

[Exodus 20:16:] "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor."

[Luther's Explanation to the Eighth Commandment:] We should fear and love God that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, or give him a bad name, but defend him, speak well of him, and take his words and actions in the kindest possible way.

1. We use the Eighth Commandment to talk about all things relating to telling the truth and the right use of speech. The concept of *truth* is very important to Jesus.
2. Jesus said to Pilate in John 18, "In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me." "What is truth?" retorted Pilate. Pilate was trying to make the truth relative. The problem of relativism is not a new one. We hear phrases today like, "What's true for you isn't true for me," or "I don't like your truth." If we change the meaning of *truth* to be a subjective thing (it's true because I think it's true) from its original meaning of being an objective thing (it's true because it's an objective fact outside of me), then statements like "I swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," become meaningless to those outside of the subject: "I swear to tell what I want to be true, you can take it or leave it, and it might change."
3. What if you're trying to find out a fact. You ask questions to find out the truth, and a person says they're telling you the truth: *their* truth. What does that mean? It ends up meaning nothing ... to you, anyway. You need to know what's real, what's a fact. Relativism takes what's real, what's a fact, and adds a layer: addition, interpretation, omission, whatever. In other words, it relates to me—but not you!
4. Let's look out the window. That's a tree. It's not a tree being (addition); it's not a tree-like thing (interpretation); it's not essence of tree (omission). It's a tree. Sure, I can envision it being something else. But it's still a tree: objectively, outside of me. The truth is that it's a tree and that I'm applying a relativistic meaning to it. My relativistic meaning doesn't change the truth that it's a tree.
5. Man's proclivity to focus on the subjective instead of the objective stems from Eden's fall. "Did God really say?" was Satan leading us to question objective truth and replace it with subjective (relative) truth. Objective truth among mankind wouldn't be the only casualty! You will not surely die. Uh-oh. Satan lied. God really *did* say we would die if we disobey Him. And so we do. What do all dead relativist philosophers have in common? They're dead.
6. Now to our text! {Read verses 1-12.} Whether the people received what the seventy-two had to say or whether the people rejected it, what they had to say was identical: the truth. The kingdom of God has come near (verse 11). And then two words are added for those who received the truth: The kingdom of God has come near to you (verse 9). This intersects with the Eighth Commandment because the disciples were not at liberty to proclaim "their" truth. They were to proclaim *the* truth: what Jesus told them! If people rejected the truth, it's no wonder since we inherit the sinful nature Adam and Eve passed on to us from Eden. If the people received it, then God's ruling activity had settled upon their hearts—just as it has for you! You know Jesus' claim in John 14:6: I am the way, the truth, and the life. God made sure that you got to hear the

truth.

7. Do we rejoice in the Truth—with a capital *T*? (And I capitalized it to make sure that we're talking about Jesus here!) He's not our sorta Savior. He is *the* Savior. Death happens. Jesus defeated death. He's the only One. Even the miracles He had the seventy-two do in His name showed His power over what leads to death. Fellow believers, embrace the truth! This world tries to eschew the truth by making truth relative. We know that this is simply the devil's language. There is such a thing as sin. There is such a thing as accountability. We do submit to our King, the Lord. We submit not because we must at our death and only then say His kingdom came near to us. We submit to our King because we love our Savior and know that His kingdom has come upon us. He gives us His Word of truth. Sure, we know why we die. *And* we know why *Jesus* died! Jesus died to defeat the devil who bore false testimony about God to Eve in the guise of a relativistic serpent, to you and me in the guise of this world's relativism. Jesus died to snatch us from the devil's kingdom and bring us into His own, replacing our hellish relative truth with divine absolute truth. We know that our names are written in heaven. {Read verses 16-20.}
8. Now some application with regard to the Eighth Commandment. God forgive us when we hedge on the truth of God's Word. God also grant us the strength to proclaim the truth! {Reread verse 16.} God has also called us to be His witnesses in our time and place. If I don't proclaim the truth of God's Word—even when it's unpopular because of concepts like sin and accountability, then I am bearing false witness and sinning against the Eighth Commandment. I am also stamping the good news of Jesus' saving work into the mud. If the truth of why He had to come becomes relative, then His salvation becomes meaningless. It is *not* meaningless! The truth of the gospel is what we need the most. Look! Jesus rose from the dead. Why? We needed Him to prove that His saving work was done. Why? We needed His being forsaken in death to be our being forsaken in death. Why? We needed His perfect life to count as our perfect life. Why? That's how our death becomes the gateway to life forever in heaven.
9. This reading closes with words of great joy, words based on the truth of Scripture that we need in this life: rejoice that your names are written in heaven. Like these seventy-two, our names are written in heaven. We are forgiven when sharing the truth is hard ... even when believing the truth is hard. Yet there's your name and my name, written in heaven. It's the truth because we have the forgiveness of sins. Jesus, the Truth says so. Jesus proves it by His resurrection. It's His testimony to the truth, guaranteeing He is the Truth. That means you have the truth always. Amen.