

tent, and they who force their way now through all the bands of justice, shall not be able to make head against him. In all temptation that way, then awe your heart with that meditation, 'What then shall I do when God riseth up? and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him?' Job xxxi. 14.

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OF THE NINTH COMMANDMENT.

EXOD. xx. 16.—*Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.*

THE scope of this command is the preservation of truth amongst men, which is a necessary bond of human society. And forasmuch as all the commands of the second table relate to ourselves as well as others, the meaning of this is, Thou shalt not bear false witness either against thyself or thy neighbour, and so neither wrong thy own nor thy neighbour's good name.

The positive part of this command is implied in the negative, viz. Thou shalt bear real and soothfast witness (as our law terms it) for thyself and thy neighbour, and so maintain thy own and thy neighbour's good name, so far as truth will allow. This witnessing is to be understood not only of judicial, but extrajudicial witnessing.

*Qucst.* 'What is required in the ninth commandment?' *Ans.* 'The ninth commandment requireth the maintaining and promoting of truth between man and man, and of our own and our neighbour's good name, especially in witness-bearing.'

I shall consider this commandment, as it relates,

- I. To truth betwixt man and man in general;
- II. To our own good name; and,
- III. To our neighbour's good name.

I. As it relates to truth betwixt man and man in the general. Truth is a sacred thing, which we are to cleave to as we would to God, who is true essentially, and therefore called truth itself. It was a notable saying of a philosopher, that truth is so great a perfection, that if God would render himself visible, he would chuse light for his body, and truth for his soul. He was not far out, for the scripture tells us of Christ, in whom the fulness of the Godhead dwells bodily, that he is the light, and the truth. And, on the other hand, it holds out Satan as the prince of darkness and father of lies. And there is a mighty affinity betwixt light and truth, darkness and lies. Truth is to the soul as light is to the body; and they that walk in the light, will walk in truth. Now, this command requires the maintaining of truth. We may take up this in these two things.

1. We must speak truth at all times when we speak, Eph. iv. 25; 'Speak the truth every man with his neighbour.' I say when we speak, for we must not be always speaking. Nature having drawn a double bar on our tongues, teaches that our tongues must not be in our mouths as a loose window in the wind, ever clattering. And if discretion keep the key of the door of our lips, we will not be of those that cannot rest till all the truth that is in be out, Prov. xiv. 33; but we must never speak any thing but truth.

What is truth? Pilate asked the question at Christ, but did not stay for an answer, John xviii. 38. Truth is a harmony, a double harmony. Anatomists observe, that the tongue in man is tied by a double string to the heart. To speaking of truth is required, (1.) A harmony of the tongue with the heart. (2.) A harmony of the tongue with the thing itself.

(1.) If we think not as we speak, we do not speak truth; the discord betwixt the tongue and the heart mars the harmony, Psal. xv. 2. We must speak as we think, then, and the tongue must be a faithful interpreter of the mind, otherwise it is a false tongue. So truth may be spoken by a man, and yet he be a false speaker, because he thinks not as he speaks.

(2.) But that is not all: if we do not speak also as the thing in itself is, we do not speak true. For there must be a harmony betwixt our hearts and the thing as it is in itself. For we must not think that our mistaken apprehensions of things can stamp lies to pass current for truths, just because we think them so, 2 Thess. ii. 11.

The sum of the matter lies here: It is our duty to speak truth, that is, so as our mind agree with the matter, and our mouth with our mind. We must speak things as we think them to be, and think them to be what they are. And hence we may see that modesty is very necessary to preserve us in the truth, in this our weak and dark condition. Self-conceited ignorance, and weakness joined with confidence, whereby people are so peremptory in their own uptakings of things, without any regard to the different light of others, is a great enemy to truth.

2. We must especially speak the truth at sometimes, that is, in witness-bearing. This is twofold.

*1st*, Witness-bearing in judgment. This command requires us to bear witness, and that faithfully, when called thereto. Now, we are to speak the truth judicially, when we are lawfully called thereunto, by the authority, whether of church or state.

*2dly*, Extrajudicial witness-bearing, wherein a man is called to declare the truth, though there be no human authority obliging him thereto, as often falls out in the case of private controversies be-

twixt neighbours, where a third person is desired to witness the truth. Yea, a man may be obliged to this witness-bearing where he is not so much as desired to speak, as when we hear our neighbour charged with any thing unjustly, we are obliged to vindicate his innocency, it being known to us.

Now, the rule in both these cases is this, that then is a man or a woman called to declare the truth under the pain of God's displeasure, when God's glory or their neighbour's good may be procured by it; when the dishonour of God and their neighbour's hurt, either of soul, body, name, or goods, may be avoided by it.

Both these sorts of witness-bearing are necessary for the maintaining and promoting of truth, the honour of God, and our neighbour's real good, though it appear perhaps to be for his hurt, in discovering his wickedness, or the wrong done by him, Zech. viii. 16.

In judicial witness-bearing, God calls men to witness the truth, by the mouth of those to whom he has given authority, making them either gods, or ambassadors for God on the earth. And therefore to decline it in that case, is to decline the divine call, and mar the course of justice, Isa. lix. 14; and so the honour of God and the good of our neighbour.

And in the other case there is a real call from the Lord unto it, as we tender his honour and our neighbour's welfare.

