

Deuteronomy 5:20

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Neither shalt thou bear false witness against thy neighbour.

Analysis

The ninth commandment 'Neither shalt thou bear false witness against thy neighbour' protects truth and reputation. The original context addresses courtroom testimony, where false witness could result in innocent persons' execution (Deuteronomy 19:16-21). This command upholds justice, requiring honest testimony even when costly. Broader applications include prohibiting slander, gossip, lying, and reputation destruction. Truth-telling reflects God's character (Numbers 23:19, Titus 1:2) and builds trustworthy communities. The Reformed tradition emphasizes Christians as truth-bearers in all contexts, guarding both truth and neighbor's good name.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern legal systems required witnesses for capital cases, creating temptation for perjury. Israel's law mandated two or three witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:15), death penalty for proven false witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:18-19), and thorough investigation of accusations. False witnesses convicted Jesus (Matthew 26:59-60), Naboth (1 Kings 21:10-13), and Stephen (Acts 6:13). Proverbs repeatedly condemns false witness (Proverbs 6:19, 12:17, 14:5, 19:5), showing this sin's seriousness.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does this commandment require not only avoiding false testimony but actively protecting others' reputations through truthful, gracious speech?
2. In what ways do gossip, slander, and careless words violate the spirit of this command even when not in formal legal contexts?

Interlinear Text

אַל	תִּשְׁעַט	בְּעֵד	עִדָּה	שְׁאֵלָה
H3808	Neither shalt thou bear	H6030	against thy neighbour	H7453
			witness	H5707
			false	H7723

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 20:16 (Witness): Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.

Exodus 23:1 (Witness): Thou shalt not raise a false report: put not thine hand with the wicked to be an unrighteous witness.

Proverbs 19:9 (Witness): A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall perish.

Proverbs 19:5 (Witness): A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape.