

Sermon File # 669

Scripture Text: Exodus 20:7; Reading: Exodus 20:1-7

Sermon Title: *Commandment Three: The Right Use of God's Name*

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Sources cited in this manuscript are listed at the end.

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Commandment 3: The Right Use of God's Name

Introduction:

Open your Bibles with me to our text, as we continue our summertime series from the Ten Commandments, the guidelines God gives for the life that pleases him. These standards for life in the covenant could be maintained only as the Israelites totally depended on the Lord, who had already saved them from bondage in Egypt. But sadly, Israel was to prove to be unfaithful and would forfeit the blessings that would have been theirs by obedience.

The law showed the weakness of human resolve, and the only one who would fulfill the law and perfectly obey these commandments is God's own Son, Jesus, the fulfillment of the promises to Israel. And Jesus would show the requirements of the Ten Commandments could be fulfilled, in their fullest extent and application, through dependence on him and God's grace for true righteousness (Matthew 5:20).

Jesus says that these commandments and indeed all of the law are summarized in the Great Commandment, to love God entirely and one's neighbor as oneself (Mark

12:28-34; Matthew 22:34-40). The first four commandments in the Decalogue pertain to loving God and the remaining six show us how we are to love others.

There seems to be a progression in these first three commandments.

Commandment one says we are to have no other gods but the true God, and to worship him alone. Now that we belong to him and are under his lordship, commandment two says we are to worship him in the right way, avoiding the tendency to make idols that pervert our worshiping God in spirit and in truth. And today, in this third commandment, we see a strong connection with the second commandment. Whereas the pagan nations had idols, Israel had the name of the Lord, which would be the “primary medium of revelation” (Honeycutt, 43). After making God our only God and eliminating corrupting idols, we must now with this third commandment make certain we understand and honor the name of the God we worship. Honoring his name replaces and precludes all idols.

Our text is **Exodus 20:7**, and I will read it in the context of all of the first three commandments, and I will begin my reading with the first verse.

People’s names serve particular purposes and are given for different reasons in various cultures. In my home country, the USA, the naming of children doesn’t seem to adhere to any specific guidelines or cultural expectations. Some families follow a tradition of passing names along to offspring who are named after a parent or other close relative. Many parents name their children after a popular figure, a hero, or select a name purely on the basis of how it sounds.

Nancy and I selected our children’s names that sounded pleasant and that perhaps were not overused at the time we made our choices. We also wanted the names of our children to have some spiritual significance or were taken from a biblical character. I continue to wonder why my parents gave me a name so similar to our family name, which continues to confuse even those who’ve known me for some time. Just this past week I received a lunch invitation addressed to “Robert,” even though the gracious lady usually knows my name is Roger.

Before our grandkids were born several years ago, both of our children and their spouses included us in their deliberations in selecting names for our grandson and granddaughter. While visiting with us, we enjoyed hearing the possibilities they were considering from books that contain thousands of names from which to choose. Of course, I teased them by suggesting outlandish names and even made a couple of serious suggestions I thought were worthy of consideration. Of course even my viable suggestions were duly ignored!

But the naming of persons is important, even in a culture that doesn’t have a rich tradition for naming children. Swiss physician, author and pastoral counselor Paul Tournier (1898-1986) wrote about the importance of naming a child, which can be a reflection of the parents’ hopes and expectations for the child and a life-time reminder to the child of his or her heritage and the promises and hopes of the

parents. In biblical times names were given to express these hopes and at times names were changed by the Lord to indicate a transformed character, a new beginning, different expectations and divine promises (e.g. Abram to Abraham, Genesis 17:5; Jacob to Israel, Genesis 32:28; and Simon to Peter, John 1:42; Matthew 16:17f). In the world of the ancient Hebrews, names connoted the nature and character of an individual, and names were never given as just a tag or label (Oswalt, 159, *NLT*; 443, *CBC*).

The third commandment has to do with the name of God, which is unchanging and unchangeable. Certain high officials and important dignitaries must be addressed with proper decorum and respect, yet the name of God is the only name commanded to be used properly and never misused, else with serious consequences. Let's note that the right use of God's name requires, first of all, an understanding of...

The meaning of the name

The significance of the name of the Lord God in the Old Testament is seen with the frequency of its use. Yahweh, the Lord, is used some 6,828 times and Elohim, the name for God, is the name given about 2600 times (Durham, 287). God gave to Moses and the Israelites and has given to us the meaning of his name...

