

The 3rd Commandment: Using His Name Rightly

Exodus 20:7

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As we wade deeper into the Ten Commandments, I think it should become clearer why people don't want them hanging around. They are intrusive. They step on our toes. They get in our business. They confront us not just with how far off society is, but how far off we are. And we've only looked at 20% of them. They show us the truth of (Romans 3:23 ESV), *"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."*

At least we have a breather this week; an easy one. No problem. This one only has to do with our tongue, our words, our integrity, profanity, and vulgarity. Now, I want you to know on the front end that to talk about this I might say a word or two in explanation that in conversation would be profanity. I only say these for teaching clarity, not to sensationalize. I also thought it wise to warn you at the beginning to insure that now I know I have everyone's attention.

The first commandment was to love, treasure, and prioritize God more than anyone or anything else. The second commandment calls us to love the right God in the right way. We are not to have any man-made representations of God that we worship as God or think draw us closer to God. There is only one way to God and that is the actual person, Jesus. Pictures, sculptures, religious images, jewelry, or refrigerator magnets don't draw us to God. Only Jesus does.

The third commandment is as follows: *"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain."* (Exodus 20:7)

Here are a couple other translations:

NIV: "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name."

NRSV: "You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name."

There is a part of this we are very familiar with. Names. Everyone here has a name. That name was given to you by your parents. They picked that name for any number of reasons. It may have been a family name, a favorite Bible name, a hero to them, or they liked how it sounds.

Some people pick a name because of what it means. This was very true in the Old Testament. Jesus was the best example when the angel told Mary and Joseph to name him Jesus, which means "Savior." The reason given was that "he shall save his people from their sins." The meaning of the name was important. Some of us maybe don't know what our names mean but that's just a different culture.

There is one person for whom the meaning of their name is of utmost importance—God. Our parents name us, but who names God? God names himself. Every name he gives

himself is intended to tell us what he is like. "God is that which he calls himself, and he calls himself that which he is." (Herman Bavinck, *The Doctrine of God*, p. 85.)

God's name represents his nature and infinite worth. To misuse his name is to profane his character which is infinitely glorious and holy.

God's self-chosen names are intrinsically connected to his personhood. He is what he names himself. So his covenantal name, Yahweh, is holy because it is a self-chosen revelation of who he is. Jesus' name is a God-chosen name and revelation of God, therefore it is holy. By the way, it is not the letters arranged in the name or the name in isolation. It all has to do with who it is tied to. I remember years ago the Cubs had an infielder named Jesus. Was it breaking the 3rd commandment to say something bad about him or worse, to give him an error for some play? "Fielding error by Jesus." That sounds blasphemous. No. That name was not connected to God; it was connected to the Cubs.

The names of God are holy to God and therefore must be holy to us. "*You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.*" The "in vain" then is the issue. We can certainly use the name of God; that's why he gave it to us. We must not misuse it. *In vain* literally means "for unreality; for what is not true." This is to use his name inconsistent with the glory that is God's; to not give it reverence; to not give it weight. One translator says, "*You shall not lift up the name of the Lord your God for nothingness.*" (Larsson, as quoted by Philip Graham Ryken, *Written in Stone: The Ten Commandments and Today's Moral Crisis*, p. 87.)

When we lift up God's name for nothingness, with lightness, or irreverence, we are not treating his name as holy. Since he is what he calls himself, to treat his name irreverently is to treat God irreverently. Do we see the why? God is holy. Therefore, his name is holy. What we do with his name, in God's eyes, we do to him.

Verbal Idolatry

The law of God is a whole. The third commandment is part and parcel of the other nine. First commandment, God is first in my heart. Second commandment, worship the right God the right way. The third commandment is essentially the same as the first two. Love God so much that you love and reverence everything that expresses his holy character, starting with his name.

Profaning the name of God is like the idolatry of the 2nd commandment. The 2nd commandment says, don't think you can take the greatness and majesty of God and contain it in anything you make. Idols are lies. They demean the glory of God. The third commandment is not something made but something said. My words demean God's glory by trying to contain and control God by what I say. It's verbal idolatry.

So for example, when some says "God damn" this or that, what are they actually saying? God is my puppet and will do my bidding and damn to hell whoever I tell him to. It's verbal idolatry. It puts God at the whim of man, which is the essence of sin. It's man ruling God. It's man on the throne. It is God bowing to man instead of man bowing to God.

Don't do that. God will not hold him guiltless who does. The only way a blasphemer can be guiltless is by faith in Jesus. But even that gives us pause to realize that every

profanity for the Christian is a sin Jesus bore on the cross. Jesus died bearing the guilt for the sin of blaspheming his own name.

Reverencing God's Name in Everything

Keeping vows/oaths/promises

The Jews at the time of Jesus had a tricky way of making promises. They would invoke something or swear by something as proof of how serious they were about fulfilling their promise—not in God's name, but by somebody or something else. Jesus addressed this in the Sermon on the Mount.

But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil. (Matthew 5:34-37)

Jesus is not only addressing the use of God's name but also the invoking of anything and the breaking that vow. The Jews would swear by heaven or the holy city of Jerusalem but then think they could break their promise. Jesus says all these are tied to God's character and glory.

In our day, we call this swearing an oath. Do you promise? Yes. Do you swear on your grandmother's grave? With God as your witness? We invoke these things that are seemingly sacred to us as proof that we will do what we say.

The concern of the 2nd commandment is false oaths—invoking God's name in making an oath and then not doing what we promise. Jesus goes on to say we should live such lives of integrity that our "yes" is "yes" and our "no" is "no." We don't need sacred things to insure our promise keeping.

