

Instruction In The Westminster Standards

The Historic Standards of Presbyterian Denominations

STUDIES IN THE WESTMINSTER SHORTER CATECHISM

Q. 78. What is forbidden in the ninth commandment?

A. The ninth commandment forbiddeth whatsoever is prejudicial to truth, or injurious to our own or our neighbor's good name.

Scripture References: Prov. 19:5. Luke 3:14. Ps. 15:3. Prov. 6:16-19. James 3:14.

Questions:

1. In general what does this commandment forbid?

This commandment forbids all falsehood, lying of any type. James 3:14 teaches this commandment: "Lie not against the truth."

2. What does the Bible mean by a lie?

A lie, according to the Bible, would be to speak or express what we know to be false.

3. Name some ways we can lie and break God's Law.

There are many ways we can lie according to the Bible. We can falsely accuse others. We can lie to make gain our own ends. We can invent stories that are not true. We can lie in order to make excuses for things we have not done. We can lie to try to cover our faults. We can lie in our jesting (course, foolish talking).

4. Who is the author and father of lies?

The author and father of lies is the devil (John 8:44).

5. How may we injure our own good name?

We may injure our own good name by doing something that would be offensive in the eyes of the world, such as adultery, theft or any kind of baseness and wickedness. We may injure it by false boasting. We may injure it by accusing ourselves when we are not guilty before God or by not using the gifts that God has given to us.

6. How may we injure the good name of our neighbor?

We may by false accusations or bearing false witness against him; by judging and censuring him over small, unimportant or doubtful matters; by talking about him in a way that would detract from his reputation; by listening to bad reports about him that are false.

7. What should we remember regarding the breaking of this commandment?

We should remember that at the last Day, we shall have to answer for our words and our actions. (Matt. 12:36, 37.)

SLANDER OR WITNESS

The ninth commandment makes it very plain that we should not slander our neighbor in any way. This sin is predominant today even within the Christian Church. Time and time again we hear of men and women of God being slandered, sometimes even by those who are professing Christians. Indeed, this commandment points out that such is using the tongue as an instrument of unrighteousness. Thomas Watson once said that the Lord put two fences up for the tongue, the teeth and lips, and then this commandment is the third fence!

There is a positive side to this commandment implied, however, of which we should take heed. The positive side is that we should stand up for those who are being slandered! Indeed it is true that we should not take part in slander. But sometimes we can take part in it by refusing to witness for the truth in the midst of slander.

The Bible is very plain about this in various places. For example, in Acts 2:15 Peter spoke up when the apostles were being charged with drunkenness. He knew that he dare not be quiet but had to witness for truth and the truth was that they were filled with the Spirit! Jonathan took the part of David when he was slandered by Saul. The men of the Bible knew very well that the time comes when one Christian must stand up for another and refuse to be party to slander in any way.

This particular teaching is very pertinent for today. The way of silence, of not wanting to get involved, is the way of the world today. It is rapidly becoming an important part of our culture. People are rapidly forgetting the teaching of the Golden Rule and are very fast to allow others to be treated in a way that would grieve them. Certainly there are human arguments in favor of not getting involved. Sometimes one gets into trouble, sometimes the law does not uphold the person trying to help. But these are human arguments and we as Christians are not to live by such a standard. Our standard is the Word of God and that Word tells us that we have the responsibility to speak up when our brethren are slandered and their names are cast down into the gutter of false accusation.

The familiar words, "Silence Gives Consent", are applicable in this case. We can break this commandment by our silence in addition to breaking it by our slander. Instead of slander our motto should be "Witness" for our brethren and tell the truth about them at all times! Then God will be pleased with us as we fulfill this responsibility before Him.

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