

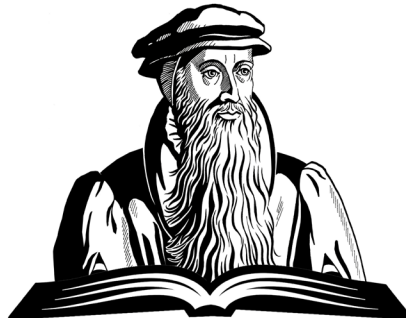
VIDEO SERMON SERIES

# Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

by Rev. Bartel Elshout

*Sermon #54, Lord's Day 43*

## The Ninth Commandment



The John Knox Institute  
of Higher Education

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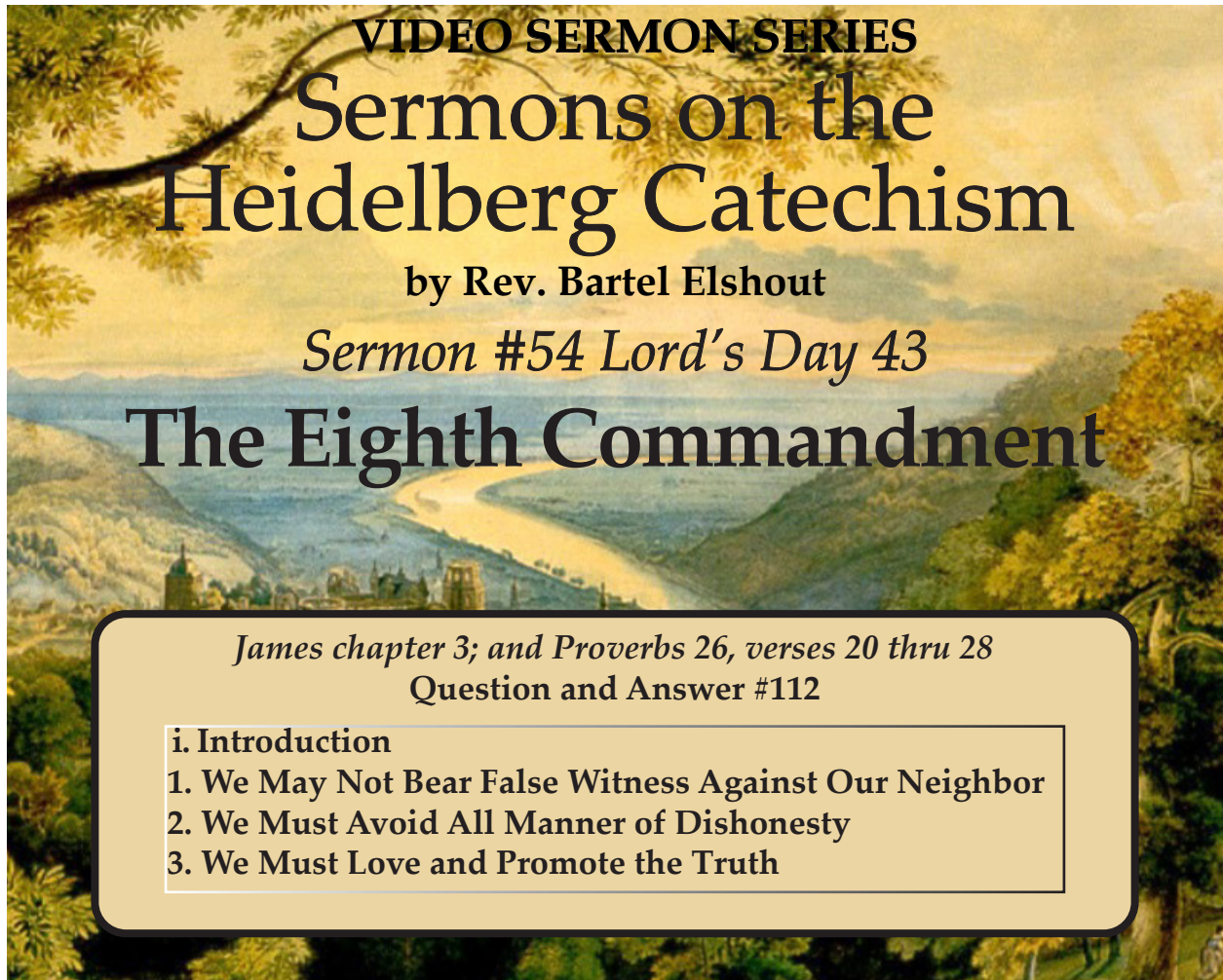
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# Sermons on the Heidelberg Catechism

