

**99. Q. What is required in the third commandment?**

A. We are not to blaspheme or to abuse the Name of God by cursing, perjury, or unnecessary oaths, nor to share in such horrible sins by being silent bystanders. Rather, we must use the holy Name of God only with fear and reverence, so that we may rightly confess Him, call upon Him, and praise Him in all our words and works.

**100. Q. Is the blaspheming of God's Name by swearing and cursing such a grievous sin that God is angry also with those who do not prevent and forbid it as much as they can?**

A. Certainly, for no sin is greater or provokes God's wrath more than the blaspheming of His Name. That is why He commanded it to be punished with death.

Read Lev. 24:10-12.

In these verses we watch Israel gathered at Mt Sinai  
as they learn how to worship God and do all that he has commanded.

What was the last narrative event?

Chapter 10 tells of the death of Nadab and Abihu,  
the sons of Aaron, who offered strange fire before the LORD,  
and so they were consumed by fire from the LORD.

But here we see that it is not merely the priests  
who will die for their failure to treat God as holy.

All Israelites—and even those of mixed birth  
—are to be holy in their conduct and in their speech.

Who was this man?

What was his name?

We hear that he was the son of an Egyptian and an Israelite woman.

We hear the name of his mother, and of his grandfather, and of his tribe.

But by the time that Israel is settled in the Land,  
no one alive knew his name.

Verse 2 says that he “blasphemed” the name of Yahweh in the midst of a fight.

Literally, he “pierced” the name of Yahweh,  
he attempted to cut down his opponent by weakening his god.

Remember that the OT speaks of curses as having literal power.

The spoken word has the power to accomplish things in the spiritual realm.

Therefore, by cursing Yahweh, he hopes to overthrow this Yahweh-worshiper.

(And to “curse” means to declare someone worthless or weightless)

If you blaspheme the NAME of Yahweh,  
if you disgrace his name,  
then your name will be forgotten,  
and worse, the name of your family will be disgraced!

Verses 13-14

The death penalty in Israel was a community event.

You cannot hire someone to do it for you.

Those who heard the curse must place their hands on the head of the offender,  
so that they may not be held guilty of that curse.  
(Just as the imposition of hands is required on the sacrifice  
in order to transfer guilt,  
so also with the blasphemer it is important to ensure  
that no guilt remains upon you who heard the curse.)  
The execution of an offender is a stain on the name of the congregation.  
Therefore the entire congregation must be involved in his death.  
(The elders—and in a difficult case, the priests—would conduct the trial)  
But here it is made clear that the sojourner as well as the native  
should be executed for blasphemy.

Verses 17-22

This passage establishes a principle of proportionate justice.  
(Quoting Exodus 21:23-25)  
Whatever you did to others will be done to you.  
If you attacked someone and broke his jaw,  
then the proper punishment is for your own jaw to be broken.  
“Whatever injury he has given a person shall be given to him.”  
If you kill his animal, you shall replace it.  
(We discover in Exodus 21-22 that if it was intentional,  
the offender must repay up to four times)

And in obedience to God’s command,  
the people of Israel brought out the man who had blasphemed God,  
and stoned him to death.

What is remarkable about this passage (considered in its own time)  
is that the same law was applied to foreigners as well as to natives.  
While God has established Israel as his unique people.  
He will not let them forget that all people are his.  
And because he claims all people,  
therefore, anyone who comes to sojourn in the land of Israel  
will be treated as one of the people of God.

Of course, this passage is cited by Jesus when he commands his people  
not to resist those who would harm us.  
He tells us that “an eye for an eye” is not the principle of justice  
that should be exercised in his church.

In the church of Jesus Christ we do not insist on a principle of exact justice.  
After all, if God judged strictly according to justice,  
we would not stand before him.  
Mercy triumphs over justice.

And yet, while Christ transforms the Ten Commandments,

he does not abolish them.

*“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.”*

If you look at Deuteronomy 14, you can see a further exposition of the third commandment.

We have seen that there is a clear relationship between Deuteronomy 6-13  
and the first and second commandments,  
but how does this discussion of clean and unclean foods relate to God's *Name*?

Notice where the passage starts.

The first two verses command the Israelites not to  
“cut yourselves or make any baldness on your foreheads for the dead.”  
These were practices of the pagan nations around them.  
They would mutilate their bodies out of their grief for the dead.  
Israel was not to imitate them.

Why?

In the Pentateuch we are not told whether God had revealed  
the future resurrection of the dead.  
But we do see hints like this, that God was preparing them for the idea.  
The underlying idea is that “you must not view death as final.”

