

Do Not Take the Lord's Name in Vain



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Exodus 20:7

Exodus chapter 20 verse 7 is the third commandment this morning. I am going to read out of the ESV, but I cut my teeth on the King James Version of the Bible. So, sometimes when I quote it I quote it in the King James. So, I am going to read it out of the ESV.

Scripture

"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."

To my knowledge, I had never taken the Lord's name in vain until I heard a preacher at my church preach on this commandment. By the time that sermon was over I had that phrase where you take God's name and put a cuss word with it, so embedded in my mind I could not get it off my mind. I left that night and I never said the word publicly, it never came off the lips of my mouth, but in my mind, because I had never thought about using that name, but after hearing him say what I could not do, it was so in my mind that all I could think about was that phrase. I so thought about that phrase I felt like I was saying it in my heart and in my mind and I had

the most miserable week I had ever had in my Christian life as a 17 or 18 year-old. I was ready for lightning to literally strike me on a sunny day because I so did not want to do it, I felt like I was doing it. And, I really wanted to blame him because if he had not preached that sermon I honestly had never thought about doing it. I do not want you to have that experience this week, but we must address this third commandment of not taking the name of the Lord in vain. Why? Because there is a consequence if you do- God said he will not hold guiltless him who takes the name of the Lord in vain.

I almost feel like we ought to take off our shoes because of the holiness of this commandment. Notice that God in the third commandment does not speak in first person, but third person. In the first two commands, after telling the children of Israel that he is the Lord who brought them out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, in first person he tells them not to have any other gods before him. He also tells them not to make a graven image of him, the Lord, their God. But now, not in a subjective tone but an objective manner, he does not continue to first person, but he switches to third person. It is almost as if God is speaking about himself, not from a subjective view, but an objective view. That is hard for me and you to do, but God can do that. Amen? He says, "Thou shall not." That means you, that means me—you shall not. This is not a suggestion; it is a command. What are we to not do ever? We are not to take the name of the Lord, our God, in vain. This verb "take," if we were to look it up in the Hebrew dictionary literally means to lift up, to take up, to carry with you, or to bear. Does everybody get that? You shall not carry around with you the name of the Lord your God in vain. You shall not lift up the name, you shall not reach down and take up God's name in vain. Now, this command is not forbidding the use of the name. It is forbidding the misuse of the name. That is why it says "in vain"- an adjective. You know what it means to do something in vain. When you do something and what you did was worthless, fruitless, or pointless, you did not accomplish your intended purpose in doing what you were doing. So when you finished it and you looked back on it, you and others remarked that what you had done was in vain. Have any of you ever labored in vain? So, here is what we are not

supposed to do. We are not supposed to misuse the name of God by carrying it around with us and using it in a fruitless or pointless way.

The root of this word literally means “light.” So, as I am carrying around the name of the Lord, I do not regard it as light, but it is heavy on me. I know I got it; I know I have him with me. There is a heaviness I sense because the name of the Lord is worthy. It is weighty. It is THE name. It is the name the Jewish people would not pronounce. It is the name that they refused to pronounce for so many years that eventually they lost the pronunciation of it. We tried to revive in the Christian world the pronunciation of it and came up with the word “Jehovah,” which was wrong. That is not God’s name. It is Yahweh, or YHWH, the personal name of God—the famous Hebrew Tetragrammaton, four Hebrew letters, four Hebrew consonants, the personal name that God revealed to Moses at the burning bush. The name that when a scribe was writing it in the Bible (and it is used 6832 times in the Old Testament), he would lay his writing instrument down, take up a new instrument, dip it in a fresh set of ink, and write that name, then he would lay that pen down and pick up his old pen. Some Jewish scribes were so worried about taking the name of God in a vain way they would actually change clothes when they wrote the name. Wow! I bet you would get to the point that you dreaded seeing the name of God. So, the Jews just called it “the name.” When God revealed his name to Moses at the burning bush, Moses said they will not believe you sent me, and one of the first things they’re going to say is I bet you do not even know his name! What am I going to say? God says you tell them I am who I am has sent you—the always present one. The one who is always with you has sent you.

