

Reverence God's Name
Exodus 20:7
Pastor John Miller

I want to read the First, Second and Third Commandments, in Exodus 20:3-7. "You shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image...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."

The Ten Commandments were given for several reasons. I want to mention three reasons why they were given. Number one, to reveal God's holiness. When you read the Ten Commandments, you are actually learning that God is holy, and that is the number one attribute by which God wants to be known. He is set apart unto Himself. Number two, the Ten Commandments teach us that man is sinful and needs a Savior. Number three, the Ten Commandments reveal God's will on how we should live.

No one is saved by keeping the Ten Commandments. I don't want anyone to misunderstand that. I don't want anyone to think, "If I keep the Ten Commandments, I get to go to heaven." But we keep the Commandments because we are saved. God writes His Laws on our hearts, and as we walk in the Spirit, we fulfill the Law. But that's not because we will save ourselves; we've already been saved by grace through faith.

In Romans 3:20, Paul says, "Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin." The Law brings us a knowledge of our sin and our need of a Savior. Then we are driven to Christ for salvation, we trust Him and then are saved by grace through faith. Ephesians 2:8-10 says, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them." Salvation is not by your works. Romans 8:4 says, "...the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."

Now we come to the Third Commandment, in verse 7. "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain..."—and then there is this punishment—"...for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain."

There are three simple questions I want to ask about the Third Commandment and seek their answers. The first question is, "What does it mean?" The second question is, "How is it broken?" And the third question is, "How is it kept?"

The First Commandment, in verse 3, commands us to worship God only. We're not to have any "other gods before [Him]." The Second Commandment, in verse 4, commands us to worship God "in spirit and truth." We're not to make any idols in our worship of God. Now this Third Commandment commands us to reverence and have respect for God's name. These first three

Commandments kind of flow together. And the first four Commandments are kind of theological, doctrinal and have to do with our relationship to God. So it starts with the true God who we have to worship, in the right way and respect His name, His nature and His character.

The New Testament counterpart to this is given in Matthew 6:9, when Jesus gave us what is commonly called “The Lord’s Prayer.” He said, “In this manner, therefore, pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.’” That’s what it means to not break this Commandment. We don’t want to take God’s name in vain; we want to hallow God’s name by our lips, by our attitude and by the way we conduct ourselves. So we don’t want to break this Commandment.

Now my first question is, “What does it mean to ‘take the name of the Lord your God in vain’?” There are three key words I want you to focus on, in verse 7. The words are “take...name...vain.”

First, the word “take” means “to take up” or “to bear.” So the idea is that we take up the name of God or bear it by professing to be a Christian. If you’re a Christian, you have the name of Christ; you are a “Christ-ian” or a Christ follower bearing His name. If you profess faith in Jesus Christ, you confessed Him before men. So you are taking up His name. Anyone who publically proclaims to be a believer has taken up that name. When you sing, when you pray, when you preach, when you proclaim, you’re taking up the name of the Lord.

The word “name,” in the phrase “the name of the Lord,” is Jehovah Elohim. It doesn’t refer to an individual name or a personal name. It’s not Jehovah, Yahweh or the name Jesus. But it is the nature and character of God. The word “name” here speaks of character, personality and authority. So when we talk about taking “the name of the Lord your God,” we’re talking about taking God Himself—His nature, His character and who He is.

The word “vain” mean “unreal, hollow, empty or frivolous.” So because I’m a Christian, I’m not to take up the name—the character, the nature—of God in a frivolous, unconcerned way. We are not to be hypocritical, but we are to be men and women of integrity.

So to take God’s name in vain happens when our lips and our lives or our belief and our behavior dishonor God’s nature and character. Any hypocrisy, duplicity or insincerity is taking up the name of God in vain. It’s not just saying His name as a swear word or in profanity, but it is also professing to be a Christian but not living according to your principles. It’s one thing to be a professor, and it’s another thing to be a possessor. Our lips and our lives must be consistent with one another as we worship the Lord and hallow His name.