Through revelation

When God called Moses at the burning bush, he granted Moses' request to know his name. God revealed his name as Yahweh, "I am that I am," or "I will be what I will be," a name that expresses his eternal and always active nature. He also placed his name in context as the everlastingly faithful God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Exodus 3:13-15). The name the Lord has given is "shorthand for all that he has revealed about himself." "I am that I am" contains the idea of God as the Holy One, the God of the covenant, the Redeemer, Deliverer, Judge, the caring God of daily providence, and the God of reconciliation who brings his people to himself (Motyer, *MOE*, 224).

Jesus Christ is God's Son, the eternal Word given to us to reveal God perfectly to us (John 1:1-18). As the angel announced to young Mary and her fiancé, Joseph, the Messiah to be conceived in her virgin womb would be named Jesus, meaning Savior, because he would save his people from their sins (Luke 1:31; Matthew 1:21). God's eternal Son, revealed himself as the incarnation of the great "I Am" in his discourse with his Jewish opponents, a claim which incited their murderous ire (John 8:58). Throughout John's Gospel we read Jesus claims in his "I am" sayings ("I am the bread of life, the resurrection and the life," etc. 6:48; 11:25).

Jesus taught us how to pray, using the address, "Our Father in heaven" (Matthew 6:9). We learn from Jesus in following his example to call upon the Father in terms

of intimacy as he did in calling his Father “Abba,” the Aramaic word best translated as “dear Father” (Mark 14:36; Romans 8:15; Galatians 4:6).

God has a personal name revealed to us and given to us...

For relationship

The Lord God gave his name to his people in order for us to call upon him. Knowing someone’s name and addressing that individual with the personal, given name is indicative of a more than formal or casual relationship. In biblical times and culture, to know and use a personal name was evidence of some privileged status. You didn’t use a person’s name unless you knew that individual and were given permission. To use someone’s name was the equivalent to having power of attorney (Oswalt, *CBC*, 443).

By the grace of God we are invited to come to him through the name of Jesus. “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Joel 2:32; Romans 10:13). As noted, Jesus taught us to pray to *our* Father in heaven (Matthew 6:9, italics mine). And we as God’s redeemed, being saved people are given a new name, as members of the family of God (Ephesians 3:14). “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called the children of God! And that is what we are! (1 John 3:1).

Our names are now associated with God’s holy name, and this third commandment charges us to hold his name in highest honor as members of his family, who are privileged to be associated with him and bring honor to his name. This is a great privilege and responsibility, and so the Lord warns us about...

The misuse of the name

The importance of this third commandment is emphasized by the explicit warning of consequences for disobedience: “...for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.” Because the name of the Lord is a reflection of his holy character, the consequences of misusing his name are serious. We speak of someone having a good name, and by that we mean the individual’s name represents a person of good character and reputation. Conversely, if someone has a bad name, we mean that individual’s reputation is less than respectful and is probably not someone to be trusted. For this reason, we are responsible to protect the good name of the Lord and never bring dishonor to his name (Wiersbe, 129).

The ancient Jews were so fearful of misusing and/or mispronouncing the Lord’s name that, because written Hebrew has only consonants without vowels, eventually succeeding generations never knew how the Lord’s name was to be pronounced (“Yahweh” is the most likely possibility). Originally the Lord’s name was pronounced only by the high priest, once a year on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 23:27, Cole,

157). Even today, many Jews make no attempt to use or even pronounce the Lord's name, addressing God simply as "Hashem," meaning "the name" (Enns, 417).

This third commandment was not intended to make the Lord's name off limits but rather was to forbid the misuse of his name. Usually when we hear this commandment the first thing that comes to mind is the use of the Lord's name in...

Profanity

The Lord Jesus solemnly warns us against the careless use of profane language, which certainly includes the use of the Lord's name sprinkled with other filthy and debasing words. Evil, unclean hearts give rise to evil and unclean words, just as a bad tree gives bad fruit. And we will have to give an account on the Day of Judgment for "every careless word" we have spoken (Matthew 12:36f). "Profanity does not insult God—a man cannot insult God; but it does cripple man" (Davidman, 44).

Paul adds his words of warning about unwholesome talk that grieves the Spirit and writes about the total incongruity of "obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place" for God's people (Ephesians 4:29f; 5:4).