See, you have to remember that to a Jewish person a name was not a title or a label. Names spoke of identity. I do not know if you know this or not, but my name, Ricky, literally means mighty ruler. I do not know if Mammie and Pop upon my birth looked at my little face and thought...*wow, he will be a mighty ruler one day! We are going to name him Ricky.* In the biblical world, your name was not your label or your title; it was who you were! It was your identity! It was the summary of who you are. There is a lady in

the church who highly respects me. Her name is Casey and she is my executive assistant. I do not know if you know this, but she struggles with some of you who knew me before I became Brother Ricky. And, when you come into the office and you ask for Ricky, it drives her crazy. See, she does not know me as Ricky. She knows me as Brother Ricky. And to Casey, Brother Ricky is not a title or a label. It is WHO I am. It is a summary of my being. What is THE name? I AM WHO I AM...the always present one...the one who is always with you! Do not take his identity, do not take his being, do not take his presence as something to be lightly regarded. Do not just throw his name around lightly.

Sometimes when I come home, Celisa will ask what I had for lunch and I will say, "Nothing." She will say, "Why?" And, I will say, "I didn't have any money." She will remind me that I have a card. She will say, "Why didn't you use the card?" Then, I will say, "Well, I don't like to use the card." She says, "Well, use the card!" So, I started using the card. Then, she had to stop me from using the card! Now, the reason she stopped me from using the card was because she is the one who reconciles the checkbook. She is the one who reconciles the budget. She is the one who takes the credit card statement and we have to have a receipt for everything on that statement—hands down! So I have a special place where I keep the receipts. So, we have this little thing going now where there are some items I use the card for and some items I do not use the card for. For example, when I need to fill up my truck with gas I can use the card- that is a weighty expense. If I go have a sit-down meal, I can use the card because that is a weighty expense. If I treat one of you, we can put the \$31 on the card, that is worthy of using the card. But there are some expenses that are not worthy of using the card, you know those 0.98 cents or \$1.32 things. So in other words, for a full meal I can use the card, but when I just run into the store for a Snickers, I cannot use the card I have to pull out cash. Cash is light; card is heavy. So I know when to take out my billfold and pull out the card and use the card and I know when to pull out the billfold and pull out the dollar. Why? Because I know my wife!

That is what God says. God is not saying in this passage do not carry me around with you. He said I am with you. I am the always present one with you. I am always there. But he says do not use my name, do not use my person for those trivial, meaningless, pointless, or fruitless things, just use me for those weighty things going on in your life. Why? Because I am who I am. And because this is not just a title that I have, because you did not name me but I named you, and my name is the self-revelation to you of who I am, the way you use my name reflects how well you know me. And it speaks about the kind of relationship that we really have together. You are not going to just embarrass you when you throw my name around; you are going to embarrass me. So I just want you to know I will punish whoever uses my name in vain. You will not get by with it. Whoa!

Now, to fully understand the misuse of the name, here is what I have done the last few weeks. I have tried to think of the right use of the name because if this name is used almost 7,000 times in the Old Testament, there are a lot of examples of how Israel used the name. And, do you know what I discovered? I discovered some patterns. There are many that I had to leave out because of time, but my favorite use of the name of God in the Old Testament was by David. David sees this giant named Goliath, he sees Israel's army, and nobody in 1 Samuel 17 will fight him. So, this little boy, this shepherd, who has had experience rescuing his sheep, looks down there at Goliath, nobody will fight him, and he volunteers to fight him. Saul even tries to put his armor on him, but it will not fit. So, David shrugs all of the armor off, he heads down into the valley, and you remember, he was wise enough to stop and pick up five smooth stones because he has a sling. He goes towards Goliath and, remember, this was a winner takes all fight. David looked at this giant coming at him and he says you come to me with a spear, javelin, and a shield. I come to you in the name of the Lord. Wow! Now, some of you are saying David should have run for his life! No, Goliath should have run for his life because there was a man standing in the valley, in his presence, who was standing in the presence of almighty God and had God with him. And, if I can say this, Goliath was too big to miss! Amen? That is where we coined the phrase "the bigger they are, the harder they fall in the name of the Lord."

This same David has an experience where they lose the Ark of the Covenant during his kingship. They get the Ark back and they are afraid of the Ark because a guy touched it and he fell dead. So, now they have it in this man's home named Obed-Edom and God's blessing was all over his presence. That man's life was blessed. So, when Israel saw this man was blessed they thought they needed to get the Ark back into the capital city. They go to get the Ark, they are bringing it into the city, and if you remember, David just loses it! He just cannot help it- he is not Baptist! He just breaks out into worship in the presence of the Lord and he dances in his linen garments. Then, he blesses the people in the name of the Lord. But his wife, because of her attitude towards him, she would not let him bless her and he would not bless her. So because she did not get in on the blessing, guess what? She never had another child. See, when David blessed in the name of the Lord, he was blessing as a representative of God himself! The ever present one through David was blessing his people.