Does that mean we shouldn't take oaths? No. Courts require an oath. Marriage requires an oath. We sign legal documents to promise certain things. That is fine as long as we do what we say we will do. Our "yes" is "yes" and our "no" is "no."

Abstaining from using profanity

To profane something requires it to have an inherent sacredness. If nothing is sacred, nothing is profane. This is how all human profanity is indirectly a statement of reverence or worship.

Profanity's power comes from the inherent glory of the thing it profanes. Our English profanity proves it: "God!" "Oh God!" "Oh my God!" "Jesus!" "Christ!" "Hell." It can be an activity of God, like damnation; or something that God has declared sacred like the human body and its functions; sexuality. All things created prior to the Fall and declared by God to be "very good." Profanity has its own abbreviations today. "OMG!"

Profanity misuses God's name by invoking the name without worship and without reverence. We say the name Jesus Christ a lot around here. But we say it consistent with who he is and it comes from a context of adoration and worship. When someone says "Jesus Christ" pejoratively, they are verbally grabbing the glory of Jesus' personhood and treating it like it is has no value. They are doing with it as they please.

Imagine someone taking the Mona Lisa and cleaning their toilet with it. Or imagine someone spraying graffiti all over The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. There would be outrage. That doesn't even begin to reflect a sinner taking the name of God and its expression of God's holy majesty, and uttering it as a curse.

This is what gives profanity its power. The words have power because what those words represent have glory. Nobody curses saying, "Earthworm!" "Butterflies!" "Son of a Pink Swan!" Guys at the mill would look at you like you are an idiot. That's not real cussing because there's not enough sacred in an earthworm to make it an effective cuss word. But the name of God, the name of Jesus, the activity of God, sexuality, body parts, and body functions—this is what sinners use to infect their words and thoughts with power. "Look at me! I can take holy things and by cursing with them, I'm greater than them." They know what they are doing.

I've told the story before, but it fits so well. Some years ago I went golfing by myself here in Crown Point. When you do that, sometimes you are matched with another golfer and this time I was. This guy was cursing from the moment I met him—nearly every shot. Every other word as we rode together in the cart. I asked him on Hole 1 or 2 what he did for a living. It was like taking a verbal bath in a toilet. Somewhere around Hole 6 he turned to me and said, "So what do you do for a living?" I said, "I'm the Senior Pastor of Bethel Church." He immediately said, "I'm so sorry!" And for 12 glorious holes, I don't know that a single profane thing came out of his mouth. Why? He was playing golf with a pastor which, to some people is like having God in the cart with you.

Abstaining from using "almost" profanity

I want to talk about this because in Christian circles, you don't often hear hard profanity, but you do hear lots of words that sound like or rhyme with profane words, or they just rearrange the letters of those words. "Gosh." "Darn." "Shoot." "Suck." There are many others. Why do we use almost profanity? In exclamation, our mind searches for an expression and somehow "Shoooot" seems natural.

Are these right or wrong? Let me ask you this, when you get to heaven and give an account for your life before God, how will this sound, "I didn't profane your name exactly, it just sounded like I did." If I am outraged at our pastoral staff, do they feel okay if I scream almost profanities? It's silly, but then isn't almost profanity silly? Why even get close to profaning the holy name of God?

If you have to say something, how about this: "llsjdffasjf"? Anything else that is a superficial sidestepping of God's name, the human body, or any other sacred part of this creation, is profaning what is holy.

Honoring the Glorious Name of God

How do we honor the name of God? It actually has nothing to do with our tongue; it's about 12 inches lower than that. It is the heart.

The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil, for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. (Luke 6:45)

What we say with our tongue is what is in our hearts. So the key is not what we say about God here but whether we love and treasure him here. I'll bet we have people right here in this room who once cursed like sailors but when they received Jesus as their Savior, their talk changed. Their talk changed because their heart changed. Now there is holy reverence and gratitude to God. Why would I put his name in the toilet? Why would I treat it like a common thing? I can't. He has been so gracious and forgiving to me. When we become Christians, now we love God and treasure everything that reflects his holy character, including his name, his creation, the human body, sexuality, etc. When I love God, everything good is sacred and treasured.

That is where our world is so far away. So crude and profane and lost. There are no ultimate answers. Nothing's holy or sacred. Yet they mock God and what he calls holy. I didn't watch it, but last week's Grammys was a picture of a world without God, lost in spiritual profanity without anything sacred to live for.

How Do We Honor His Name?

Prayer: *"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."* (Matthew 6:9)

Worship: *"Praise the name of the LORD; give praise O servants of the Lord!"* (Ps. 135:1)

Evangelism: *"No other name under heaven...by which we must be saved."* (Acts 4:12)

Forgiveness: *"...in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins."* (Acts 2:38)

Preaching: telling about the name of Jesus (Acts 8:12; Acts 9:28)

Baptizing: *"...in the name of the Father...the Son...and the Holy Spirit."* (Matthew 28:19)

Praise: *"...the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name."* (Hebrews 13:15)

Serving: *"your work and the love that you have shown for his name."* (Hebrews 6:10)

In these ways we hallow and honor his name, but this begins in the heart. When God is great here [in my heart], my words show it here [in my mouth].

Our words are powerful and they mean something to God. If you struggle with the 3rd command, confess it as sin to God. Ask him to grant you obedience to the first command. When you love him more than anything, you will find your tongue not profaning, but praising. No cursing but blessing. No demeaning but delighting in the wonder and the glory of a God who has loved you in Jesus. Hallowed be his name.

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