apply it to spiritual jurisdiction or administration; here it is a common occurrence that every one bears false witness against his neighbor. For wherever there are godly preachers and Christians, they must bear the sentence before the world that they are called heretics, apostates, yea, seditious and desperately wicked miscreants. Besides, the Word of God must suffer in the most shameful and malicious manner, being persecuted, blasphemed, contradicted, perverted, and falsely cited and interpreted. But let this pass; for it is the way of the blind world that she condemns and persecutes the truth and the children of God, and yet esteems it no sin.

<sup>263</sup> In the third place, what concerns us all, this commandment forbids all sins of the tongue whereby we may injure or approach too closely to our neighbor. For to bear false witness is nothing else than a work of the tongue. Now, whatever is done with the tongue against a fellow-man God would have prohibited, whether it be false preachers with their doctrine and blasphemy, false judges and witnesses with their verdict, or outside of court by lying and evil-speaking...

<sup>269–270</sup> But you say: Shall I not say it if it be the truth? Answer: Why do you not make accusation to regular judges? Ah, I cannot prove it publicly, and hence I might be silenced and turned away in a harsh manner [incur the penalty of a false accusation]. "Ah, indeed, do you smell the roast?" If you do not trust yourself to stand before the proper authorities and to make answer, then hold your tongue...

<sup>290</sup> [T]here is nothing on or in entire man which can do both greater and more extensive good or harm in spiritual and in temporal matters than the tongue, though it is the least and feeblest member.