

(3.) The thief is a terror to himself, he is always in fear, Pf. liii. 5. 'There were they in great fear;' true of the thief. Guilt breeds fear: if he hear but the shaking of a tree, his heart shakes. It is said of Catiline, he was afraid of every noise. If a briar doth but take hold of a thief's garment, he is afraid it is the officer to apprehend him; and fear hath 'torment in it,' 1 John iv. 18.

(4.) The judgments that follow this sin, 'Achan the thief was stoned to death,' Joshua vii. and Zech. v. 2. 'What seeft thou? And I said, a flying roll,' verse 3. 'This is the curse that goeth over the face of the earth; I will bring it forth, saith the Lord, and it shall enter into the house of the thief.' Fabius, a Roman censor, condemned his own son to die for theft. Thieves die with ignominy, the ladder is their preferment: and there is a worse thing than death, while they rob others of money, they rob themselves of salvation.

Qu. *What is to be done to avoid stealing?*

Ans. 1. Live in a calling, Eph. iv. 28. 'Let him that stole steal no more, but rather let him labour, working with his hands,' &c. Such as stand idle, the devil hires them, and puts them to the pilfering trade. An idle person tempts the devil to tempt him.

2. Be content with the estate God hath given you, Heb. xiii. 5. 'Be content with such things as ye have.' Theft is the daughter of avarice: study contentment. Believe that condition best, God hath carved out to you. God can bless that little meal in the barrel. We shall not need these things long, we shall carry nothing out of the world with us but our winding sheet. If we have but enough to bear our charges to heaven, it is sufficient.



OF THE NINTH COMMANDMENT.

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

THE tongue, which at first was made to be an organ of God's praise, is now become an instrument of unrighteousness. This commandment binds the tongue to its good behaviour; God hath set two fences to keep in the tongue, the teeth and lips: and this commandment is a third fence set about it, that it should not break forth into evil; 'Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.' This commandment hath a prohibitory, and a mandatory part: the first is set down in plain words, the other is clearly implied.

I. *The prohibitory part of the commandment*, or, what it forbids in general. It forbids any thing which may tend to the disparagement or prejudice of our neighbour. More particularly, two things are forbidden in this commandment, (1.) Slandering. (2.) False witness.

(1.) *Slandering our neighbour.* This is a sin against the ninth commandment. The scorpion carries his poison in his tail, the slanderer carries his poison in his tongue. Slandering, “is to report things of others unjustly,” Psal. xxxv. 11. ‘They laid things to my charge which I knew not.’ It is usual to bring in a Christian beheaded of his good name: they raised a slander of Paul, that he should preach, ‘Men might do evil, that good might come of it,’ Rom. iii. 8. ‘We are slanderously reported; and some affirm that we say, let us do evil, that good may come.’ Eminency is commonly blasted by slander. Holiness itself is no shield for slander. The lamb’s innocency will not preserve it from the wolf.—Christ was the most innocent upon earth, yet was reported to be a friend of sinners: John Baptist, a man of a holy austere life, yet they said of him ‘he hath a devil,’ Mat. xi. 18. The scripture calls slandering, smiting with the tongue, Jer. xviii. 18. ‘Come and let us smite him with the tongue.’ You may smite another and never touch him. *Majora sunt lingue vulnera quam gladii*, Aug. The wounds of the tongue no physician can heal: and to pretend friendship to a man, yet slander him, is most odious. St. Hierom speaks thus, “The Arian faction made a shew of kindness; they kissed my hands, but slandered me, and sought my life.” And, as it is a sin against this commandment, to raise a false report of another; so it is a sin to receive a false report before we have examined it, Psal. xv. 1. ‘Lord, who shall dwell in thy holy hill?’ *Quis ad cælum?* ver. 3. ‘He that backbiteth not, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour.’ We must not only not raise a false report, but not take it up. He that raiseth a slander, carries the devil in his tongue; and he that receives it, carries the devil in his ear.

(2.) The second thing forbidden in this commandment is, false witness. Here three sins are condemned: (1.) Speaking. (2.) Witnessing. (3.) Swearing, that which is false, *contra proximum*.