by Rev. Bartel Elshout

*Sermon #54 Lord's Day 43*

## The Eighth Commandment

*James chapter 3; and Proverbs 26, verses 20 thru 28*  
Question and Answer #112

### **i. Introduction**

- 1. We May Not Bear False Witness Against Our Neighbor**
- 2. We Must Avoid All Manner of Dishonesty**
- 3. We Must Love and Promote the Truth**

### **Introduction**

Congregation, turn with me for a moment to John 18, the Gospel of John chapter 18. We're going to look at verses 36, 37, and 38 of John 18. And this is where Jesus is being questioned by Pilate, and in verse 36, when Pilate says, "What hast thou done?" (verse 35). "Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence. Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king."—this is important here—"To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. Pilate saith unto him, What is truth?" And congregation, that will be the focus of the message tonight, because the Ninth Commandment deals with the issue of truth, even though the Ninth Commandment is formulated in a negative way. And so, when the Ninth Commandment says, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour" (Exodus 20:16), that means positively, Thou shalt always be truthful to thy neighbor. Thou shalt always be a person of truth. It's very remarkable that Jesus says specifically in this verse that he identifies himself, he says, "To this end...for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth" and, "every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." And so, Christ, here, clearly identifies his people as a people of truth; as a people who hear the voice of him who came to manifest and to represent the truth, as it is ultimately in God himself.

And so, in light of that, let us consider the Ninth Commandment, and let's consider the exposition of it in Lord's Day 43, where we read, in

Question #112: *What is required in the ninth commandment?*

And the Answer is: *That I bear false witness against no man, nor falsify any man's words; that I be no backbiter nor slanderer; that I do not judge, nor join in condemning any man rashly or unheard; but that I avoid all sorts of lies and deceit, as the proper works of the devil, unless I would bring down upon me the heavy wrath of God; likewise, that in judgment and all other dealings I love the truth, speak it uprightly and confess it; also that I defend and promote, as much as I am able, the honor and good character of my neighbor.*

So, three things are highlighted in the Answer of the Catechism. First of all, very directly and straightforwardly, *We May Not Bear False Witness Against Our Neighbor*. We may not be untruthful to our neighbor. We may not deceive our neighbor. Secondly, *We Must Avoid All Manner of Dishonesty*. And so, there again, the Catechism goes beyond the letter of the law and focuses on the vast context of this Commandment, the spirituality of the law. We are to avoid all manner of dishonesty, calling it *the proper works of the devil*, calling it so serious that it brings down *the heavy wrath of God* upon those who do not repent of it. And thirdly, positively, *We Must Love and Promote the Truth*. It says here, *Likewise, that in judgment and all other dealings I love the truth, speak it uprightly and confess it*. So, *The Ninth Commandment; We May Not Bear False Witness Against Our Neighbor; We Must Avoid All Manner of Dishonesty; and, We Must Love and Promote the Truth*.

