

# WESTMINSTER CONFSSION OF FAITH

## SHORTER CATECHISM

### LESSON # 38(Q3LES12) - THOU SHALT NOT BEAR FALSE WITNESS

1. **Prayer**
2. **Bible reading: Jeremiah 9: 1 - 8**
3. **Review:** In our last lesson, we covered the eighth commandment, which is **Thou shalt not steal**. This commandment is covered in SC questions 73 through 75. We learned that the eighth commandment deals with the relationship of a man and property. The commandment deals not only with the obvious, theft and robbery, but with the use of that property that God has given us. We are to take care of God's gifts, use them wisely, and also to help others who are in need.
4. **Introduction:** This week we will look at the ninth commandment. The ninth commandment is covered in SC questions 76 through 78. Like the preceding four commandments, this commandment deals with the duties God requires of us in our relationship with man. While the sixth commandment deals with our own and our neighbors life; the seventh commandment deals with our own and our neighbors chastity; the eighth commandment deals with our own and our neighbors wealth and outward estate, the ninth commandment deal with our own and our neighbors good name.

#### 5. Questions & Answers:

**Question 76:** Which is the ninth commandment?

**Answer:** The ninth commandment is, *thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.*

**Question 77:** What is required in the ninth commandment?

**Answer:** The ninth commandment requireth the maintaining and promoting of truth between man and man, and of our own and our neighbors good name, especially in witness-bearing.

**Question 78:** What is forbidden in the ninth commandment?

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

## 6. The SC, LC and WCF?

- a. The SC and the LC both cover this commandment in three questions, the SC in questions 76, 77, & 78, the LC in questions 143, 144, & 145. As usual, the three questions are basically the same, and the SC answers are a summary of the answers provided for the LC. Both the SC and the LC are in agreement with each other. The LC expands greatly on the duties required and the sins forbidden by this commandment. The WCF does not provide specific guidance on this matter.

## 7. Approach to this commandment.

- a. False witness – Even my Webster's New 20<sup>th</sup> Century Dictionary didn't have an entry for "false witness". It defined "false" as "not true". The next definition, however, states: "*untruthful; lying; dishonest; uttering what is not true, as a **false witness***". The first definition given for witness is: "*testimony; a testation of a fact or event, evidence*". It also says: "*to bear witness; to be or give evidence; to testify*". I've had people ask me where in the ten commandments does it say we are not supposed to lie, in fact, not too long ago, I asked myself the same question. Well, here it is.
- b. As the LC answers are the expanded version of the SC answers, let's take a look at LC has to say.
  - LC q144 asks: "*What are the duties required in the ninth commandment? It answers: "The duties required in the ninth commandment are, the preserving and promoting of truth between man and man, and the good name of our neighbor, as well as our own; appearing and standing for the truth; and from the heart, sincerely, freely, clearly, and fully, speaking the truth, and only the truth, in matters of judgement and justice, and in all other things whatsoever; a charitable esteem of our neighbors; loving, desiring, and rejoicing in their good name; sorrowing for, and covering of their infirmities; freely acknowledging of their gifts and graces, defending their innocency; a ready receiving of a good report, and unwillingness to admit of an evil report, concerning them; discouraging tale-bearing, flatterers, and slanderers; love and care of our own good name, and defending it when need requireth; keeping of lawful promises; studying and practicing of whatsoever things are true, honest, lovely, and of good report."*
  - LC q145 asks: "*What are the sins forbidden in the ninth commandment*". It answers: "*The sin forbidden in the ninth commandment are, all prejudicing the truth, and the good name of our neighbors, as well as our own, especially in public judicature; giving false evidence, suborning false witnesses, wittingly appearing and pleading for an evil cause, out-facing and over-bearing the truth; passing unjust sentence, calling evil good, and good evil; rewarding the wicked according to the work of the righteous, and the righteous according to the work of the wicked; forgery, concealing the truth, undue silence in a just*

*cause, and holding our peace when iniquity calleth for either a reproof from ourselves, or complaint to other; speaking the truth unseasonably, or maliciously to a wrong end, or perverting it to a wrong meaning, or in doubtful or equivocal expressions, to the prejudice of truth or justice; speaking untruth, lying, slandering, backbiting, detracting, tale-bearing, whispering, scoffing, reviling, rash, harsh, and partial censuring; misconstructing intentions, words, and actions; flattering, vain-glorious boasting, thinking or speaking to highly or too meanly of ourselves or others; denying the gifts and graces of God; aggravating smaller faults; hiding, excusing, or extenuating of sins, when called to a free confession; unnecessary discovering of infirmities; raising false rumors, receiving and countenancing evil reports, and stopping our ears against just defense; evil suspicion; envying or grieving at the deserved credit of any, endeavoring or desiring to impair it, rejoicing in their disgrace and infamy; scornful contempt, fond admiration; breach of lawful promises; neglecting such things as are of good report, and practicing, or not avoiding ourselves, or not hindering what we can in others, such things as procure an ill name.”*

- c. We will approach this question differently than the last few. Instead of using the LC as the basis of our discussion, we will develop questions about this commandment with some help from TV.

