

The Name Above All Names

Exodus 20:7

*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.*

We are looking for Jesus in Exodus. He has told us that we can and should see him in the Old Testament and thus far, we've seen him in Genesis and Exodus. Right now, we're looking for him in the Ten Commandments.

1st Commandment – Don't have any other gods before me. Why would you?

2nd Commandment – Don't make any image of me. How could you?

3rd Commandment – Don't take my name in vain.

We've seen Jesus in the 1st commandment as the faithful son who always honored and obeyed the Father and never put anything or anyone, even himself, before the Father.

Last week, in the 2nd commandment, we saw Jesus as the image of God. Do you want to know what God is like? Jesus is the best picture.

This were we're looking at the name of God and what it means to take it in vain. Let's begin with,

First: The Glory of God of his Name

Isaiah 57:15 - *"Thus says the One . . . who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy."* His name defines him.

Isaiah 9:6 - *"To us a child is born, to us a son is given; . . . his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."* His names defines him.

Matthew 1:21 - *"You shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."* His name defines him.

Revelation 19:13 & 16 - *"The name by which he is called is The Word of God. . . . On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords."* His name defines him.

This may not be true of us, but it is of God.

Is it any wonder that Jesus said -

Matthew 6:9b – Hallowed be your name.

When God introduces himself to anyone in the OT, he uses his name, and that name describes who he is –

Exodus 3:14 – I am who I am.

Genesis 16:13 – [Hagar said to God] So she called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, “You are a God of seeing, [El Roi] for she said, “Truly here I have seen him who looks after me.”

Note: Hagar is the only person in the Bible who names God.

That God has revealed himself to us and that he has given us access to him is something that should never be taken for granted. He is the only God and he is a thrice-holy God (Isaiah 6:3).

Ezekiel 39:25 – [Concerning the high priest’s garments] They also made bells of pure gold, and put the bells between the pomegranates all around the hem of the robe, between the pomegranates... (just in case he died while in the Holy of Holies)

To use his name disrespectfully is to dishonor him. It is to speak ill of him. Thus, God says that he will not consider a person guiltless for misusing his name.

Second: The Meaning of the Text

- Exodus 20:2 - *“I am the LORD your God.”*
- Exodus 20:5 - *“I, the LORD your God am a jealous God.”*
- Exodus 20:7a - *“You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain...”*
- Exodus 20:7b - *“...for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.”*

This is an important text to understand but to understand it, we need to know what ‘vain’ means and it means pointless, useless, empty, void of meaning.

Jeremiah 2:30 - In vain have I struck your children; but they took no correction.

Jeremiah 4:30 - In vain you beautify yourself. Your lovers despise you.

Jeremiah 6:29 - In vain the refining goes on, for the wicked are not removed.

Jeremiah 46:11 - In vain you have used many medicines; there is no healing for you

Ill – We raised our children to use God’s name only when speaking to him or about him. In addition, we never said things like, “Gosh,” or “Golly,” because we considered thus substitutions for God’s name; a way to try to get around the 3rd commandment.

I think many of us view the commandment this way; as a prohibition against using curse words or abusing the name of God in speech. Of course, in a culture such as ours, we can easily fall into the trap of speaking of God irreverently.

This commandment certainly includes those thoughts – don’t take God’s name in vain-without profit, uselessly, for no reason - but they don’t exhaust its application.

For instance, this text is probably more about taking oaths or making promises, which, in the Old Testament, were to be made in God’s name as a symbol of one’s truthfulness and commitment, and then breaking your word, thus defaming God’s name.

Leviticus 19:12 - You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.

Ask yourself, “*Has God ever broken his word? Has he failed to keep a promise?*” The answer is, “*No.*” When the Israelites made vows/promises/covenants in God’s name, they were to keep their word as though keeping it to God. And being an Israelite, one of God’s chosen people, to break a promise reflected on the God whom the Hebrew worshipped. It made God look like an oath-breaker.

- Goliath was guilty of taking the Lord’s name in vain and he ended up with a rock in his head. This means only a blockhead takes God’s name in vain.
- Sennacherib too, took the Lord’s name in vain and it cost him 250,000 soldiers and his own life.

This command is a lot like the 9th command that forbids harming our neighbor by a false oath. The third commandment is concerned about harming the reputation and name of God because of a false oath. Just as the ninth commandment tells us that we must protect our neighbor's name and reputation, so the third commandment tells us that we must protect God's name and reputation.

In particular, God's name is not to be appealed to in an oath in any solemn situation unless we intend to be faithful to the commitment that we are giving our word to.

I am still convinced that we should use God's name only when we are talking to him or about him. And I'm still convinced that we shouldn't use substitutes for God's name in an effort to get away with using some other form of his name. But there is far more to it than that.

Third: The New Testament Application

There is no NT text telling us to make oaths in God's name. Instead...

Matthew 5:33-37 - *"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.'³⁴ But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God,³⁵ or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.³⁶ And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.³⁷ Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil.*

Fourth: The Name of Jesus

Does this mean we are free from the third commandment? Oh no.

Philippians 2:9 – Speaking of Jesus, Paul said - *God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name.*

Wasn't that a great song we sang about the name of Jesus?

*There is a name more brilliant than the sun.
There is a name our hope is built upon.
Greater than disappointments, stronger than sin's offense.
Higher than any other, nothing can stand against.
Brighter than earthly glory, banner and strong defense.
And at the name of Jesus, heaven begins to dance.*

The name "Israel" means "Struggler with God," or "a man seeing God," or "God perseveres," but most people don't know that and won't know that unless they look for some reason or someone tells them.

