

Exod. 30:7 The Third Commandment (part 3)

If you've been here the last two weeks we spoke about how God bears His name. This means that He names Himself and his name is who He is. We can't separate his name from his person. In this way any sin against God's name is against God. Any sin against God is a sin against his name. Last week we saw that Jesus bears God's name because He is the image of the invisible God. If you have seen him, you have seen the Father. Today, I would like to point out that all of creation bears his name. I will do this by looking at how Jesus taught the third commandment. Then, we will move to some practical applications for the rest of our time. So, point #1 is:

1. All Creation Bears His Name. This point could be a volume of sermons, but I will be brief. Turn if you would to Matt. 23:16-22. Jesus said: **“Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.'¹⁷ You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred?¹⁸ And you say, If anyone swears by the altar, it is nothing, but if anyone swears by the gift that is on the altar, he is bound by his oath.¹⁹ You blind men! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that makes the gift sacred?²⁰ So whoever swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it.²¹ And whoever swears by the temple swears by it and by him who dwells in it.²² And whoever swears by heaven swears by the throne of God and by him who sits upon it.”**

Here, we see Jesus accusing the scribes and Pharisees of trying to find loopholes to mitigate or lessen the force of their oaths. You see, the scribes and Pharisees did not swear, or make oaths, in the name of God because they feared that if and when they failed to keep their promise then, at least, God's wrath might be less because they didn't swear by his name, which they knew was the highest way of making an oath. Instead, they swore by the temple or they swore by the altar. If we think about this, we do the same thing. When we want someone to believe our words, we might say, *“I swear.”* Some might say, *“Let lightning strike me if I'm not right.”* If we REALLY want someone to believe our words, we might say, *“I swear on my mother's grave.”* In the highest oath, some might even swear by the name of God. But, oh how serious this would be!

Now, this is what I believe Jesus was teaching. All of creation bears God's name. Jesus said, *“You swear by the gold of the temple, but what makes the gold holy? It is the temple (inner sanctuary) itself. You swear by the gift. But, what makes the gift holy. It is the altar.”* He was saying, All of creation bears God's name. And, it is God Himself that makes anything sacred or holy. So, any oath is as binding as the next. So if you swear by Heaven or by the throne of God, or by the temple, which God has made, you ultimately swear by His Him, or his name. This is why Jesus said in Matt. 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.”**

Anytime, we swear by anything in heaven or in earth, it is binding because all of creation bears his name. This means that any oath is binding. So if we swear by God's temple, we call on God

to continue maintaining its holiness. But, the same is true of our own heads (eg. “*May my hair turn white if I don’t perform my oath*”), we are swearing by God, for only God can determine our hair color. I conclude that because God is holy and has created all things and remains sovereign over them, to swear by anything is to swear by him. It is wrong to use his name flippantly. At the same time, it is wrong to misuse anything in the whole creation. All sin, therefore, can be seen as a violation of the third commandment.

Here is one quick application before we move on to some others. One of our unofficial goals at GBC is to create an environment where worship is primary. This means that worship isn’t simply Sunday mornings. It is 24/7. This means we do not separate “church” from family or “church” from work. I do understand that we may call “this” time on Sunday mornings as “corporate worship” or our home group times as “special times of worship.” And, this is ok. But, what I mean by saying that we want to create an environment where worship is primary, or 24/7, has its foundation in the name of God, or as we have seen in God himself. All of creation bears his name. We cannot make these categories that one thing is holy while something is not.

Now, what I would like to do is give some broad and specific ways we may break the third commandment by taking the name of the Lord in vain. Some of principles for these applications belong to (Al Mohler) and some of them are mine.

A. We take God’s name in vain when we minimize theology. Mohler calls it reductionistic theology. Simply put, we try to reduce God down to our size. To understand the name of God is to understand the power of the name, and the name implies an entire theology. And, when we reduce God’s character like his holiness, his sovereignty, his love, his power, etc., we take his name in vain. When we misrepresent him we bear false witness. Theologies that reduce God are disguised forms of idolatry that in their false witness they take his name in vain. Al Mohler says, “*It was a lot easier to deal with paganisms of old, for they were more honest forms of idolatry. We face now the persistent temptation to redefine God in our image, and to make God an idol by the corruption of his name. We bring in wrong ideas about God, wrong teachings about his character, and we create an ideological idol in our own midst.*”

Here are some examples. One theology reduces God to a god that does not work miracles or is not powerful enough to guard and keep his word. In this way naturalism replaces supernaturalism. Another theology sees God’s omniscience as limited. In other words, He may be preached as a God who does not see the future and only sometimes intervenes with the course of events when He wants to. Another theology emphasizes the love of God, but rejects the wrath of God, thus reducing him down to be like us. Another theology confuses God’s sovereignty with man’s responsibility. I could go on and on.

