



# We Value Reputations

Matthew 15:10-20 James 3:3-12

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Last year was a record setting year for forest fires. Millions of acres were burned, billions of dollars in damage was done. Maybe you remember seeing it on TV or reading about it online. The images were frightening.

**The damage your tongue can inflict on other people is described in terms of a forest fire!**

How great a forest is set ablaze by such a small spark! And **the tongue is a fire**, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell. JAMES 3:5-6

James will later say that *our tongues are a restless evil, full of deadly poison (3:8)*.

Its no wonder that what we say *and* what we don't say about other people is the subject of one of God's Commandments.

## **The Eighth Commandment.**

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

*What does this mean?*

We should fear and love God that we may not deceitfully belie, betray, slander, or defame our neighbor, but defend him, speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything.

This is actually the second commandment that deals with our tongues. Remember that the **Second Commandment** dealt with what we say **about God**: *Thou shall not take the Name of the Lord thy God in vain.* The **Eighth Commandment** deals with what we say **about other people**: *Thou shall not take bear false witness against thy neighbor.*

The eighth Commandment teaches us to **VALUE REPUTATIONS**. Your reputation is your witness to the world; it defines your character; it is how people think about you and know you. Your reputation even reflects on God Himself. God teaches us in this commandment that we are to use our words to **build up** people's reputations;

*not tear them down.* The eighth commandment is meant to protect both yours and other people's **REPUTATIONS**.

This commandment teaches us that we are to keep our **tongue** under control; and to guard our **ears** from hearing evil. By nature, we all have **poisonous tongues** and **itchy ears** always ready to break this Commandment. However we are commanded **NOT** to **slander** our neighbor; nor **gossip** about them, nor are we **TO LISTEN TO slander** or **gossip** about our neighbor.

- **SLANDER** is when you *tell lies* about your neighbor in order to hurt his/her reputation. We see it in the world all the time – especially in national politics, the media, and social media; but it has **NO PLACE** in your life at all.

- **Do you want people telling lies about you? OF COURSE NOT! They don't want you telling lies about them either.**

Jesus is clear: lies come from the Father of Lies: Satan himself (John 8:44). Slander is lying and it is directly linked to Satan and his demons.

- **GOSSIP** is when you *tell the truth* about your neighbor in order to hurt his/her reputation. You may know some sin or evil about your neighbor, but you are not at liberty to tell anyone else about it, unless there is danger involved. It is not your business to broadcast the failures of other people.

- **Do you want people gossiping about you? OF COURSE NOT! They don't want you gossiping about them either.**

God has not called you to expose the sins of other people. Gossip is one of the **MOST UNLOVING THINGS** you can do to someone else.

**Martin Luther** compares **slanderers** and a **gossips** to pigs rooting in the dirt: *they know a slight offense about someone, and they carry it into every corner, and they are delighted and tickled that they can stir up someone else's troubles, as swine roll themselves in the dirt and root in it with their snouts.* Martin Luther, *Large Catechism*, 268

**Martin Luther** compares **slanderers** and a **gossips** to pigs rooting in the dirt

**James** in the New Testament compares it to starting a forest fire that will hurt other people.

**You are to keep your tongue under control!**

Of all places, we can learn about the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment from Walt Disney! He got it right in back in 1942 in the movie "Bambi". *Do you remember this scene?*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=popXDFvOsLg>

35 second scene from **Bambi**: *if you can't say something nice, don't say nothing at all!*

***If you can't say something nice, don't say nothing at all!*** The way the Commandment put it is: *thou shall not bear false witness against thy neighbor*. And Luther explains it *we should fear and love God that we may not deceitfully belie, betray, slander, or defame our neighbor*. This Commandment teaches us that God listens to our every word and our every conversation. ***If you can't say something nice, don't say nothing at all!***

The 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment exposes your speaking sins; and calls you to repent. Its not right to speak evil about someone else and hurt their reputation. **But maybe you have**. Maybe you have lied, betrayed, slandered or defamed your neighbor. Maybe gossip rolls off your tongue as easily as breathing. Maybe your ears love hearing about other people and their sins and failures. Maybe your tongue has set so many “forest fires” that there are hurt people everywhere in your life. Maybe your words have wounded people and broken relationships.

The 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment exposes your speaking sins; and calls you to repent. Control your tongue! Guard your ears! Confess your misuse of your tongue and your ears to God. Admit that your tongue is *a restless evil full of deadly poison!*

**THANKFULLY** you have a Savior who never speaks evil of you. He never uses His tongue to hurt you; but rather He defends you and speaks well of you. Jesus uses His words **to declare that you are forgiven** and **to publically announce that you belong to Him!**

Jesus took every single word of gossip you have spoken, and all of your poisonous slander, and your eagerness to hear slander and gossip --- He took it all to the cross. His death paid for those sins, as well as all your other sins. In His Resurrection, your ears hear **words of peace**, **words of forgiveness** and **words of life**. Jesus uses His words to defend you and speak well of you.

But if anybody does sin, we have an **advocate** with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. **2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.** 1 JOHN 2:1-2

The word “**advocate**” means *defense attorney*; Jesus speaks on your behalf to God the Father, defending you and speaking well of you, reminding God the Father that your sins have been paid for through His atoning sacrifice on the cross.

**God’s good words to you TEACH YOU and MOTIVATE YOU to speak good words about others.** Martin Luther summarized it as *defending our neighbor, speaking well of them, and putting the best construction on everything we hear about them.*

**The last thing we want to do  
is hurt someone with our words.**

Remember the children’s rhyme: *Sticks and stones may hurt my bones but words can never hurt me.* **BOY, THAT IS A FALSE SAYING – isn’t it?**

The reality is that words can hurt; and sometimes they hurt for a lifetime;

- ✓ words can wound deeply;
- ✓ words can destroy friendships;
- ✓ words divide families.

**Don’t let your tongue  
set a “forest fire” with someone else.**

**Don’t let your ears  
rout around in the mud like a pig.**

By the power of the Holy Spirit, you learn to defend your neighbor, speak well of them, and put the best construction on everybody.

Because the Savior speaks Good Words of forgiveness, peace and life to you, you learn to speak good words about others --- and to avoid using your words to speak evil, gossip, or slander about someone else.

As the Old Testament Proverb (25:11) says,

**Let Your Words**

**Be Apples Of Gold  
In Settings Of Silver!**

Amen!