

The Devil's Work  
*Heidelberg Catechism*  
By William Pols

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**Bible Text:** John 8:31-59  
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Let's now turn to the gospel of John 8, and we'll begin reading at verse 31 and continue down to the end of the chapter.

31 Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. 32 And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." 33 They answered Him, "We are Abraham's descendants, and have never been in bondage to anyone. How can You say, 'You will be made free'?" 34 Jesus answered them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. 35 And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. 36 Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed. 37 I know that you are Abraham's descendants, but you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. 38 I speak what I have seen with My Father, and you do what you have seen with your father." 39 They answered and said to Him, "Abraham is our father." Jesus said to them, "If you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham. 40 But now you seek to kill Me, a Man who has told you the truth which I heard from God. Abraham did not do this. 41 You do the deeds of your father." Then they said to Him, "We were not born of fornication; we have one Father--God." 42 Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. 43 Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word. 44 You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. 45 But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. 46 Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? 47 He who is of God hears God's words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God." 48 Then the Jews answered and said to Him, "Do we not say rightly that You are a Samaritan and have a demon?" 49 Jesus answered, "I do not have a demon; but I honor My

Father, and you dishonor Me. 50 And I do not seek My own glory; there is One who seeks and judges. 51 Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death." 52 Then the Jews said to Him, "Now we know that You have a demon! Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and You say, 'If anyone keeps My word he shall never taste death.' 53 Are You greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Who do You make Yourself out to be?" 54 Jesus answered, "If I honor Myself, My honor is nothing. It is My Father who honors Me, of whom you say that He is your God. 55 Yet you have not known Him, but I know Him. And if I say, 'I do not know Him,' I shall be a liar like you; but I do know Him and keep His word. 56 Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." 57 Then the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?" 58 Jesus said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM." 59 Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.

In connection with our Scripture reading let's turn to the Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 43. So we're considering this part of the Catechism that explains the 10 Commandments and we're up to the 9th Commandment. Lord's Day 43.

Q. 112. What is God's will for you in the ninth commandment?

A. That I never give false testimony against anyone, twist no one's words, not gossip or slander, nor join in condemning anyone rashly or without a hearing, rather cause I should avoid under penalty of God's wrath every kind of lying and deceit as the very works of the devil, and in court and everywhere else, I should love the truth, speak it candidly and openly acknowledge it, and I should do what I can to defend and advance my neighbor's honor and reputation.

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, in Psalm 97:10 we hear these words, "You who love the LORD, hate evil!" And there are many passages of God's word that elaborate on human depravity and wickedness, as if they are intentionally calculated, intended by the Holy Spirit to show the evil and the hatefulness of sin and to teach God's people to cultivate from his word a kind of revulsion against sin. And of course, I could give countless examples of that. That's one reason why it's important to read all of the Bible, to read Leviticus, and to read the prophets, and to read the Psalms, because all of Scripture shapes not only our thoughts and our doctrine, but it shapes our feelings, it sharpens and it should shape our attitudes towards sin. And like Scripture, the Catechism often uses very emotive language in order to teach a right attitude towards sin. We are more and more to hate sin and run from it. That's a description of conversion. It involves hating sin, running from it.

We heard in our consideration of the 6th Commandment that God hates the roots of murder and we're to share his hatred for envy and jealousy, and a desire for revenge. In the 7th Commandment, we're told that we should detest all impurity, not only should we avoid it, but we should have a kind of revulsion. We should detest impurity. We just moved down to the answer to Question and Answer 113 with respect to the 10th Commandment, it says with all our hearts we should always hate sin and delight in all righteousness. Christianity and true godliness is not simply a matter of having correct doctrine and making right choices regarding our behavior, but it pertains to the attitudes of our hearts, our deepest feelings, what we love and what we hate. The law indeed is aimed at shaping our feelings about sin as well as our thoughts and our practices. These things really are inseparable and no exaggeration is needed. In fact, we might say no exaggeration is possible to depict the awfulness of sin. We need only consider that it required the death of the Son of God, the hellish agony of the Savior, in order to make atonement for our sin, or to consider that it will result in eternal punishment and wrath for all those who appear before God, the Judge, without a covering for their sin.