It's interesting how seemingly sophisticated and educated people resort to profanity for sake of emphasis, exposing a paucity of proper articulate vocabulary. And those who likely are unbelievers will use the name of the Lord, whether God, Jesus or Christ, in their profanity, which shows their awareness that using God's name is the most offensive word they can use; or their cursing with the names of God gives them authority they lack within themselves. I agree with Joy Davidman, who says, "Significantly enough, no one swears by God so readily as the professed atheist" (44).

In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke against the use of oath-taking to add credibility and authority to one's statements. As people of God, Jesus says, our simple truth telling should be sufficient without adding an oath (Matthew 5:33-37). Our integrity of character goes hand in hand with integrity of speech.

While profanity is included, it seems this third commandment has more to do with...

Hypocrisy

G Campbell Morgan (1863-1945), Pastor of London's Westminster Chapel, was "right on" in saying that the profanity of the church is infinitely worse than the profanity of the street (41). We can more readily excuse those in the gutter for using gutter language, but when God's people hide behind the façade of the faith and use "double-speak" God is particularly displeased, dishonored and misrepresented. This is misusing God's name egregiously.

Jesus warned that on the Day of Judgment false prophets will protest that they had prophesied and done great religious works and spiritual miracles in his name. Yet Jesus will send them away from his presence, saying he never knew them (Matthew 7:21-23). When nominal “Christians” call on Jesus’ name and piously use his name in prayer, in teaching or in preaching, they are taking his name in vain and leading others astray and causing many to stumble. Jesus, in quoting Isaiah, condemned those who honored him with their lips but whose hearts were far from him (Matthew 7:6ff; Isaiah 29:13).

The king in Shakespeare’s Hamlet gives the empty essence of hypocrisy when he says,

“My words fly up, my thoughts remain below;

Words without thoughts never to heaven go” (Act III, Scene III, lines 97f).

Tragically, pulpits across Western countries and on worldwide television are hypocrites, leading many astray with false teaching and also by their ungodly, greedy lives. But hypocrisy isn’t confined to the pulpit, although preachers and teachers have the greatest influence for evil (James 3:1f). Parents, teachers and pastors are guilty of false teaching also by not practicing what they preach and not doing what they expect of others (Matthew 23:3). Children are geniuses at detecting their parents’ hypocrisy, which can do irreparable damage to their concept of God’s word.

How many times have professing Christians misrepresented God’s word with false teaching, even with their children, by misquoting Scripture or attributing falsehood to Scripture, with sayings such as “God helps those who help themselves,” and “Cleanliness is next to godliness”? Jesus’ words, “The poor you will always have with you” (Mark 14:7), which Jesus spoke in the context of the woman’s extravagant display of devotion, has been used as a proof text to excuse our selfish materialism and neglect of the poor.

God’s name is misused especially inside Christian circles through...

Manipulation

We misuse God’s name when we invoke his name and authority for our self-concocted ideas and selfish interests. Parents do this often by telling their children that God will be angry with them or worse, won’t like them if they don’t do as their parents wish. God’s name is misused when athletes, basking in the glow of victory, indicate God helped them, meaning that he was on their side. Politicians, who generally give God the short shrift in their personal lives and political decisions, nevertheless “season” their speeches with Bible verses, which are usually quoted out of context and convey a meaning that does violence to the intent of Scripture. And closing the speech with “God bless America” is certain to gain the politician additional favor in the eyes of many.

Pastors and other spiritual leaders are guilty of misusing God's name when they proclaim his endorsement of their self-serving programs, goals and ambitions. Shamelessly and certainly presumptuously they may declare that God gave them a certain revelation, which the preacher then expects the membership to accept. To question the verity of this revelation, even though we are told to "test the spirits" to see if they are from God or are false prophecy (1 John 4:1), is considered by these preachers to be spiritual rebellion against their God-given authority.

Worse than saying, "the Lord told me thus and so," is to say "God told me to tell you thus and so," thereby putting words in God's mouth, words which in all likelihood are not God's truth for that person but more likely are used to manipulate the other (Ryken, 585).

When our son, Kyle, was a preschooler, a popular toy was a plastic tricycle called a "Big Wheel," designed to look like a motorcycle. Darren, a neighbor friend down the street was given a Big Wheel for his birthday, one that exceeded Kyle's in size and in the number of "bells and whistles." Although every kid on the block had a Big Wheel, they all wanted the opportunity to ride on Darren's. I was outside working in the front yard ("garden" to you Europeans), when Kyle came running out of our house with the little green New Testament that the Gideons had distributed at his school some weeks before. I asked him, "Kyle, where are you going with your New Testament?" He replied as he ran down the street, "Darren won't share his Big Wheel with me and I'm going to show him that the Bible says you're supposed to share!"