But, I will end one remedy to this problem. In Paul’s last words to the elders at Ephesus he said, “**I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God**” (Acts 20:26). This means that we believe the Word of God is sufficient and we must preach ALL of it. We mustn’t leave things out. Now, we may not understand it all, but we must still preach it. This is why we preach through books. We cannot leave the hard things out. When we do, we reduce God down to our size and take his name lightly.

B. We take God's name in vain when we refer to Him in easy familiarity. Mohler calls this "triumphalistic piety." Look around you. Think of some of our bumper stickers. "*God is our co-pilot, our dream weaver, our life artist, our friend, our coach, our therapist.*" I understand that our motives may not be that bad. But, I believe our motives need to be taken higher. God renders no therapy. He offers no coaching. He weaves no dreams. Here is what he does: He reveals Himself and saves His people from sin. In Is. 43:3 God says, "**For I am the LORD your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior.**"

He rules over the earth and no one can limit his power. 1 Chr. 16:31 says, "**Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice, and let them say among the nations, 'The LORD reigns!'**" Ps. 99:1 says, "**The LORD reigns; let the peoples tremble! He sits enthroned upon the cherubim; let the earth quake!**" So many times in our culture we avoid a canon of forbidden words yet we take the Lord's name in vain by the cheapness and flippancy and fake familiarity when we talk about Him. When we speak of God easily with this type of familiarity, we take his name in vain. When we speak of Him, we should never talk in a way that isn't reverent and serious. Shouldn't our motives and our speech reflect the words of Isaiah who said, "**How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, Your God reigns.**"

Another example of this may be saying, "*God told me,*" "*God showed me,*" and "*God led me*" with no clear revelation from the Scriptures. God does speak. He does lead. He does show. But, He does this through his Word.

Another example might be the prosperity Gospel, the kind of theology that promises health and wealth to all believers. If this isn't true, it belittles his name and is great sin. In reality, maybe the Lord actually wants us satisfied in Him and dissatisfied with everything else. Maybe God wants us to hunger and thirst for the glory of His name, and even risk physical hunger in order to be reminded of spiritual hunger. God wants us to thirst for righteousness when we often experience no thirst at all.

C. We take God's name in vain through superficial worship. Do you remember the story of Nadab and Abihu? In Lev. 10:1-3 we read: "**Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it and laid incense on it and offered unauthorized fire before the LORD, which he had not commanded them.** ² **And fire came out from before the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD.** ³ **Then Moses said to Aaron, This is what the LORD has said: Among those who are near me I will be sanctified, and before all the people I will be glorified. And Aaron held his peace.**" As we saw with the second commandment God requires that we worship Him in the ways he has told us to worship. Mohler says that worship must be "*Word-centered, biblically regulated, scripturally established, Christ-focused, and Trinitarian. And yet, evangelicals turn worship into a laboratory of frivolities and a circus of creativities.*"

May churches in our culture tell us that worship must be fun; it must be creative. "*If God hasn't told us not to do it, we have freedoms,*" they say. They say, "*Let's appeal to their felt needs.*" There is a place for felt needs. But when it comes to worship, our need is give God his place!

Our need is to give glory to his name! Our need is to worship Him as sovereign Lord, creator of all, and the One who saves a sinful people. I have been in services where God is welcomed as if he were a guest. We take the Lord's name in vain in our superficial worship and our worship betrays us, demonstrating what we genuinely believe. When we worship, our prayers, sermons, and songs all reveal what we genuinely believe. I am going to be bold. When you sit here and talk to your kids and your spouse about trivial matters and your motive is not to listen to God's Word or sing the songs, you take God's name in vain.

D. We take God's name in vain through manipulative God-talk. Stephen Carter, a Yale law professor wrote, "**In truth, there is probably no country in the Western world where people use God's name quite as much or quite as publicly or for quite as many purposes as we Americans do.**" He then goes on to give an example like the political speech that speaks the name of God, asking God to bless the audience, and assuming God is blessing such a "great nation" or the "great work" they are undertaking. We see athletes thank God on television for scoring the winning touchdown. Politicians like to thank God as on their side.

