



# **Pinewood Lutheran Church**

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**I had planned on writing about the 8th commandment before the Senate Judiciary hearings that we were all “treated to” yesterday. Who knows, maybe God has been priming me over the past few weeks because He knew what was coming? In any case, everyone can draw their own conclusions over the spectacle witnessed in Washington on their own. Ferreting out “the truth” in that particular instance is above my pay grade—thank God! But addressing the slanderous nature of our society is not.**

**What you say about other people and how you say it directly impacts your faith, how others view Christianity, and ultimately the salvation of your soul. That’s a fact, not an opinion. As God’s 8th commandment states: “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.” Then, to flesh the meaning of this out (both the positive and the negative) Dr. Luther adds this explanation: “We should fear and love God that we do not lie about, betray, or slander our neighbor, but excuse him, speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything.” That’s a tall order! It’s also one that none of us keeps. We like to hear and repeat gossip. We like to cut others down in order to build ourselves up. We sometimes say or do almost anything to hide our sins and protect our reputation. And both the internet and social media feed this in our ego-centric culture. Sins of the tongue, and by extension the keyboard or pen, are deadly both to ourselves and to others. And they are condemned in the Bible as anti-Christian. Recall that passage from James: “no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison.” (3: 8)**

**Our Catechism’s first question under the 8th commandment asks this: “What is false witness?” Then comes the answer: “It is every untrue or unkind statement about our neighbor in court or in daily life.” Then to break it down further, it says that we bear false witness**

in court when we “make a false charge, lie, or withhold the truth (perjury), or knowingly pass an unjust sentence.” I don’t know about you, but I’ve never been to court and put under oath. However, I have signed my tax filing form “under pains and penalties of perjury” and I’ll bet you have, too. My mother used to say: “The truth will always come out.” She was right. So, just be honest. It’s a lot easier on your life and certainly your soul.

The next question in our Catechism asks: “When do we bear false witness in daily life?” Again, here are the answers: “when we lie about our neighbor, betray him, or injure his reputation by slander or gossip.” Whoa! That one hits closer to home, doesn’t it? And all people are guilty of breaking it. Maybe you don’t willfully lie about another, maybe you’ve never broken a confidence. But who isn’t guilty of slander or gossip? Who isn’t guilty of ruining another’s reputation by repeating some “juicy” story? Who doesn’t slant the truth in order to help make their point to feel superior?

I read various blogs almost daily to keep abreast of the news and what’s going on in the world. I do this to protect myself and hopefully my people from the influences of evil in this world. “To be forewarned is to be forearmed.” And it’s hard not to get caught up by the slander that is so rampant. People really do say horrible things about others. It’s especially bad when they know it’s not totally true but they repeat it anyway to make some sort of point. After this week we’ve all been subjected to such hypocrisy from a variety of sources. Again, my mother used to say: “Politics is a dirty business.” Again, she was right. And it’s all so very sad.

Our Catechism does tell us to sometimes speak about our neighbor’s sin “when concern for the truth and for our fellowmen requires it.” Then it quotes Christ’s guidance in this regard from Matthew 18. First, go and speak directly to your guilty brother or sister out of concern for their soul—one on one. If that doesn’t work, do it again with a couple of witnesses. If that doesn’t work, eventually you need to involve “the church” in the form of the Pastor and Elders. And if that doesn’t work, eventually “the church” engages in church discipline (withholding of communion to the guilty party) and perhaps excommunication if they refuse to repent. Note that in every step of that process concern for their soul is paramount. It’s tough love. But it is still love.

Now comes a positive question about all this: “What does God require of us in the 8th commandment?” The answer: “to always be

**truthful and sincere toward our neighbor, excuse him as far as the truth will permit, speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything.” I always have the confirmands memorize one passage in this section which summarizes the above quite well. Ephesians 4:15 says: “Speak the truth in love.” Since Jesus is Divine Truth, naturally He expects us, as Christians, to operate under the truth. Speak it in love. Speak it from pure motives. Speak it in a way which doesn’t tear down but instead builds up. I especially like Luther’s term: “put the best construction on everything.” Excuse and defend another’s words and actions by taking them in a positive and not a negative way. Maybe you get hurt by another’s words. But did they mean them in the same way you took them? How do you know? Wouldn’t you like others to “put the best construction” on seemingly innocuous things that you say literally every day?**

**Then, comes the final question concerning how Jesus kept this commandment for us. He did so by: “speaking only the truth, showing perfect love toward all people, and enduring false accusations in our place, especially during His Passion.” As Isaiah 53:9 states: “He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.”**

**It’s a good thing that Jesus puts this kind of perfection over our head and shoulders by shrouding us in the cape of faith. Yes, His righteousness covers our sins of the tongue. So, next time before blurting out some salacious tidbit, remember James’ words about “taming the tongue.” For once they are uttered, you cannot pull them back.....**

**Pastor Thomas H. Fox**