

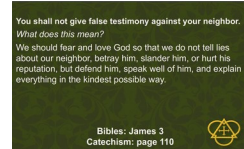
In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

The Eighth Commandment is:

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 possible way.



To understand this commandment you must understand that there are three things a Christian should know in order to be saved.

First we should know what to do, and what not to do, so that we can meet God's standards of perfection.

Second, realizing that God's standards of perfection are too great for us to meet, we need to know where to go for help to obtain what we need, to be what God demands.

Third, we must know how to seek out and obtain that strength that is required. We must know how to get to the place where that help can be found.

It is just like a person who has a disease. That person must first discover what the disease is that ails him. Then he must find out what should be done, or what must not be done, to cure the disease. Then knowing the cure, he must go to the place where the cure may be found. Finally he must find the medicine, or to have it brought to him, so that it can cure his disease.

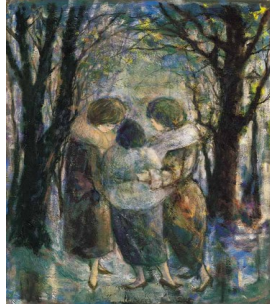
There are three things in the Church that provide what we need for our souls.

First, the Commandments that teach and show us that we are sick. The Commandments teach us to perceive and understand our sickness. They teach us that before God, we are sick and unhealthy. They teach us how to understand what we should, and should not do, to be healthy. They teach us we are all sinful and wicked people, who have no hope of getting to Heaven without God's help.



Second is the Creeds which tell us where to go to find the cure. They teach us how to be faithful. The creeds point us to God alone, because of His grace and mercy, given and shown to us through the work of Jesus Christ.

Finally, the Lord's Prayer teaches us how to ask God for the cure. It teaches us where to go, and how to ask, for all that we need. So in these three things: The Commandments, The Creeds, and The Lord's Prayer, you find a basic description of the teachings of the entire Bible.



The Eighth Commandment is broken by anyone who does not tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. It is also broken by those who do harm to others, or to another's reputation, or by anyone who spreads gossip that would hurt another person. Gossip is a sin. To dismiss it as "everyone does it" does not excuse it. Such excuses only make you an unrepentant sinner.

This commandment is broken by anyone who tries to twist the meaning of words to hide the truth, because hiding the truth is exactly the same as lying. Purposefully twisting words to appear like they mean one thing, when the truth is in fact something far different is lying.

This commandment is broken when you do anything that might harm another person's reputation. It is also broken when you hear someone harming another's reputation and you say nothing about it. By saying nothing, your silence is giving approval, to sin. You are in fact helping the liar tell the lies.

We should all defend and protect the reputation of those who live around us. Beyond that, this commandment would have us go even further. We keep this commandment by speaking in a way that makes others look good, by saying things that help and build up those around us.

This commandment is kept when we look for ways to heal broken relationships and when we defend those who have had lies told about them, by standing up and stating the truth boldly. A Christian needs to be wise to understand when to be silent, and when to speak out, in order to protect the income, property and reputation of all those who live around us.

Our prayer to God should happen with the understanding we don't deserve anything from Him. Yet, through the work of Jesus, He has allowed, and even commanded, that we call Him Father. He has made us His beloved children. We should ask God to help us love the people around us the same way that He loves us, seeing each and every person as a brother or sister in Christ. We should pray to

God the same way a child might talk to their father or mother to get help for themselves or friend.

When we go to God in prayer we should not think only about ourselves. We should also think about all the other people around us, the good and the bad. We should leave anger, hatred and division behind us, and come to God with hearts that are full of the love He has given to us. We should pray the way Jesus taught us. Not saying *my* Father, but *our* Father who art in Heaven.

The most important phrase in this command is: “explain everything in the kindest possible way.” By committing this to heart, and keeping it in mind, whenever you speak you will overcome the temptation to hurt your own reputation by saying things which would harm another’s.

This commandment is as much about self-respect as it is about respect for others. Respect that starts with our respect for God, and then flows into all other aspects of our lives.

James writes:

Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct let him show his works in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast and be false to the truth. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, *demonic*. For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.¹

That’s pretty straight forward. There’s no hidden message in those words. There’s nothing in those verses that is hard to understand. The only secret you might have to dig up here is to discover to whom James is speaking. He’s not preaching to unbelievers. He’s not talking to people outside of the Church. He is talking to members; people on the inside.

