



Hunger Catechism: Eighth Commandment

BIG IDEA: Finding truth and the struggle for justice | **Reading:** Leviticus 19:33–34

Purpose

This Hunger Catechism lesson will discuss the Eighth Commandment, Martin Luther’s interpretation and how we can live out this commandment with our neighbor. This lesson also covers false narratives and how we are called as Christians to move from seeing strangers as “others” to seeing everyone as neighbors in Christ.

Commandment and focus

EIGHTH COMMANDMENT: “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.”

FOCUS QUESTION: How does God call us to respond to false witnesses about our neighbor?

Luther’s lens *(Small Catechism)*

“We are to fear and love God, so that we do not tell lies about our neighbors, betray or slander them, or destroy their reputations. Instead we are to come to their defense, speak well of them, and interpret everything they do in the best possible light.”

Luther’s explanation *(Large Catechism)*

“False witness, then, is everything which cannot be properly proved. Therefore, what is not manifest upon sufficient evidence no one shall make public or declare for truth; and, in short, whatever is secret should be allowed to remain secret, or, at any rate, should be secretly reproved, as we shall hear.”

Going further

QUESTION: What would the world be like if we all saw each other in the kindest light?

Have you ever joined in a rumor, saw or heard others spreading a rumor or been the target of a rumor? At times, telling the truth in the midst of a widespread rumor can feel much more difficult than simply going along with it. But the truth is that spreading false accusations about our neighbors can have a deeply negative impact on everyone involved—it not only destroys truth; spreading rumors destroys trust. If we feel that we cannot trust our neighbor, we turn inward, trying to protect ourselves at any cost. Eventually, we create an environment where those around us are willing to say anything about anyone to “get ahead” of their peers or colleagues.

Martin Luther experienced this firsthand when he expressed his position on justification by faith instead of works. He challenged

many people’s understanding of their relationship with God and neighbor—including people in great power. Luther immediately became the target of rumors, insults and attempts to ruin his reputation. The Roman Catholic Church went so far as to give Luther the nickname “the wild boar” to try to discredit him.

According to Luther, obeying the Eighth Commandment is more than just not lying. We are to fear and love God to avoid any form of deception, especially in an attempt for one person to get ahead at the expense of another. Going further, we are also called to defend and speak well of our neighbors in the kindest light. When we do this, we establish trust in each other, which encourages us to turn outward toward our neighbors rather than inward toward ourselves.



READING

LEVITICUS 19:33–34

“When an alien resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the alien. The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”



ELCA World Hunger
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
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Points to ponder

- + What do the media, the public, and political leaders say about how we should see others?
- + Why do you think they present others in this light?
- + How would your relationships change if you tried to see everyone in the kindest light?
- + If we start speaking to others as if we were speaking to Christ, how might that change the way we interact with them?

The facts

- + **43.3 million** immigrants live in the United States (13.5 percent of the population).¹
- + **36 percent of U.S.-born children of immigrant parents** are college graduates (5 percent above the national average).¹
- + **Incarceration rates among U.S.-born citizens are two times higher** than that of undocumented immigrants and **three times higher** if detention centers are removed from the calculation.²
- + While some people might suggest that immigration makes it harder for native residents of the United States to find jobs, research shows that unemployment has gone down as immigration has increased over the last 120 years. Also, studies have found that when immigration increases, unemployment, property crime and violent crime rates decrease. This suggests another side to the immigration story.

Make it matter

There is a false narrative, an inaccurate assessment, of our neighbors seeking safety, opportunity and freedom in this country. Because of the misconceptions that are created by some of our rhetoric, many of our immigrant neighbors face ridicule, harassment and injustice. The misinformation that continues to be spread can seem to justify mistreatment of our neighbors, including personal violence, harassment and denial of their legal rights.

As Lutherans, we are not only called to speak out against false narratives and injustices but also to speak well of our neighbor. Martin Luther believed that the Eighth Commandment “is given first of all that everyone shall help their neighbor secure their rights, and not allow them to be hindered or twisted, but shall promote and strictly maintain them.”

There will always be someone telling us how to think and speak about other people. But the truth is that we all come from God, and God lives within all of us. So, we are called to speak of, care for, and love our neighbors as if we were staring into the eyes of Christ. In that way, we discover the truth—God’s truth—about our neighbor.

‘Guardian Angels— an introduction’

(AMMPARO)



Link to video: vimeo.com/157458987

Diving deeper

- + How does the Guardian Angels program help youth like Cristian?
- + In what ways do the Guardian Angels fulfill what we are called to do by the Eighth Commandment?
- + What would you do if you lived in a country where your family’s safety or well-being was threatened?



ACT

ADVOCATE

Before engaging in conversation, practice noticing your own tendencies when you talk to or about other people and try to see Christ in them. Talk with your pastor about what your congregation is doing to advocate for immigrants, migrants and refugees. Learn how your congregation can protect community members by becoming a “sanctuary church.”

Brewing questions

What other questions come to mind after learning about Luther’s interpretation of the Eighth Commandment?

¹ Bureau of the Census, *Selected Characteristics of the Native and Foreign-Born Populations: 2015 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates* (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2015).

² Pew Research Center, “Second-Generation Americans: A Portrait of the Adult Children of Immigrants” (2013).

³ Michelangelo Landgrave and Alex Nowrasteh, “Criminal Immigrants: Their Numbers, Demographics, and Countries of Origin” (Washington: Cato Institute, 2017).