Just as a child, we adults can use God's name and word to manipulate to our own advantage or even to deprive, marginalize or harm others. But worse than manipulating others is...

Defamation

To defame is "to disgrace, to harm the reputation of by libel or slander," the synonym being "malign" (*Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary*). A serious misuse of God's name is to disgrace, harm and malign the reputation of our God of perfect holiness and love. As God's children we can defame God's perfect reputation and honor just as a rebellious child his or her father (Proverbs 19:26).

When the Israelites had egregiously sinned against the Lord and he threatened to destroy them, Moses interceded on behalf of God's reputation, fearing that the surrounding nations would say the Lord was unable to deliver his people (Exodus 32:12ff; Numbers 14:13ff). We should have the same concern for God's name, i.e. his reputation, as did Moses, fearing that our lives and conduct would cause others to see him as less than he is (Oswalt, *CBC*, 444).

The believers at Antioch were the first to be given the moniker "Christ-ones," or "Christians," a label that has lost much of its distinction through the centuries of nominal Christianity. But these followers of Jesus were given his name because of their difference from the pagan world around them but also because of their similarity

to Jesus Christ of Nazareth (Acts 11:26). It seems that we who carry the name “Christian,” and identify ourselves as followers of Jesus, have the privilege of pointing others to him or causing others to think less of Jesus than he truly is. We do well to ask ourselves whether those who know us are likely to think more highly of Jesus Christ because of what they see of him in us, or are they just as likely to think less of him?

The word “Christian” no longer is a witness to our being “Christ’s ones,” but is merely a label to distinguish from other world religions and is used with political parties. How distressing it is to hear the news media describe the terrorist young man who committed the horrible murders and destruction in Oslo two days ago as a radical, right-wing fundamentalist *Christian*! If they would just leave out that name, the name that used to identify true followers of Jesus!

Just as we considered the first two commandments in light of their positive application, so can we also look at this third commandment as a positive one. We’re to make Jesus Lord and worship him only (1st Commandment) and worship the Father in spirit and in truth (2nd), and now we’re ready to honor and promote his name by realizing...

The might of the name

Just as Orthodox Jews tabooed the name of God because it is so great, so people today taboo his name because it has become so small and insignificant in the eyes of many. The “ultimate blasphemy” may not be misusing the name of the Lord but rather “not calling upon God at all” (Davidman, 44) God has given us his name to be used according to his will in a way that brings immediate and eternal blessings into our lives and into the lives of others. There is power in the name of the Lord, and we know the first introduction to his power is with his...

Power to save

The name of the Lord contains the essence of who he is, and to call upon his name is to call upon God himself, to address him personally in faith. The apostles witnessed to the power of Jesus to save and said,

“Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).

The Apostle Paul wrote, in quoting from the prophet Joel (2:32),

“Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Romans 10:13).

Salvation, the forgiveness of sin, being made right with God and the free gift of eternal life, comes by grace alone. God’s grace reaches down to us sinners where we are, and God gives us grace to believe that Jesus died for our sins and is alive to

save us. And in our sorrow for sin and desperate need for his rescue, we then call on him to save us and commit ourselves to follow him as our only Lord and Master. To know the name of Jesus is to know who he is and what he can do for us. This is what it means to call on the name of the Lord unto salvation.

The might of the name of the Lord is also displayed through...

Power in prayer

We are invited to come to the Lord in prayer, trusting in the power of prayer and the willingness of the Father to answer our requests that are offered in the name of Jesus. As Christians we typically end our prayers with the phrase, "In Jesus' name, amen." We need to understand that this is not a "quasi-magical appendage" that is supposed to guarantee answers to our prayers (Oswalt, *CBC*, 443), nor is it simply a polite "good-bye" to God.

Several times Jesus invites us to pray in his name and promises that the Father will do anything we ask in his name (John 14:13f; 15:7, 16; 16:23). This is not a blank check or carte blanche guarantee to grant our every wish. These promises presuppose that we are abiding in Christ in an intimate relationship, and are asking for requests that will glorify his name, advance his kingdom and are thus according to his perfect will (1 John 5:14f).

To pray in Jesus' name, and in a way that God honors, is in essence to say to the heavenly Father, "Your Son wants me to ask this of you" (Oswalt, *CBC*, 443). Because the Father and the Son are perfectly one and always in agreement, to pray in Jesus' name is to experience power in prayer.