Neither ought people to scare at witness-bearing judicially, because of the oath of God; for a lawful 'oath, imposed by lawful authority, for the honour of God and the good of our neighbour, is a duty whereby we worship and glorify our God, Jer. iv. 2. Now, in this case of witness-bearing,

1. It is our duty to tell the truth; and, (1.) Not to conceal it, or any part of it known to us, which may make for the clearing of the matter in question, 2 Sam. xiv. 18, 19, 20; that is, to tell it fully. (2.) Freely, not being awed by any person, or any evil that may thereby come unto us by the guilty or otherwise, 1 Sam. xix. 4, 5. (3.) Clearly, not mineing, obscuring, and wrapping up the truth, so as they who hear it know not what to make of it, Josh. vii. 19. (4.) Sincerely, 2 Chron. xix. 9; without any influence of malice, or partial counsel, without feud or favour.

2. It is our duty to tell nothing but the truth; that were to bear false witness with a witness indeed. Truth stands in no need of lies to support it, Prov. vi. 19.

II. As it relates to our own good name, we are to maintain and promote it. It should be every body's care to procure and maintain their reputation; for a good name is a very precious thing, which

we should love and be careful of, Prov. xxii. 1. And they who value not their reputation, will hardly be found to value either their souls or bodies. Now, it must be cared for and maintained in words, and by deeds.

*First*, In words, and that these three ways.

1. By speaking nothing but the truth concerning ourselves. They that seek a name to themselves by lying and boasting, ordinarily lose what they have, instead of getting more, Prov. xxv. 14. And they that would preserve their name, let them be careful of their word, to fulfil their lawful promises, Psal. xv. 4.

2. By concealing prudently those secrets concerning ourselves which we are not obliged to discover. They sin against God and themselves who unnecessarily give another their reputation to keep, Prov. xxv. 9, 10; 'Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself; and discover not a secret to another; lest he that heareth it, put thee to shame, and thine infamy turn not away.' This is not to be extended to the concealing of scandalous sins, which people are lawfully called to confess: for in that case the name of a confessing penitent is better than that of an obstinate scandalous sinner, Prov. xxviii. 13; 'He that covereth his sins, shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.'

3. By defending our good name when it is unjustly attacked, as our Lord did, when he said to the Jews, 'I have not a devil; but I honour my Father, and ye do dishonour me,' John viii. 49. It is a tender point to be wounded in; and if it be done wrongously, we are enemies to ourselves, if we use not all means competent to clear ourselves.

*Secondly*, By deeds, we are to care for it practically.

1. If we would maintain our good name, let us not do evil things. An ill name will follow an ill life; who can help it? If a man steal, let him thank himself that his good name is lost. A vile practice will at length make a man's name stink.

2. We must not do what is like evil, 1 Thess. v. 22. They who take a liberty to themselves in suspicious practices, throw away their own reputation. And if they be innocent as to gross things, they are in the nearest disposition to be guilty. We should follow the apostle in this case, Phil. iv. 8. 'Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise think on these things.' Julius Cæsar having divorced his wife, was called to witness against her; and being interrogated, declared he knew nothing of the business; and being asked, Why

then he had put her away? Because, said he, I would have all my relations as free from the suspicion as the guilt of a bad action.

III. As it relates to our neighbour's good name. We are to maintain, and promote it too, as far as is consistent with truth. And for this cause there is required of us,

1. A charitable opinion and esteem of our neighbours, 1 Cor. xiii. 7; being ready to hope the best of them, unless the contrary be evident.

2. A desire of, and rejoicing in, their good name and reputation, Rom. i. 8. We are to love them as ourselves, and therefore should be glad of the sweet savour of their name, though their reputation outshine ours.

3. Sorrowing and grieving for their faults, 2 Cor. xii. 21. The blasting of any body's name by their sins, should make us mourn, and the rather that the same root of bitterness is in all naturally: and they are the deeper in God's debt that get through the world with an unblemished reputation.

4. Covering their infirmities with the mantle of love, 1 Pet. iv. 8. Every body has some weak side, and needs a cover from others in love: and it is a dangerous business to aggravate and blaze abroad this to their dishonour.

5. Freely acknowledging the gifts and graces that are in any, 1 Cor. i. 4,—7. As none are so good but they have some discernible infirmity, so hardly is one so bad but there is some one thing or another praise-worthy in them. And if it were but one thing, it is our duty frankly to own it.

6. Defending their innocence, as Ahimelech did David's, 1 Sam. xxii. 14; 'Who is so faithful,' says he 'among all thy servants, as David, which is the king's son-in-law, and goeth at thy bidding, and is honourable in thine house?' It is necessary and just to defend the innocent, especially if absent, against the poisonous bites of a viperous tongue lest we be held consenting to the tongue-murder of him, in God's account.

7. An unwillingness to receive an ill report of them, and a readiness to admit a good report of them, 1 Cor. xiii. 6, 7. Psal. xv. 3. Love readily opens the door to a good report of our neighbour, but is not very hasty to let in an evil one, being truly sorry if it should be true.

8. Discouraging tale bearers, flatterers, and slanderers, who go about gathering all the filth they can find to throw upon the name and reputation of others. These should be discouraged as the pests of human society, as David did, 'Whoso privily slandereth his neighbour,' says he, 'him will I cut off,' Psal. ci. 5.

9. *Lastly*, Watching over one another giving sound and seasonable admonitions, checks, and reproofs, for what is ill or ill like in others, Lev. xix. 17; and telling themselves of it, so as it may not be blabbed out without necessity: whereby both their souls might be timely preserved from the snare, and their good name preserved too.

Having thus given a view of the duties required in the ninth commandment, I proceed to consider what is forbidden in it.

