

## Don't misuse the Lord's name

### Guard your tongue

The Lord has given commandments to us, his people, so we know how to live to his glory. Many things can distract us so we need this assistance.

- ❑ Jesus assumes this will be taught to his people (Matthew 5:17).
- ❑ The law teaches us to walk in humility. It is the poor in spirit who are blessed (Matthew 5:2).
- ❑ The law is not our master but is still our wisdom (Psalm 119:97-100; 2 Timothy 3:16).

The third command requires that we guard our tongue. 'You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name' (Exodus 20:7).

- ❑ God reveals his name to Israel (Exodus 3:14-15; 6:3-7).
- ❑ The same is true for us Christians. God has revealed himself to us in the name of Jesus (Acts 9:4-5; 2 Corinthians 4:6).
- ❑ The Lord's name tells us who he is and gives us hope of what he will do, so it's important not to abuse it.

So, how *should* we use the Lord's name? That will help us notice when we misuse it.

- ❑ In this name, Moses goes to Pharaoh, performs the miracles that destroy Egypt's strength and leads God's people to freedom (Exodus 15:1-3).
- ❑ After his ascension, and when the Spirit comes, the apostles announce that everyone who calls on his name will be saved (Acts 2:21, 38).
- ❑ What the apostles do is done in the name of Jesus (Acts 3:13-16).
- ❑ He gives us the name to use when we pray—it's 'Father' (Matthew 6:9). He sends his Spirit so our cry is not hollow but comes with all the certainty of being his sons and daughters (Galatians 4:6-7).
- ❑ This is astonishing. We know the name of God, and can call on him to save us because we know we are his.

You can only be secure in this world if you have a great God. And it is a great kindness on God's part to reveal himself in this way. A proverb says, 'The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run into it and are safe' (Proverbs 18:10).

So how could we misuse this name? The word actually means to treat it in an empty way.

- ❑ We think that someone who uses 'God' or 'Jesus' to impress or to swear is misusing his name. That is certainly an abuse of the Lord's name. But this law is addressed to us who know him. It's us who know the fullness of his name who are most likely to use it in an empty way.
- ❑ What if we say the Lord is alive but act as though he didn't exist? What if we pray to the Lord and don't expect him to do us any good (James 1:6-8)? What if we tell friends we believe in the Lord, and then don't demonstrate his goodness in our living (Romans 2:24; 1 Corinthians 6:5-6)? What if we sing songs in church but don't actually love the Lord (1 Corinthians 13:1-3)? What if we say 'Lord, Lord'—expecting him to hear our prayer—but don't do what he says (Matthew 7:21).
- ❑ What if we promise something 'in God's name' (Deuteronomy 6:13), or introduce our promise with, 'As surely as the Lord lives...' (Jeremiah 4:2). The Lord expects that we will use his name in this way—as we shall see. But if we want to sound more confident than we are, or want to create a bigger impression than we deserve, or, just deceive people about our integrity, we have misused the Lord's name (Isaiah 48:1).

This is such a problem when Jesus comes that he teaches us not to swear in God's name at all.

- ❑ We should just say, 'Yes' or 'No' and mean it (Matthew 5:33-37).
- ❑ The formal use of swearing an oath in the Lord's name is culturally beyond repair.

James (who is probably the step brother of Jesus and grew up in the same house) tells us what an unruly thing our tongue is (James 3:1-12).

- ❑ Our talking is the overflow of what is going on in our hearts (Matthew 12:34). We are not just talking about a 'slip of the tongue'.
- ❑ If, in any way, our hearts are not settled in the love of God, or our conscience at peace through Christ's offering, we are very likely to 'overspeak'. That is, our tongues 'run away with us' and we are speaking about what we don't know, drawing attention to ourselves and not to our Lord and Saviour.
- ❑ It is this that is at the heart of 'taking the Lord's name in vain'.
- ❑ Rather, our hearts should be 'full of Christ and love his glorious matter to declare'.

However, the Lord is pleased for us to use his name to support our promises.

- ❑ Paul is an example (Romans 1:9; 9:1-2).
- ❑ We know we have God watching to see if we have meant what we said. This 'checking up' by God is good for us. We are not just dealing with people we may be able to deceive or impress. We are dealing with God.

Having a faithful God, and calling on him truly, does lead to a faithful life.

- ❑ Our passions are subdued, our fears are calmed, our egos are tamed, or humbled.
- ❑ The Lord anticipates that we will become like him and be able to be trusted in the same way he is.
- ❑ This helps a whole community to grow. We need everyone to mean what they say. Otherwise, people become cynical and loyalty begins to die.

And now, the Lord tells us he 'won't hold anyone guiltless' if they break this command.

- ❑ The Lord values his name, even when we don't, and he won't overlook our empty talk (Matthew 12:36).
- ❑ If he doesn't act, we live on in our self-deception, and his name is shamed in the world. If we get 'full of ourselves', the Lord has to let us fail.

Given that our tongue is the hardest thing to control, how glad we are that our keeping of this command does not begin from yesterday's mistakes but from the righteousness of Christ.

- ❑ It is this that gives full flow to our desire to please the Lord.
- ❑ We do not keep the commandments because we have to but because we want to.

So, let us love the name of the Lord. Let us call on his name. Let us proclaim the Lord's name. And let us claim integrity in his name. But don't ever think the name doesn't mean anything!