The might of God's name includes also...

Power in praise

The prayer and songbook of the Bible is The Book of Psalms, and throughout these songs we are invited to praise the name of the Lord, to exalt his person and bring honor and glory to the one who alone is worthy of all praise and worship. The last book of the Bible also is a call to praise and glorify the crucified and risen Lamb upon his throne, the one who is worthy of all honor, glory and praise (Revelation 5:13).

Our purpose as God's redeemed, being saved people is to honor and glorify him, not only in our corporate worship on the Lord's Day, but to present our lives to him daily as a spiritual sacrifice and act of worship (Romans 12:1). We are to live for the glory and honor of his name, and there is power in the life and act of worship in his name.

The Day is coming when the name of the Lord will be glorified by every creature. Even unrepentant unbelievers, who never acknowledged the worth of Jesus, will be included among "every knee" which will bow before the majesty of Christ and confess his Lordship when his beautiful, glorious name is announced (Philippians

2:9ff). Even those who sullied his name and all who ignored and shunned his name will be forced to confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father, even though they will be judged and shut off from his presence and from his followers, who will continue to praise him throughout eternity.

Finally, the might of the name includes...

Power in proclamation

The Lord has given us his name, which is the power of God for salvation for all who call upon his name. And for us who know him and who are being saved, we are to join him as his missional people in making his name known in all the earth, beginning with our individual spheres of influence. The Lord's name and renown should be the desire of our hearts (Isaiah 26:8b). Our desire should be that the name of the Lord might be made known among the peoples of the earth (Isaiah 64:2; 65:1).

To disown the name of the Lord is to be disowned before the Father (Matthew 10:32f) and the angels of God (Luke 12:9). As God's chosen people we are called and privileged to "declare the praises of him who called (us) out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9).

To ignore the use of God's name as his life-giving power unto salvation is to misuse his name, culpable of "our guilty silence" (Stott). To remain true to Christ's name is to be like those believers in Pergamum, who did not renounce their faith and were faithful witnesses even unto death (Revelation 2:12f).

This third commandment is against the misuse of an unbridled, uncontrolled and undisciplined tongue, which has great potential for evil, as we read about in James 3:1-12. But although James calls for a bridled tongue, he's not advocating a silenced tongue (Motyer, *TOF*, 62). To release the mighty power of Jesus' name we must be ready to speak for him and be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks us to give the reason for the hope that we have (1 Peter 3:15).

Conclusion:

The Lord warns us of his judgment for misusing his name. Perhaps some of us here today are guilty of misusing the name by using it recklessly or dragging his name into the gutter with profanity. For this sin we need his forgiveness and cleansing.

Maybe we've used his name carelessly or selfishly for our own purposes, to give an appearance of holiness, which we know is only a façade apart from his cleansing and purifying our hearts. Maybe we're guilty of doing things our way but claiming the authority and blessing of God.

Perhaps we've been harsh and judgmental toward others and have misrepresented the God of mercy and love by the way we have misquoted his word and misrepresented his true image as a holy yet loving God.

Maybe our greatest guilt has been our silencing the voice of prayer in his name, or praise to his name, or even witness for his name. This may well be the ultimate blasphemy, to neglect his wonderful name, the name above every name and the name that is the power of God and fount of his blessing.

There may be someone here today who has never called upon the name of Jesus. Today he may be calling you to call on him, to call upon him to have mercy on you, forgiving your sins and giving you eternal life as his free gift. His gift is free but not cheap. His gift demands your life, as you follow him now as your Master and Lord. Whoever calls on the *name* of the Lord Jesus Christ will be saved.

To obey this commandment we can't just not misuse God's name. God says in effect "Use my name! Use my name for the forgiveness of sins. Use my name in prayer for your needs and intercession for others. Use my name in praise to me and in proclaiming me to those in your life."

May we all live to the honor of his blessed name!

Thoughts and questions for personal reflection and/or group discussion:

1. What do you think is the most common understanding of this third commandment and how it's usually violated?
2. Why do you think God's name is important, and why is it important that we treat his name correctly?
3. How do you usually address God in prayer and speak about him to others? Does the way you address him influence your thoughts about him and how you pray to him? Explain.
4. What does it mean to misuse God's name through hypocrisy?
5. In what ways can we use God's name to manipulate others?
6. How can we defame or disgrace the name of God?
7. Conversely, how can we bring honor to God's name? List some ways we can honor his name and use his name to bring him pleasure and honor.

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