1. Speaking that which is false, Prov. xii. 22. ‘Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord.’ To lie, is to speak that which one knows to be an untruth. There is nothing more contrary to God than a lie. The Holy Ghost is called the ‘Spirit of truth,’ 1 John iv. 5, 6. Lying is a sin that doth not go alone; it ushers in other sins: Absalom told his father a lie, that he was going to pay his vow at Hebron, 2 Sam. xv. 7. and that

lie was a preface to his treason. Where there is a lie in the tongue, it shews the devil is in the heart, Acts xv. 3. 'Why hath Satan filled thy heart to lie?' Lying is such a sin, as unfits men for civil society. How can you converse or bargain with him, that you cannot trust a word he saith? This is a sin which highly provokes God. Annanias and Sapphira were struck dead for telling a lie, Acts v. 5. The furnace of hell is heated for liars, Rev. xxii. 15. 'Without are forcerers, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.' Oh abhor this sin! *Quicquid dixeris justum putes*, Hierom. When thou speakest, let thy word be as authentic as thy oath. Imitate God, who is the pattern of truth. Pythagoras being asked, what made men like God? answered, *cum vere loquuntur*, when they speak truth. It is made the character of a man that shall go to heaven, Psal. xv. 2. 'He speaketh the truth from his heart.'

2. That which is condemned in the commandment is, witnessing that which is false; 'thou shalt not bear false witness.' There is a twofold bearing of false witness. (1.) There is a bearing of false witness for another. 2. A bearing false witness against another.

1st, A bearing false witness for another: When we do give our testimony for a person that is criminal and guilty, we justify him as if he were innocent, Isa. iii. 23. 'Which justify the wicked for a reward.' He that goes to make a wicked man just, makes himself unjust.

2^{dly}, There is a bearing false witness against another, *i. e.* when we accuse another in open court falsely. This is to imitate the devil, who is the 'accuser of the brethren.' Though the devil is no adulterer, yet he is a false witness, Solomon saith, Prov. xxv. 18. 'A man that beareth false witness against his neighbour, is a hammer and a sword:' In his face he is hardened like an hammer; he cannot blush, he cares not what lie he witnesseth to: and he is a sword; his tongue is a sword to wound him he witnesseth against in his goods or life: thus, 1 Kings xxi. 13. 'There came in two men, children of Belial, and witnessed against Naboth, saying, Naboth blasphemed God and the king:' and their witness took away his life. The queen of Persia being sick, the magician accused two godly virgins, that they had by charms procured the queen's sickness; whereupon she caused these virgins to be sawn asunder. A false witness doth pervert the place of judicature: he corrupts the judge, by making him pronounce a wrong sentence, and causes the innocent to suffer. Vengeance will find out the false witness, Prov. xxix. 4. 'A false witness shall not be unpunished, Deut. xix. 18, 19. 'If the witness be a false witness, and hath testified falsely against his brother, then shall ye do unto him as he

had thought to have done unto his brother:’ *i. e.* If he had thought to have taken away his life, his own shall go for it.

3. That which is condemned in the commandment, is swearing that which is false. When men take a false oath, and by that take away the life of another, Zech. viii. 17. ‘Love no false oath.’ chap. v. 2. ‘What seest thou? I said, a flying roll.’ verses 3, 4. ‘This is the curse that goeth forth, and it shall enter, saith the Lord, into the house of him that sweareth falsely by my name: and it shall consume his house, with the timber and stones of it.’ The Scythians made a law, when a man did bind two sins together, a lie with an oath, he was to lose his head; because this sin did take away all truth and faith from among men. The devil hath taken great possession of such who dare swear to a lie. This is a manifest breach of this commandment.

Use I. Branch 1. It reproves the church of Rome, who will dispense with a lie, or a false oath, if it be to promote the catholic cause. They approve of an officious lie; they hold some sins to be lawful; they may as well hold some lies to be lawful. God hath no need of our lie. It is not lawful to tell a lie *propter Dei gloriam*, if we were sure to bring glory to God by it, as Austin speaks.

