

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

The Third Commandment

The third commandment – “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain” or “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord thy God”. This command and our study of it should cause us to ask ourselves the question, “How much respect do I have for God and His name?” and “What am I doing to bring honor or dishonor on that name?”

There are at least two different areas in which the name of God can be used “in vain”.

1. You can misuse God’s name through your speech.

A person or an organization’s name comes to symbolize the kind of character that that person or organization possesses. How many of you when you were picking names for your children would not give a certain name to your child because every time that you heard that name, it reminded you of someone from your past who was not exactly what you wanted your child to be? I’ve never met a girl named “Jezebel” or a boy named “Judas”. I have a suspicion that the reason for that is because the actions of those persons so marred the name that they carried that no one today wants to use those names.

There’s a little TM after that name. Do you know what that stands for? It means “Trademark”. That means that the name of this soft drink is the sole property of the company. They own the name and all rights to its use. What would happen if I took a cup of water, added some caramel coloring to it and some sugar and then slapped a different one on it and tried to sell it to the public? I would probably get sued. The reason that I would get sued is because I had put the same name on my product that was on their product. Well, what’s the problem with that? What’s so important about a name? The name stands for who you are as a company. Everything that you are as a company – your entire reputation – is wrapped up in that name. Therefore, you get very agitated when someone uses that name in an inappropriate way.

A good reputation – a good name – is vital to the growth of a business. Companies are very jealous of their reputations. By that, I mean that they work hard to keep their reputation strong. If their reputation goes down, so does their business. For that reason, they get very upset when people use their name without their consent.

Now, having looked at how companies feel about the significance and sacredness of the names of their products, how do you think God feels when we use His name in an improper way? I think that it makes Him very angry. The latter part of Exodus 20:7 says that He will not hold guiltless anyone who misuses or takes in vain His name. To put it in legal terms, he will not drop His suit against those who use His name in an improper way or without His permission.

To “take in vain” means to use God’s name in a careless or flippant manner. It means to treat it with no more respect than any other word in the English language. So when something amazing or shocking happens, rather than saying, “Wow!”, we might say “O my God!” without even thinking about the fact that we just spoke God’s name. It’s as if has become just another word in the dictionary. I know a person who constantly says that phrase – “O my God!” In fact, she would say it several times in a row when shocked by something or when scared. When that person was confronted with the fact that she was using God’s name this way, she said that she didn’t

Even realize that she was saying it. It flowed from her tongue without her ever thinking about the awesomeness of the God to whom she was referring. Just as a

company's whole reputation and character is summed up in its name, so God's name and the use of it should point to how awesome and wonderful He really is.

God's name when used in these ways has lost its significance and glory. It no longer points to Him. It has simply become a point of punctuation and exclamation like a period or exclamation point. God says that He will punish – his words are “not hold guiltless” – anyone who uses His name in this way.

2. You can misuse God's name through your lifestyle.

The nation of Israel carried around the responsibility of bearing God's name. Remember, when Israel joined into the covenant, they became God's people. (Exo 19:4-6 NIV) 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites." This covenant means that God promised to provide for them and protect them. But it also meant that they bore the responsibility for carrying God's name to the rest of the nations of the world. When others looked at Israel, they saw God's people. They got an idea of what God was like. They carried God's reputation with them. You bear your parents' name. Your parents may have said something like this whenever you got into trouble: "Don't you know that what you do reflects on us and on the family name?" The actions of Israel didn't just reflect on Abraham, their ancestor. Their actions reflected on God and God's name because they were God's people. How did they live up to their role as the bearers of God's name? "shut the temple doors . . . useless fires . . . not pleased with you" (vs. 10) – something is going on that is upsetting the Lord, so much so that the Lord wants the doors of the church to be shut up tight "accept no offerings" (vs. 10) – wasn't even willing to accept the offerings that they gave "My name will be great . . ." (vs. 11) – God's intention in choosing Israel as His people was so that the nations could look at Israel and would praise and magnify God's name because of what they saw God had done in this group of people – how he had taken one man, made him into a great nation, rescued that nation from slavery, and then had given them a beautiful land. "rising of the sun to the setting" (vs. 11) – all day long "in every place" (vs. 11) every nation; all parts of the world God wanted and God deserved for His name to be exalted among the Jews and among all the nations of the earth, but that is not what He received. Instead, the very things which God had instituted to cause His people to honor and magnify His name were treated with disrespect, disgust and contempt. In verse 6, God says that He had tried to have two different relationships with Israel – one as father, and one as master. As a father, he deserves honor; as a master, he deserves respect. But He complains that He has received neither. Instead, everyone in the nation all the way up to the priests had shown contempt for His name.

Contempt means to look down on something as if was totally worthless or meaningless. It's almost a synonym for "take in vain". It's the kind of feeling you get when you go to reach for those leftovers that have been in the refrigerator just a month or two too long. "Nope, don't guess I'll be using those for dinner tonight." They make your stomach turn. How had these people shown contempt for God's name? It wasn't through their words; it was through their actions. [read vs. 7-8] The Israelites were supposed to bring their best animal as a sacrifice. Specifically, the sacrifice was to be a one-year old male lamb that had no blemish or spot, no broken legs, and no disease. Instead, they were bringing the leftovers – the ones that they and no one else wanted. God says in vs. 8 "Try offering them to your governor!" What they were bringing to God supposedly to honor his name was something that their public officials would have laughed at and been offended by. God's name was supposed to be lifted up and magnified in Israel so that the rest of the world would see what a great God they had and magnify Him (vs. 14b). But instead, Israel through its actions had thrown mud on God's name so that the rest of the world

laughed at their God rather than praising Him. Israel bore God's name but did so unsuccessfully and unworthily.

God has a new people who bear His name now. (Acts 11:26c NIV) The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. The term "Christian" means "Christ-ones" or "little Christs". As Christians, we carry around the name of Christ wherever we go. In Acts 9:15,15:17, & I Pet. 4:16, it talks about people who bear God's name and the responsibility that they had to do it well and in such a way that men would praise God because of their lifestyle. Turn over to I Pet. 2 [read it, and make comments; esp. vs. 12b "that they may see your good works and glorify God on the day He visits us"] We are the people of God. Wherever we go and whatever we do reflects back on God and how the world thinks of Him. When those people at Antioch were called Christians, they wore the name proudly. The reason they were called "Christians" is because they lived like Christ – they were different. It was an honor and a responsibility and certainly not something which was taken lightly. One reason that it was not taken lightly was that to be known as a Christian could very well mean that you would have to give up your life.

How do we treat the title "Christian"? Do we act like that all it means is that we will go to heaven when we die, but it has nothing to do with how we live? I Cor 10:31 "Whether you eat or drink or whatsoever you do, do all to the glory of God"

I can take God's name in vain through my mouth and I can bring shame on His name through my lifestyle. How then are we supposed to treat God's name?

The PROPER way to use God's name is to . . .

1. Praise and worship His name (Phil 2:9-11)
2. Reverence His name (Luke 11:2)
3. Declare His name (Matt 28:19-20)
4. Defend His name (1 Sam. 17:26)