

Hallowed be thy Name
Men's Bible Study at Park View
October 18, 2005

Scriptures: Exodus 20:7; Matthew 5:33-37, 6:9-10; John 14:1-14, Phil. 2:10-11

When the Israelite people agreed to the covenant at Mount Sinai, they took the name of God upon themselves. They were “bound by all the honor and authority and power of God’s name to keep the terms of the covenant into which they entered with one another.”¹ Therefore, the third commandment is primarily about integrity – sincerity and faithfulness in one’s relationship with God.

The third commandment is a logical continuation of the first two. The first commandment declares that God is the only sovereign to be worshipped. The second commandment prohibits idols, images or addictions. The third commandment prohibits the use of God’s name in ways that are selfish, irreverent, or out of keeping with God’s sacred character. It is the only one of the ten commandments that carries an immediate threat of punishment – “the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.”

Names had particular meanings in ancient times. Children were not named until they had taken on certain characteristics. Therefore, the name of God is an extension of the character of God. “The name of the Lord is a fortified tower; the righteous run to it and are safe (Proverbs 18:10).

The third commandment prohibited the Israelites from using the name of God in magical incantations, as sorcerers often did. Neither were they to profane the name, as did an Israelite man (Leviticus 24:11, 16). He blasphemed the Name by cursing and was stoned for his irreverence. To profane God’s name is to drag it down to the ordinary. Perjury, or swearing falsely, also profanes the name of God (Leviticus. 19:11-12).

To use someone else’s name in a transaction without permission can be a criminal offense, as in forgery. It can be used to steal not only their money, but also their reputation. It is a serious thing to use God’s name as though one has a signed note from him. “To claim to know exactly what God wants another person to do is to usurp the place of the Holy Spirit who is meant to lead the people of God.”²

The third commandment also forbade God’s chosen people to use God’s name to manipulate God for their own selfish purposes.“ Those who profess in words or imply in action that God is on their side against their enemies or that God is the defender and protector of a particular economic or political order run the risk of complacency and self-righteousness that may blind them to God’s action in history.”³

¹ Owen M. Weatherly, *The Ten Commandments in Modern Perspective*, p. 47

² Edith Schaeffer, *Lifelines: The Ten Commandments for Today*, p. 71

³ Brian Haggerty, *Out of the House of Slavery*, p. 65

We misuse God's name when we claim to have divine approval and support for those of our own attitudes and actions which are in obvious contradiction to the revealed nature and will of God" (Deuteronomy 18:19, 20).⁴ Nations have tortured, raped, and plundered other peoples, all in the name of God. This too is profaning God's name.

Important vows, such as in baptism, marriage, and ordination, are generally made before God in the presence of witness. Breaking these vows is to break our promises before God – a misuse of the name of God.

"The form in which the third commandment is broken most completely, most awfully, most terribly, is by perpetually making use of the name of the Lord, while the life does not square with the profession that is made."⁵ "The man who professes with his lips to honor God and yet denies Him in his life, will do far more to hinder the coming of the kingdom than the man who openly blasphemes and make no profession of honoring God."⁶

In the Hebrew scriptures, the people were exhorted to swear in God's name (Deuteronomy 6:13 and 10:20). This was thought to add gravity and dignity to their vows or declarations. But Jesus discouraged his disciples from swearing at all (Matthew 5:33-37). He urged them to use simple language to make their affirmations.

Rather than use the various names for God in the Old Testament, Jesus addressed God most frequently as "Father." He restated the third commandment in a positive way in the prayer that he taught to his disciples: "Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name." Further, Jesus taught his disciples to use his name to approach the God who made the covenant with the people at Mount Sinai. When we truly know God the Father through the name of Jesus, we will commit ourselves to never use the divine names for our own selfish purposes, whether in our prayers, our conversations, or our actions.

Ideas to ponder:

What does this lesson bring to mind about what you were taught as a child about using God's name in vain?

How does our use of language reflect on our commitments to Jesus Christ or God?

In what way(s) do you sense that God is calling you to a new depth of faithfulness in the use of God's name?

⁴ Weatherly, p. 49

⁵ G. Campbell Morgan, The Ten Commandments, p. 42

⁶ G. Campbell Morgan, p. 42