Branch 2. It reproves those who make no conscience of slandering others; they come under the breach of this commandment, Pf. l. 20. ‘Thou sittest and slanderest thy own mother’s son,’ Jer. xx. 10. ‘Report, say they, and we will report,’ Ezra iv. 15. ‘This city (*i. e.* Jerusalem) is a rebellious city, and hurtful to kings and provinces.’ Paul was slandered as a mover of sedition, and the head of a faction, Acts xxiv. 5. The same word signifies both a slanderer and a devil, 1 Tim. iii. 11. ‘Not slanderers:’ In the Greek, Not devils. Some think it is no great matter, to misreport and slander others; know that this is to act the part of a devil. Clipping a man’s credit, to make it weigh lighter, is worse than clipping of coin. The slanderer wounds three at once: he wounds him that he slanders; and he wounds him to whom he reports the slander, by causing uncharitable thoughts to arise up in his mind against the party slandered; and he wounds his own soul, by reporting that of another which is false. This is a great sin; and I would, I could not say, it is common. You may kill a man as well in his name as in his person. Some are loth to take away their neighbour’s goods; conscience would fly in their face: but better take away their corn out of their field, their wares out of their shop, than take away their good name. This is a sin you can never make them reparation for; a blot in a man’s name, being like a blot on white paper, which will never be got out. Surely God will visit for this sin. If idle words shall be ac-

counted for, shall not unjust slanders? The Lord will make inquisition one day, as well for names as for blood. Oh therefore take heed of this sin! it is a breach of the ninth commandment. Was it a sin under the law to defame a virgin, Deut. xxii. 19. And, is it not a greater sin to defame a saint, who is a member of Christ! The heathens, by the light of nature, abhorred this sin of slandering. Diogenes used to say, "Of all wild beasts, a slanderer is the worst." Antonius made a law, that, if a person could not prove the crime he reported another to be guilty of, he should be put to death.

Branch 3. It reproves them who are so wicked as to bear false witness against others. These are monsters in nature, unfit to live in a civil society. Eusebius relates of one Narcissus, a man famous for piety, who was accused by two false witnesses of unchastity: and to prove their accusation, they bound it with oaths and curses after this manner: one said, 'If I speak not true, I pray God I may perish by fire:' the other said, "If I speak not true, I wish I may be deprived of my sight." It pleased God, that the first witness who forswore himself, his house beset on fire, he was burned in the flame: the other witness being troubled in conscience, confessed his perjury, and continued so long weeping, that he wept himself blind. Jezebel, who suborned two false witnesses against Naboth, she was thrown down out of a window, and 'the dogs licked her blood,' 2 Kings ix. 33. O tremble at this sin! a perjured person is the devil's excrement. He is cursed in his name, and seared in his conscience. Hell gapes for such a wind-fall.

Use II. Branch 1. It exhorts all to take heed of the breach of this commandment, of lying, slandering, and bearing false witness; and to avoid these sins.

1. Get the fear of God. Why doth David say, 'the fear of the Lord is clean?' Ps. xix. 8. Because it cleanseth the heart of malice, it cleanseth the tongue of slander. 'The fear of the Lord is clean:' it is to the soul as lightening to the air which cleanseth it.

2. Get love to your neighbour, Lev. xxi. 18. If we love a friend, we will not speak or attest any thing to his prejudice. Men's minds are cankered with envy and hatred; hence comes slandering and false-witnessing. Love is a lovely grace; 'love thinks no evil,' 1 Cor. xiii. 5. It makes the best interpretation of another's words. Love is a well-wisher, and it is rare to speak ill of him we wish well to. Love is that which cements Christians together; it is the healer of division, and the hinderer of slander.

Branch 2. To such whose lot it is to meet with slanderers and false accusers, (1.) Labour to make a sanctified use of it. When Shimei railed on David, David made a sanctified use of

it, 2. Sam: xvi. 10. ‘The Lord hath said to him, curse David.’ So, if you are slandered or falsely accused, make a good use of it. See if you have no sin unrepented of, for which God may suffer you to be calumniated and reproached. See if you have not at any time wronged others in their name, and said that of them which you cannot prove; then lay your hand on your mouth, and confess the Lord is righteous to let you fall under the scourge of the tongue. (2.) If you are slandered or falsely accused, but know your own innocency, be not too much troubled, let this be your rejoicing, the witness of your conscience. *Murus aheneus esto nil conscire sibi.*—A good conscience is a wall of brass, that will be able to stand against a false witness. As no flattery can heal a bad conscience, so no slander can hurt a good. God will clear the names of his people, Pf. xxxvii. 6. ‘He shall bring forth thy righteousness as the light.’ God, as he will wipe away tears from the eyes, so he will wipe off reproaches from the name. Believers shall come forth out of all their slanders and reproaches, as ‘the wings of a dove covered with silver, and her feathers with yellow gold.’

