

Sermon Title: Do Not Dishonor God's Name
Scripture Text: Exodus 20:7 (10 Commandments # 5 of 13)

Speaker: Jim Harris
Date: 3-20-11

When I first came to know Christ and I came to church, I knew by heart every word of probably every song that had been on the '60s Rock and Roll stations; unfortunately, they still clutter my brain, and I can still sing along with all of them. And I came into church, and there were these people singing these things that I had never heard—like, "There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel's veins" ("Praise for the Fountain Opened," 1772, William Cowper). There is a lot of theology in that, and I realized: "These people have something I don't! They know something I don't! They are excited about what they are doing!" And I had this sense that I need to find out what this is; and the songs were part of the heritage in doing that.

I had a pastor acquaintance tell me one time that, "That's the *worst* thing we could do in church, is sing something like, 'There is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel's veins'! People don't understand that!" And I said, "Well, maybe not—but you're wrong! They *need* to understand that! *We all* need to understand that!" And something that will get in your mind like music is such a *wonderful* way to plant those things there.

And I was checking while we were singing—I'm pretty sure that in our worship service so far today, we have sung things that were written in the 18th, 19th, 20th, and 21st Centuries, and one of the tunes came from the 8th Century. We have a heritage! It's not an accident that we named a church that. It's a wonderful thing to have a heritage.

And I want to tell you that I know *not one single song* that has anything to do with the passage before us this morning! Maybe somebody can fix that for us. Today, we're studying Number 3 of the Ten Commandments, which is only one verse long. It says: "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain" (Ex. 20:7; NASB-1995, and throughout, unless otherwise noted).

For some reason I don't understand, this is the one of the Ten Commandments which it seems a great number of unbelievers are aware of; and for *some reason*, many people who don't know Christ seem to be sensitive in their conscience to this, even though they don't understand it.

In my golf hobby, I frequently get to play with unbelievers. The cool thing is: Among the people I play with, about half are Christians and about half are not; so, it's evangelism and it's discipleship, all at once. If that's not a good excuse, I don't know what is!

But it is interesting how unbelievers often respond when they find out that I'm a pastor. I've had similar experiences many times, but one really sticks out: There was a man I met one day, who used several profane expressions—including various references to God—out loud when he didn't play well; and that day, that was most of the time. After 11 or 12 holes, he found out from another player in the group that I'm a pastor. He came running over to me; I was on one side of the green and he was on the other—I thought something was *wrong*! He was in such a hurry, he came over to me and he said, "I need to apologize to you for my language!"

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Now isn't it interesting that he thought it was so important that he apologized to *me* for what he said; isn't it interesting: He didn't say the same thing to Jay Brown, who was my partner that day and who is probably better known in that world for his Christian testimony than I am! It didn't matter to say anything to him. Isn't it interesting that one nonbeliever in our group told another nonbeliever that he needed to apologize to the preacher for his language!

I had one of those rare moments of quick thinking; I amazed myself with what I said to him when he apologized. I didn't want to make him feel inappropriately guilty for the *wrong* reasons, so I said two things to him. The first thing I said was, "Well, if you say something I have never heard on a golf course, I'll let you know." I think that kind of put the guy at ease; he chuckled a little bit. And then I said, in a moment of boldness: "Besides, it isn't *me* that you're accountable to for what you say; God takes care of that stuff." He chuckled again, but that time it seemed a lot more nervous and a lot less funny to him.

I don't know why so many people seem so sensitive to apologize to the preacher for bad language they spew into the air. None of them ever apologize to me for their *immorality*; none of them apologize to me for lying to their bosses, or having lustful thoughts, or yelling at their spouses, or getting drunk the night before, or being hypocrites. But even though I can't figure out why so many people seem to act as if the Third Commandment is foremost among the Ten as the reason to apologize to the preacher, one thing I do know is this: Most people don't really understand what this commandment is all about.

It's only one verse long: Exodus Chapter 20, Verse 7—"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain." One sentence, two parts: There's a Prohibition telling you what not to do, and then there is an Explanation that violating the command will result in punishment. Do Not Take The Name Of The Lord In Vain—that's the Prohibition. Do Not Incite His Punishment is the Warning.