*Quest.* 'What is forbidden in the ninth commandment?'

*Ans.* 'The ninth commandment forbiddeth whatsoever is prejudicial to truth, or injurious to our own or our neighbour's good name.'

The sins forbidden in this commandment are here reduced to three heads.

1. Whatsoever is prejudicial to truth.
2. Whatsoever is prejudicial to our own good name.
3. Whatsoever is prejudicial to our neighbour's good name.

These I shall consider in order.

I. This command forbids whatsoever is prejudicial to truth. The God of truth has set this command as a hedge and fence about truth, that it be not wronged. For it cannot be prejudiced but by the same means that we wrong God and our neighbour too. Now there are two cases in which truth is apt to suffer hurt.

*First*, Judicially, in judgment, in judicatories, whether ecclesiastical or civil. There truth is to make its most solemn appearance, Zech. viii. 16; and lies there are most sinful. The judges judge for God, and so the solemnity of the thing ought to strike the greater awe on all to do or say nothing prejudicial to truth. Now truth is prejudiced in judgment, and this command broken,

1. By judges when they pervert judgment, respecting persons, and passing unjust sentences, Prov. xvii. 15. calling evil good, and good evil, and rewarding the righteous as the wicked, and the wicked as the righteous: and iniquitous laws can never bear men out in this, Isa. v. 23. and x. 1.

2. By the complainer, while he falsely accuses or charges another, Luke xix. 8; forges writs, Psal. cxix. 69; or suborns false witnesses, Acts vi. 13.

3. By the defender, when he denies a just charge, being called to a free confession, Prov. xxviii. 13. And seeing judges are set to judge for the Lord, this must be reckoned a lying to the Lord.

4. By the witnesses, and that when they either conceal the truth, not discovering freely and fully what they know, or when they tell any thing that is not truth, Lev. v. 1. Prov. xix. 9. And thus

people may prejudice truth, when they keep up what might make the truth appear, and the cause go right in judgment.

5. *Lastly*, By the pleaders, while they appear for an unjust cause to bear down truth and justice, Acts xxiv. 2, &c.

*Secondly*, Extrajudicially, in common conversation and otherwise. Wheresoever we go, we should carry truth along with us; but out of judgment truth is often prejudiced; and that these three ways.

1. By unfaithfulness in conversation, when people slip the bond of their word, and make nothing of breaking lawful promises, Rom. i. 31. A man ought to value his word highly, as a man, and much more as a Christian. That is a sad complaint 'There is no truth in the land,' Hos. iv. 1; when men do with their promises as an ape with its collar, slipping it on and off as it sees meet.

2. By undue silence. Strange is the disorder that sin has brought into the world; as in the tongue, which is often going when it should be quiet, and often quiet when it should speak. Our tongues are our glory; but they are often found wrapt up in a dark cloud of silence, when they should be shining forth. Truth is prejudiced by silence, when the honour of God, or the good of our neighbour, either in the way of justice, or charity, calls for the discovery of it. Thus men sin against God, the truth, and their neighbour, when they hold their peace, (1.) When iniquity calls for a reproof from them. (2.) When it calls for a complaint to, or giving information thereof, unto others, Lev. v. 1. Dent. xiii. 8. God has given men a tongue as a banner to be displayed for him. To run away then with flying colours, in such a case, is very dishonourable to God, and dangerous to ourselves, Mark viii. 38. It is most injurious to our neighbour, whom we think so to gratify, being a snare to his soul, Lev. xix. 17; and to ourselves, by involving us in their guilt, Eph. v. 7, 11.

3. By undue speaking. The world is a world of iniquity, and several ways speaks to the prejudice of truth. Truth may be prejudiced thus,

(1.) By speaking it unseasonably. Truth hath suffered much prejudice by the unseasonable venting of it: therefore people must take heed, not only what but when they speak; for 'there is a time to keep silence, and a time to speak,' Eccl. iii. 7; 'A fool uttereth all his mind; but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards,' Prov. xxix. 11.

(2.) By speaking truth maliciously, as Doeg did. It was both unseasonable, while Saul was in a rage against David, 1 Sam. xxii. 8, 9; and malicious, Psal. lii. 2, 3. This is the way how the devil speaks truth; as he stirred up the damsel possessed with a spirit of

divination, to cry concerning Paul and Silas, 'These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation,' Acts xvi. 16, 17; and this very maliciously, as the context shews.

(3.) By perverting truth to a wrong meaning, as the false witnesses did against Christ, Matth. xxvi. 60, 61. What he spoke of his body, they turned it to the temple of Jerusalem. So it is not enough that we speak truth, but it must be seasonable and charitable too.

4. By equivocal expressions to the prejudice of truth or justice; in which the sense goes doubtfully, either true or false. Of the same nature are mental reservations. Thus Isaac sinned in denying his wife, and calling her his sister, Gen. xxvi. 7, 9. They are indeed lies, an untruth, spoken with an intention to deceive; for words must be taken according to the common use of them, and answers are understood as given according to the question. The devil, who is the father of lies, brought this manner of speaking into the world, Gen. iii. 5. and that way he was wont to deliver his oracles; for he never speaks truth, but either maliciously or equivocally, as he moved the false prophets to speak in the affair of Ahab's going up to Ramoth-Gilead, 1 Kings xxii. 6, 12.

5. *Lastly*, By lies, Eph. iv. 25. Lying is prejudicial to truth, as darkness to light, and is from the devil. But observe some speeches that are like lies, but are not so.