See, the name of the Lord was to be used in battles because when you are fighting God's enemy God is going to be with you. But, it was also used in relationships to bless people and also used to curse people. One of the really cool stories in the Bible was when Elisha received the prophetic mantle from Elijah and Elijah prays a twofold anointing of his spirit on him. Elisha was there when he was taken to Heaven and he receives the prophetic manual. Then, he heads to his destination. When he heads to his destination, he meets two kids. The prophet of God was walking by and when they saw the prophet of God they made fun of him and called him Baldy, Baldy. When they made of fun of his head and called him old Baldy, guess what Elisha did? Elisha cursed those two boys in the name of the Lord in 2 Kings 2:24. And, do you know what happened? Immediately two she-bears came out of the woods and devoured the two little boys. Yes, two mama bears with all of that ferociousness protecting their little ones unleashed their fury because they had been cursed in the name of the Lord. You read through the Old Testament and people spoke in the name of the Lord, but God said if you are going to use my name when you speak, if you are going to tell somebody what I said, you better make sure

I really said it. And, here is how you will know if someone is really telling the truth, if they say what I said then what I said will come true if I said it. But, if it does not come true then you just know they did not hear it from me and they misused my name.

I get so aggravated that some of you still watch Hal Lindsey Jr. who, when I was a young man, made a prediction that Jesus Christ would come back in the 1980s. He predicted it, it did not come to pass, people still listen to him, and he still has a ministry. My Bible says if you say something in my name that does not come true; you are not mine. Whoa!

King David in his songs talked about his prayer life and when he prayed, do you know whose name he called upon? He called upon the name of the Lord. Do you know whose name he used when he went into God's presence? He used God's own name! Throughout the Old Testament, you see when someone is called upon to tell the truth, God says...*hey, if you need to swear, use my name if you are my people*. God so wanted people to understand his people tell the truth that God said...*hey, when you are called to give an oath or when you are called to make a promise it is ok to swear by my name*. What that means is you are calling on the integrity of God to back up that what you are saying is the truth. But, here is what God says... *you better make sure you are telling the truth when you use my name*... That is the proper use of the name of God.

Now, from those proper uses of the name, I think you now, if you are like me, start getting convicted because now you already know what the misuse of God's name is and some of you are seeing this for the first time. See, I always thought the misuse of God's name was to put God's name with that cuss word. And, because of our audience, I am not going to say that word, but you all know what I am talking about, right? Man, that just goes all over me! We have some standards in our life, Celisa and I. And, we judge a lot of things by how someone uses the name of God. We are not going to support a television show or movie when God's name is used that way. If we recognize it, even if we paid \$40 in tickets and \$40 for popcorn, that is ok, we are leaving right then on the spot because you do

not use my God's name that way! Amen? And, I am sure not going to watch it in the privacy of my home for free! It is not going to happen.

Some of you worry about that curse word we call the ___-bomb. I can't say it, but you know what I am talking about. Yes, that ___-bomb tears me up too, but using the God-bomb REALLY tears me up. Can I just ask you; how can it not tear you up? How can you and I not get fighting mad when someone takes the name of our God, puts that other word with it, and uses it in a derogatory fashion just because they are angry or just because they are frustrated? No, God is not going to condemn somebody just because you used that term, but that is what you are calling on him to do. And, many people use it are not even believers! In a nation where people do not want to acknowledge God, how can we use God's name that way? I have always wondered if I went into another country, would they say Buddha, Muhammed, or Allah____, you know what goes in the blank. Then, why do we use God that way? Or how can you get frustrated and say, "Jesus Christ!" See, God's name was never meant for us to use lightly in frustration or anger..."Oh my God, are you kidding me!" or "Good Lord, are you kidding me!" I have some of you send me texts and you put "OMG" on it, and you put a couple exclamation points behind it. Tell me what God had to do with what you just used that expression for. NOTHING! No, the use of that expression does not mean that he is your buddy or you have God on your brain all of the time. No, it tells how little you respect him when you use his name that way. See, God does not want us using his name in careless speech.

