

Name: _____



**Advanced Bible Correspondence Course
Lesson 43: The Law of God – Ninth Commandment**

LORD'S DAY 43

Q. 112. WHAT IS REQUIRED IN THE NINTH COMMANDMENT?

ANSWER: THAT I BEAR FALSE WITNESS AGAINST NO MAN (A), NOR FALSIFY ANY MAN'S WORDS (B); THAT I BE NO BACKBITER NOR SLANDERER (C); THAT I DO NOT JUDGE, NOR JOIN IN CONDEMNING ANY MAN RASHLY OR UNHEARD (D); BUT THAT I AVOID ALL SORTS OF LIES AND DECEIT, AS THE PROPER WORKS OF THE DEVIL (E), UNLESS I WOULD BRING DOWN UPON ME THE HEAVY WRATH OF GOD (F); LIKewise, THAT IN JUDGMENT AND ALL OTHER DEALINGS I LOVE THE TRUTH, SPEAK IT UPRIGHTLY AND CONFESS IT (G); ALSO THAT I DEFEND AND PROMOTE, AS MUCH AS I AM ABLE, THE HONOUR AND GOOD CHARACTER OF MY NEIGHBOUR (H).

(A) PROVERBS 19:5&9, 21:28; (B) PSALM 15:3, 50:19&20; (C) ROMANS 1:30; (D) MATTHEW 7:1, LUKE 6:37; (E) JOHN 8:44; (F) PROVERBS 12:22, 13:5; (G) I CORINTHIANS 13:6, EPHESIANS 4:25; (H) I PETER 4:8

Speaking about our neighbour

The ninth commandment commands us not to bear false witness. This includes that we are called to give an honest testimony, if the court of justice asks us to give evidence, even if it would be an incriminating testimony. On the other hand, we must not give a false testimony, slandering our neighbour if he is innocent. Neither are we permitted to judge on unfounded rumors, but are obliged to first personally listen to the person who is accused of wrongdoing.

However, in this commandment, *all* talk is forbidden that will harm our neighbour (except requested incriminating evidence before the judge). Causing harm to life, to possessions, or to his good name are all forbidden. Included are offending, insulting, and mocking others, in or outside of their presence, all forms of nagging and pestering, but also all so-called jokes which are so popular and which are made at the expense of others. What pain that can often cause,

sometimes without we being aware of it. Many a celebrated comedian does more damage than he realizes.

The forbidding of gossip also falls under this commandment. Gossip is not only speaking evil of somebody who has done no evil, but it is also speaking about the evil someone has done, without a compelling need to do so. Gossip often serves to fill time or to delight in the evil of someone who is not our friend. That is slander and backbiting. Paul wrote: “*(Love) thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, (...) beareth all things*” (I Corinthians 13:5-7).

On the other hand, we must not, of course, use “the cloak of love” to cover up iniquity and to permit it to spread. Then we inflict harm to our neighbour.

Correcting our neighbour

This commandment also forbids many forms of criticism. We may and are obliged to, if necessary and justified, and if it does not unnecessarily harm our neighbour, honestly express our opinion to each other and about each other’s work. This must never be done behind his back! Criticism should always serve the purpose of helping the other person to improve that which is wrong. To that end, our criticism should be charitable and cautious, and include directions for improvement, not arrogantly as one who “always knows better”. It must be done kindly and humbly, conscious of the fact that the gifts which we possess are only received out of God’s undeserved goodness. If necessary, in order to temper our criticism, we may point the other person to our own weaknesses and shortcomings. That will make the criticism more bearable, and it will give the other person more courage to work toward improvement. Paul said: “*Admonish him as a brother*” (II Thessalonians 3:15).

Always speak the truth?

Sometimes speaking the truth about another’s activities or omissions can bring that person into great trouble. For example, during wartime by speaking we could betray someone to the enemy. Then the command to love one another commands us at such times to keep silent or to hide something that we know is true.

However, this silence may never stem from laxity or apathy. We may never be lax or indifferent if it involves God’s law or His Name, or the genuine wellbeing of our neighbour. It can be that we see and hear our neighbour transgress God’s commandment, or that some danger threatens him or her. If we do not then admonish or warn him or her, our silence is a sinful form of self-love. In the epistle to the Hebrews we read: “*But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin*” (Heb. 3:13).