(1.) Figurative speeches, though not literally true, are not lies, as Christ's calling himself a vine, John xv. 1. Of this sort are allegories and fables, such as Jotham's parable, Judg. ix. 8; parables, Luke xvi.; hyperbolic speeches, John xxii. ult; ironical speeches, Gen. iii. 22. 1 Kings xviii. 27. In the former the sense and meaning of them is agreeable to truth, and fables and parables are a sort of speech by pictures. In irony the gesture readily explains the meaning, 1 Kings xxii. 15.

(2.) The telling a part of the truth, and concealing another part of it, when there is no obligation on us from the honour of God or our neighbour to discover it, is not lying, 1 Sam. xvi. 2; for though we are never to tell but the truth, yet we are not always obliged to tell all the truth.

(3.) Speeches according to present intention, without prejudicing further liberty, as when one at table refuses such a thing, yet changes his mind, and takes it, or on importunity yields, as Gen. xix. 2, 3. 2 Cor. i. 17.

*Lastly*, Threatenings not executed when the condition understood is done, and promises not fulfilled when the condition is not performed. Now, these being set aside, consider,

1. Sometimes, though the words agree with the mind of the speaker, yet not with the thing itself. This is called a material lie, or an untruth, and is sinful, as disagreeing with the truth, Isa. lix. 13.

2. If the words agree not with the mind of the speaker; that is a formal lie, the tongue speaking contrary to what the mind thinks. Lies are of four sorts.

1. *Jesting lies*; that is, when a person speaks that which is contrary to the known truth, in a jesting or ludicrous way; and embellishes his discourse with his own fictions, designing thereby to impose on others. This they are guilty of who invent false news, or tell stories for truth, which they know to be false, by way of amusement. Hosea complains of this practice, chap. vii. 3. 'They make the king glad with their wickedness, and the princes with their lies.'

2. *Officious lies*; that is, when one speaks that which is contrary to truth, and the dictates of his conscience, to do good to himself or others thereby, or with a design to cover a fault, or excuse ourselves or others, Job xiii. 7. 'Will ye speak wickedly for God? and talk deceitfully for him?' Rom. iii. 8.

3. *Pernicious lies*; that is, when a person raises and spreads a false report with a design to do mischief to another. This is a complicated crime, and the worst species of this sin, a thing which is an abomination to the Lord, Prov. vi. 17.

4. *Rash lies*; that is, when a person uttereth that which is false through surprise, inadvertency, and customary looseness, as in the case of the tidings brought to David, that Absalom had slain all the king's sons at the entertainment he had provided for them at Baal-hazor, 2 Sam. xiii. 30.

Concerning all these species of lying, we may say, that God is a God of truth, but the devil, the father of lies, who incites men to imitate him in this ancient hellish trade, by which he destroyed the founders of the human race; that the word of God expressly condemns every kind of untruth; and that people should never reckon that a small thing which will land the transgressors in hell, Rev. xxi. 8.

II. This command forbids whatsoever is injurious to our own good name. We ought all to be very careful of our reputation, and not to bear false witness for or against ourselves. Now, people may be guilty of the breach of this command with respect to themselves,

1. In their hearts, either by thinking too meanly of themselves, or too highly. Though people can never be too humble, yet they may be too blind to what God has done, for them; and there may be a great deal of bastard self-denial, which hinders men to be

thankful to God, and useful to others, as in the case of Moses, *Exod. iv. 10,—14.* But the most dangerous extreme is thinking too highly of ourselves, *Rom. xii. 16.* This is a most dangerous piece of false witness, which the false heart gives in favour of self.

2. In their actions, when people either do evil, or that which at least is evil-like. When Eli's sons lost their tenderness, and gave themselves to debauchery, they lost their good name. An unsavoury report followed their vicious and base life, *1 Sam. ii. 24.* And there are such things as are of evil report, suspicious practices, evil-like things, that though they be not the worst of things, yet they make way for them; by these, persons throw away their good name, *Prov. v. 8, 9.* and witness against themselves, that they are untender and vicious persons, in a near disposition to the greatest evil.

3. In words. And thus men may be guilty by,

(1.) Bearing witness against themselves unnecessarily, without a due call, discovering their own secret faults and infirmities, especially to those who have no true sense of piety, but are ready to improve the same to the reproach of them, or of religion, or both, *Prov. xxv. 9, 10.* 'Debate thy cause with thy neighbour himself; and discover not a secret to another: lest he that heareth it put thee to shame, and thine infamy turn not away.'

(2.) Bearing false witness against ourselves, as accusing ourselves unjustly, denying the gifts and graces of God in us, as Job says, *chap. xxvii. 5, 6.* 'God forbid that I should justify you: till I die, I will not remove my integrity from me. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go: my heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.' Pride often puts people on this, that they may appear the more humble. But humility never teaches men to rob God of his praise, or to lie against the truth. Lying against our minds can never be good, though it seem to humble us.

(3.) Bearing false witness for ourselves. Thus people are guilty, upon being duly called to confess their sins, they deny them, hide them, and, over the belly of their conscience, cause their tongues witness for them, *Prov. xxviii. 13.* 'He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.' It is sad witnessing when the conscience within tells people they are lying.