Branch 3. It should exhort such to be very thankful to God; whom God hath preserved from slander and false witness. Job calls it ‘The scourge of the tongue,’ chap. v. 21. As a rod doth scourge the back, so the slanderer’s tongue doth scourge the name. It is a great mercy to be kept from the scourge of the tongue; a mercy, that God stops malignant mouths from bearing false witness. What mischief may not a lying report or a false oath do? One destroys the name, the other the life. It is the Lord who muzzles the mouths of the wicked, and keeps those dogs, that snarl at us, from flying upon us, Psal. xxxi. 20. ‘Thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion, from the strife of tongues.’ It is, I suppose, an allusion to kings, who being resolved to protect their favourites against the accusations of men, take them into their bed-chamber, or bosom, where none may touch them: so God hath a pavilion, or secret hiding-place for his favourites, where he preserves their credit and reputation untouched; he keeps them from the ‘strife of tongues.’ This is a mercy we ought to acknowledge to God.

II. The mandatory part of this commandment implied; that is, “That we stand up for others, and vindicate them, when they are injured by lying lips.” This is the sense of the commandment, not only that we should not slander, or falsely accuse others; but that we should witness for them, and stand up in their defence, when we know them to be traduced. A man may wrong another as well by silence as by slander; when he knows him to be wrongfully accused, yet doth not speak in his behalf. If others cast false aspersions on any, we should wipe

them off. The apostles (who were filled with the wine of the Spirit) being charged with drunkenness, Peter was their purgator, and openly cleared their innocence, Acts ii. 15. 'These are not drunken, as ye suppose.' Jonathan knowing David to be a worthy man, and all those things Saul said of him to be slanders, vindicated David, 1 Sam. xix. 4, 5. 'David hath not sinned against thee, but his works to thee-ward have been very good. Wherefore then wilt thou sin against innocent blood, and slay David without a cause?' When the primitive Christians were falsely accused for incest, and killing their children, Tertullian made a famous apology in their vindication. This is to act the part both of a friend and of a Christian, to be an advocate for another, when he is wronged in his good name.

OF THE TENTH COMMANDMENT.

EXOD. xx. 17. *Thou shalt not covet thy Neighbour's House, thou shalt not covet thy Neighbour's Wife, nor his Man-servant, nor his Maid-servant, nor his Ox, nor his Ass, nor any Thing that is thy Neighbour's.*

THIS commandment forbids, (1.) Covetousness in general, 'Thou shalt not covet.' (2.) In particular, 'Thy neighbour's house, thy neighbour's wife,' &c.

1. It forbids covetousness in general, 'Thou shalt not covet.' It is lawful to use the world, yea, and to desire so much of it as may, (1.) Keep us from the temptation of poverty, Prov. xxx. 8. 'Give me not poverty, lest I steal, and take the name of my God in vain.' (2.) As may enable us to honour God with works of mercy, Prov. iii. 9. 'Honour the Lord with thy substance.' But all the danger is, when the world gets into the heart. The water is useful for the sailing of the ship; all the danger is, when the water gets into the ship; so the fear is, when the world gets into the heart, 'Thou shalt not covet.'

Qu. *What is it to covet?*

Ans. There are two words in the Greek, which set forth the nature of covetousness. 1. *Pleonexia*, which signifies "an insatiable desire of getting the world." Covetousness is a dry dropsy. Austin defines covetousness, *Plus velle quam sat est*; to desire more than enough; to aim at a great estate; to be like the daughters of the horse-leech, crying, 'Give, give,' Prov. xxx. 15. Or like Behemoth, Job xl. 23. 'He trusteth that he can draw up Jordan into his mouth.' 2. *Phylarnyria*, which signifies an "inordinate love of the world." The world is the idol; it is so loved, that a man will not part with it to any good