My second question is, “How is this Commandment broken?” or “How do we violate this prohibition and take the name of the Lord in vain?” I’ve reduced a long list to only three ways. First is frivolous oath-taking or flippancy. It would be without thinking or frivolously using the name of God in a swear word or curse word.

But when we go into a courtroom and put our hand on a Bible, under civil law, we are required to do that. This is not a violation when we answer “I do” to the question, “Do you swear to tell

the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?" That's okay. And if you swear to God to tell the truth, you'd better do it, because you're bringing God into it, you're invoking God.

The Jews would actually swear to Jehovah, using the name of the Lord, but they weren't truthful about it. They weren't sincere. Leviticus 19:12 says, "And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God." And in Isaiah 48:1, it says, "...who swear by the name of the Lord, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth or in righteousness." So they were using God's name to take an oath, but they were disrespecting the God whose name they were using. He was saying that this should not happen.

How the Jews reverence God's name is amazing. When the Jewish scribes would write the Scriptures and come to the name of the Lord—there are over 300 names used for God in the Bible, such as Elohim, Adonai, Jehovah our Righteousness—they would stop, lay down their pen, go take a bath, put on fresh clothes, pick up a new, never-used pen, dip it in new ink and write the name Elohim or Jehovah or Yahweh. They would write down the name of God.

If they were reading the Bible and came to the name of the Lord, they would bow their head and say "the name." They thought the name of the Lord was too holy, too high and too righteous to pronounce on their own lips.

So they were doing it frivolously and flippantly. They weren't really thinking about the honesty that was involved in the confession of God's name.

The Jews were very reverent of God's name, so when they took an oath sometimes and wanted to get around lying, they wouldn't say, "in the name of God," they would say, "in the name of heaven" or "in heaven's name." We use that expression. Or they would use the earth; they would say, "I swear on the temple in Jerusalem."

Jesus actually rebuked them for this when He said, in Matthew 5:34-35, "But I say to you, do not swear at all; neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King." So whatever you swear by is still connected to God, so you need to be reverential in the use of oaths.

Today people use the expression when they make a statement, "I swear to God." They're not in a courtroom, their hand's not on a Bible, they're not under oath. Why do they do that? Because they lie so much that they have to say, "I swear to God" to get people to believe them. If you just tell the truth, you don't have to say, "I swear to God." You can drop that from your vocabulary.

It's interesting again that Jesus said, in Matthew 5:37 that "Let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one." All you need to say is a "Yes" or a "No." You don't have to say, "I swear to God" or "I'm telling you the truth." Be a person of integrity. You don't need to use the name of God.

The second way this Commandment is often broken is in the use of profanity or obscene

language or swearing. The Bible has a lot to say about the words we use, that they need to be pure. Someone said, "Profanity is a linguistic crutch of the inarticulate." It doesn't take a high IQ or a high education to swear. Anyone can cuss and swear. But it's kind of like, "I'm cool. Aren't I awesome! I swear. I want to be accepted by my friends." Young people start to curse and swear, and then they carry it over into adulthood. It's like they never grow up and their speech never cleans up. Every other word is a cuss word or a swear word or a foul word.

And because of the culture we live in today, we can't go anywhere in public where we don't hear vulgarity. You don't want to hear it, but you hear it because everyone's using it.

It's an indication of a person's heart. Someone said, "If it's in the well, it comes up in the bucket." Sometimes people will cuss and look up, and there's Pastor Miller. "Oh, Pastor Miller! I'm sorry. I don't know where that came from."

I say, "I know where that came from. It came from your heart."

"If it's in the well, it comes up in the bucket." We're sometimes concerned with the pastor hearing our swearing, but God heard you swear. It dishonored God, degraded you and you're taking God's name in vain.