Now, this Lord's Day before us, Lord's Day 43, it displays the evil of lying and deceit, and it does so by making a connection that should be fixed in our minds and in our hearts, and that is that all forms of lying and deceit truly are the devil's work. Our Catechism cites a verse from our Scripture reading, verse 44 of John 8 in this connection, and this morning we are giving attention to Satan, yes, not that the 9th Commandment or not that this sermon is so much about the devil but rather it is about sins that we are to hate, we are to avoid as devilish, and we're to see these sins in the stark conflict with who we are and how we are to live, how we are to love as God's children. We're to avoid all lying and deceit as the very works of the devil. Our theme is to almost taken verbatim from the Catechism's explanation of the 9th Commandment.

We begin by considering the fact that the devil is a false witness and an accuser. Just think of his first appearance in the Bible. How is Satan depicted? Well, he comes in a form of a serpent to tempt Eve. And yes, he will outright contradict the word of God. He will tell this boldfaced lie to Eve when he says, "You shall not surely die. God says you shall surely die if you eat of this forbidden fruit." Satan, "You shall not surely die." But before he gets to that point, he's already making subtle insinuations by twisting God's word, by misquoting the Lord himself, "Has God said that you may not eat of all the trees of the garden," just inserts a few little words there, "all the trees of the garden?" He bore false witness by twisting the words of God to spread confusion and doubt and to prejudice Eve's mind against God. From the very beginning, he bore false witness against the Lord himself.

You know, that's how these lying witnesses bore false witness against the Lord Jesus Christ, you recall, "He said He would destroy this temple made with hands and rebuild it in three days without hands." Jesus never said any such thing. He said, "Destroy this temple and I will rebuild it in three days," not describing something that he was going to do, describing something that they would do referring to the temple of his body. But they really weren't all that concerned with the details. They had an agenda and so they used some of his words in order to bear false testimony against him to have him killed.

I asked my Catechism class as we considered this Lord's Day this past week, I asked them, "How much would you trust others to give a fair and accurate report of what you said without you being present? How much would you trust them to be completely fair, accurate, honest in telling someone else what you said, especially if it involved a sensitive matter?" I think if we think about that, we'd all kind of want to listen in, wouldn't we? We'd kind of want to know how they quoted us. Did they get it right? Did they respect the actual words that were spoken? Did they take care about the context in which they were spoken? That takes great care, doesn't it? It takes a kind of determination to be fair even against someone that we might not like, because the temptation is a very real thing that we're all guilty of, and reporting what other people said, the temptation is to sensationalize and make a better story of it perhaps, or perhaps to exaggerate one thing or another, or use a tone of voice that communicates something quite different than what was originally said, or take it out of context. The ways in which we can twist the truth, it's like they're almost endless and something that we're all guilty of. We have this tendency and often it's to put others in a bad light or put ourselves in a good light at their expense, or to promote an agenda that we have, and sometimes we're willing to sacrifice, maybe in a small way, the truth or the whole truth for the sake of that agenda.

Satan bore false witness against the Lord. Satan also first appears as an accuser. Actually in Revelation 12, Satan is described there as the accuser of the brethren who accused them before God day and night, and at the exaltation of our Advocate, the accuser of the brethren is cast down. But that's what Satan does, he brings charges. And here actually in Satan's first appearance, he appears not only as a false witness to God but he insinuates a kind of accusation against God that he wants Eve to buy into. "God knows that in the day that you eat of this fruit, you will be like God knowing good and evil." And the subtle accusation there is that, "You see, God actually is withholding something from you. God is not respecting your rights. God might be a little bit jealous of you being raised a little bit higher than He wants you to be. His motives are kind of base and unworthy. Eve, you've got to think through this for yourself. Don't be naive. Don't be gullible. You've got to, in a sense, get behind God's word and evaluate His intentions and maybe judge whether what God says is true and reliable."