Of this sort is vain-glorious boasting and bragging. There are some, who, when they speak of themselves, are sure to speak very big, as the Pharisee did, *Luke xviii. 11.* A man or woman that is a boaster, will be found to be a liar ordinarily. They will boast of what they have not, or of doing what they never did, *Prov.*

xxv. 14. 'Whoso boasteth of a false gift, is like clouds and wind without rain.' Yea, some will accuse themselves of wickedness which they did not commit, for the pleasure that they take in boasting of mischief. And where the man has any ground to walk on in his boasting, he is a liar in magnifying it, as was the case of the Pharisee, Luke xviii. 12. It was one of the basest offices for a man to trumpet his own praise: It is a great evidence there is little in him, that he makes so much noise with it. Such are in the black roll, 2 Tim. iii. 2.

III. I come now to consider this command as it forbids what is injurious to our neighbour and his good name. We may contract guilt in injuring our neighbour, over the belly of this command, several ways.

*First*, In our hearts; for all the commands of God reach to the heart as well as the outward man. We are injurious in our hearts to our neighbour's good name, by,

1. Unjust suspicions of him, 1 Tim. vi. 4. Thus Potiphar injured Joseph, suspecting him of that villainy which he was far from. Christ bids us beware of men, and so not to be credulous. But there is a medium betwixt vain credulity and evil groundless suspicion, which fills men's heads with a foresight of what others will do when they have such and such temptations, from no light but that of their own uncharitable spirits.

2. Uncharitable judging and condemning of others in our hearts, Matth. vii. 1. The prevailing of the censorious humour amongst us, is a speaking evidence of this waspish disposition, which is a compound of pride, rashness, harshness, lightness, and emptiness, directly opposite to the love and charity that we owe to our neighbours, which 'beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things,' 1 Cor. xiii. 7. I grant, that to call an evil action an evil thing, and an habitual grossly profane life a mark of a profane heart, is no breach of charity, Gal. v. 19. But to lash men in our hearts, beyond what the habitual frame of their lives gives ground for, is that uncharitable judging.

It is the product of pride and self-conceit; for the man makes himself the rule, so all that is beyond him, or does not reach his length, must fall under his condemnatory sentence; he invades the throne of God, setting up one for himself in his neighbour's heart, not confining himself to his outward actions, Rom. xiv. 10. It is rashness, flowing from want of consideration; it is harshness, carrying their judgment farther than the matter will bear; it is lightness and emptiness, for they are confident of that which really they do not know. How confident were the barbarians, upon seeing the

viper fasten on Paul's hand, that he was a murderer! &c. Acts xxviii. 4. Thus men condemn the actions of others, merely from their own rashness, as Eli did Hannah; and, which is worst of all, they will judge their state before God from things utterly unable to bear the weight of their presumptuous sentence, as Job's friends did; and thrust in themselves to the secrets of their hearts, as those mentioned, Rom. xiv. 4. 'Who art thou that judgest another man's servant?' judging their consciences: the like whereto was the horrible judgment some have expressed touching those that took the oath of abjuration, that they had gone over the belly of their conscience, and in other cases too. If you think that I am speaking for it, ye are uncharitable: but I would not for the world judge other men's consciences at that rate. It is sufficient for me to condemn men's evil actions which I see, not to judge their consciences, which I neither see nor can see. Were the impressions of the tremendous tribunal of God more on men's spirits, they would not be so hasty to judge before the time.

3. Misconstructing others, their intentions, words, and actions. No innocence can be a safeguard against that temper, which is always ready to give the worst turn to the intentions, words, and actions of their neighbour, which they are capable to bear. It is like the corrupted stomach, that corrupts whatever is put into it. See Neh. vi. 6. Rom. iii. 8. Psal. lxxix. 10.

4. Contempt of others in our hearts, undervaluing and thinking basely of them; when men stop their eyes from beholding whatever is praise-worthy in their neighbour, and gather together what makes against them, and sit brooding on that. This is evil in all cases, but especially where men contemn others for what is good in them, 2 Sam. vi. 16. We are even in our hearts to give every one their due; and so far as we withhold it, we are guilty, Luke xviii. 9, 10, 11.

5. Envy and grieving at the just and deserved credit or reputation of any. This is a most unchristian and truly Pharisaical temper, Matt. xxi. 15. It is the nature of envy to torment a man with the good of his neighbour. What refreshes the charitable spirit, vexes and frets theirs. They are like the moon that turns pale and wan whensoever the sun begins to shine above the horizon. But if men loved their neighbour as themselves, and their God more than themselves, they would rejoice at their neighbour's reputation, though it should outshine our own, Numb. xi. 29.

6. Rejoicing in the disgrace and infamy of others, Jer. xlvi. 27. This is a devil-like sin, for dust is the serpent's meat. Whatever mischief befalls men is the devil's delight: and so there are many,

that if a black cloud be thrown over the reputation of others, it tickles their hearts, they have a secret satisfaction in it; their hearts say within them, Aha! so we would have it. And many vent their satisfaction in outward rejoicing at it.

7. *Lastly*, Fond admiration of men, Jude, 16. As the former are sins in defect, so this is a sin in excess. And indeed we become guilty by thinking too highly and above what is meet of any man, as well as thinking too meanly of them, 1 Cor. iv. 6. This is both a sin and a snare: for those whom we fondly admire, we are apt to imitate in evil as well as good, and so to follow them to the prejudice of truth. It is a sad evidence of the corruption of a man's heart, that he is ready either to idolize or else to despise others.

*Secondly*, In our lives and actions. Men may injure the good name of others without speaking a word against them.

1. Men may be guilty of the breach of this command, to the prejudice of their neighbour's good name, by bare gesture of the body, Prov. vi. 13. 'He winketh with his eyes, he speaketh with his feet, he teacheth with his fingers.' A man may with a wink, a nod, a grave look, a sigh, &c. stab another's reputation, filling others by these means with suspicions of him unjustly; or when one is slandered in our presence, making such signs as import our consent thereto.