So: Do Not Take The Name Of The Lord Your God In Vain. Questions immediately come to mind: What does "the name of the Lord" mean? He has *many*, many names in Scripture, and they're all legitimate. What is "the name of the Lord"? How do you "take" a "name"? And what does "in vain" mean? It's easy to rattle off the sentence, but let's think it through and see what it really means.

So, what is "the name of the Lord"? Well, "the name of the Lord," in Hebrew culture and language, means: everything that is identified with Him, everything that is identified with "Jehovah" (Gen. 22:14; Ex. 6:3; 17:15; Jdg. 6:24; Ps. 83:18; Is. 12:2; 26:4; KJV). "Don't take the name of Jehovah in vain" would be what this verse says.

Your name is—even in our culture—a synonym for your reputation (cf. Jdg. 6:32; 2 Sam. 23:8; Rev. 3:1). A "good name" means: a clean reputation. A "bad name" means that someone's integrity is sullied. To "make a name for yourself" means: to have an impact that makes you well-known (cf. Gen. 11:4); that's "making a name for yourself."

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So then, "the name of the Lord" is *all* that stands for God, and all that God stands for; it is God's *identity*. When you see the phrase "the name of the Lord," it refers to God Himself. In the Bible, God does indeed have *many* names that emphasize many aspects of His character and nature as He relates to people (e.g., Gen. 4:26; 16:13; Ex. 6:3; 33:19; 34:14; Lev. 24:16; Deut. 12:5; 14:23; 18:22; 28:10, 58; 32:3; Jdg. 6:24; 1 Sam. 12:22; 17:45; 2 Sam. 6:2; 22:50; 1 Ki. 8:20; 9:3; 14:21; 18:24; Ps. 8:1; 9:10; 20:1; 29:2; 30:4; 83:16; 86:11; 92:1; 102:12; Prov. 18:10; Is. 26:8; 50:10; 63:16; Jer. 23:6; Matt. 21:9; Lk. 10:17; Acts 9:15; Col. 3:17).

In ancient Hebrew culture and language, a person's name was supposed to represent his character and nature, or the message illustrated by his life (e.g., 1 Sam. 25:25; 1 Chr. 4:9). For example: "Jacob" means "supplanter" (see Gen. 27:36); "Zechariah" means "God remembers"; "Jehovah," one of the names of God, is a form of the verb "to be," and it emphasizes that God is eternal—in the Book of Revelation, He "was" and He "is" and He "is to come" (4:8; cf. Ps. 102:12; 135:13; Mic. 5:2b; Jn. 8:58; Heb. 13:8); "*Elohim*" means "Mighty One"—it is God's name in relation to Creation, whereas "Jehovah" is related to His keeping His eternal covenants with man (Lev. 26:24).

"The name of the Lord" wraps up everything that God is: He is "Master" (2 Tim. 2:21), He is "King" (Ps. 47:2), "the true God" (Jer. 10:10), "the living God" (Deut. 5:26), the Great "I Am" (Ex. 3:14; Jn. 8:58); the "Creator" (Is. 40:28), "the Lord of Hosts" (1 Sam. 17:45), "the King of kings and Lord of lords" (1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 17:14; 19:16); "Savior" (Is. 43:3; 45:21; Titus 2:13); "Father of mercies and God of all comfort" (2 Cor. 1:3); "love" (1 Jn. 4:8, 16; cf. 2 Cor. 13:11); "The Light of the world" (Jn. 8:12; 9:5); "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace" (Is. 9:6); "The resurrection and the life" (Jn. 11:25); "a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29); "The bread of life" (Jn. 6:35); "The water of life" (Rev. 21:6)—He is *so many things*; that's just a few.

And as He introduced Himself to Moses at the Burning Bush, *Moses* asked Him, what is His name, in part in this famous passage: Exodus 3, starting at Verse 13—"Then Moses said to God, 'Behold, I am going to the sons of Israel, and I will say to them, "The God of your fathers has sent me to you." Now they may say to me, "What is His name?" What shall I say to them?' God said to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM.' " That's the best we can do at translating something that is just describing eternal existence; like I said, it's a form of the Hebrew word "to be." The Greek translates it: "I Am The One Who Is." "And He said, 'Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, "I AM has sent me to you." ' God, furthermore, said to Moses, 'Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, "The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you." This is My name forever, and this is My memorial-name to all generations.' "

So you see how His name goes from the past—when He called Abraham—"to all generations." It is His eternal character. He *is* eternal, and He is also involved in human history—"the God of your fathers"—and His "name forever...to all generations."