Now isn't that the kind of subtle accusation that we're all faced with? It goes like this, "You stick to God's word?" And that means you're kind of simple-minded and it means you're kind of gullible, it means you're kind of foolish, and it's only being honest to say that it's the fear of that accusation that leads so many people to cave into the lies of the Evil One because he has a legion of people that will communicate that very accusation, that will repeat it. They'll repeat it in the university classroom. They're repeating it on the media constantly. Our politicians repeat it. The pop stars repeat this kind of subtle accusation that if you really believe the word of God, if you really follow it for what it says, you know, you're really kind of naive. You're not very sophisticated, really, are you? You're kind of dumb, actually. You've been taken for kind of a fool. While we know that God has made foolish the wisdom of the world but the world judges the word of God to be foolishness, and what that means is that the world will judge you if you hold to the teaching of God's word to be a fool, and there are very few that are able to stand up to

that accusation that you're a fool for following God's word. You're narrow-minded. You're inexperienced. You're uneducated. You've been brainwashed. But we need to be fools for Christ's sake if we're going to resist the subtle, persistent accusation of the devil and of this world that says, "If you follow the word of God, you're a fool."

We can clearly see the devil's work in the Pharisees in John 8. They contradict and accuse Jesus, Jesus the faithful witness, and actually throughout this chapter, there's a lot of witnessing language. Jesus is accused of bearing false witness. In verse 13, "The Pharisees therefore said to Him, 'You bear witness of Yourself; Your witness is not true.'" They presumed to be standing upon the law that requires two or three witnesses. Jesus is bearing witness of himself. And it's interesting that Jesus does acknowledge that he bears witness of himself. He is God and we might say that his word also is self-authenticating. It's true. It carries with it its own authority. But that's not all. Jesus also affirms that the Father also bears witness. In verse 18, "I am One who bears witness of Myself, and the Father who sent Me bears witness of Me."

Oh yes, the word of God bears witnesses to the truth of who Jesus is when you compare his works with the prophecies of Scripture. Even a voice from heaven bore witness to the Son of God as the one in whom the Father is well pleased. His marvelous works bear testimony to his identity according to the Scripture. There's an abundant testimony made clear by the words and the works of the Lord Jesus as to the truth of what he says and who he is. In verse 26, "He who sent Me is true; and I speak to the world those things which I heard from Him. I do nothing of Myself," verse 28, "but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things. And He who sent Me is with Me. The Father has not left Me alone, for I always do those things that please the Father."

And what was their response to such words of truth? They wanted to kill him. What was their response to him for such words of truth? They come up with these horrible accusations. "You have a demon." They want to repeat. "You have a demon." It's astounding, isn't it? Jesus is able to say, "Who of you convicts Me of sin? I always do those things which please the Father," something that no sinner could ever say, and their response was to say, "He's possessed by the devil." The irony, really, is quite astounding, isn't it, because the fact is that they were exposing themselves, they were revealing their true nature as what? Sons of the devil. Those are the words that Jesus uses to describe them. He repeats it, "They're of the seed of the serpent," right? Genesis 3:15, "I'll put enmity between you and the woman and her seed and your seed."

Now, Satan doesn't have natural children, but the world is filled with those who bear his image and his likeness, and they follow his ways without Christ. That's our humanity. And here they seek to crush the seed of a woman. He calls them out and identifies them for who they really are, and that explains their resistance to the truth, their preference for lies. "You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it." He's the father of lies and they bear his likeness by speaking lies and resisting the truth.