2. Drawing others into things that are ill or evil-like, and of bad report. Thus many ruin one another's reputation, till they are as rotten things laid one upon another, which corrupt each other, till both send forth a stinking smell, Matth. xviii. 7. They that lay the stumbling-block, and they that fall over it, are both ruined together, though double vengeance abides them who ruin others together with themselves.

3. By not hindering what we can in others those things that procure an ill name. The evil that befalls others which we might have prevented, will justly be laid at our door. This brought the judgments of God on good Eli and his house too, so that they went all to ruin together, 1 Sam. iii. 13. The Spirit of God records, for the justification of poor Tamar, the care she had of preventing the ill name of herself and of Amon, 2 Sam. xiii. 12, 13. So that neither by terror nor allurements she could be drawn into the villainy, though she was forced, which was her misery, but not her sin.

*Thirdly*, In our lips. The tongue is the principal mischievous instrument whereby people ruin or wound the good name of others. And here come in the sins of the tongue against our neighbour in a special manner. Thus men injure their neighbour,

1. By silence, when they forbear to speak what they ought and

can for the credit of their neighbour. Thus men may wrong others by their silence in their neighbour's cause while he is aspersed, Prov. xxxi. 8. for in that case silence is consent. As also when their neighbour is justly commended, the entertaining thereof with silent looks, as if they knew something that may justly mar his reputation. If that be not the sense of it, it reflects on the silent person as grudging the reputation of the person commended.

2. Our neighbour may be injured by sinful speaking; and this command may be broken many ways.

(1.) By unnecessary discovering of the faults and infirmities of others. O how much guilt is contracted this way, by people's going in the way of cursed Ham, Gen. ix. 22. unvailing instead of vailing the weaknesses of others, without any necessity, but to the lessening of their reputation.

(2.) By aggravating their lesser faults, Matth. vii. 3, 4, 5. Men see motes like beams in the eyes of others, while beams are as motes in their own. It is a mischievous tongue that, counting the faults of others, for fifty sets down a hundred, and still looks to them through a magnifying glass. Had we the dexterity of aggravating our own as we have of aggravating the faults of others, we would be happy, because very humble people.

(3.) By reviving the memory of our neighbour's crimes which were worn out of mind, especially being repented of. Thus many vent their malice against others by casting up their former faults to them, as Shimei did to David. Truth it may be, but it is uncharitably and maliciously spoken, for which the speaker must give an account to God.

(4.) By betraying secrets committed to us. It is true, if the honour of God and the good of our neighbour require the discovering of a secret, in that case, as we ought not to promise, so we ought not to conceal it. But when we have lawfully promised to keep it, either expressly or tacitly, we sin against truth, justice, and friendship, to betray it. And though there be no promise in the case, yet when the revealing of it tends to the detriment of our neighbour, it is sinful, Prov. xvii. 9. 2 Tim. iii. 4.

(5.) By detracting, or endeavouring any manner of way to impair the deserved credit of our neighbour, Ezek. iv. 12, 13. This is the native result of envy and ill-will at our neighbour; for those who cannot endure others to sit on high, where they are deservedly placed, will go about one way or other to undermine them.

(6.) By evil reports to the prejudicing of our neighbour unjustly. In these many are involved in guilt. [1.] The raiser of it, Exod. xxiii. 1. Satan has the mouths of many at command for a forge of

ill reports, who strike that hellish coin with their stamp, that it may pass for current. [2.] The receivers and spreaders of it, who are guilty here as well as the raiser; for they are to the raiser as the receiver is to the thief: Report, say they, and we will report. If others will gather filth, they will throw it on their neighbours' faces, and yet are not innocent, though they can give their authors, Neh. vi. 6. See Psal. xv. 3.

(7.) By slandering, which is an ill report without all ground, Psal. l. 20. This is the venom of a wretched tongue, made use of to kill and bury alive the innocent. It has been the trial of the people of God in general, and seldom if ever do any of them escape without it. Satan loves by his agents to vomit out against them reproaches and slanders, wherewith their good name may be blasted, and especially if religion and the cause of God can be wounded through their sides. The scourge of the tongue is a sharp scourge.

(8.) By backbiting and whispering, Rom. i. 29, 30. Both agree in that they speak evil behind men's back, accusing them, and loading them with reproach when they are not present to answer for themselves. The backbiter does it openly, and the whisperer does it secretly.

(9.) By tale-bearing, Lev. xix. 16. This is a sort of pedlar-trade for the devil, driven by many whose work it is to carry tales out of the house or company where they happen to be; and these are the wares they have to vent in other houses or companies, where they will be ready to take up new clashes and tales to where they go next. These are the plagues of society, like Satan sowing discord among brethren. Hence secret grudges against one another, and none knows wherefore; and when they are searched to the furthest, it is all grounded on some talebearer's credit.

(10.) By countenancing and encouraging the black tribe of slanderers, backbiters, &c. Prov. xxix. 12. If these merchants for hell got not their wares taken off their hands, they would be ashamed of their trade, and forced to quit it. But many are as ready to take them off their hands as they are to deliver them.

(11.) By stopping our ears against the just defence of the parties lesed, as the malicious Jews did against Stephen, Acts vii. 57, 58. How rare is it to find a person as ready to receive a defence for, as an accusation against their neighbour?