So, what is "the name of the Lord"? It is His person, and it is His character—it is all that God stands for in the world.

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What does it mean to "*take* the name of the Lord"? We don't use that terminology much, unless we're quoting the Bible. The verb "take" in the Hebrew is *nāsā*, and it's a word whose meaning is almost as flexible as the word "take" in English. You know, you can "take" a helping of food; you can "take" a bath; you can "take" Communion; you can *have* a "take" on a situation; you can "take" a friend to church; you can "take" a pitch instead of swinging at it, or you can "take" a swing at the pitch; you can even "take" a nap—and if you are, stop now or I'll "take" action! It's a little word with a big meaning.

The Hebrew word essentially means "to lift something"; it can be applied in a number of ways: This is the word that is used for the water "lifting" the Ark, or "taking" the Ark (Gen. 7:17). That's the sense in which it is most likely meant here. The idea seems to be "lifting something with your voice" (e.g., Gen. 21:16; Ezek. 21:22); so, you can use your voice to "lift up"—announce (Prov. 8:1; Is. 40:9; 52:8), or "take" or "take up" a "name" (Ps. 16:4), a "song" (Hab. 2:6), a prayer, a "reproach" (Ps. 15:3); you can even "take up...weeping" (Jer. 9:10). The word *nāsā* is also used for "taking" in the sense of bearing something, or carrying it along with you—like "take" your Bible to church with you. It also can include the idea of carrying guilt.

So, to "take" something means: to announce it, to be closely associated with it, to be tied to it, and to carry it around with you. So, when you "take" a name, you are saying the name in such a way that you are tying yourself to it; you are associating yourself with it.

On our wedding day, Marsha and I said to each other: "I *take* you to be my husband / to be my wife." From that day—coming up on 39 years ago, now—we have been inseparably associated with and committed to each other; and as a matter of fact, Marsha made the commitment to "take" my last name; ever since then, she has been known as "Marsha Harris," and she has not taken it in vain.

So, what does it mean to "take the name of the Lord"? Does it mean, to *say* His name? Certainly, it does. But it means *a whole lot more than that*, because the word "take" has such a wide range of meaning; it includes something that you can utter with your voice, but it's *much more* than that: To "take" His name means, to identify yourself with God; it means, to associate yourself with Him; it means, to be a bearer of His name in the world. Do you see how it means *so much more* than saying a bad word? The "name of the Lord" is everything God is; so, to "take the name of the Lord" is to identify yourself with God by proclaiming His name (Deut. 32:3; Heb. 2:12), proclaiming your allegiance to Him—and thereby, associating yourself with Him (2 Chr. 7:14; Jer. 15:16; Dan. 9:19; Acts 15:17).

So, what does "in vain" mean? The Hebrew word translated "vain" here in this context—the word *shav*—implies emptiness or vanity. This is one of those places where I need to comment on the very popular New International Version; this is one of the passages where they outdid themselves, and inserted an *interpretation* in place of a translation; the New International Version says: "You shall not *misuse* the name of the Lord your God." By that translation, they imposed on the text to make it sound as if this *only has to do with things you say*, such as using God's name in flippant oaths; but the actual word is *much* stronger than that.

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And that's another one of those cases why I say: The New International Version is very popular—if you want to read through the whole Bible in a smooth way, it's not bad for that, the way it's paragraphed and the way it's formatted; but *don't* use it as your study Bible! There are some *serious* problems with the liberties that they take with the translation. And now, I just read this week, they've come out with a 2011 edition that replaces the previous one—the original was in 1978, updated in 1984, and it had those theological problems. They made it much, much, much, *much* worse a few years ago when they went "gender-neutral," and now they've made it *even worse* with a *new* gender-neutral edition, where they don't want to use "he" when the text says "he."

