

or disadvantage is not in the interest of a neighbor, one should be careful not to work what is ill.

The command would prevent us from giving our neighbor ill-intended advice that would lead to his harm. No doubt we all offer advice at times that proves to be less than best, but the intent is what is silenced by this law. Your neighbor might have a problem and you with some animosity might offer advice which you would know to be harmful. It might be that you conceived of it as "getting even" for some offense your neighbor had shown you. But the Lord has acknowledged that these personally hostile acts only lead to other problems and recriminations. For the sake of peace, if for nothing else, the law forbids false witness.

The Ninth Commandment: Cause of the problems

"Why," we might ask, "would anyone resort to false witness?" It would seem to be an illogical way to go, the potential penalties would suggest that a wise person would not take the risk no matter the cause. But a number of sinful factors enter our thinking and produce a false witness response.

The first of these is simply personal gain. It is amazing how often greed is a major factor in sins of personal commission. We hardly need to illustrate it but for an advantage social or practical it is often the easy course. One tries to advance oneself by a report that puts another at a disadvantage so that the initiator gets ahead. The false witness that leads to this might be an open act, a word of insinuation, or a detrimental statement. One must be very careful in any matter that is chiefly for one's own cause. We do not say that such is necessarily wrong but it often can become a situation in which we promote ourselves by means of an unfair act.