

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.

What does the eighth Commandment forbid? The eighth Commandment of God forbids us to injure our neighbour by words, either in court or elsewhere. This Commandment was written on the second Table of Moses in these words: Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. It forbids, then, false testimony; but under this head must be understood all the wrongs we may do our neighbour by the abuse of speech.

The sins contrary to this Commandment are especially (1) false testimony; (2) falsehood and hypocrisy; (3) backbiting and calumny; (4) evil reports; (5) abusive language; (6) violation of secrecy; as also (7) rash judgment and unfounded suspicions, which are as it were interior words, injurious to the good fame of our neighbour.

False testimony is a deposition made in court, upon oath, contrary to the truth. This is always a mortal sin, since it includes perjury, which does not admit of lightness of matter.

To lie is to speak contrary to our conviction, to say what we believe to be false, knowingly and with a design to deceive. There are three kinds of lies: a jocose lie, which is told for mirth or sport; the officious lie, which is told to excuse one's self, to save one's self or others an inconvenience; the malicious lie, which is told to injure our neighbour.

Words said in jest, whose untruth is apparent, do not constitute a lie; nor do certain forms of speech, false in appearance, but whose meaning is readily understood. The real lie is ordinarily a venial sin, but is mortal when it causes our neighbour grave injury in his good name or property.

Hypocrisy is also a species of lie: it consists in borrowing the appearance of virtue to attract the esteem of men. The Pharisees were hypocrites: their heart was corrupt, and they pretended to be virtuous and honest men because they preserved appearances. But Jesus, who read their heart, reproached in biting terms their perversity: You are, said He to them, like to whited sepulchres (St. Matt, xxiii. 27).

Let us avoid, my brethren, lying as a shameful vice and one which God holds in detestation. I abhor, says He, the double tongue; that is, duplicity and lying. To lie is to imitate the demon, the father of lies. To speak but the truth is to imitate God who would deceive nobody, and all of whose words are truth.