### **1. We May Not Bear False Witness Against Our Neighbor**

Congregation when God created man in his image, Adam and Eve were truthful creatures, because they were created by a God of truth, God, who himself is the very embodiment of that which is true. And because God created man in his image, he also made us capable of recognizing that truth, and responding to that truth, and honoring that truth, and living that truth. And so, having been created in God's image, God created us as communicating creatures. Now, we recognize that even in the realm of the animal world, even there, there is some communication between animals, some more than others, but not in any way resembling the gift that God gave man. And so God created us with the capacity of knowing the God of truth, of loving the God of truth, and serving the God of truth, in harmony with his truth. And part of that is that God gave us a special organ with which we would be capable to express that, namely, our tongue. We just read from James 3, what an evil instrument the tongue has become as a result of sin, and so it was not originally. And so, God created man with intelligence, and the capability of expressing himself, the capability of verbally acknowledging God's truth; the capability of verbally worshipping the God of truth in response to what he revealed of himself. And how dreadful, therefore, have been the consequences of the fall; that that instrument, the tongue, that unique capability of speech; that unique capability to express in words that which we think, being image-bearers of God; that instrument has become an instrument of evil. And how can we begin even to express the evil that has been done in this world as a result of the tongue.

And James 3 sets that before us in a very, very graphic way. And so, it all began, it all began with the fall of Satan, the greatest of all the angels that God created. But he was not satisfied, who lusted after the glory of God's Son and therefore was expelled. And from that moment, he became the father of lies. And so, the fall of man begins with a lie. The fall of man begins with the fact that Satan, concealed by the serpent, set before our first parents, especially Eve at first, a lie. He misrepresented God's truth. He caused them to doubt God's truth. And we know the sad sequence

is that Eve believed that lie; Adam believed that lie (Genesis 3:3–7). And ever since then, our fallen world is governed by the lie. Humanity lives a lie. Boys and girls, I'm going to tell you something very simple to help you remember this. So when God created Adam and Eve, they had life—L I F E, life. And because they had life, they were a people of truth. They knew God, they loved him, they served him according to truth, according to what God revealed of himself. But when Adam and Eve fell, the “F” fell away from “life”. And so, when you take the “F” out of the word “life,” what's left?—it's the word “lie.” So ever since man has fallen, we now live a lie. We are born as liars. We are born inclined towards untruth. We are born inclined to believe the lie that Satan continues to foist upon the human race. And the reason why our world is a world of misery, why our world wallows in sin, why our world demonstrates in many ways the radical depravity of the human heart, is because, as fallen sinners, we reject the truth, and we believe the lie. That's why the words of 2 Timothy 3 are so striking, when the Apostle describes fallen humanity as either deceiving or being deceived (2 Timothy 3:13). Such are the wretched consequences of our fall. And so, as a result of the fall, man has become a liar and an abuser of his tongue.

In Proverbs 18, verse 21, we read, “Death and life are in the power of the tongue.” Romans 1, verses 28 through 30, that striking description of the depravity of the Gentiles, of the fall of the human race, it says, “And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge...being filled with...maliciousness...debate...deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters.” All of that manifests itself in a fallen human race. But even though we have fallen—that is true for all of God's Commandments—God's requirement of us remains the same. God's requirement of us in his law is that we love our neighbor as ourselves, and that includes that we, therefore, as an expression of love for our neighbor, we will be truthful with our neighbor, we will not mislead our neighbor. That's part of loving your neighbor as yourself. Because, again, if we apply “The Golden Rule” (Matthew 7, verse 12), that we briefly quoted this morning, I don't think there's anybody here who does not want other people to be truthful with them. We don't like it when people deceive us, when people pull the wool over our eyes. Well if we don't like to be treated that way it should be the other way around as well.

And so, the sacred calling of the Christian is to be a person of truth. Because, remember, we are dealing with the Ninth Commandment here, in the context of Gratitude. And it means that, by grace, Christians endeavor, by grace, to honor the Christ who redeemed them, by living according to his revealed will; by ordering our lives according to truth; by being a people of truth. And of course, the only standard and context of the truth is the written Word of God that God has given us. But as you well know, that written Word is the Father's record of his living Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the ultimate embodiment of truth. And so, God himself is truth. God himself, and through his Word, in which he has revealed himself, gives us the benchmark of truth. And so, the definition of truth is very simple and straightforward. Truth is that which perfectly harmonizes with reality. Truth is reality as it really, really is. And of course, ultimately, God is that reality. God is a God of truth. And so, therefore, God's Word—God's written Word—which God has given to us in a fallen world, God's written Word is about the living Word. God's written Word is the standard of truth by which the Christian is to order his life. And that Word, from beginning to end, requires of us to be a people of truth, and in many ways, addresses our wretched inclination not to be truthful. That's why Isaiah says, in Isaiah 8 verse 20, “If they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.”

