

## **8. You must not bear false witness against your neighbor (and, "You must not covet")**

### **Chapter 1.**

This Commandment seems small, and yet is so great, that he who would rightly keep it must risk and imperil life and limb, goods and honor, friends and all that he has; and yet it includes no more than the work of that small member, the tongue, and is called in German Wahrheit sagen, "telling the truth" and, where there is need, gainsaying lies; so that it forbids many evil works of the tongue. First: those which are committed by speaking, and those which are committed by keeping silent. By speaking, when a man has an unjust law-suit, and wants to prove and maintain his case by a false argument, catch his neighbor with subtilty, produce everything that strengthens and furthers his own cause, and withhold and discount everything that furthers his neighbor's good cause; in doing which he does not do to his neighbor as he would have his neighbor do to him. This some men do for the sake of gain, some to avoid loss or shame, thereby seeking their own advantage more than God's Commandment, and excuse themselves by saying: Vigilanti jura subveniunt, "the law helps him who watches"; just as if it were not as much their duty to watch for their neighbor's cause as for their own. Thus they intentionally allow their neighbor's cause to be lost, although they know that it is just. This evil is at present so common that I fear no court is held and no suit tried but that one side sins against this Commandment. And even when they cannot accomplish it, they yet have the unrighteous spirit and will, so that they would wish the neighbor's just cause to be lost and their unjust cause to prosper. This sin is most frequent when the opponent is a prominent man or an enemy. For a man wants to revenge himself on his enemy: but the ill will of a man of prominence he does not wish to bring upon himself; and then begins the flattering and fawning, or, on the other hand, the withholding of the truth. Here no one is willing to run the risk of disfavor and displeasure, loss and danger for the truth's sake; and so God's Commandment must perish. And this is almost universally the way of the world. He who would keep this Commandment, would have both hands full doing only those good works which concern the tongue. And then, how many are there who allow themselves to be silenced and swerved

aside from the truth by presents and gifts! so that in all places it is truly a high, great, rare work, not to be a false witness against one's neighbor.

## Chapter 2.

There is a second bearing of witness to the truth, which is still greater, with which we must fight against the evil spirits; and this concerns not temporal matters, but the Gospel and the truth of faith, which the evil spirit has at no time been able to endure, and always so manages that the great among men, whom it is hard to resist, must oppose and persecute it. Of which it is written in Psalm lxxxii, "Rid the poor out of the hand of the wicked, and help the forsaken to maintain his just cause."

Such persecution, it is true, has now become infrequent; but that is the fault of the spiritual prelates, who do not stir up the Gospel, but let it perish, and so have abandoned the very thing because of which such witnessing and persecution should arise; and in its place they teach us their own law and what pleases them. For this reason the devil also does not stir, since by vanquishing the Gospel he has also vanquished faith in Christ, and everything goes as he wishes. But if the Gospel should be stirred up and be heard again, without doubt the whole world would be aroused and moved, and the greater portion of the kings, princes, bishops, doctors and clergy, and all that is great, would oppose it and rage against it, as has always happened when the Word of God has come to light; for the world cannot endure what comes from God. This is proved in Christ, Who was and is the very greatest and most precious and best of all that God has; yet the world not only did not receive Him, but persecuted Him more cruelly than all others who had ever come forth from God.

Therefore, as at that time, so at all times there are few who stand by the divine truth, and imperil and risk life and limb, goods and honor, and all that they have, as Christ has foretold: "Ye shall be hated of all men for My Name's sake." And: "Many of them shall be offended in Me." Yea, if this truth were attacked by peasants, herdsmen, stable-boys and men of no standing, who would not be willing and able to confess it and to bear witness to it? But when the pope, and the bishops, together with princes and kings attack it, all men flee, keep silent, dissemble, in order that they may not lose goods, honor, favor and life.

### Chapter 3.

Why do they do this? Because they have no faith in God, and expect nothing good from Him. For where such faith and confidence are, there is also a bold, defiant, fearless heart, that ventures and stands by the truth, though it cost life or cloak, though it be against pope or kings; as we see that the martyrs did. For such a heart is satisfied and rests easy because it has a gracious, loving God. Therefore it despises all the favor, grace, goods and honor of men, lets them come and go as they please; as is written in Psalm xv: "He contemneth them that contemn God, and honoreth them that fear the Lord"; that is, the tyrants, the mighty, who persecute the truth and despise God, he does not fear, he does not regard them, he despiseth them; on the other hand, those who are persecuted for the truth's sake, and fear God more than men, to these he clings, these he defends, these he honors, let it vex whom it may; as it is written of Moses, Hebrews xi, that he stood by his brethren, regardless of the mighty king of Egypt.

Lo, in this Commandment again you see briefly that faith must be the master-workman in this work also, so that without it no one has courage to do this work: so entirely are all works comprised in faith, as has now been often said. Therefore, apart from faith all works are dead, however good the form and name they bear. For as no one does the work of this Commandment except he be firm and fearless in the confidence of divine favor; so also he does no work of any other Commandment without the same faith: thus every one may easily by this Commandment test and weigh himself whether he be a Christian and truly believe in Christ, and thus whether he is doing good works or no. Now we see how the Almighty God has not only set our Lord Jesus Christ before us that we should believe in Him with such confidence, but also holds before us in Him an example of this same confidence and of such good works, to the end that we should believe in Him, follow Him and abide in Him forever; as He says, John xiv: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life,"—the Way, in which we follow Him; the Truth, that we believe in Him; the Life, that we live in Him forever.

From all this it is now manifest that all other works, which are not commanded, are perilous and easily known: such as building churches, beautifying them, making pilgrimages, and all that is written at so great length in the Canon Law and has misled and

burdened the world and ruined it, made uneasy consciences, silenced and weakened faith, and has not said how a man, although he neglect all else, has enough to do with all his powers to keep the Commandments of God, and can never do all the good works which he is commanded to do; why then does he seek others, which are neither necessary nor commanded, and neglect those that are necessary and commanded?