But, "Christian" is another matter. No one has to explain that "Christian" implies, "Christ-follower."

We are to live in a way that honors the name of Christ and when we don't, it defames Jesus, breaking the 3rd commandment.

Luke 6:46 - Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?

In other words, don't claim the name of Jesus, unless you live a life that respects and honors his name. This means the commandment isn't just about our words but our lives.

Our lives reflect our God, and our untruthfulness is a poor reflection on Him.

Look again at the warning in the latter part of v 7: *"for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name."*

This implies that we might be among that group to whom Jesus one day says,

Matthew 7:21 & 23 – Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven....And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

Last week we remembered Jesus and his saving work for us in communion. But it shouldn't be a once-a-week thing. The name of Jesus should be on our hearts.

Conclusion: Perhaps this series on the Ten Commandments should be titled, "10 for 21" because we are learning how to apply the TC in our 21st century.

Succinctly put, Dr. Adrian Rogers says there are three ways to break this command:

- 1 - Profanity
- 2 - Frivolity
- 3 - Hypocrisy

For Christians: When our hearts are emptied of *affections* for God, then our words are emptied of the *truth* of God, and our actions and words are vain, futile, pointless.

Don't treat God's name as empty, futile, pointless, trivial, inconsequential, or insignificant.

For nonChristians: It is no wonder people want to do away with the TC. They are so counter-cultural in a world that wants to forget promises as soon as they are made. Of course, behind that is the hope that God doesn't exist and, that if he does, he doesn't keep his word about judgement.

But if the greatest commandment is to love God with all our hearts, then speaking the name of God and keeping our word are expressions of loving God and keeping the greatest commandment.

In this command, we learn that Words are never just words. Words make and break worlds. Everything that is, apart from God, began with words. By making us in his image, God gave us his own ability to communicate. This means that we image God by our speech and, our words, like God's can lead to life, and they can lead to death (Prov 18:21).

Psalm 18:10a - *The name of the Lord is a strong tower.*

Don't treat God's name like a dilapidated shack.

Let's respond to God's revelation about honoring him with our words by remembering, *How Great is our God.*

Community Groups

- 1 – How do the Ten Commandments begin?
- 2 – Why is this important?
- 3 - Restate the first commandment and think about how we see Jesus in it.
- 4 – Restate the second commandment and think about how we see Jesus in it.
- 5 – Restate the third commandment.
- 6 – Read Psalm 8:1; Psalm 111:9, Exodus 3:14 and Genesis 16:13. How does God's name reveal his character?
- 7 – What does the third commandment imply/mean?
- 8 – In the OT, how did Israel take God's name in vain?
- 9 – In the OT, how did individual Hebrews take God's name in vain?
- 9 – In the NT, how are we to make oaths/promises?
- 10 – Read Matthew 5:33-37. How does it revolutionize promise making/keeping?
- 11 – Read Luke 6:46. Why is important that Christians live like Jesus?
- 12 – What does Matthew 7:21-23 mean?

Daily Devotion

Monday, August 21st. Read Ex 20:7; Is 57:15; Is 9:6; Matt 1:21; Gen 16:13. How does God's name describe/define him in these verses? Where do you see God's majesty? Does God's holiness set the tone for your relationship to him? What does it mean to you that God was, is and always will be? God always sees you. How does this encourage you in trials, encourage your holiness, etc? In conversation today, use one of these verses to help someone else better understand God.

Tuesday, August 22nd. Read Ex 20:7; Lev 19:12; Ps 15:4 ("he who swears to his own hurt"). Has God ever broken his word? What does this say about God? When you speak of him, do you speak of him like a strong tower or a crumbling shack? How does this encourage your trust in God and his Word? What about you? Are you trustworthy, even when being so, costs you something, time, effort, sacrifice, etc. This is something to work on in your life. Don't promise everything. Make few promises. Keep the promises you make. Use these verses to help your own heart make and keep your word but also use them to help others do the same.

Wednesday, August 23rd. Read Ex 20:7 & Matt 5:33-37. In Matthew, Jesus explains Ex 20:7. Any promise/vow/covenant may be given to people but it is also made to the Lord and should be kept. But Jesus then instructs us to let our word be our word. This is a revolutionary thought in Jesus's time. Christians don't need to 'swear' by our God or any other thing ("on my mother's grave," "pinky promise," etc) to make us keep our word because we are Christians, indwelt by our God who sees/hears what we do and enables us to keep our word. Let Matt 5 sink in. Then let it affect the way you act and speak. If you find a friend or family member who breaks their word, take them aside and encourage them from Matt 5:33-37.

Thursday, August 24th. Read Ex 20:7; Phil 2:9; Lk 6:46 Matt 7:21-23. Think about it. How would it affect you and your relationship to God if you knew he might not keep his word? As Christians, our word reflects our God. Even Jesus kept his word to "his own hurt" (Ps 15:4). How about you? Use these verses this week to stir your own heart to word-keeping. Then, in a casual conversation with someone, interject why it is important for Christians to keep our word.

Friday, August 25th. Read Ex 20:7; Eph 1:4; Lk 22:42. The Trinity created salvation's plan before the foundation of the world. How is Luke 22:42 an expression of Jesus keeping his word to the Father and the Spirit? Because of Calvary, we know God is a promise-keeping God. What is the most important Bible promise to you? Use that verse and

promise to remind someone of God's promise-keeping character and then, ask them, "What is the most important Bible promise to you?" Then, toge