And so, conversely, if, by the grace of God we have been renewed by the Spirit of God, if that Spirit dwells within us, that should manifest itself also in the manner in which we speak. So when the Spirit of truth dwells within us, we again become a people of truth. At least, that is the desire of

the believer. And yet, congregation, also when it comes to this Commandment, to our sorrow, we have to confess that we have but a small beginning of that new obedience. Who of us would dare to say that at all times and under all circumstances, we are absolutely truthful, that there is never a shade of meaning in what we say or what we do? When it comes to this Commandment, what reason we therefore have to pray every single day, “Lord, search my heart; give me grace to be a man or woman of truth.”

So let’s see what we are forbidden by this Commandment. So when God forbids us to bear false witness against our neighbor, that means we may not say anything to our neighbor—now remember, who is our neighbor? Our neighbor is potentially any human being. But our neighbor is, in the first place, that person with whom God providentially brings me into contact on a regular basis. That means, our family members. That means the people we work with. They are our neighbors. And so, what this Commandment is saying, as we interact with our family members, as we interact with the people at work, as we interact with the people we encounter in our business dealings, I may not say anything to them that is not in harmony with truth. And, whenever we deviate from that, however subtle it may be, we are transgressing the Ninth Commandment. And congregation, the true believer recognizes that. Because the wonderful that happens in regeneration is that our conscience again begins to function correctly. And one of the evidences of growth in grace is that that conscience becomes more and more sensitive, more and more sensitive. It is the Holy Spirit’s work to make his people hypersensitive to sin, and that applies to this Commandment as well. So, I pray, congregation, for myself, and for you, that we would have such a hypersensitive conscience when it comes to truth, so that we will not bear false witness to our neighbor. The Catechism says that I may not *falsify any man’s words*. That means I may not understate what another man has said; I may not exaggerate what another man has said; I may not distort what another man has said. So also, when I repeat the words of another, I may not add to what is said, nor may I subtract from what is said. And that’s easier said than done. It’s so very, very subtle. It is so easy for us to add or subtract, or to place it into a different context. And boys and girls, some of you may have participated in this classroom experiment; I did it myself years ago, when I was a school principle, when I wanted to illustrate to the children in my classroom how easily we are guilty of distorting and falsifying what someone else says. And so, it went simply this way. I would tell something, I would whisper something to the student in his ears, and then that student was supposed to pass it on to the next, and it made its way all the way through the classroom. And then I asked, finally, the last student what was it that I said? And it did not even resemble what I said. It was a distortion of what I said. But that happens, you see. Nobody in that classroom intentionally, I think, distorted what was said. But we are so inclined to do it, that as it made its way from person to person, this one added this, this one described it as this; by the time it made it all the way to the end of the classroom, the original story had disappeared. That’s how vulnerable we are to bearing false witness, to falsify the words of another.

And of course, the worst form, therefore, I’ve already implied that, the worst form of bearing false witness is when our walk does not agree with our talk. Because, what a responsibility we have, if, by the grace of God, we are Christians, and we profess ourselves to be Christians, the world may rightfully expect from us that our life agrees with what we profess. More harm has been done in church history by those who have professed to be Christians, but whose lives contradicted that profession. And that is a very grievous way of bearing false witness. Because, if we profess the name of Christ, our lives—not just our words—but our lives should be a manifestation of truth. That’s what we are called to. As Christians, we are called to live the truth in every aspect of our lives. And throughout the years, I have met people, also in my travels, who would share with me,

“I was raised in the church, but I was so turned off by the hypocrisy,” and they would mention specific examples of those who professed the truth, but whose lives so blatantly contradicted it that it turned them off to Christianity altogether. Of course, that’s no excuse, but I’m saying that what a responsibility we have; what a responsibility we have to be, as Paul calls it, readable epistles. It has been said—it’s not original with me—that as we interact with humanity, as we interact in our business world, that we may be the only Bible people will ever read. That’s a sobering thought. And so, do those, do our children, who live with us day and night, our grandchildren who know us so intimately, can they sense in our lives that we live what we profess, lest we bear false witness to the truth?