Some of the things we see him mention here are a really a bit insidious, things more seductive than just a love of position and power. These are things that like to lurk in the shadows and call our name to come have a look, like a stranger offering candy to a child. Things that grow, not just in everyone else, but inside ourselves. James talks about things like bitter jealousy, and selfish ambition, claiming to be wise about the Bible, and the Christian faith, when there is actually no effort to actually open the Bible to read it.

1 James 3:13-16

James has some strong words when he talks about this sort of thing. He says such things are self-centered and *demonic*.² Demonic, that's a strong word, but that's the word James uses. Demonic: that means acting like a demon, a servant of Satan, one who does the bidding of Lucifer, among us.

Can those people actually be in the Church? Can those people actually come to church every Sunday? Sure they can. In fact the Bible goes a step further. James isn't the only one who had to deal with this sort of thing. St. Paul wrote about these people when he said:

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no surprise if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness. Their end will correspond to their deeds.³

I have seen that sort of thing in congregations. It was in fact that sort of thing that kept me out of the ministry for so long. Watching pastors get attacked, lied about and demeaned. Gossip spread with cruel hatred and evil intentions. When I see, in the very House of God, these facades of Christianity, hiding in darkness and spiritual filth. It reminds me, that is why Jesus described the gate as narrow and the road as hard for the faithful. That is why He says, "Few find the way."⁴

When that stuff starts happening in a congregation the church becomes a swirling cauldron of conflict, instead of the very visible voice of grace in the community it should be. Do you see why: James, Paul and others, call this stuff insidious and demonic? It brings the church's focus inside, and pulls it away from the work of bringing God's Word outside. It is insidious. It is seductive. It is demonic.

James warns us all to be on guard, be on the lookout, for such things. Those whispering little digs in your ear. "Did you hear this?" "Did you see that?" Spreading, through the seeds of gossip, weeds that grow and choke off the Church. Weeds that flourish and grow like mushrooms that you find in the dank, dark and shadowy places.

These weeds don't do well in the light.⁵ The light burns them up. It shows them to be what they really are. James warns us all, don't let them get a foothold. Shine

2 James 3:15

3 2 Corinthians 11:13-15 (Adapted)

4 Matthew 7:13-14

5 John 8:12

a bright light on them. Point them out. Give them no dark corners in which to hide. Let the Gospel Light of Christ shine, ever so brightly, in every place.

Paul writes:

Can right and wrong be partners?
Can light have anything in common with darkness?
Can Christ agree with Satan?⁶

That's how you turn on the lights. That's how you burn up those sprouts of sin and gossip, before their roots dig in. That's how we keep our house swept clean⁷ of such things, before they start to change our attention from spreading God's Word outside to inventing problems inside. Turn on the Light of the World: Jesus Christ.

We know this stuff. We've all been taught this stuff. We've all heard Martin Luther's explanation to the eighth commandment which is:

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.

Our words should be encouraging not discouraging. Words that tear down, not only affect current members of our congregation, but new members and visitors, who hear such things. They formulate their opinion of us based on what they hear, and in these cases their faith is tested rather than being built up.

St. Paul writes:

“We should all be concerned about our neighbor and the good things that will build his faith.⁸”

He also wrote:

Since we belong to the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.

6 2 Corinthians 6:14-16

7 “A House Swept Clean” is the title of a book by Pastor Darrell McCulley giving reference to Luke 11:25.

8 Romans 15:2 (GWT)

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up.⁹

Gossip and demeaning comments, only serve to divide a congregation. It really is a poison. Such lies can only be invented and spoken with contempt in one's heart. Good Christian people do not slander another's good Christian name. These actions do not display Christian love or charity, nor do they reflect the Christian faith.

Our job should be to provide a safe and encouraging place for people to feel comfortable; where they can worship God in peace. Gossip never solves problems. It only makes more problems.

St. Paul says:

At one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true). Try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.

Live as children who have light. Light produces everything that is good, that has God's approval, and that is true.

Determine which things please the Lord.¹⁰

Then chase after them. Don't run into cliques and groups whispering in shadows. Run from that sort of thing. Chase after those things which cause us to be what God desires for our lives. Live in the grace, peace and mercy that only Jesus gives.

In His name. Amen.

**Proclaim God's Word,
Encourage one another in faith,
Witness to God's love and
Serve all people**



9 I Thessalonians 5:8-11

10 Ephesians 5:8-10