The devil is a false witness and an accuser, and the 9th Commandment says don't be like him. Don't do his works. Secondly, the devil is a liar and a deceiver. We heard that in the last part of verse 44. You know that there's a resurgence today, especially in the Western world, there's a resurgence of blatant devil worship. It was on display in the past weeks at the Grammy Awards. I didn't see this myself, but I've heard it described and reported in such a way that would lead anyone who is at all sensitive to the difference between good and evil, saying, "This is awful. It's horrific." And yes, but it's also true that it's awful and horrific for reasons that a lot of people might not appreciate or think. You know that Satanists or I believe at least most Satanists, I know there are different groups of Satanists too, but most satanists, they don't believe in the devil as an actual wicked spirit, as an actual being. They're atheists. They neither believe in God nor do they believe in the devil. And Satan is like a metaphor for their anti-Christian, anti-God philosophy. And their worship of Satan is really just a gross, awful protest against God and against everything that he represents, everything that he stands for. That's why these worship services seek to flaunt the disorder, the dystopia of a world without God, of anarchy and death and ugliness and sexual perversion of every imaginable kind. What are they doing? They're showing their hatred of God. It's a celebration of their rejection of all religious restraints whatsoever, all restraints to their will, to their desire to do what they want, to be their own God. Do you know that what the awful reality is? The awful reality is that they are following the real devil. Unbeknownst to them, they are completely under the power of his lying deception. They're people who promise themselves liberty but they're slaves of corruption. They're taking captive by the devil's will to believe the lie, even the lie that he doesn't exist. They're deceived by the murderer, the murderer of souls.

He is a liar and a murderer. You see, these things, they go together. In verse 44 Jesus identifies these Jewish leaders as sons of the devil because they want to kill him and they're showing their likeness to their father not only in their embrace of the lie and the rejection of the truth but by the consequences of that and leading them to want to destroy the Lord Jesus. His false witness of God and of Christ leads to the murder of souls. Lying tongues that deny the Lord Jesus with false doctrine lead others to eternal destruction. You see it that lies and deceit, they have awful consequences, terrible consequences among people. They can result in literal death. How often is that not the case with respect to false witness? False witness in the courtroom, remember the murder of Naboth because Ahab was sad because Naboth wouldn't sell him his vineyard and his wife Jezebel says, "Are you king or not? We'll take care of this guy." And she went out and she got some false witnesses, set him up in court, "Naboth blasphemed God and the king." Naboth was taken care of. He was murdered by the use of false witnesses.

The result of lies is murder and death, misery, "Here, take this pill. Here, get this injection. It will help you. It will make you feel better. Or you get this surgery and that way your body will reflect your true identity as you choose. Or you remove this blob of tissue from your womb and it won't hinder your freedom, and it won't cause any troubles for you whatsoever." The ways in which the lie is combined with mutilation and murder and misery are unfold, innumerable. Lying and murder ought to be joined very closely together in our minds. Lies and deceit have awful consequences among people. You

know, the Bible often uses violent and deadly imagery for the misuse of the tongue. It's a world of fire, James says. In Psalm 57 it says, "My soul is among lions. I lie among the sons of men who are set on fire, whose teeth are spears and arrows and their tongue a sharp sword." Now, does that mean that they actually have filed their teeth down to bite and devour? No. Their tongue, their teeth, their mouths speak such destructive lives that pierce, that cut, that wound.

In Proverbs 25, we have similar imagery where it says in verse 18, "A man who bears false witness against his neighbor Is like a club, a sword, and a sharp arrow." Again, violent imagery to describe the harm that's done through a false witness. Many passages in the Proverbs also are indeed calculated to create this revulsion and this hatred for such things. In chapter 6, "A worthless person, a wicked man, Walks with a perverse mouth; He winks with his eyes, He shuffles his feet, He points with his fingers; Perversity is in his heart, He devises evil continually, He sows discord. These six things the LORD hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him: A proud look, A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil, A false witness who speaks lies, And one who sows discord among brethren." How many of those descriptions of what God hates pertain to bloodshed, violence, murder and falsehood with all its destructive influences? These are the very works of the devil that we're to avoid.

