

that party might be. In the Old Testament we learn that the term neighbor comes from the same verbal root meaning "to pasture" or "to shepherd." Consequently the neighbor is someone who keeps his flock next to yours. Generally then the neighbor is not necessarily an especially close friend but is someone proximate to you to whom you may show kindness or, if you are not obedient to the truth, for whom you may harbour hatred. Since we are all surrounded by such persons, the ninth command takes on increased meaning.

The Ninth Commandment: Its Meaning

What does the ninth command mean? A false witness would obviously seem to be the giving of a report, etc., that could not be true to the harm of one close by. Deuteronomy 19 offers the commentary on this and it is to this passage we now turn. In this interesting chapter we find notes on the person who accidentally takes another's life and how cities of refuge are appointed for his safety until justice can be established and equity restored. (19:1-10) But the last half of the chapter discusses personal relations with neighbors; starting with killing (19:11-13), continuing with family inheritance (19:14) and entering into a discussion of affairs between neighbors (19:15-21). The fifteenth verse tells us that two or three witnesses are needed to prove an act of violence while in verses 16-21 we are told the danger of false witnesses. The temptation, you see, is very great. If one wanted to get an advantage over a neighbor, the easy thing would be to secure a false witness to establish his case. The law warns that the false witness and his complicitors will be dealt with as they hoped to deal or get advantage of others. Thus the command basically means that one will not seek to gain advantage of others by bearing a report or giving a witness that is not true. To seek to make a gain in this way is to be in total