There can also be a grievous misrepresentation of the truth. And as an illustration, I would mention the friends of Job. They were godly men. But when you read through the book of Job, they said some remarkable things, but what’s really stunning is that they presented it in such a way that God rejected it outright. And so, in Job 42, twice he says to these men who would have died if Job had not sacrificed for them, he said, “You have not spoken concerning me that which is right; you have misrepresented me.” That’s how closely this works here. Godly men, who, with good intentions, who were guilty of bearing false witness to Job, who were guilty of misrepresenting the truth and the character of God. And what grace we therefore need, as Christians, every single day; and what need we have to pray, “Lord, enable me, by grace; enable me to live the truth; enable me so to walk; enable me so to conduct myself that I will not be guilty of bearing false witness to my neighbor, of misrepresenting the Christ whose name I profess. That’s why Jesus said, “Not every one that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father” (Matthew 7:21). That’s why, when we get to the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Christ uses that powerful parable of the wise and foolish builders, addressed to the hearers of this word, that true Christians must be doers of the Word, we must be doers of the truth, we must live the truth (verses 24 to 27).

Not only are we forbidden to be untruthful towards our neighbor, but we are also forbidden to be untruthful about our neighbor. It says here *that I be no backbiter nor slanderer; that I do not judge, nor join in condemning any man rashly or unheard*. That’s what we focused on this morning. So first of all, I am not to be a *backbiter*, and I would like to even include, first of all, the sin of *gossiping*. Who of us has not been guilty of that in one form or another? Sometimes we don’t even realize we’re doing it. So what is gossiping? Gossiping means that I pass on negative personal information about my neighbor to others, so that gossiping means that I talk about my neighbor instead of talking to my neighbor. We are so prone to that sin, so prone to say, “Have you heard this about so-and-so?” I remember once years ago visiting a family, and right by their dining room table, they had a big sign where it says, “We will not speak evil about anyone,” just to remind them, to remind the family, as they would gather around the dinner table, that their conversation would not degenerate in talking about other people. “Will will not speak evil of anyone.” And congregation, we need to take this to heart, because we so, so very easily slip into that sin.

We may not *backbite*. “Backbiting” is an old English word that simply means that I say spiteful things about my neighbor behind his back, so a form of gossiping; a more grievous form of gossiping. And then, *slander*—I may not slander. What is “slander”? Slander is when I deliberately say untruths about my neighbor in order to defame and damage his reputation. That means when somebody tells a deliberate mistruth about my neighbor. That’s why slandering has been called “the commission of verbal murder.” By means of slander, we can murder someone’s reputation. And maybe you’ve heard the illustration of the story of a pastor who was very ill, and one of his members who had given him so much grief, came to him to ask for forgiveness, and he said,

“Pastor, I’m so sorry for what I’ve done. Please forgive me.” He said, “Pastor is there any way in which I can undo what I have done?” And the pastor said, “What you need to do is take a pillow, and go to the top of the steeple of our church, and cut open that pillow and shake out all of the feathers. And then I want you to go and gather all of the feathers and put them back in the pillow.” And of course, the man realized at once what the pastor meant. He realized there’s no way that he could ever bring those feathers back into the pillow. And so he said, “Young man, I forgive you. I forgive you for what you have done, but the feathers are gone.” That’s how harmful the abuse of the tongue can be. That’s how harmful backbiting and slander can be. And if only, if only that were not true within the church!