(12.) By scornful contempt, and scoffing, and mocking others. This was the way of Ishmael's persecuting of Isaac, Gal. iv. 29. These viperous tongues work upon the miseries of others, as the soldiers did at Christ in his sufferings, Matth. xxvii. 28, 29. The natural imperfections of others are their sport, though reproaching the

poor they despise his Maker; yea, and their sinful imperfections too, for fools make a mock at sin.

Some have a mighty fondness for gibing and taunting; their whole converse runs that way, to make others uneasy and themselves merry with their taunts. Let them not value themselves on their talent; if any spark of tenderness be left in them, I doubt if they dare look to it as a good gift given them from above, but as an abuse of the good gift of God. It was Ishmael's way, for which he was cast out of the family of the faithful, Gal. iv. 29.

(13.) Reviling and railing, giving others reproachful and opprobrious names, piercing them with bitter words, and murdering them with their tongues, Matth. v. 22. 1 Cor. vi. 10. Revilers are among those excluded out of heaven.

These are some of the ways how the wicked tongue gives home-thrusts to others, and pierces like the piercing of the sword, following the example of him who was a liar and a murderer from the beginning. But would ye see them all gathered together in one, ye have them in,

(14.) *Lastly*, Scolding and rating, an abominable disorder which we are so much disturbed with. There their wicked hearts, stirred up with passion and revenge, vomit out all at once this filthy stuff. For there their neighbour's faults are unnecessarily discovered, aggravated, &c. as if hell's forces were rendezvousing betwixt them. Wonder not at the expression. See Jude, 9. No, the angel durst not engage Satan with these weapons, whereof he was the proper master, and at which none can outdo him. If ye take not better heed to your tongues, they will ruin you, Psal. lii. 2,—5.

There are some other evils of the tongue here forbidden, the hurt whereof does not so plainly appear.

1. Talkativeness, or much speaking. Some are ever talking, and are never in their element but when prattling; and when once they loose, it is as hard to stop them as to stop a flood, and turn it another way. Of it I say,

(1.) It is a sign of a loose and frothy heart, where the fear of God hath little place, Eccl. v. 2; for that would make our words few, true, weighty, and useful. When God has given us two ears, and but one tongue, that we may be swift to hear and slow to speak, it is a pregnant evidence of a naughty heart, to be swift to speak and slow to hear.

(2.) It is the fool's badge, Eccl. v. 3. Talkative persons, for want of acquaintance with themselves, thinking to shew themselves wise, ordinarily present a fool to the company. They will have a flood of words, who have hardly a drop of good sense or judgment;

so that they are just a voice, and no more. They that are given to much speaking, can hardly speak either true or well; which made an orator ask a double fee of a talkative scholar, one to learn him to speak well, another to learn him to hold his peace. It is the character of a virtuous woman, that 'she openeth her mouth with wisdom,' Prov. xxxi. 26. Her mouth is not always open, but duly shut, and discreetly opened.

2. Idle speaking, Matth. xii. 36. The tongue was given to man to be for the honour of God, and the good of himself and neighbour, Though our words, then, be not evil in themselves, they are evil because they are idle; that is, words spoken to no good purpose, tending neither to the honour of God nor the good of ourselves or others, neither to his moral good, to make him more holy, nor to his civil good, as not being upon the necessary concerns of human life, nor his natural good, to maintain the moderate cheerfulness of society. It may be comprehended under foolish talking, rash, raving, and impertinent discourse, doing no good to the hearers, but bewraying the folly of the speaker.

3. A trade of jesting, Eph. v. 4. It is not sinful to pass an innocent jest for begetting of moderate cheerfulness. The wise man tells us, 'There is a time to weep, and a time to laugh, Eccl. iii. 4. It may in some cases be necessary to cheer the spirits, as a cordial is to restore them, or a pleasant gale of wind to purify the air. It was not unbecoming the gravity of the prophet to mock Baal's priests, and to say, 'Cry aloud; for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is on a journey; or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awakened,' 1 Kings xviii. 27. But sinful are,

(1.) Offensive jests, which tend to the shewing a despising of our neighbour, to the irritating or provoking of him. And indeed it is often seen, that those who are much given that way, their conversation is most offensive, sparing neither friend nor foe, and will rather lose their friend than their jest.

(2.) Profane jests, either making a mock of sin, or of that which is holy, particularly wresting and abusing scripture, to express the conceits of their light and wanton wits. It is a dangerous thing to jest in such matters.

(3.) People's being immoderate in jesting. To make every word a jest is liker the stage than Christian gravity. This is as absurd as to present a man a dish of salt to feed on; a little of it is good for seasoning, but to give it for the whole entertainment, is absurd.

4. *Lastly*, Flattery, Psal. xii. 3. This is a most dangerous stroke, and the more deadly that the wound it gives does not smart, but by it a man is hugg'd to ruin. The words of a flatterer are smoother

than oil, yet are they in effect as drawn swords. It is a compound of lying, abjectness of spirit, and treachery. The flatterer gives the praise that is not due, professes the kindness that is not real, and screws up all to a pitch far above truth; and so he is a liar. He debases himself to please others, turning himself into every shape to humour the party he is to flatter; and betrays him into self-conceit and unacquaintedness with himself.

I shall shut all with a twofold dehortation.

*First*, Speak truth, and beware of lying. Lying is a very common sin; repent of that guilt, and beware of it for the future. For motives, consider,

*Mot.* 1. That God is the God of truth, the Author and Lover of truth, so that he cannot lie; and therefore lying is most contrary to the nature and mind of God: it is therefore singularly abominable and hateful to him, Psal. x. 5. Prov. vi. 16, 17. We find that God suffered Adam's sons to marry their own sisters, and the Israelites to spoil the Egyptians of what they had borrowed of them; but never did the God of truth at any time dispense with men's speaking lies. Hate that abominable thing, then, which God so hates.