The devil doesn't love the truth nor does he love others. In other words, the devil does not do what we are called to do by grace. We are called not only to avoid the works of the devil but we're to do the opposite. We're to use the power of the tongue for life, not death, for healing and not harm. Six times in our Scripture reading from John 8 we have the word "truth." Truth. Jesus was a man who told you the truth, who spoke the truth about himself, about God. He spoke the truth very candidly, very boldly and openly, even though it meant exposing sin, and he uses rather hard language. But it's the truth that sets free. You shall know the truth, and it shall set you free, free from slavery to sin.

The first positive command of the 9th Commandment is to love the truth, to love it from the heart, to love the truth of who God is, to love the truth of the gospel, to love the Lord Jesus who himself is the truth, the way, the life. And where there is a love for the truth, for God's sake, and a love for Christ, there will be a love for truth as truth. There's a sacredness to the truth that should create an aversion in each of us to play fast and loose with it in any way. Love your neighbor by your use of the truth, and sometimes that love means that we that we cover up the truth. Oh yeah, because love covers a multitude of sins and there are multitude of sins that should be buried in silence that ought not to be brought up, that ought not to be repeated but covered in love.

Love also confronts sin. Open rebuke, the Proverb also says, is better than secret love, and Jesus said, "If your brother sins against you, tell him his fault between you and him alone. Don't tell his fault to others. Tell him his fault. If he hears you, you've gained your brother. If he won't hear you, bring with you one or two, or two or three, then at the mouth of two or three witnesses, every word may be established." The aim here is reconciliation. The aim is faithful confrontation with a goal. That is good and wholesome.

It means caring about the reputation of others as much as you care about your own reputation.

Here again, it's a matter of applying the golden rule, right, to love our neighbor as ourselves. I think, I daresay that we're all a little bit sensitive about our reputation. We're all naturally concerned if we think that people are saying bad things about us and we wonder who has been told or how that's affecting the way others might look at us, right? Now that doesn't mean that we should be ruled by what other people think about us. We shouldn't be ruled by the fear of man, but on the other hand, we all know that it hurts. It hurts to be misrepresented. It hurts to be lied about. It hurts to be talked about unnecessarily even about faults and weaknesses. And so if we love our neighbors as we love ourselves, then we'll try to avoid doing that to others.

Let's stand together against our common enemy. The devil is our common enemy. We're not to join, the Catechism says, we're not to join in condemning anyone rashly or without a hearing. In other words, we're not to join with those who accuse and that means we're not to join with the accuser and take part perhaps in his devilish work of bringing up past sins of long ago, or bringing up forgiven sins, or bringing up weaknesses. We don't want to add to the weight of those who already may be burdened with a conscience that is awake to God. We don't want to add to the temptation to discouragement over the reality of our common failings.

One of the other proof texts that the Catechism cites here is 1 Peter 3 where it says, "Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling," even someone who says something bad to you or about you, don't return evil for evil, don't justify your exaggerations, don't justify your misrepresentations, don't justify your desire to sensationalize and put someone in a bad light because they're bad people and you're sure of it. And so they deserve it if other people think badly of them too. No, don't return evil for evil.

As Christians, we share a message of no condemnation, "There is therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus," and we ought to not only live as the justified but view others as among the justified. That doesn't mean that we don't have a concern for our sanctification or their sanctification. It doesn't mean that we never bring up issues. But we do not bring them up in order to judge and to condemn and to hurt and to put down. Sometimes it may be to convict, sometimes it might be to help and to humble with truth, but if we love others it's intended for good.

And we need to know our common position as those for whom there is no condemnation. "Who is he who condemns?" Well, the devil would condemn us yet in our own consciences, and there's enough to take hold of because of the reality of our sin. But the devil would stir us up with thoughts of despair and hopelessness and guilt when those sins have been forgiven. It is Christ who died. Furthermore, he's risen again. He's even at the right hand of God. And there he is our Advocate. He speaks for us. He defends us not as innocent, not as perfect, but as forgiven sinners whom he loves who are accepted in the



Beloved for his sake. "Receive one another," Paul says, "even as Christ also received us to the glory of God." Amen.