Use a good translation: The New American Standard Bible; New King James Version; the new "ESV"—the English Standard Version—is very good and very scholarly; the King James Version is very scholarly—the main problem with it is that the English is a foreign language to most people in this generation, but the New King James Version pretty well solves that problem.

It's *not just* a matter of "misusing" His name. It's *not just* a matter of saying it in the wrong context. It's *not just* a matter of saying it in a flippant way.

Looking at all the ways that this word "vain" is translated in various contexts gives you the idea of what God meant when He chose this word. In English translations in the Old Testament, this word is translated "deceit," "deceitful," "deception," "empty," "emptiness," "false," "falsehood," "lies," "vain," "vanity," and "worthless," among other things. Do not take the name of God in a "worthless" sort of way.

One lexicon says this word describes anything unsubstantial or unreal or worthless. It's a word that is sometimes used for idols, or for the words of false prophets. So, don't take the name of the true God in a false or phony or wasteful kind of a way.

So, what then does it mean to "take the name of the Lord your God in vain"? It means: to speak using the name of God in such a way that you identify with Him in an insincere way (Is. 48:1; cf. Lev. 19:12; Ps. 145:18; Zeph. 1:5). It is to misrepresent God by what you say or do (Rom. 2:22). It is to use His name frivolously or deceitfully, because what you do doesn't match up to your use of the name of God (1 Jn. 2:4).

If you were to take an oath, like in a court, by saying something like, "So help me God," and you don't fulfill every detail of your promise, you have "taken the name of the Lord your God in vain." If you utter the name of God in your speech, if you associate God in any way with the truthfulness of what you say, then you make yourself accountable to Him for *living up to* what you say (Num. 30:2). If you use the name of God as an expletive, you immediately bring shame on the name of God—and, by the way, you humiliate yourself. A lot of people don't realize that.

People misuse the name of God in order to make themselves sound important; it seems like you're *somebody* when you toss around the name. Have you ever heard someone hit his finger with a hammer and clench his teeth and say, "George Washington Dad-burn-it"?

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No. Why? Because everyone knows George Washington has no power to bring damnation on *anyone*. So why do people use the name of God in such ways? It's because they know, deep down, that God is the One who *has* the ultimate power in the universe! That's why throwing His name around makes you sound important! But if you don't live up to what you say, you're not important; you're a fool (Ecc. 5:4)—and God will not leave you "unpunished."

You "take the name of the Lord your God in vain" any time you misrepresent Him. Think of it like putting on a uniform. I saw a Marine in uniform on TV the other day, and the thought kind of popped into my mind: If you wear the uniform of a U.S. Marine, you are openly identified with *very specific standards* of conduct. You take an oath to defend the nation and its constitution against all enemies. Your every action, your every word, is subject to the Uniform Code of Military Justice—and *you will be judged by its standards*, without exception.

When you accept the uniform, you accept all that comes with it; you are expected to perform to the standards that are *far above* those of most other people in the country—down to how you wear your hair and how you maintain the uniform itself. You are *expected* to put your life at risk *at any moment* to defend those standards, and to defend others protected by them. If you shirk your duty or if you disobey orders, you will be disciplined. You might be dishonorably discharged, and possibly imprisoned. That would be like "taking the uniform in vain."

When you take God's name and you claim to believe you are His adopted child, you are openly identified with *very specific standards* of conduct and speech (e.g., Eph. 4:1; 5:3; Col. 1:10; 1 Thess. 2:12). Don't do it "in vain."

Do Not Incite His Punishment—the second point. Exodus Chapter 20, Verse 7—"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, *for the Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain.*" The second half of that verse is *very clear*: "The Lord will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain."

Now, it's worded as gently as possible, but the meaning is pretty obvious: If God will not leave you *unpunished*, what does that mean? You *will* be punished (cf. Ex. 34:7; Prov. 11:21; Nah. 1:3).

Sometimes God punished blasphemy, misrepresenting Him, *in this life*. Who can know how many blessings a person forfeits, and how much is lost through the loss of reputation and character, by misrepresenting the name of God?