## **8. Promoting and preserving truth, and a good name.**

- a. What is generally required in this commandment?

The maintaining and promoting of truth between man and man. (**Zech 8:16** *“These are the things that ye shall do; Speak ye every man the truth to his neighbor; execute the judgement of truth and peace in your gates:”*)

- b. How do we get from “*truth between man and man*”, and “*our own and our neighbors good name*”? Do not all of the commandments dealing with our duty to man, if observed, contribute to our or our neighbors good name? If you honor your father and mother, do not kill, or steal, your good name is enhanced. How is this commandment different, or more specific relating to our good name? The scripture proof given in the LC question for this point is (**3 John :12** *“Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself: yea, and we also bear record; and ye know that our record is true.”*).

Here, the good name of Demetrius is linked to the truth.

Two points:

- The commandment itself talks about truth relating to your neighbor. (**Ex 20:16** *“Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.”*).

- Reputations (read “good name”) are made and lost by what is said. (**Eph 4:25** *“Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor: for we are members one of another.”*).
- c. In relation to maintaining and promoting our own good name, what can we do to deserve a good name?

Do all the things listed as duties required in LC q 144. TV says, *“That we may deserve a good name amongst men, we must be holy, humble, harmless, wise, loving, patient, meek, just, righteous, sober, chaste, true, honest, and every way gracious and virtuous, as to our inward dispositions, and affections; our conversations also, and actions, must be correspondent, doing always those things which be praise-worthy and of good report.”* (**Phil 2:15** *“That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world:”*)

- d. Now let’s look at our neighbor. In relation to maintaining and promoting our neighbors good name, what can we do to promote for him a good name?

With ourselves:

- By looking for and appreciating the worth and good things in our neighbor. (**Phil 2:4** *“Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.”*)
- By liking, and loving, and desiring, and giving thanks to God for their good name and fame. (**Rom 1:8** *“I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.”*)
- By a willingness and desire to believe the good reports about our neighbor. (**3 John 3 – 4** *“(3)For I rejoice greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth. (4)I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.”*)
- By not listening to, and discouraging gossips, slanderers, and those who speak evil. (**Prov 25:23** *“The north wind driveth away rain; so doth an angry countenance a backbiting tongue.”*)
- By grieving at their faults, which expose them to disgrace, with desires and endeavors to promote their amendment and the recovery of their reputation. (**2 Cor 2:4** *“For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you.”*)

With others:

- By giving to them the honor which is due, speaking well of them behind their backs, freely acknowledging their gifts and graces, and good things, and

preferring them in honor before ourselves. **(Rom 12:10 “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honor preferring one another;”)**

- By defending their reputation and good name, in endeavors to prevent or stop any evil or false report concerning them, and to vindicate them so far as we can; especially when we are called before a magistrate to bear witness to their innocency, so far as it is consistent with truth. **(1 Sam 22:14 “Then Ahimelech answered the king, and said, And who is so faithful among all thy servants as David, which is the king’s son-in-law, and goeth at thy bidding, and is honorable in thine house.”)**

e. What is our duties to neighbors who do not deserve a good name?

- Start with grieving at their faults, which expose them to disgrace, with desires and endeavors to promote their amendment and the recovery of their reputation. **(2 Cor 2:4 For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you.”)**
- By concealing and covering their faults and infirmities when we may, with unwillingness to expose them unto disgrace; and, in the spirit of meekness, endeavoring to restore them when they are overtaken and fallen into sin. **(Gal 6:4 “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.”)**
- By reproofing them before others only when there is need, and that with a respect unto their condition, and remembrance of what is praise-worthy in them. **(Matt 18:15 – 17 “<sup>(15)</sup>Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. <sup>(16)</sup>But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word shall be established. <sup>(17)</sup>And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as a heathen man and a publican.”)**

f. This is well and good relating to our brethren in the church, but how does it apply to common folks with which we deal daily?

g. What about little white lies, or lies of consideration (like to the ill?). Part of the answer to LC q145 is, “speaking the truth unseasonably”. The scripture proof is **(Prov 29:11 “A fool uttereth all his mind: but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards.”)**

Is this saying a little white lie is OK?

## 9. Summary

- a. The ninth commandment simply says “thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbor.” It requires not only telling the truth, but a loving approach to our neighbors, insuring that they get credit when due, to enhance their good name, and giving them every benefit of the doubt, and helping them, when their good name has been tarnished. Remember, as Jesus said, the sum of our duty to our fellow man is “love”.