

EXODUS 20:16 DON'T "SMEAR" THEI NAME
(8th COMMANDMENT)

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

V. 2 I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

V. 3 *You shall have no other gods before Me.*

V. 7 *You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.*

V. 8 *Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.*

V. 12 *Honor your father and your mother.*

V. 13 *You shall not murder.*

V. 14 *You shall not commit adultery.*

V. 15 *You shall not steal.*

V. 16 *You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.*

V/ 17 *You shall not covet your neighbor's house.*

You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, workers, or animals, or anything that is your neighbor's.

“Oh no! I just smeared paint on the window!” To smear one thing onto another is generally not good, unless it's butter on bread, or grease on gears. Smearing someone's name is likewise not good; it's more than swiping a little paint on the neighbor's mailbox. It's smudging, dirtying, and ruining someone's good name—his reputation. When someone gets a bad reputation for not paying bills, it's hard to get any purchase trust anywhere. When someone gets a reputation for being a cheat and a thief, it's hard to get a job. Etc. We have been studying the Ten Commandments. God gave them to protect us. He protects life—You shall not murder. He protects marriage and family—You shall not commit adultery. He protects property—You shall not steal. He protects the precious commodity of a good name—You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

The obvious violation of this command is giving false witness—speaking lies—against someone in a court. Bible examples: 1) Naboth would not sell his vineyard to King Ahab; wicked Queen Jezebel arranged for scoundrels to speak lies against Naboth before the leaders of his city; Naboth was stoned to death; King Ahab got his vineyard. 2) False witnesses spoke against Jesus at His trial before the High Priest, but none of the testimony agreed. There are also Bible examples of ruining another's reputation, *outside of court*: 1) Absalom gave false witness against his father, King David, by telling the people that King David did not have time to listen to their issues; if he were king it would be different. Many followed him and made him king. Absalom's army drove David from Jerusalem and the throne. Absalom got his head caught in a tree and was killed by David's soldiers. 2) In the Garden of Eden, the devil bore false witness against God Himself by telling Eve she would not “surely die,” as God had said, by eating from the forbidden tree. He said she would become like God knowing good and evil. Adam and Eve did eat, did learn good and evil; but they did not become like God. “Half-truths,” or “half-lies,” are as much lies as the “no-truths” or “full-lies.” Only more subtle.

Why do people bear false witness against a neighbor? Sometimes deliberately to get them into trouble, due to anger or revenge. Other times, to get ahead of a competitor by making him look bad. Sometimes to keep self safe and family safe when threatened by others. Or to keep self safe from the harmful consequences of one's own sins not fit for public consumption. All of these are obvious in politics, big business, news-media-sensationalism, and general muckraking.

What temptations against this commandment do you face? Likely not lying in court, or muck-raking against a political opponent. But Satan brings temptations nonetheless. Gossip and slander—telling soap-opera-type news from the lives of others, and adding a few tidbits of your own. Gossip can be entirely false, but gossip isn't always lies and made-up things. Gossip is also truth that has no value in being repeated. It ruins and smears someone's name. An example: I walk a lot in town. One of you may see me as I'm walking past the bar. My toe happens to catch on a lip in the sidewalk. I stumble. Here's something for the gossip train. “The Pastor stumbled in front of the bar.” From stumbling in front of the bar, it becomes stumbling coming out of the bar. That goes to, he must have been drinking in the bar. He had too many in the bar. He was drunk when he came out of the bar. To be sure, the initial kernel of the whole matter was true, but look what a fire it started! *Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and creature of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by*

mankind. But no man can tame the tongue (James 3:5-8). Luther compared gossip to opening a feather pillow on a windy day. Swoosh! When you realize the mistake you've made, no matter how hard you try, you never recover them all. The point: Before opening your mouth to share "news," ask yourself: "Is it true?" If not, by all means say nothing. "Is it kind?" If it's only hurtful and in no way helpful, say nothing. Finally, "Is it necessary?" If it's not necessary, say nothing. Again: Is it true, is it kind, is it necessary?

What if the situation merits saying something? Maybe I really did have too much to drink! Then what? Blabber it all round? No. What does the Bible say? *Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more . . . etc. (Matthew 18:15-17).* Speak personally to the pastor, or to any other offender for that matter. (Perhaps the whole matter can easily be clarified—"I really did trip. I wasn't in the place." This keeps the matter as quiet as possible.) If the matter is true, the goal is not immediately to spread it around and start a scandal. The goal is, as Jesus said, is to "win your brother over." To win a fellow Christian—pastor or other—away from his sin, to repentance and forgiveness in the Lord, is a blessed goal! Ignoring or to hiding sinful behavior accomplishes nothing. It only provides more fuel for a bigger fire later. A pastor with an alcohol problem cannot be slipped hush-hush from one congregation to another. The devil will see to it that bigger trouble comes of it. The matter must be met head-on and corrected. Pastors use the same procedure when dealing with straying parishioners. Christian loves demands it.

What about "tattling"? The goal of tattling often is: "To get someone else into trouble—Yippee!" But is that a kind, caring, and godly reason to tattle? No. And there is another incorrect side of tattling. "When I get someone else in trouble, how do I look? So good!—Yippee!" Is that a godly goal? No. Such tattling is a sin against the 8th Commandment, whether by a child or adult. However, if it is done to protect the offending individual or others, then it is different. Is it wrong to go to Dad or Mom, saying, "Little Susy has taken out the butcher knife and won't put it away like I told her"? Such is an act of love, not hate. I would not even call it "tattling."

Sometimes when two people are talking, they find out that both have witnessed the same bad behavior in someone else. The compare notes. Is this then gossiping? It depends where it goes and what the intent is. The next move needs to be that one of them talks to the person, and proceed from there.

Common targets for smearing are bosses, teachers, fellow workers, neighbors, siblings, in-laws, civic leaders, business operators, etc. In this day and age, beware of the reputation-smearing capability of the internet! How easy to smear someone impersonally in electronic print! There is a double catch. Even if you don't spread it, the "report" has already had its affect on your heart and mind. Various internet avenues can be a lot like Hollywood tabloids. Avoid them.

Let's look at the positive side. Speak up and defend those whose reputation is under fire! Say, "Sure, so-and-so has faults, so do I. But he/she does have good points—etc." Also, when personally witnessing or hearing questionable things, don't immediately take it in the worst possible way. Put the best construction on it. Take it in the kindest possible way. Jesus came to Mary's defense (sister of Martha) when Judas found fault with Mary for anointing Jesus' feet with expensive ointment. Also when King Saul wrongfully spoke with anger against young David, Saul's own son Jonathan spoke up in David's defense.

Do you realize, every time you sin against God, you are smearing His wise and loving reputation? You are making yourself look important and God look unimportant; yourself right. God wrong—before the world! Now what? As you stand before God's judgment, can anyone speak up for you? No one. But the Son of God, your Savior, intercedes for you! He is your mediator! Paul says: *It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us (Romans 8:34).* John says, *If any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous. And He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:1-2).* Jesus died and rose for you. Jesus speaks up for you, who are indeed guilty! Through His intercession you are forgiven, even for sins of smearing someone's reputation. You are forgiven! Treasure that gift. He wants us to defend the good name of others.

Martin Luther explained the 8th Commandment: "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 [put the best construction on everything.]

Amen! So be it!

Pastor Kanzenbach---