Sometimes, God gives you a little glimpse into how seriously He takes His name when you utter it. It's not normally this dramatic, but consider the case of Herod Agrippa the First; he's the grandson of Herod the Great. And Agrippa was, on the surface—at least, so he wanted people to believe—a zealous practitioner of Jewish rituals; he claimed to be a very religious man. But his outward profession of loyalty to the name of the Lord was "in vain." Look at the end of his life in Acts 12, Verses 21 through 23.

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Like I said, it's not usually this dramatic, but it says this: "On an appointed day Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering an address to them. The people kept crying out, 'The voice of a god and not of a man!' " Now, the problem is, Herod *enjoyed that* (contra Acts 14:11-14). "And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died." Now, I'm not singling out people who ought to receive that fate, but—Do you think some people may have gotten the point?

Usually, the justice of God is delayed much more than that, by His mercy and His love (Rev. 2:21; cf. Ps. 86:15; 2 Pet. 3:9). But, my friend, *don't count on it!* (1 Thess. 5:3; cf. Lk. 13:1-5) *Watch* what comes from your mouth, and *be sure* you are willing to live up to what you say.

Most of the time, the punishment for taking the name of God in vain is not so visible—although, like I said, it can be very *real*, if not subtle. As you diminish your own reputation by what you say, you forfeit *untold* blessings.

But, even if the punishment for taking the name of God in vain is not always complete in this life, I promise you: *It is never forgotten*. Look at the words of Jesus in Matthew 12, starting at Verse 34. By the way, He is speaking to mainly the Pharisees, the most religious people of His day, the ones who were the spokesmen—so they said—for God (Matt. 23:2); they took His name. The *Son* of God addresses them this way: "You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man brings out of his good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of his evil treasure what is evil. But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." That means: What comes out of you in the long run, over the pattern of your life, *that* shows what is on the inside—good or evil.

Look at the Great White Throne Judgment in Revelation Chapter 20. The "books were opened," and the things that are "written" in them (vs. 12)—everything everyone has ever said or done (see Prov. 15:3; cf. Ps. 44:21). That's the standard by which you will be judged (Ecc. 12:14; Lk. 12:2).

There is a lot of room here for personal application. This does not mean *merely* that you review, and perhaps tweak, your list of words you won't say; that's not all that this passage is about. Yeah, you should review your patterns of speech; compare what you say and how you live. But let me suggest some ways you might be guilty of taking God's name in vain.

The Holy Spirit is the One who brings conviction, as necessary, that we might repent (Ezek. 36:27; Jn. 16:8; 2 Tim. 2:25). If you need to change something, *change it*, I urge you (Ps. 119:59; Rev. 3:19). Remember: This is not written to the *vile* man under the heat of battle. This Third Commandment was given to Israel at Mount Sinai; it was to the people who bore the name of God. It is to people like us, in a different era.

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Do you speak irreverently of God? Think about what you say. He is the Infinite Majesty of Heaven. Do you ever speak lightly of Him? Do you ever think of God as just like you, only a lot bigger, a lot nicer, and a lot more powerful? (Ps. 50:21) Don't be irreverent—*certainly*, it means that.

Do you profess to belong to Him, but you live your life as if you are not accountable to Him? (cf. Ps. 10:13) Titus Chapter 1, Verse 16 describes some people; it says, "They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed." I hate to tell you how many times I have heard someone say, "Yeah, my dad was highly respected in the church—and at home, he yelled at us, he screamed at us. He was a hypocrite." (cf. Phil. 3:18)

Do you live up to what you profess? Do you say, "I'm a Christian," but there is something in your life that is immoral or illegal? That's "taking the name of the Lord in vain."

Do you ever use God's name flippantly in idle conversation? Do you ever say things like, "Oh, my God!"? In text-language it isn't even spelled out; it's just "OMG"—*so flippant*. Are you *really* calling the God of the Universe to witness what's going on there? Do you *really* mean that you are *declaring* something about God? If you're not, don't say it.

Do you come to church and sing the praises of God and of His Son Jesus Christ, but not truly worship Him from the heart? (Is. 29:13) If so, you are "taking the name of the Lord in vain"; He "will not leave you unpunished," according to His own word (cf. Num. 23:19). Jesus says, if you're doing these things "to be noticed by men" (Matt. 23:4), "Truly" you have your "reward in full" (Matt. 6:2). Somebody sees you, somebody things well of you—that's all you get, because God is not impressed.

