

Reverencing the Name of God

The Third Commandment Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

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by C.W. Powell

Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

1. Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God, and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.
2. Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few.
3. For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words.
4. When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed.
5. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.
6. Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?
7. For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities: but fear thou God.

The Third Commandment is this, found in Exodus 20 and HC 92. The commandment is explained in HC. 99, 100, 101, and 102.

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain.

HC Q99: What is required in the third Commandment?

A99: That we must not by cursing, or by false swearing, nor yet by unnecessary oaths, profane or abuse the name of God; nor even by our silence and connivance be partakers of these horrible sins in others; and in summary, that we use the holy name of God in no other way than with fear and reverence, so that He may be rightly confessed and worshiped by us, and be glorified in all our words and works.

HC Q100: Is the profaning of God's name, by swearing and cursing, so

grievous a sin that His wrath is kindled against those also who do not help as much as they can to hinder and forbid it?

A100: Yes, truly, for no sin is greater and more provoking to God than the profaning of His name; wherefore He even commanded it to be punished with death.

HC. Q101: But may we swear reverently by the name of God?

A101: Yes, when the magistrate requires it, or when it may be needful otherwise, to maintain and promote fidelity and truth to the glory of God and our neighbor's good; for such an oath is grounded in God's Word, and therefore was rightly used by the saints in the Old and New Testaments.

HC. Q102: May we swear by "the saints" or by any other creatures?

A102: No, for a lawful oath is a calling upon God, that He, as the only searcher of hearts, may bear witness to the truth and punish me if I swear falsely; which honor is due to no creature.

The Interpretation of the Lord Jesus of the Third Commandment is found in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:33-37:

33. Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths:

34. But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne:

35. Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King.

36. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black.

37. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

The sum of this commandment, therefore is this.

1. Because we are sinful people living in a sinful world, on important and solemn occasions, we bind ourselves with oaths in order to establish the seriousness of the words that we say, as we read in Hebrews 6:16: "For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife." So in court, in weddings, in licensure and ordination of the ministry, for church membership, for public office, we require men to take oaths that their word is true or that they will faithfully perform that which they have sworn to do.

2. God himself, to accommodate our weakness established Christ as the Mediator by an oath. Of course, there is none greater than He, so He swore by Himself, "I have sworn by myself, Thou art a priest forever, after the order of Melchisedec." Thus we have two immutable things, according to Hebrews, the Word of God which is immutable, and the oath of God, which is immutable, to give us assurance that our salvation is safe in the hands of Jesus Christ.

3. We defile God's name in several ways:

- a. By refusing to swear by His name, as if we are accountable to no one but ourselves. Hence, the law said that Israel was to swear only by the name of God.
- b. By swearing falsely, by not doing what we have sworn to do.
- c. By making false promises that we do not intend to keep, or that we would not be able to keep.
- d. By using the name of God in a light and frivolous way. “O my God.” Which is evil in two ways, taking the covenant into your mouth vainly; and using the name of God vainly.
- e. By using words in an empty and foolish way, chattering on and on about nothing.
- f. By living in arrogance as though we were masters of our own destiny. James says, Do not say I will do such and such—but, if God wills, I will do such and such. We should live in reverence for the attributes of God which should be called to mind by the mention of His Name. Therefore we are to fear the Name of the Lord, for He is in Heaven and we are on the earth.

But let us look at the passage before us:

I do not intend to look at the New Testament passages so much today, because I intend to preach on the Sermon on the Mount after I finish this study. The Ecclesiastic passage will serve our purposes this afternoon:

Vs. 1. Keep your foot when you go to the house of God. The temple was the place where oaths and vows were to be made. It is an integral part of man’s nature to respond to God. Just as God makes promises to men, so men makes promises to God. This is not wrong, but an important part of worship. At Bethel, when God appeared to Jacob and made promises to Jacob, Jacob responded by prayers and promises to God.

Far more important is what God says to us, than what we say to God. Preaching and the reading of God’s word is far more important than singing and prayers, although the latter are not to be ignored. The sacrifice of fools means empty and vain promises and vows that men make to God. God is greatly pleased with the sincere offerings of praise and thanksgiving and earnest and reverent prayers, but he has no pleasure in fools who chatter on and on, thinking they are heard for their much speaking, or thinking that God will be impressed with the rash and impudent promises.