2. All lies are from the devil in a special manner, John viii. 44. It was he that first broached lies in the world, ruined mankind with them; and having sped so well with that engine of hell at first, no wonder he sets himself to keep up the trade. He is the father of lies, that begets them in the false heart, and they are brought forth by the lying tongue. Whom do liars resemble then, the God of truth, or the father of lies?

3. Lying is a part of the old man of sin, which must be put off, if we would not be put out of God's presence, Eph. iv. 24, 25. It is the way to which our corrupt natures do kindly and quickly incline, Psal. lviii. 3; 'The wicked go astray as soon as they be borne, speaking lies.' Hence children are not to learn this; they have the art of it from their first father Adam. But as soon as grace enters the heart, it rectifies it in that point. Hence the Lord's people are called 'children that will not lie,' Isa. lxiii. 8.

4. There is a meanness or baseness in lying beyond what is in other common sins, either because it proceeds from fear, or tends to deceive. Hence liars themselves cannot endure to be called liars; the baseness of the sin being so much acknowledged in the world, that though many bring forth and cherish the vile brat, none can endure to be reputed the father of it. And no wonder it is reputed such a base thing; for when once a man is known to make no conscience of truth, he has lost his credit, and is looked upon as a man that cannot be bound with the common ties of society, nor trusted.

*Lastly*, It will bring God's wrath heavily on the guilty, Prov. xix. 5, 9. A false witness shall not go unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape. A false witness shall not be unpunished; and he that speaketh lies shall perish.' God's truth is impawned for the liar's destruction, even eternal destruction. Shall liars have access to heaven? No, they are barred out from thence, Rev. xxi. ult. 'There shall in nowise enter into it any thing that—maketh a lie.' Their lodging is appointed to them in another place, with the devil the father of lies, in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, Rev. xxi. 8. and xxii. 15.

I shall give you a few advices.

1. Strike at the root of lying, and so the fruit will wither and come to nought. The great root of all is the corrupt nature, that needs to be mortified by grace from Jesus Christ. There are also particular lusts on which lies depend. Labour to be humble, for pride and self-seeking occasions many lies, as the boaster's lie. Some are founded on covetousness, as the lies in bargaining; some in fear, slavish fear of men, as denying truth; some in the vanity and rashness of our natures, whereby lies come to be broached without a formed design.

2. Accustom yourselves to few words, for 'in the multitude of words there wanteth not sin,' Prov. x. 19. It is but just with God, that idle words be punished by suffering people to fall into lying words.

3. Remember that God will discover truth; and that his eye is upon you at all times. And though ye may deceive others with your lies, ye cannot deceive the omniscient God. He is witness to the truth, and will call you to account for your contradicting it. And indeed the trade of lying is hard to keep up without discovery. Liars had need of good memories. 'A lying tongue is but for a moment,' Prov. xii. 19.

*Lastly*, Curb lying in young ones, out of pity to their souls, and care of their credit when they come to years. For some get such a habit of it when they are young, that there is no mending of them when they grow old.

*Secondly*, Beware of carrying an evil tongue. The lying tongue is contrary to truth, the evil tongue to charity and love to our neighbour, being employed in slandering, backbiting, reproaching, reviling, scolding, &c. For motives,

*Mot.* 1. Consider the woful perverseness that is in an evil tongue. God gave man speech, which he denied to other creatures, that by his tongue he might glorify God, and do good to himself and others, Psal. lvii. 9, 10. Shall we thus turn our glory into shame, and per-

vert the ends of speech? How just were it that we were struck dumb?

2. It is a murdering instrument. I observed to you before, that an ill tongue is a parcel of murdering weapons, a bow and sharp arrows to pierce, a sword to stab, and a fire to devour others. Yea, Solomon observes, that death and life are in the power of the tongue. It is a fire that kindles strife and contention in all societies, and turns them into confusion; and oft-times returns heavily on the head of those who carry it. The tongues from heaven were cloven, to be the more diffusive of good; but those fired from hell are forked to be the more impressive of mischief.

3. Consider the wickedness of it. It is a world of iniquity, Jam. iii. 6. They have much ado that have an ill tongue to guide, a world of iniquity to guide. It is a broad stream from the fountain of the wickedness of the heart.

4. An unbridled tongue cuts off all pretences to true religion, Jam. i. 26. For where the fear or love of God and our neighbour is in the heart, it will be a bond on the tongue to keep it within the bounds of Christian charity.

5. We must give an account of our words at the day of judgment, Matth. xii. 36, 37.

*Lastly*, An ill tongue will ruin the soul. Bridle your tongues; however unruly they be, they shall be silent in the grave. And, if repentance prevent it not, the day will come that they will be tormented in hell-flames, Luke xvi.

I shall conclude with an advice or two.

1. Begin at the heart, if ye would order your tongues aright. Labour to get them cleansed by the sanctifying Spirit of Christ. Study love to God and your neighbour, which are the fulfilling of the law. Labour for meekness, and patience, and humility, which will be the best directors of the tongue.

2. Set yourselves, in the faith of promised assistance, to watch over your hearts and tongues. Unwatchfulness is dangerous in the case of such an unruly member as the tongue is. God has guarded it naturally. Do ye also watch it.