When you live your life by the standard of, "What will everybody think?"—you're on *really thin ice* there! Because, on the one hand, if what you mean is, "People will think I'm evil if I do something evil," then, good—don't do it! But if you're doing it to *perform* so that people think you are good, you're deceiving them; you know you're not good. Do what is "right before God" (Acts 8:21).

Do you "go through the motions" of praying to God, but you don't *really* believe in His power to act in response to your prayers? In other words: It is possible to pray to God—at least in words—and not really *trust* Him. Do you pray without believing that God is good and faithful? If so, your *very prayer* is "taking His name in vain" (cf. Prov. 28:9).

Do you claim to be a Christian, but you are superstitious? (cf. Is. 65:11) I was talking to a friend one time who told me that she was listening to a certain local Christian radio station that was promoting an event; it was an outdoor event; it was in the early summer, when things can be stormy; and they were saying, "We're hoping for good weather." And the person, speaking on a Christian radio station, said: "Cross your fingers and pray." Wait a minute! "Cross your fingers and pray"?—that's like saying, "If we're *lucky*, God will bless us!" Look, *God is God*—don't *toy* with that!

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Don't speak where you're not qualified to speak. Do you ever misrepresent or twist God's Word? (cf. 1 Tim. 1:7; 2 Tim. 2:15; 2 Pet. 3:16) I have had people tell me that, "Well, *my* sin is not so bad. I mean, Abraham lied about his wife being his sister! I just told a 'little white lie'—I shouldn't get in trouble for that! David had more than one wife; it's okay for *me*." Don't misrepresent God's Word; He "will not leave you unpunished."

Some people "take the name of the Lord in vain" when they attach God's name to their wickedness (Jer. 7:8-10; cf. Prov. 21:27; Jude. 4). There are people who go around and commit murder by bombing abortion clinics *in the name of God*—as if He needs *your* puny little help to execute His judgment! (Rom. 12:17, 19)

There are these ones going around now, making headlines; they are claiming to be Christians; they're claiming to be a Baptist church; and what they do is, go harass people at military funerals, because of their views of what's wrong with our country. They put themselves in the place of God—they "take His name in vain." It wouldn't surprise me if, someday, a bolt of lightning were to come down there; but it doesn't, because God is so gracious and so patient—but they will *not* be "unpunished."

Of course, there's the obvious one: Do you ever utter the name of God as profanity? (Lev. 24:11) I mean, if you can't figure out *anything else*, you must figure out that Exodus Chapter 20, Verse 7, *eliminates that!*

Do you ever make rash vows? Do you ever try to "cut a special deal" with God? There are things like: "God, please, just get me out of this mess—I'll give You half my assets!" That's "taking God's name in vain"—*unless*, of course, He gets you out of the mess and you live up to your promise, for His glory. I know *one* person who landed in jail—and he deserved it; the only problem with him being there is that he deserved it *a lot sooner*, and for a lot more things than he was actually put there for—and his testimony is: "I said one of those prayers, *but I meant it!* 'God, get me out of here and I will serve You!' "—and he still is; about 35 years later, he still is. But that wasn't a rash vow, you see; that was a *genuine* one. Don't try to "make deals" with God. Carry His name with you *faithfully*.

Do you ever accuse God of evil? You say, "Well, I wouldn't do *that!*" Well, do you ever shake your spiritual fist at Him, and blame Him for you not getting the answer that you want for your prayers? (Num. 11:1; 21:4-5; Jb. 40:1-5; Ps. 78:19-20; Jon. 4:8) I hear people say, "I'm mad at God! Things didn't work out the way I wanted them to! I'm mad at God!" You're not going to win that argument! (Is. 45:9)

Don't be *silly!* Don't *blaspheme!* A lot of people have an insurance-industry view of theology, where the only times it seems like God is active in the world is when there's a fire, a flood, a hurricane, a tornado, an earthquake, or a tsunami; those "acts of God"—"He only does *bad* things!" That's "taking His name in vain."