Vs. 2. Let your words be few. Better to reverently hear what God says than to make your rash and proud promises to God. Don’t enter into church membership lightly; don’t enter into marriage lightly; don’t enter into the ministry lightly. God will hold you accountable for your promises and your vows.

Vs. 3. When a person is occupied with a great deal of business, often at night the confusion of the day will seep into his dreams, and his dreams will be disjointed and filled with chaos. His dreams may very well reveal the disturbances of the day. Our prayers before God are not to be like these disjointed dreams. Just as disjointed dreams may very well be the result of frantic daily activity, so a man's words may very well reveal a disjointed and irrational life. Our prayers to God are not to be the result of a restless and disjointed life, but are to be thoughtful and considered, for God is in heaven, and we are on the earth, and we must never forget that distinction.

If frantic and disjointed prayers are not pleasing to the Lord, how much less will He be pleased with a speech that is irrational and unmeaning, a speech that makes no sense at all. It is interesting that as Christians have departed from the doctrines of Scripture and the plain meaning of Scripture, they have become more and more irrational in their speech, so that some think that God is pleased with speech that makes no sense at all, and they pour out irrational mutterings and ravings.

A man who does not think clearly or who is confused will very often chatter on and on, going from one thought to another, making no sense, but using a lot of words. This is the mark of a fool. The wisest men I know, do not talk much. Proverbs says, "A fool uttereth all his mind, but a wise man keepeth it in till afterwards."

Vs. 4, 5. The sacrifice of a fool before the Lord is a promise that he cannot or will not keep. Don't make the promise if you cannot or will not keep it. God will hold you accountable, either for wickedness or for folly. Do not make many promises; but if you do make them, recognize that you are accountable to keep them, even if it is very difficult for you to keep them. Let us look at Psalm 15 [Of course, this can only apply perfectly to Jesus Christ; but He is the standard to which we must shoot, frail and weak though we be]:

1. LORD, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?
2. He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart.
3. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour.
4. In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the LORD. He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not.
5. He that putteth not out his money to usury, nor taketh reward against the innocent. He that doeth these things shall never be move.

Vs. 6,7. Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. Of course a wicked vow is not binding. You may vow before the Lord to kill someone, as those men who bound themselves with an oath to kill the Apostle Paul. Such a vow is wicked and not binding; but it is a grievous sin to vow such a vow, for shall we call on God to confirm our wicked designs.

Who is the angel: Some say it is the angel of the covenant, the Lord Jesus—of course this is true, for he witnesses all we do. Some say it is a collective noun and stands for all the angels that witness what we do, as in Paul saying that our church worship should be biblical because of the angels. The majority opinion, to which I lean, is that it refers to the priest who witnessed the vow, as the messenger of the Lord.

It is foolish to think that you can escape the sin of forswearing yourself by saying “it was a mistake.” This is the most common excuse given when people break their marriage vows. “Well, I should not have married him in the first place.” Church members, “Well I didn’t know what I was doing.” Etc. A profane age that has no use for God as He is revealed in the scripture will take worship lightly and will take its vows lightly. If God doesn’t mean what He says, then why should I. If He changes His mind in response to human history, then why can’t I find reasons to break my word. Conditions have changed; hence, my promises therefore do not bind me.

Do you know that God can be very angry at what you say? You say, “I didn’t mean anything by it.” Exactly. You should have meant something, or you shouldn’t have said it. God always means something when He speaks. He knows your heart, and He sees the difference between what you say and what is in your heart. He knows whether your words reflect the truth, or whether you are putting people on. He is no fool. This is why Jesus said: in Matthew 12:

35 A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things.

36 But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.

37 For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.

Every idle word is a form of profanity for empty and foolish talking is against sobriety and reverence for God and His world. This does not mean that humor and entertainment and such things are wrong, for they may very well serve a good and useful purpose—this is not what Christ means, I do not believe, for it is good sometimes to make merry with your friends.

But vanity and emptiness are not good things. This is especially true when you go to the house of God. Leave your vanity and levity behind. Do not seek it in the house of the Lord. Let your words be few, and seek the word of God. Seek churches where a reverence for the holiness and dignity of God’s name is held; where reverence for the Lord is not mocked and reverent worship is not ridiculed; where thoughtful and sensible prayers are offered and worship is not reduced to entertainment and irrationality, for this is taking God’s Name in vain, and is a frightful offense in the eyes of the Lord.

May God bless you. Amen.