I remember when I was a young elder in another place, the former Rev. Hoffman Sr. preached for us, and somehow this conversation came up. And at that time, television was a big issue, and so, we, as office-bearers, were trying to deal with that. And I’ll never forget what he said. He pointed to the wall where the telephone was hanging—and in those days we had telephones on the wall; we don’t have those anymore today—but there was a telephone on the wall. And he said, “Brothers, how about that thing on the wall there?” He said, “I think that telephone does as much harm in the congregation as a television set.” And he simply meant that that telephone, at least in those days—but of course that’s still true today, that applies to social media—that it becomes a means whereby we transgress the Ninth Commandment in so many different ways. We live in a culture now, and also when we consider the recent election, where people have lost confidence in the press,<sup>1</sup> because of the sheer dishonesty, the sheer distortion of facts simply surrounded us. But what I’m trying to say, and what Rev. Hoffman Sr. wanted to point out to us is how much evil is committed with those means of communication. And of course, all of that has become much more sophisticated in our day. And sometimes I fear that artificial intelligence will bring that possibility of destroying someone through a false witness, will even go to a higher level, if God does not forbid it. And boys and girls, why was it that, when the children mocked Elisha, when they ran behind him and said, “Go up, thou bald head!” (2 Kings 2:23–24). Why was it that God’s judgment was so severe that they were killed by the bears who destroyed them? It’s because the reason those children mocked Elisha is because their parents had been guilty of bearing false witness about this prophet. Congregation, it is a sin, it is a sin that God hates.

## **2. We Must Avoid All Manner of Dishonesty**

That’s why it goes on to say that we are to *avoid all sorts of lies and deceit, as the proper works of the devil, unless I would bring down upon me the heavy wrath of God*. And so, congregation, since God is a God of truth, and since his Son is the embodiment of that truth, we will understand why the violation of that truth—the bearing of false witness—is so utterly obnoxious to God and provokes him to wrath. It is the work of the devil. And that’s very sobering. So if we gossip, if we backbite, and God forbid, if we slander, we are doing the devil’s work. That’s very sobering, congregation. And as a believer, that should make us tremble, that we’d say, “Lord, give me the grace that I would not be guilty of such a transgression.” That’s why we have to take, being truthful, we have to take that so very, very seriously. In Proverbs 12, verse 22, we read—listen to how strong the language is—“Lying lips are abomination to the LORD”—abomination. And when God says that something is an abomination to him, that means it’s very serious. “But,” he says, “they that deal truly are his delight.” Because God is a God of truth.

And so, our sacred calling is to avoid all manner of deceit, either in private life or in the public

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<sup>1</sup> “press”—this is a reference to journalism, as in newspapers, periodicals, radio and television news broadcasting, news reporters, publishers, and broadcasters as a group.

arena. The world should know us to be a people of truth. Because, if we are, what honor we bring to Christ, what honor we bring to his Word. And so, in Psalm 101, verse 5, we read, “Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour, him will I cut off: him that hath an high look and a proud heart will not I suffer.” Proverbs 19, verse 5, “A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape.” Matthew 12:36, “But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.” Turn with me to Proverbs 6, verses 16 through 19—a striking passage in connection with this Commandment—from verse 16. And there we read, “These six things doth the LORD hate”—I want that to sink in, these things the Lord hates—“yea, seven are an abomination unto him”—underscoring it. And here, it is: “A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren.” So it talks about “a lying tongue,” “a false witness,” and they “that soweth discord among brethren.” And we know this happens in the world, in an ungodly world, but sadly, it happens in the church as well. So much church trouble throughout the ages has been because of the tongue; that godly people professing Christianity have abused their tongue, and they have sown discord among brethren. That’s why God hates it. And so, the language that the Catechism here uses is not strong enough.

And it says it will bring *upon me the heavy wrath of God*. And we’ll see in a moment when I come back to this, that’s what Christ had to endure to save sinners like you and me. To save transgressors of the Ninth Commandment, he had to endure the heavy wrath of God.

