

Delighting in the Name of God

Heidelberg Catechism #47

Exodus 20:7 | Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 99–102

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.

As we know the first four commandments teach us how to delight in and love God. The first commandment teaches us to do this by delighting in the one true God alone. The second, by delighting in worshipping this one true God. Now here in the third, by delighting in speaking of this one true God as he desires and deserves. And what we've seen is that as those born again and made a new creations in Christ, the desires of our hearts are to be more and more the desires of God's. That's why we can say with Paul, "I delight in the law of God in my inner being" (Rom. 7:22).

God desires that we don't take his name in vain, which is positively to use it reverently. To know how to delight in his name we have to know the name. So tonight let's look at Exodus 3 where the Lord reveals his name.

THE LORD APPEARS

Moses was going about his life out in the wilderness like his forefathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Then *the LORD appeared*. But the story says the "angel of the LORD appeared." So who appeared—an angel or the LORD? The

text speaks of the angel but goes on to say “the LORD saw” and “God called” (v. 4), “I am the God of your father” (v. 6), and “I have surely seen” (v. 7). Ok, but how does this fit with our Trinitarian belief? Which divine Person appeared? The same person whom Abraham rejoiced to see his day (John 8); the same person whom Isaiah saw high and lifted up (John 12); the same person who stands at the top of the heavenly Jerusalem (Heb. 12); the same person who appeared to John with eyes like a flame of fire (Rev. 1)—the Son of God, our Lord. Well before he became flesh and dwelt among us he commissioned Moses to be a typological savior. He foreshadowed his own coming as the Savior of the world!

The Son appeared as the angel of the LORD “in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush” and although “the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed.” Why not just as a flame of fire; why include the bush? The fire is self-sufficient because it has no fuel, pointing to the self-sufficiency of God as the eternal I AM. He appears in such a way because it reinforces his promises throughout the chapter that although Israel was like a lowly bush, humbled by the fire of persecution and oppression, they would not be destroyed, but would be saved and sent to a better land.¹ What a promise for us! No matter the suffering, because we belong to Jesus we shall be preserved.

THE LORD IDENTIFIES

Then *the LORD identified* himself: “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (v. 6). This sounds similar to the preface to the Ten Commandments, doesn’t it? “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.” This is covenant language. God identifies himself not as the God of the philosophers and professional theologians but as the covenant God for his lowly people, who made and now keeps his promises.

Then he explains more: “I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry...I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them.” Seen, heard, come down; this is the language of action. Notice who *he* takes the initiative: *I*. God doesn’t speak of himself in the third person as if he was aloof or unconcerned, but who comes down into the mire of our sinful lives to save.

THE LORD SPEAKS

Then *the LORD speaks* in answer to Moses’ two objections to the Lord’s plan to send him to be a savior for Israel.

The first objection is so simple: “Who am I?” Who am I Lord, since my fellow countrymen rejected me when I sought to save them already, and

since the Pharaoh sought to kill me for killing an Egyptian? I tried this already and it didn't work! The Lord answers in the simplest yet powerful way: "I will be with you." This is the assurance he gave to Jacob when he fled from Esau and the assurance he gave when Jacob did not want to travel in the famine down to Egypt. I will be with you. You see, what God is saying in this answer is that no matter what our insufficiency is, he is sufficient; no matter what our inability is, he is able; no matter what our frailty is, he is powerful. Then he gives a further answer to this objection: the sign that the LORD sent Moses would be that Israel would worship on this very mountain.

But this seems so far off in the future. Moses wanted present assurance. So he objected in a second way: "Who are you?" If the Israelites ask, "What is his name?" What shall I say to them?" There was a one hit wonder song in the 90s that went like this:

If God had a name, what would it be?
And would you call it to His face?
If you were faced with Him in all His glory
What would you ask if you had just one question?

The Lord's answer is pure brilliance: I AM WHO I AM. It is true that God is eternal but this is not making a mere point about his nature, but is applying it to his people. Just as he bound himself in a covenant with

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob before, so he will do so now through Moses. I am a promise-making and promise-keeping God. We see this in verses 15–17 where the great I AM says he is the God of Israel’s fathers. What’s his proof? Just as he promised to Abraham that he would give a promised land to his people, so too this promise is the purpose of coming to them now. And so wonderfully all this came true in the person of Jesus Christ.

Notice how the name I AM WHO I AM is the LORD himself. His name is who he is! And you and I are called to delight in this name that is the Lord himself by speaking of it as he desires and deserves in a reverent way. This is why we don’t blaspheme, which is to speak irreverently of the name of God.

That song I just mentioned also goes on to say:

What if God was one of us
Just a slob like one of us
Just a stranger on the bus
Trying to make His way home?

We also don’t curse his name or lie after swearing by his name.

Instead, we use the holy name with reverence and awe because it is *his* name. “I delight in the law of God in my inner being” by trusting his will for my life in this commandment. His will is to guard my heart and mouth from my base and lowly ways of thinking and speaking about him.

Endnotes

¹ Sarna, 41; Theodore, 228.