Not only does God not allow us to worship any other gods, and not only does He not allow us to worship *Him* in the form of idols—those are the first two Commandments—He does not allow us to collectively treat Him as if *He* is no more than an idol. When we act as if

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He is *not* all-powerful, when we act as if He is not always good, or when we act as if He is the One who wrote the platform for our political party of choice, we "take His name in vain," we *demean* Him, we *lower* Him, we misrepresent Him.

We "take the name of the Lord in vain" when we fall into the silly, mostly TV misrepresentations of God, as if He wants us happy and fertile and healthy and well-educated and full and satisfied *all the time*. You know, the truth is: Maybe He wants us satisfied *only* in Him (Ps. 73:25; 142:5), and *dissatisfied* in everything else (Ecc. 2:25). For a lot of people, a little physical hunger and doing without things would maybe help "hunger and thirst for righteousness" to grow (Matt. 5:6), for the glory of His name.

God is *not* just "the life of the party" who wants to make you happy! *He is God*—the "God of *truth*" (Ps. 31:5), the "God of *justice*" (Is. 30:18); yes, a "God" of "mercy" (Eph. 2:4) and a "God of love" (2 Cor. 13:11) and a "God of grace" (1 Pet. 5:10), but He is *all* of that, all of the time (Ps. 119:68).

We profane God's name when we worship Him superficially. We act as if true worship is *fun*, and it always needs to be *innovative*. Boy, in our generation this is *all over the place*. We sing theological tripe, like the one that came and went—I'm glad it went; have you ever heard that song: "Jesus Needs A Few Good Men"? "Oh, poor Jesus! You know, if our pitching staff just had *one more good starter* and *one solid closer*, we could win our division! If Jesus just had *a few good men*, then maybe..."—*What does that mean?* It's *demeaning*, some of the stuff we say about Him!

We mouth words, and sometimes we don't mean what we say. "There *is* a fountain filled with blood drawn from Immanuel's veins"—there's a lot of figurative stuff in that sentence, but *that's pretty important!* That's *serious!* It insults His name when we speak of Him, but we don't really *act* like it; we're superficial.

Sometimes we speak as if He is a guest in our services or in our homes, instead of, He is Lord of everything.

We profane the name of God when we spout pious things like, "God told me..." or, "God showed me..." or, "God led me..." Albert Mohler, the president of Southern Theological Seminary, wrote this, commenting on Exodus 20, Verse 7; he said: "Well, God *does* show, God *does* tell, and God *does* lead—*by His revealed Word!* Forms of disguised idolatry come among us when, *without* any revealed canonical Scriptural Word, we speak as if God has spoken to us and given us new revelation!" Friends, watch out for words like that to come across your mind. "God told me!" He *did*? What does His voice sound like? Was there a mountain quaking, and lighting and thunder? That's *what happens* when He speaks! (cf. Jb. 40:9; Ezek. 43:2; Rev. 1:15)

We profane God's name when we trivialize Him, when we speak *silly* things in His name—like the football player thanking God in the end zone after scoring the touchdown; the politician piously asking God to bless his audience, and implying that God is the author if his political position; or we pontificate about "what God is doing."

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Listen to Mohler again; I couldn't help but pass this one on: "The challenge here is deeply theological. We have no right to speak where God has not spoken! You see, it is not just the misuse of God's name by a politician that troubles me; I'm *far* more concerned with the misuses of God's name by Christians—pastors, public figures, church members—where we would *dare* speak where God has not spoken! The Lord's name is taken in vain when we say things like, 'We know why God did that!' and, 'I can tell you why you have cancer.' God's name is taken in vain. Turn on the television and you will find many who follow the example of 'Eliphaz the Temanite' (Jb. 2:11), the friend of Job who shows up to explain why God did this, or why God did that, or what God is saying to us in this or that. These TV Eliphazes often speak where God has *not* spoken (Jer. 14:14), where God has *not* given them license to explain His ways (Jb. 42:7)." Amen!

I heard some preachers dare to get up and *explain* why God brought the towers down on September 11th, 2001. *You can't do that!* He hasn't said.