Now, I know some of us are really spiritual. We would never use God's name that way so we just say "gosh." You are doing the same thing! If you say gosh darn then you ought to have your mouth washed with soap. You know that is what the old timers used to do, right? I had a granny and a Mamaw who believed that if there were certain words coming out of your mouth then you had a mouth problem. And yes, once as a little boy my Granny Bogard took me into the bathroom, and with a bar of soap, she rinsed my mouth out with soap. She thought whatever was good for the outside was good for the inside. I do not believe I used a word wrong, but

she thought I was going to. She thought I was thinking it and before it could defile me she dealt with that. See, when you hear somebody use that terminology, they do not have a mouth problem; they have a heart problem. Jesus talked about the abundance of the heart was revealed out of the mouth. It comes up the esophagus and out the mouth. Please do not carelessly throw around the name of the Lord. It is used for spiritual battle. It is used for important relationships. There are times to use the name to bless people. There are times to say "God bless you," but there are times not to say "God bless you." As a matter of fact, there is a time when some of us say "God bless you," that is blasphemous and you better be glad that he is God and I am not or there would be more lightning strikes than there are. I just want you to know that.

I am going to get in trouble for saying this, but so be it. A couple of years ago I got really agitated. I got really mad when my president, the president who represents me and the United States of America, was the first sitting president to go speak at the Planned Parenthood organization. He gave his speech and at the end, when he was concluding his speech before he walked off said, "Thank you. God bless you. God bless America. Thank you." How dare the man in the highest office of the land say, "God bless you" to an organization that takes the life of babies in the womb of a mother and defends that action, and then pronounce God's blessing on them! You do it, our society does it, and he is a reflection of where we are in this country when it comes to the name of our God. How DARE we know someone is getting ready to do something that is morally wrong before God and somehow we do not have enough integrity to not say, "God bless you." When we use that phrase as a Christian, "God bless you," it sanctions what people are doing and it is wrong before God!

Please, this is not written on a tablet of stone anymore that we hang on our wall or put on the lawn of a courtyard; it has been written in the DNA of you and I as believers. It is written on our hearts and we value God's name! I would not let you use my wife's name that way and I would not let you use my kids' names that way. How do we stomach people using God's name in that way? "I swear on a stack of Bibles," and you are only using

that to deceive somebody. Woe to us who use God's name to say that what we are getting ready to do is right and you can trust what we are saying when we know what we are doing is deception and we call God into the equation. It is a misuse of his name! It is a lack of fully understanding who he is.

Please be careful! Please be careful when, as a Christian, you are so burdened for someone that you want to go tell them what God told you to tell them. I have to be honest with you...I have always struggled when God tells some of you what you ought to tell me before he tells me himself. I always thought God would probably tell me first, amen? But see, sometimes you so want what you want that you just throw God's name in there hoping that when you use God's name it will make the other person, who so fears God, believe that what you are doing is from God when you haven't heard from God at all! So you throw his name in there and say it's what God led you to do. ARE YOU KIDDING ME? The new one among our young people now is how God leads young people to live together before they get married. They will actually say, "God gave us a peace about it. We've prayed about it. We feel good about it." ARE YOU KIDDING ME? As a Christian, at least respect God enough that you leave him out of your sin! You don't carry his name around lightly because the way you use his name expresses what you and I know and believe about him. And, what did Jesus tell us? Hallowed be his name. HOLY, HOLY, HOLY.

God so wanted Israel to know him that he revealed his name to them, he revealed his being to them, but so that we would really know him, he sent his son, God with us, Emmanuel. And when the angel told the father what to name him, the name was to be what? Jesus—Yahweh saves. At that name, Jesus, every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. That name is to be used in prayer, that name is to be used in spiritual battle, and that name is to be used in sharing the good news of what he did on a cross. But you be careful when you are praising the Lord for something that he might not have even been in on. Please be careful when you are so frustrated that, that is the first words that come out of your mouth. I know we are under grace, not under law, but I still

believe this...one day your life will bear out if you take his name in vain. You will not go unpunished and you will not be guiltless because we are not dealing with a title or a label, we are dealing with the very being of God and God is jealous for his namesake because he is jealous for who he is. He doesn't just want you to not embarrass yourself; he doesn't want you to embarrass him.

Some of us have a mouth problem. I wish I could tell you that you need soap, but nope. What you need is the blood of Christ. How many of you know this morning that you have broken this commandment? Can we repent of it? Can we just get out of our seats right now? Probably the whole congregation needs to come to repent of how we have misused the name of God. And if you are thinking you will never speak God's name again, don't be that person, don't be like the Jews. No, just use it correctly! Use it right.

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