There is something contaminating about death.

It is not holy.

It is cursed.

But you should not think like the nations about death!

(Today there is an alarming rise in cremation among Christians  
as Christians seem to think that the body doesn't matter.

But if your body still belongs to Christ after death,  
then you should not send to that which belongs to Christ into the flames!

If your hope is the resurrection of the body,  
then do not consign your body to a picture of hell.

Obviously, if you get cremated,  
God will have no difficulty raising you from the dead,  
but cremation sends the wrong signal.

In the same way that Israel should not imitate the death-practices of the nations around them,  
so also we should not imitate the death-practices of the nations around us.

Instead, in the context of death, Moses says,

“You are the sons of Yahweh, your God.”

The reason why you must not cut yourself or tear your hair out of your forehead,  
is because you are the sons of Yahweh.

The language of sonship is regularly used to talk about inheritance and service,  
but it is actually rare to find such a direct reference as this in the OT.

This is a striking statement.

You *cannot* act like the nations regarding death,  
because you are sons of Yahweh.  
“You are a people holy to Yahweh your God,  
and Yahweh has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession,  
out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.” (v2)

Your Father is holy.

His Name is holy (note that Yahweh is used three times in two verses).  
Therefore do not treat death like a pagan.  
Do not deform your body because of death.  
You are sons of Yahweh, who bear *his* name.  
In your grief, do not defile his image;  
do not defile his name.

No, this is not a clear teaching on resurrection,  
but it is preparing Israel for that doctrine.  
It’s teaching them to think differently about death—and about the body—than their neighbors.

Deuteronomy 14:1-21 reflect on the holiness of the people of God,  
as they live as the sons of Yahweh,  
who bear his name.

Look back over Deuteronomy, and you will see this all throughout the book:

1. The name of Yahweh is set apart as holy (6:13)
2. The place that Yahweh chooses for his name to dwell is holy (12:5ff)
3. The Levites are holy because they are to minister to and bless the people in the NAME of Yahweh (10:8, 18:5-7)
4. The Israelites are holy because they are set apart from all the nations, and the NAMES of their gods (6:13-14, 12:3, 16:19, 28:10)
5. If the Israelites do not fear the glorious and holy NAME of Yahweh, then Yahweh will destroy them. (28:58-61)

God is teaching his people about the importance of boundaries.

Boundaries are very important to God.

The principle of separation—of holiness—is described by boundaries.

Do not be like the nations—do not do what they do.

Instead, through these distinctive practices and rituals,  
you are to create a different sort of community.  
—a holy community.

Holiness was maintained by staying within boundaries.

The Ten Commandments form the most important of those boundaries.

This is the way of life that should characterize my people.

The purity laws develop boundaries in nature:

unclean animals are those which cross perceived boundaries--  
fish with no fins or scales,  
flying insects with too many legs, etc.

There are three general categories of abominations that Moses discusses:

animals, fish and birds.

Every animal that parts the hoof *and* chews the cud is clean.

Those that have one or the other, are not.

Some have tried to say that God gave these commands for health reasons.

There is no biblical evidence for this.

That is not the reason that *God* gives.

God says that Israel shall do this *For you are a people holy to the Lord your God.*

After all, he permits the sojourner in the land to eat of unclean things (v21),

but not Israel.

This suggests that the reason is not simply one of health.

No, the reason for these commands is because of holiness.

In order to be clean, an animal must fulfill its proper function.

There is something decidedly improper about pigs.

They part the hoof, but do not chew the cud.

Likewise, fish are supposed to have fins and scales.

If you see something swimming in the water that does *not* have fins and scales,  
then it is not proper—it is not clean.

And carrion birds are unclean—they feed on dead things—which is improper for birds.

Birds are supposed to eat fruits and insects.

And winged insects are certainly unclean.

Birds are the only creatures that are supposed to fly;  
flying insects are an aberration!

Now, God is not saying that unclean animals are *bad*.

He is not saying that they are mistakes.

He is not saying that they are not fulfilling *his* purposes.

Rather, they are unclean because they are mixed up.

God is teaching Israel about holiness.

He is teaching them about the difference between that which is holy and proper,  
and that which is unholy and improper.

So he takes these animals which he created,

and uses their oddities to teach Israel about holiness.

Remember, Israel bears the name of his Father.

As a holy people, Israel must be separate from the nations.

This is emphasized with respect to animals that die naturally.

Israel may not eat them.