### **3. We Must Love and Promote the Truth**

So we have considered that *We May Not Bear False Witness Against Our Neighbor*, that *We Must Avoid All Manner of Dishonesty*, but also that we must, positively, *We Must Love and Promote the Truth*. And congregation, I already addressed it in the beginning, but let me say it here again—that should be the fruit of our lives. Because that’s what regeneration does. Regeneration, the Holy Spirit, when he regenerates us, when he makes us a new creature in Christ, when he unites us to Christ, he transforms us from a liar into a person of truth again. That’s why Jesus said, “By their fruits ye shall know them” (Matthew 7:20). There’s a remarkable verse in Psalm 51, verse 6; it says, “Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts.” “Blessed are the pure in heart” (Matthew 5:8). Because that’s what the grace of God does. The grace of God makes us holy from within. The grace of God purifies our heart. And when our heart gets purified, that will manifest itself in the fruits of our life. And that’s where grace makes us honest. The grace of God makes us sensitive to these things. That’s why I said, when it comes to truth, as the people of God, as the ones who profess the truth of God, we must be so hypersensitive to it.

First Corinthians 13, verse 6, it says, “Charity”—love; this is, again, a manifestation of that new man, that regenerated man—“rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth.” Regeneration transforms us into a people of truth. And so, in the context of 1 Corinthians 13, that means that, in our relationships, when someone fails, when someone even offends us, we do not rejoice in it, but we rejoice in the truth. Because, by the grace of God, we become a people of truth. Proverbs 13, verse 5, “A righteous man hateth lying.”

Congregation, can that be said of you and me? Can we say before God, “Lord, knowest my heart and the secrets within”? That’s what Paul meant when he said, “That which I’m called to do, I do not do; and that which I hate, I do” (Romans 7:15). There’s not a believer who will manage to live the rest of his life without ever transgressing that Commandment in one way or another. But the difference is this, that by grace, we hate it. That’s the difference, you see. God’s people still sin,

but they hate it. They hate it, why? Because the love of God has been shed abroad in our hearts (Romans 5:5). And why do we hate lying? Because the grace of God transforms us into people of truth.

And so, it says here, we must *speak it uprightly*. We must speak it without guile. That's what Jesus said about Nathaniel. He said, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" (John 1:47). And congregation, that's what people should be able to say of us, especially those that know us. Our children, our grandchildren, our brothers, our sisters, the people with whom we work. They should be able to say, "This man, this woman, this boy, this girl, is a person without guile; a person who is upright." And so, Paul exhorts us in Ephesians 4, verse 25, where he says, "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another." And so, to connect with what I said earlier, when I said, negatively, one way we bear false witness is if our lives contradict what we profess. Positively, that means that we must confess the truth, not only with our lips, but we must confess it with our lives. Our lives should be a manifestation of truth. That's what Jesus meant, in Matthew 5, when he said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (verse 16). And we must do so at all costs, even at our own disadvantage. That's what Christ did, because they accused him of lying; they accused him of bearing false witness. "Art thou the Christ?" Art thou the Christ? (Luke 22:67–70). Now, humanly speaking, if he had denied it, he could have saved his life. But he said, "Thou sayest it" (Mark 15:2). He spoke the truth, and humanly speaking, it cost him his life. That's what paved the pathway to the cross of Calvary. Psalm 15, verse 4 says, "He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not." In other words, a man who is committed to the truth, a man who will endeavor to be true to his word, to be true to the vows that he has made, and changes not and will not waver.

And finally, it says, *Also that I defend and promote, as much as I am able, the honor and good character of my neighbor*. In 1 Peter 4, verse 8, we read, "And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins." So rather than talking about the sins of other members of our family, talking about the sins of other members of our church family, it says, "Charity shall cover the multitude of sins." I must do it, it says here, *as much as I am able*, that is, to the utmost of my ability. Psalm 39, verse 1, "I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue."