But, what about Christian pastors, public figures, and church members who dare to speak when God has not spoken? The Lord's name is taken in vain when we say things like, "*We know why God did that,*" or "*I can tell you why you have cancer,*" or "*I can explain to you why Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans or why Muslim terrorists flew planes into the world trade center.*"

Do you remember Job and what happened to him? One of his friends, Eliphaz the Temanite shows up and starts telling Job why God did this to him. We find out later that he was completely wrong. He had no clue and no right to speak for God in the way he did. It has been my experience that on most of the difficult issues in life, I can't explain the whys. The Apostle Paul said in Rom. 11:34, "**For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?**" In other words, God's ways are past finding out. When the Scriptures speak clearly, we can speak clearly without taking his name in vain. But, when God doesn't tell us, don't speak as if he has. You take his name in vain.

E. Other General Topics Related to the third commandment.

i. Profanity – This is probably the application that most of us think of when we consider what it means to break the 3rd commandment. (Although, I wouldn't expect this from us after we consider the depths of the command.) In our society, words like *God*, *Christ*, and *Jesus* often appear as exclamations of surprise or anger. I think one of the reasons we hear this so much is because people want to use strong expressions in these situations because divine names are the strongest expressions they can find. Here's my take. I would say, "*Don't use these names unless they are really cries for divine help in a difficult situation.*" I think most of you would probably agree with me.

But, what about "*golly, gosh, gee, and other words that sound like this?*" In reality, these are substitutes for divine names. But, do you remember what Jesus taught us just a few minutes ago concerning oaths? Substituting some other expression for the divine name in no way lessens the seriousness of the oath because all of creation bears his name. I realize that the motives behind some of our substitutes may not be bad. And, I'm not going to tell you not to use them. But, you

may want to give this more thought based on other principles. Let every man be convinced in his own conscience.

ii. What about bathroom and sexual slang? I will be very brief here. But, I believe this kind of speech is related to the 3rd commandment indirectly. If God made all things and created us in his image, any time we refer to excrement in relation to human beings made in God's image as one of the ugliest, lowest and most unpleasant substances imaginable, we belittle God's creation. And, the problem with sexual slang is that it shows contempt, not only for people, but for the precious heart of marital love.

iii. What about humor in the pulpit or in our teaching? I cannot help but laugh when I picture the poor husband pitching his tent on the corner of his roof because his wife nags so much. Just this past week I read about uselessness and vain and the writer pictured it as a person who would build a lodge in a cucumber field. There are many examples of humor in the Bible. I think humor should be used in the pulpit and in our teaching when it makes a point of teaching biblical truth, not simply the telling of stories in order to entertain.

I don't have time this morning to speak about so many other issues like language in literature and drama or secret societies that give secret allegiance through oaths and promises in secrecy that they can't share with their brothers and sisters in Christ. I question these greatly!

In the end, I would like to close commandment with what is really important for us as Christians. Look at Psalm 24. Let's read it. **"The earth is the LORD's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, ² for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers. ³ Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place? ⁴ He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully. ⁵ He will receive blessing from the LORD and righteousness from the God of his salvation. ⁶ Such is the generation of those who seek him, who seek the face of the God of Jacob. Selah ⁷ Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. ⁸ Who is this King of glory? The LORD, strong and mighty, the LORD, mighty in battle! ⁹ Lift up your heads, O gates! And lift them up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. ¹⁰ Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, he is the King of glory!"**

Notice in v. 1 that all of God's creation belongs to him (us included). Whenever we violate or break God's covenant or command, we bring dishonor on his Name. I hope you have seen over the past 3 weeks that you have broken this command in more ways than you can count. And, you have brought dishonor to his name by any sin that you have committed. It is interesting that the word in v. 4 "*lift up*" is the same word in the 3rd commandment for "*bear*" or "*take*." And, the word "*false*" in v. 4 is the same word translated as "*vain*" in the third commandment. With this in mind, this Psalm alludes to this commandment. Now, look at v. 7 **"Lift up your heads, O gates! And be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is this King of Glory? The Lord, strong and mighty, the Lord, mighty in battle!"**

Who has not taken the Lord's name in vain? It is God Himself. It is Immanuel, God with us. It is Jesus who is the name above all names. He has fulfilled this commandment. And, it is him we Christians worship. Trust Him today!