This is not for health reasons—because sojourners are allowed to eat them,  
and God is always as concerned for the sojourner as for Israel.

No, the animal that dies naturally is off limits

because God has commanded a different practice for his holy people.

Remember that last week we saw that Israel could eat meat in their towns,

so long as they slaughtered the animal in a certain way.

Eating meat was always to remind Israel of the sacrifice.

There was to be a non-sacrificial ritual even for ordinary meat.

The animal is dying so that you might live and rejoice.

The last sentence is perhaps one of the strangest in the book:

Moses forbids boiling a kid in its mother's milk:

an act of killing should not be mixed with a life-giving act/substance.

boundaries would be crossed

The mother-goat's milk is life-giving.

To cook a young goat in its mother's milk would be a horrid image,

mixing life and death in the same pot.

The people of God cannot mix life and death!

You cannot blend clean and unclean!

If the unclean comes in contact with the clean,

then the whole thing is ruined!

Israel was to exhibit this corporate holiness through their communal life as the people of God.

Keeping God's name holy has as much to do with the way you live your life,

as it does the way you talk.

Some people are too literal in their focus on the 3d Commandment.

They hear the command not to take the Lord's name in vain,

and so they focus on keeping their speech free

from an empty usage of God's name.

This does not please God.

The holiness of God's name is profaned every time we partake of that which is unclean.

This was always a problem for the Jews when they were in exile.

How could they maintain their ceremonial holiness in the midst of a pagan culture?

Recall the problems that Daniel and his friends had

when commanded to eat of the Babylonian delicacies!

But while obeying the ceremonial laws was required of Israel,

many of them understood the point of these laws.

They understood that there was a moral and a spiritual point to these laws.

Their separation from the practices of the nations was to be an entire way of life,

not just a few cultural oddities.

This is why Isaiah calls out to those returning from exile in chapter 52:

“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.” (Speaking of the return)

“Break forth together into singing, you waste places of Jerusalem,

for the Lord has comforted his people; he has redeemed Jerusalem.

The LORD has bared his holy arm before the eyes of all the nations,  
and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.”

And then comes the call:

“Depart, depart, go out from there; touch no unclean thing;  
go out from the midst of her; purify yourselves, you who bear the vessels of the LORD.  
For you shall not go out in haste, and you shall not go in flight,  
for the LORD will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard.”

In the midst of rejoicing and celebration for the deliverance that God has wrought,  
the restoration from exile that God has promised,  
there is a call to separation,  
to Holiness.

Especially those who carry the holy vessels must maintain their ceremonial purity.  
Why, in the midst of celebration,  
is this warning given?  
Why this emphasis on avoiding the unclean?

Because the holiness of Israel is central for their calling to be the light to the nations.  
This is where we *must* be willing to read the prophets in their own context.  
If we insist on applying the suffering servant songs solely to Jesus,  
then we will make nonsense of Isaiah.

Look at the passage.

What is the *very next line*?  
v13-15

Isaiah has just been talking to Israel about their restoration from exile in Babylon.  
He is saying that they must maintain their ceremonial holiness,  
and not fear the nations, because God is doing something *huge*,  
and they need not fear that his purposes will fail.

And then he talks about the servant who brings the blessings of God to the nations.  
Of course this is about Israel!  
The whole point of Israel’s holiness–separateness–from the nations  
was not for their own personal benefit;  
it was so that they would be a holy nation, a kingdom of priests,  
mediating the blessings of God to the nations!

Isaiah is saying that Israel’s faithful suffering will work to the deliverance of the nations.

And yet, after Israel returns from the Exile,  
it doesn’t happen.

The nations remain in darkness.

Israel dwindles to a third-rate vassal of several successive empires.

And nobody *really* understands what Isaiah was saying until Jesus came.

Jesus understood that all of God’s promises to Israel were really about himself.

Because in Jesus, the history of Israel is focused upon one man.

In Jesus, the return from exile has come.

Jesus, the true Israel, the Last Adam,  
has been seated at the right hand of God;  
Therefore we have already received the firstfruits of the blessings of the return  
in the promised Holy Spirit, and in Him,  
we have the guarantee that we will indeed arrive in the New Jerusalem.

Indeed, some passages suggest that we should view our lives  
as the journey from Babylon to the New Jerusalem.

As Isaiah had called Israel to “depart, depart, go out from there; touch no unclean thing...”  
So Paul in 2 Cor 6:17 addresses the concerns in Corinth regarding pagan sacrifices,  
by emphasizing the fact that we are the temple of the living God.

