

The Ten Commandments

The Third Commandment

“Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain...”
Exodus 20:7

The Foundation

- The theme of this command is the “name of the LORD thy God” which refers directly back the introduction in vs. 2 of “I am the LORD thy God”.
- In Bible times, someone’s name carried much greater ideas than simply identity, but carried the ideas of power, personality, and presence.
- The importance of the name of God is reinforced historically in such passages as Jacob wrestling with God in Genesis 32:29 and Moses and the Burning Bush in Exodus 3:13-14
- The name of God is seen as a key part of His revelation to man in Exodus 33:19 and 34:5-7.
- The New Testament expands the importance of His name: Matthew 6:9, Matthew 28:19, John 14:13, Acts 4:12, Colossians 3:17, Philippians 2:9, Revelation 19:11.
- The first commandment is about how we worship Him singularly, the second how we worship Him straightforwardly, and the third how we worship Him sincerely.

The Commandment

- The name of God.
 - By using the name of God, we are identifying or associating with Him.
 - B.H. Carroll: “The name of God means God Himself as revealed; therefore it means all his nature, virtues, attributes, the character, authority, purpose, methods, providences, words, institutions, truth, kingdom; in a word what has been revealed, whether the revelation is concerning His nature, virtues, attributes, His word, His kingdom or His truth, or anything else.”
- The act of taking of that name.
 - Traditionally, the focus has been on swearing oaths or profanity.
 - The wording implies much more: it is the “lifting” or “bearing” of the name.
 - The Hebrew verb here (*nasa*, Strong’s H5475) is found 659 times in the Old Testament, and in well over 500 of those uses means simply to bear, lift, take, carry, or bring.
 - Only a few times does it refer to speaking or swearing an oath: Exodus 6:8, Numbers 14:30, Nehemiah 9:15, Isaiah 3:7
 - Leviticus 19:12 is a clearer prohibition against swearing falsely in God’s name.
 - Therefore, this act is better understood as any use of the name of God.
- The possible vanity of the act.

- Note that it is not wrong to take the name of God for the right purposes.
- Vanity means empty, worthless, or purposeless, and is a common term to express things false or sinful – Psalm 12:2, Proverbs 30:8
- Examples in Scripture: Leviticus 18:21, 20:3, 21:6; Isaiah 48:1-2; Jeremiah 5:1-2, 7:9-15
- The guilt of the vain act.
 - The misuse of God’s name is a direct assault on His perfection.
 - George Boardman: “Indeed, Jehovah could not: for this sin, whether in the form of perjury, of insincerity, or of profanity, is a sin directly against Jehovah himself; the name of God being, as we have seen, the very epitome and symbolic essence of Deity. It is to insult and defy and blaspheme the Almighty in the citadel of his Godhead. Being in its very nature the most godless of sins, God from his very nature cannot allow it to go unpunished.”

Historical Application for Israel

- The Jews have guarded against “uttering the Name of Heaven uselessly”.
- This is typically done by not speaking or printing it fully.
 - The “Tetragrammaton” is God’s name in four letters of Hebrew – YHWH
 - Today it is generally translated as Jehovah or Yahweh.
 - When reading the Scriptures aloud, Jews would substitute *Adonai* (“Lord”) or *Elohim* (“God”)
 - This has led to the tradition followed in almost all English Bibles of using LORD (all caps) for YHWH.
 - Even today, Jews will write “G-d” in non-sacred writings lest the name of God be profaned.

Practical Application for Today

- The New Testament speaks of honoring the name of God and of caution in swearing oaths – I Timothy 6:1, Matthew 5:33-37
- The traditional applications of this commandment – swearing oaths and profanity – are but one application of the positive side of this command: that we honor and glorify God when using His name.
- We have a responsibility that comes from association with God’s name.
 - Our actions can bring dishonor to His name – Romans 2:24, I Timothy 6:1
 - Religious duplicity/hypocrisy (falsely claiming His name) is condemned – Matthew 23:27-28, Revelation 3:1
- We must not associate His name with things evil or vain.
- In our language we must reverence God’s name – Philippians 2:9-10, Psalm 145
 - We should avoid using His name or any euphemism of it in a way that would dishonor Him.
 - You can tell a lot about a person’s spirituality by how they use God’s name.