Why is it—I do not know—that we have to use the name of Jesus, Jesus Christ or God to damn people and to swear? Why is it when you're hammering a nail and you hit your thumb instead of the nail that you don't say, "Oh, Buddha!" or "Oh, Confucius!"?

Before I got saved, I had a filthy mouth. And when I got saved, God took out my old heart and gave me a new heart. Praise God! And I remember when I hit my thumb one time, I said, "Oh, praise the Lord!" And I looked around and said, "Wow! I've been born again!" The heart had been changed. That was one of the first things I noticed in my life that God changed. It was my foul speech, because God had changed my heart. "Old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

Jesus said, "Out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks." And in Colossians 3:8, Paul says, "You yourselves are to put off...filthy language out of your mouth." So like a soiled piece of garment, you're to take off that dirty language and not to speak that way.

In Ephesians 4:29-30, it says, "Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption." Foul speech dishonors God and grieves the Holy Spirit.

If you are struggling with vulgarity, get on your knees and ask God to forgive you. And ask God to give you His Spirit and a new heart, and to change the way that you speak.

Number three, this Commandment is violated by hypocrisy. This is one that really hits home. So it is not only violated by flippancy and profanity but also by hypocrisy. Whenever our

practice contradicts our profession, we are taking God's name in vain. Jesus said, "Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord' and not do the things which I say?" You profess Jesus as Lord, but you really haven't submitted to His lordship. You're taking His name and using it in a vain way. That's hypocrisy.

When we pray, we pray "in Jesus name." Did you ever think about what that means? Are those just like magic words that you tag on the end of your prayer? And if you say them with real emphasis, that sounds authoritative and powerful. No. Weird is what it is. Would you talk to your friend like that? No.

When we pray "in Jesus name," what it means is "according to His will, for Jesus' sake, for Jesus' glory, for Jesus' honor." What we are saying is "hallowed be the name of Jesus." So my prayer must not be selfish; I must accept God's purpose and plan. Whenever you pray, you must pray, "Thy will be done," not mine. You're praying, "Have Thine own way, Lord"; you yield to Him and you put Jesus' name on the end of your prayer, saying for Jesus' sake, for Jesus' honor and for Jesus' glory. "In Jesus name."

And this Commandment can also be violated on Sunday morning in a worship service. Not with profanity but with hypocrisy. This is really tough. We sing,

"Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!

Thou art the potter, I am the clay.

Mold me and make me after Thy will,

While I am waiting, yielded and still."

But we don't surrender our lives to God. That's hypocrisy. You just sang what you didn't really mean. You just proclaimed what you don't really practice. Or you sing,

"I surrender all,

I surrender all;

All to Thee my blessed Savior,

I surrender all."

And then you don't surrender all.

One of the problems with a living sacrifice is it has a tendency to keep crawling off the altar. You ever notice that? "My all's on the altar. Lord, I give you my life." But you mean only until the party on Friday night. But it's just for the night; you'll put it back on Sunday.

So when you sing, think about the words that you are professing. Are they consistent with your life? Are your lips and life consistent in your worship? Maybe you sing,

“Take my silver and my gold.

Not a mite will I withhold.”

But you don’t really give your talents and treasures to God.

You may say, “Well, Pastor, it’s no big deal. It’s just a little thing taking the name of God in vain. It’s not murder. It’s not adultery.”

But it is a big deal. Notice the punishment of the prohibition, in verse 7. This is the reason why we should not take the name of the Lord in vain: “...for the Lord...”—it’s all capitals, so it means “Yahweh” or “Jehovah”—“...will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.” This is a unique Commandment in that He attaches on this punishment.

God takes His name seriously, and so should we. Don’t trifle with the name of God. Don’t trifle with the reverential name of God.

In Acts 4-5, the church was blessed; it was growing and prosperous. Everyone was selling property they had and gave the proceeds to the church. They were honored by that. One couple that was connected to the church, who were professors, was Ananias and Sapphira. They conspired together to sell some of their land and to give it to the church. But they didn’t give all the proceeds to the church; they held some of it back. But they were going to let the church think or they were going to feign that it was all of the proceeds from the sale.