The signs of the return from exile were the restoration of the temple,  
and the restoration of the throne of David.

Jesus is sitting at the right hand of the Father—which restores the throne of David,  
and so quotes Leviticus, Isaiah, and several other places,  
insisting that holiness still requires separation from the ungodly.

Of course, we do not have these dietary regulations.

Jesus taught his disciples that

“whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him,  
since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled”  
(thus he declared all foods clean)

But rather,

“what comes out of a person is what defiles him.  
For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts,  
sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting,  
wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness.  
All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”

Jesus is saying that the Mosaic regulations were designed to teach you something else.

They were given to teach you about true defilement—which comes from the heart.

Mark and Matthew both follow this teaching with the story of the Syro-Phoenician woman,  
this Gentile woman, who is the firstfruits of the teaching on cleanliness.

The barrier between Jew and Gentile is being broken down.

The new standard of holiness (which was the point of the old standard),  
is beginning to draw new boundaries for the people of God.

Jesus has removed the specific dietary laws of the OT,  
but that does not mean that *everything* is clean.

No, as Paul says, “Since we have these promises, beloved,  
let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit,  
bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.”

So what does the Third Commandment mean for us?

What does it mean to regard the Name of the Lord as Holy?



I would suggest that we must view ourselves in the position of the Israelites coming out of Babylon and heading for the restored Jerusalem.

Our Babylon is American culture

–the socio-economic power that sets itself up as the rival claimant for our affections.

Revelation 18:4 warns 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians about the Roman world,

as also 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians about the American world:

“Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins, lest you share in her plagues; for her sins are heaped high as heaven, and God has remembered her iniquities.

Pay her back as she herself has paid back others, and repay her double for her deeds; mix a double portion for her in the cup she mixed.

As she glorified herself and lived in luxury,

so give her a like measure of torment and mourning.”

You are elect exiles, as Peter calls you, sojourning in this modern Babylon.

Remember what you are elect for!

God has called you out of Babylon to come and dwell in the New Jerusalem.

You can no longer set your affections on the things that this culture prizes.

You must seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.

You must set your hearts and minds on things above,

where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

To regard the Name of the LORD as holy means that your conduct reflects *his* holiness.

Your Father is holy—therefore as his holy children, be holy in all your conduct.

There is no greater violation of the third commandment than denying the name of Jesus..

To prohibit a person from speaking in the name of Jesus is to profane the holy name of God.

So when schools prohibit prayer in the name of Jesus,

they are breaking the third commandment.

To simply address “God” as generic is to deny what God has revealed.

Jesus has revealed to us the true name of the Father and of the Son and of the HS

Paul expands on this understanding of the name of the Lord Jesus.

In Phil 2:9-10, after reminding the Philippians of the incarnation of Christ,

he declares that through the resurrection,

Jesus has received the name that is above all names,

that at the *name* of Jesus, every knee should bow and every tongue confess

that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

In Romans 10:13, he says that whoever calls upon the *name* of the Lord will be saved.

In Col 3:17, he urges us to do all in the *name* of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In these texts we see that it is through the *name* of Jesus—the *name* of the LORD—that salvation comes to the people of God.

Everything God is and does is holy.

And because God has become man,

because the Word has become flesh,  
therefore his holy name has come to rest upon you.  
You have been baptized in the *name* of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Let us therefore walk in a manner worthy of the *name*.

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A. We are not to blaspheme or to abuse the Name of God by cursing, perjury, or unnecessary oaths, nor to share in such horrible sins by being silent bystanders. Rather, we must use the holy Name of God only with fear and reverence, so that we may rightly confess Him, call upon Him, and praise Him in all our words and works.

**100. Q. Is the blaspheming of God's Name by swearing and cursing such a grievous sin that God is angry also with those who do not prevent and forbid it as much as they can?**

A. Certainly, for no sin is greater or provokes God's wrath more than the blaspheming of His Name. That is why He commanded it to be punished with death.

**101. Q. But may we swear an oath by the Name of God in a godly manner?**

A. Yes, when the government demands it of its subjects, or when necessity requires it, in order to maintain and promote fidelity and truth, to God's glory and for our neighbour's good. Such oath-taking is based on God's Word and was therefore rightly used by saints in the Old and the New Testament.

**102. Q. May we also swear by saints or other creatures?**

A. No. A lawful oath is a calling upon God, who alone knows the heart, to bear witness to the truth, and to punish me if I swear falsely. No creature is worthy of such honour.