If we desire to be warned or admonished in such situations, then we must also speak to others who are in danger of falling into sin or into something that could harm them. Christ said: “*Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets*” (Matthew 7:12).

Admonishing in love

It goes without saying that admonishing or warning others needs to be done with love and tact. Solomon said: *“A wise man’s heart discerneth both time and judgment” (Ecclesiastes 8:5)*; and James wrote: *“If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God...and it shall be given him” (James 1:5)*.

Of course, this does not mean that our admonishment should always be gentle. It can sometimes be necessary to admonish our child or our neighbour sharply if they are not willing to listen to gentle words. The sons of Eli were admonished, but continued in their sins. Therefore a terrible judgment came over them. Their father Eli was also severely condemned by the Lord, because although he exhorted his sons (I Samuel 2:23-25), he did not do so severely; he did not restrain them (I Samuel 3:13).

The white lie

One very difficult area is the white lie, the lie out of necessity. According to some people, all lying is from the evil one, since he is called *“a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44)*. Yet we should be careful here. The devil never lies unless it brings to ruin; it is never done out of love, but always out of hatred. However, sometimes there can be extra-ordinary situations, for example, during times of war, when innocent refugees must be kept hidden.

The biblical understanding of “to be truthful” implies that justice must be done to man. The Greek understanding of “truth” signifies that justice be done according to the facts. Therefore in very special circumstances it can be necessary to alter the facts to protect the lives of our neighbours. However, then we ought to be well aware that only love to our neighbour guides us, and not sinful self-love! The Bible gives us an example: the Egyptian midwives who lied to Pharaoh to protect the life of the children of Israel. Without any reference to any disapproval of their actions, it is said that therefore God was kind to them: *“Therefore God dealt well with the midwives....And it came to pass, because the midwives feared God, that He made them houses” (Exodus 1:20&21)*.

Promoting the good name of our neighbour

That love is the fulfillment of the law also applies to the ninth commandment. And love is not passive, but active. God commands us, as much as we are able, to defend and promote the good character, that is the good name, of our neighbour. This implies that we, wherever possible and when it is justified, speak well of our neighbour, and that we resist, as much as possible, backbiting and gossip. The name of our neighbour must be held in high esteem by us, whether or not he is friendly towards us. We should not cause or permit his name be put down. The well-known example of Monica, the mother of the fourth century church father Augustine, is worthy of imitation. When in company and there was any gossiping about someone, she admonished those people to refrain from doing so. If that did not help, she then proceeded to say as many good things as possible of

the person about whom there was gossiping. Often, the result was that the gossipmonger was shamefully silenced.

That is what Paul meant: “*She (love) rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth*” (I Corinthians 13:6).

The heavy wrath of God

Let us consider that all of us probably transgress the ninth commandment the most easily and the most readily, but that the Catechism correctly says that by transgressing this commandment we bring down the heavy wrath of God upon us! This is according to the Word of God: “*Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord*” (Proverbs 12:22).

Question:

In what ways can we give false witness against our neighbour? Give four examples.

Evaluator: _____

Meditation: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” James 1:5
“If any of you lack wisdom.” There is no “if” in the matter, for I am sure I lack it. What do I know? How can I guide my own way? How can I direct others? Lord, I am a mass of folly, and wisdom I have none.

Thou sayest, “Let him ask of God.” Lord, I now ask. Here at Thy footstool I ask to be furnished with heavenly wisdom for this day’s perplexities, ay, and for this day’s simplicities; for I know I may do very stupid things, even in plain matters, unless Thou dost keep me out of mischief.

I thank Thee that all I have to do is to ask. What grace is this on Thy part, that I have only to pray in faith, and Thou wilt give me wisdom! Thou dost here promise me a liberal education, and that, too, without an angry tutor, or a scolding usher. This, too, Thou wilt bestow without a fee – bestow it on a fool who lacks wisdom. O Lord, I thank Thee for that positive and expressive word, “It shall be given him”. I believe it. Thou wilt this day make Thy babe to know the hidden wisdom which the carnally prudent never learn. Thou wilt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterwards receive me to glory.

Taken from: “The Cheque-Book of the Bank of Faith” by C.H. Spurgeon