Now God doesn’t care if you keep some back. But He does care when you lie and pretend you gave everything.

Ananias, the husband, came to church first and gave the money to Simon Peter. Peter saw the money, and the Spirit of God spoke to Peter and gave him discernment of what was going on. Peter asked, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit?...You have not lied to men but to God.” He acted as though he were giving all the proceeds from the sale of the property to the Lord, because he wanted to be applauded and praised as though he were giving everything. Immediately Ananias fell dead right there in the service.

His wife came in a few minutes later, and Peter said to her, “Tell me whether you sold the land for so much? She said, ‘Yes, for so much.’” She was party to the lie as well. Then Peter said, “Look, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out.” Then she dropped dead and was carried out of the service.

What does that mean? God takes hypocrisy seriously. So when we sing, let’s think about what we sing. When we preach, let’s think about what we preach. When we proclaim, when we pray, let’s think about the proper use of the name of the Lord. It’s so very important.

My third and last question is, “How do we keep this Commandment and reverence God’s name?” We know what this Commandment is, we know how it’s broken, but how do we keep this Commandment? It says, “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.” Let me give you five ways. Number one, you must be born again, John 3. Jesus told Nicodemus, “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” We must be born from above, born of the Spirit. That’s how we become a Christian. You can’t keep the Law without the Spirit of God in your heart and life. So you have to be born or regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

Number two, you are to be filled with the Holy Spirit, Ephesians 5:18. Paul commands the believers—and you and I are included—to “be filled with the Spirit.” That is an imperative, a command. In the Greek, it’s also inclusive, meaning every one of you. It’s not just for the elite group. It’s in the passive voice, meaning let the Spirit fill you. And in the Greek, this command is in the present tense, meaning you continually, ongoing let the Spirit fill you. That’s the only way to get a new heart and have new words that are consistent with your life.

Number three, you must truly know God in His Word, the Bible. You can only honor and reverence God’s name if you know who He is. Do a study of the names of God, the compound names of God. They are words, names and titles that express what God’s nature and character is. So familiarize yourself with God in His Word.

Number four, replace flippancy, profanity and hypocrisy with integrity. “Integrity” means “the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles; moral uprightness; the state of being whole and undivided.” So “integrity” means it’s not divided up, because the opposite is duplicity. Duplicity means you have compartments in your life. It means the person you are on Sunday is not the person you are on Monday. The person you are on Saturday night is different than the person you are on Sunday. That would be practicing duplicity instead of integrity. You never know people; you don’t know what you’re going to get when you talk to them.

Hypocrisy is tied into the word integrity. Hypocrisy is the opposite of integrity. It’s duplicity. It means “to speak from under a mask.” The Greek actors who put masks on while on stage would speak from underneath the mask. They would take off the mask and put a different mask on for a different part. So they were “hupokrite,” which means “to speak from under,” which in this case means from under a mask. They were practicing duplicity. So what we need to do is replace the hypocrisy with integrity—oneness or wholeness.

Number five, use your life and lips to praise the Lord. I’m convinced that the more we know who God is, and the more we yield to His Holy Spirit and the more we worship Him as He is revealed in His Word, then we use our lips to praise the Lord, to pray, to worship and to proclaim, and we are actually doing the positive, hallowing God’s name. It’s being fulfilled with our lips and in our lives.

We must praise the Lord with our lips, we must proclaim the Lord with our lips and we must pray to the Lord with our lips. We pray, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.” Isn’t it

amazing that's the first petition in the prayer? Before we ask for bread, before we ask for pardon, before we ask for protection, we ask that God's name be holy.

So we would pray like this: "Hallowed be Your name in me personally; hallowed be Your name in me domestically, in my family; hallowed be Your name in me in the world publically; and hallowed be Your name in the church corporately.

Psalms 34:3 says, "Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together."