Now, what *does* God ask of you? Well, if He says, "Don't take My name in vain," it doesn't mean "don't take My name"—it means "*take* My name *in truth!*" (Ps. 86:11; cf. Jos. 24:14; 1 Sam. 12:24; Is. 48:1; Jer. 4:2; Dan. 9:13) Know Him as He is (Hos. 6:3). It's revealed to you in His Word, the Bible (e.g., Jn. 4:24; 1 Tim. 1:17; 2 Tim. 3:15), and He asks you to accept the unspeakable privilege of being His representative in the world (2 Cor. 5:20; Phil. 2:15).

The Prophet Micah put it this way: "Though all the peoples walk each in the name of his god, as for us, we will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever" (Mic. 4:5). He wants you to represent Him accurately!

Or, as Jesus put it in the Sermon on the Mount: "Let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil" (Matt. 5:37; cf. Zech. 8:16). That was in the context of chiding the Jews for all of their many layers of oaths, and what things you could swear by and what things you shouldn't swear by, and when it was binding and when it was not (Matt. 23:16-22).

Or James, the half-brother of the Lord Jesus, put it this way in James 5:12—"But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath; but your yes is to be yes, and your no, no, so that you may not fall under judgment."

In other words: *Know* God (Col. 1:10); *believe* God (Rom. 4:3, 5); "speak" the "truth" (Eph. 4:25); "speak the truth in love" (Eph. 4:15); *mean* what you say and say what you mean—it's not all that complicated! (cf. Mic. 6:8) Don't add *all this other stuff* to put yourself at risk.

Philippians 2:9-11, speaking of Christ: "For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

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To "take the name of God" is to be a follower of His Son, Jesus Christ—to "take His name" (see Acts 11:26b; Jas. 2:7b). Everyone *will* "bow" at that name, because God the Father committed "all judgment to the Son" (Jn. 5:22; cf. Matt. 28:18; Acts 10:42; 17:31). *Everyone* "will bow"—you bow *now*, voluntarily (Rom. 10:9); or you bow in the future, when He is your Judge (Rev. 20:11-12; cf. 2 Tim. 4:1; 1 Pet. 4:5).

So, what about this Third Commandment? You know, I'm not *nearly* as concerned about people who flippantly and irreverently say bad words; that's not really the issue. I'm not nearly as interested in being offended when I hear those things. You know, I *expect* cats to act like cats, and dogs to act like dogs, and birds to act like birds, and Non-Christians to act like Non-Christians (cf. 1 Sam. 24:13)—that doesn't surprise me! I don't spend a lot of energy getting all *offended* by that personally, as if the offense is against me—the offense is against Almighty God!

It *really bothers me* when people who claim to know the Lord live lives that don't match up to their claims! Does *yours*? Do your words match up with your life? And does your life match up with your words? Is there something that you need to talk to God about right now? I mean, *how did you do* in the first hour of the service? Was it just "going through the motions"? Was it just your Sunday morning habit? Be careful that you were not taking His name in vain. Those who take His name in vain will not go "unpunished"!

But, you know what? *We've all done it*, right? We have all broken all ten of the Commandments, when we realize what they *really* mean in our heart. But Christ died *to take the punishment!* (Is. 53:5; Matt. 20:28; 1 Pet. 3:18; cf. Col. 2:14) He is the One who "died for our sins," and "He was buried," and "was raised" (1 Cor. 15:3-4), and "always lives to make intercession for" us (Heb. 7:25) before the throne of God the Father (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 9:24). And He *is* coming again (Heb. 10:37), and He *will* make it right (2 Thess. 1:6-10).

So, don't just go away afraid of a slip of the tongue. Go away, "taking the name of the Lord your God"—taking it with you, lifting it up, speaking it, speaking it in truth, speaking it in love, *certainly* speaking it not "in vain."

Let's pray:

Our Father, how we thank You for letting us bear Your name, letting us be Your ambassadors. Father, whatever needs to be done in our hearts to make us more effective ambassadors, to make us more clear speakers of Your truth, to make us more humble and reliable servants in Your name, we ask You to do it, we pray, so that You will receive all the glory. You know each heart here, Father. If there is anyone here who has made a profession of being Your follower and it is in vain, please, bring them over—bring them over to genuine faith today. Do Your work, we pray, in Jesus' wonderful, matchless name. Amen.