

Zechariah 8:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD.

Analysis

And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD. This verse continues the ethical requirements begun in verse 16, addressing internal motivations and oath-taking. The command "**let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour**" (ve-ish et-ra'at reehu al-tachshvu bi-levavkhem, **וְאַיִשׁ אֶת־כְּעֵת רְעֵהוּ אֶל־תְּחַשֵּׁבּוּ בְּלִבְבָּקָם**, probes beneath external behavior to internal attitudes. The verb chashav (חַשֵּׁבּ, "think," "devise," "plan") indicates deliberate mental activity—plotting harm, nursing grudges, planning revenge. This isn't accidental negative thoughts but cultivated malice.

The phrase "in your hearts" (bi-levavkhem, בְּלִבְבָּקָם) locates the problem in the inner person—the center of thought, will, and emotion. God's law addresses not merely actions but motivations (cf. the Tenth Commandment against coveting, Exodus 20:17). Jesus intensifies this principle in the Sermon on the Mount: anger equals murder in the heart (Matthew 5:21-22), lust equals adultery in the heart (Matthew 5:27-28). Covenant righteousness requires transformed hearts, not merely controlled behavior.

Second, "**love no false oath**" (ve-shavuat sheker al-te'ehavu, **וְשָׁבֹועַת שְׁקֵר אֶל־**). A shavuat sheker (שָׁבֹועַת שְׁקֵר, false oath) invokes God's name to guarantee a lie—perjury in court or deceptive promises made under oath. To "love" such oaths means to be attached to, delight in, or habitually practice them. The

conclusion **"for all these are things that I hate"** (ki et-kol-elleh saneti, כִּי אֶת-כָּל־ שְׁנָאָתִי) employs the strong verb sane (שָׁנָא, "hate"), showing God's vehement opposition to these sins. What God hates, His people must avoid.

Historical Context

These commands address sins that destroyed Israel's pre-exilic community. Micah condemned those who "devise iniquity and work evil on their beds" (Micah 2:1), plotting to steal fields and oppress the poor. Jeremiah denounced widespread lying and oath-breaking: "They proceed from evil to evil... everyone deceives his neighbor... they have taught their tongue to speak lies" (Jeremiah 9:3-5). False oaths particularly violated the Third Commandment against taking God's name in vain (Exodus 20:7).

The post-exilic community needed to establish a different social order grounded in truth and integrity. Their visible righteousness would witness to surrounding nations (cf. Zechariah 8:20-23) that Yahweh is the true God. Conversely, community characterized by internal malice and false oaths would dishonor God and repeat the fathers' failures.

Jesus addressed these same issues. He forbade oath-taking altogether because people used oaths to justify lying (Matthew 5:33-37): "Let your 'yes' be yes and your 'no' be no." Simple truthfulness eliminates need for oaths. James echoes this (James 5:12). Paul commands believers to "put away falsehood" and speaks of God-haters as those who are "haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil" (Romans 1:29-30). The ethical standards Zechariah proclaims find fulfillment in the Spirit-transformed community of the new covenant.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How can you guard your heart against 'imagining evil' toward others—cultivating malice, nursing grudges, or plotting harm?
2. What does God's command to avoid even thinking evil against neighbors teach about the depth of righteousness He requires?
3. In what ways might believers today 'love false oaths'—speaking carelessly, making promises without intention to keep them, or using God's name lightly?
4. How does knowing God hates these sins motivate genuine heart transformation rather than mere external conformity?
5. What practices or spiritual disciplines help align our inner attitudes with God's standards of love and truth?

Interlinear Text

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| וְלֹא תַּעֲשֵׂה | תְּשַׁעַר | רֵעֵהוּ | אֶל | פְּנֵיכֶם |
| And let none | evil | against his neighbour | of you imagine | |
| H376 | H853 | H7451 | H408 | H2803 |
| בְּלִבְבָּךְ מַ | שְׁמַר | אֶל | כִּי | אֵלֶּה |
| in your hearts | oath | no false | and love | are these |
| H3824 | H7621 | H8267 | H157 | H3605 |
| רָאשֵׁךְ | שְׁנַי אֶתְּנִי | בְּבוֹא | כִּי | כִּי |
| for all these are things that I hate | | | | |
| H834 | H8130 | H408 | H3588 | H853 |
| נָאָם | יְהִי | בְּבוֹא | אֵת | כָּל |
| saith | the LORD | | | |
| H5002 | H3068 | | | |

Additional Cross-References

Zechariah 7:10 (Evil): And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart.

Malachi 3:5 (References Lord): And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts.

Psalms 10:3 (Evil): For the wicked boasteth of his heart's desire, and blesseth the covetous, whom the LORD abhorreth.

Proverbs 3:29 (Evil): Devise not evil against thy neighbour, seeing he dwelleth securely by thee.

Jeremiah 44:4 (Parallel theme): Howbeit I sent unto you all my servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, saying, Oh, do not this abominable thing that I hate.

Jeremiah 4:14 (Evil): O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?

Matthew 12:35 (Evil): A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.

Matthew 15:19 (Evil): For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies:

Habakkuk 1:13 (Evil): Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he?