Congregation, is that your commitment too? That ought to be the commitment of every Christian. That ought to be our prayer every day, to take heed to our ways, "that I sin not with my tongue." We read it from James 3, that a man who does not offend in words is a remarkable man (James 3:2). So James acknowledges then that we are always in danger. That's why, when we pray, "Oh Lord, lead me not into temptation, but deliver me from the evil one," Lord, keep me from the temptation of transgressing also the Ninth Commandment, "That I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle" (Psalm 39:1). That's how it ought to be. That ought to be the commitment of a Christian, realizing that when I transgress this Commandment, in whatever way, I dishonor the Savior whose name I profess, whom I profess to love. My love for him, my love for his honor should motivate me to keep my mouth with a bridle. And Christ, of course, exemplified this perfectly, that he sought, promoted *the honor and good character of my neighbor*. Look how he treated Judas (Iscaiot). He knew exactly what Judas was up to, and yet he addressed him as "friend", and he dealt gently with him at the last supper, giving him an opportunity until the very end to repent in what he was doing. He did it so carefully that the other disciples didn't realize that Judas was the one. Because, they said, "Lord, is it I?" (Matthew 26:21–22). It didn't even dawn on them. So, Christ had zealously protected the name of Judas, though he knew full well

what he was up to. What an example that is for us. We sang Psalm 15 this morning actually, it says, “LORD...who shall dwell in thy holy hill?...He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour” (verses 1 and 3). That’s our sacred calling.

So, in conclusion, congregation, the verdict is “guilty”. Last week, at the beginning of the sermon, I asked you, “Are there any thieves here?” Is there anyone here tonight who would dare to say, “I have never transgressed the Ninth Commandment”? We’re guilty. That’s why our only hope, our only hope is in Christ, who kept this law perfectly, who perfectly obeyed it all the days that he walked here upon earth; who merited for us poor needy sinners, he merited for us a perfect and flawless obedience to the law, including the Ninth Commandment. And to save sinners like us, to save transgressors of the Ninth Commandment, he allowed himself to be maligned as a transgressor of the Ninth Commandment. He was numbered among the transgressors. And in your place, dear believer, he endured the heavy wrath of God, also provoked by the transgression of that Commandment. He who knew no sin was made sin, also regarding this Commandment. And God’s wrath was poured out upon his head, thereby to secure the salvation of liars, the salvation of the transgressors of the Ninth Commandment. And so, there is forgiveness. A God of truth will forgive the sinner who believes his truth who embraces his truth, who responds to his truth, and who comes to the Lord Jesus, who said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). And so, there is forgiveness with him that he may be feared (Psalm 130:34).

That’s why Peter is in heaven instead of hell. Oh, how Peter lied when he was asked, “Are you not one of them?” He lied three times, even swore an oath that he did not know Christ (Luke 22:54–62). And yet, Christ saved Peter. All he had to do was look at him, and Peter went out and he wept bitterly. Peter, the rest of his life, never forgot this, never, never forgot that Christ did not abandon him. That’s why, congregation, if we have been convicted by this, and we ought to be, including myself, we need to again take refuge to Christ. We need, every day, we need to ask ourselves, also when it comes to this Commandment, “Is there any way that I am guilty of this?” and to seek forgiveness. And what a blessing it is for the Christian to know that God, as our heavenly Father, is always ready to forgive, seventy times seven times. And so, may our prayer be, also when it comes to this Commandment, “Cleanse, oh, cleanse me from my sin.” And the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin, also the transgression of the Ninth Commandment. And so, by the grace of God, may it be our petition that we read in Psalm 141, verse 3, “Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips.” Amen.

### **Let’s pray.**

Gracious God if thou shouldst mark iniquity, who of us can stand? Lord, thou knowest who we truly are. Oh, make us honest and upright before thee. And oh, Holy Spirit, so work in us that we become increasingly sensitive to this transgression, that by grace we may become a people of truth; that our lives may be a manifestation of that truth; and to the world around us, we may be readable epistles; and so that men may see our good works and do glorify our Father which is in heaven. Forgive us all the ways in which we transgress this Commandment. Cleanse, oh, cleanse us from our sins. And may we thus abide in thee, O Lord Jesus, and walk daily with thee. And as we abide in thee, may we bring forth much fruit, to the glory of God the Father. Go with us now as we go homeward. Keep us safely, grant what is needed in the coming week again in our daily callings, in school, in our families. And Lord, give us grace also this week to be a people of truth, that so we may honor the Savior who redeemed us. We ask it in his name. Amen.