

# AM Exodus 20:1-17 What's in a name?

## Commandment 3

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[ 0 : 00 ] your Bibles with you, can I invite you to turn to the book of Exodus in chapter 20. The book of Exodus in chapter 20. And as I said, those of you who have been with us and those who haven't will know, or those who have been here will know that we've been looking at these ten commandments of God and we've just got to the third commandment this morning.

We're going to look at that which is contained for us in verse 7. But I want us to read just to get the connection from Exodus chapter 20 and we're going to read down to verse 21.

And I'm reading from the English Standard Version this morning. So the people are at the foot of Mount Sinai and God is speaking these words to the people and to Moses.

So Moses is writing these words and he says, And God spoke all these words, saying, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

[ 1 : 24 ] You shall not bow down to them or serve them. For I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.

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. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

Six days you shall labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work. You, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates.

For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them. And he rested on the seventh day.

Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy. Honour your father and your mother that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

[ 2 : 51 ] You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbour's.

Now when all the people saw the thunder and flashes of lightning, and the sound of the trumpet and the mountains smoking, the people were afraid and trembled.

And they stood afar off and said to Moses, You speak to us and we will listen. But do not let God speak to us lest we die. Moses said to the people, Do not fear, for God has come to test you that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.

The people stood far off while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was. Amen.

[ 4 : 00 ] And may God give us good understanding of his written and inspired word. Now would you turn back with me to that passage that we read a moment ago.

And we're going to consider this morning verse 7, the third commandment as I've already intimated. I've entitled the sermon What's in a name? What's in a name?

Verse 7 says, You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. For the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes God's name or his name in vain.

As we've been going through the Ten Commandments or making a start at them, we have seen that the first commandment that God gave in verses 1 and 2 prohibited the worship of false gods. And the second commandment that we thought of with the children this morning prohibited worshipping the one God actually in the wrong way. The first two commandments are, if you like, the who and how we worship.

[ 5 : 19 ] And they're pretty fundamental to Christianity. And maybe when we think, when we come to this commandment in number, in verse 7, commandment number 3, we may be tempted to think, it's just a gentle reminder to us to watch our language rather than a sort of fundamental commandment.

But it appears not. For at the end of the commandment in verse 7 as we read it, there is a severe threat and a warning of judgment for those who break this commandment.

Let's read the commandment again. It says, you shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. Why? Here's the reason. For the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. And this morning I just want to look at three things about this commandment that we have in verse 7. I want us to look at the command itself. Secondly, what the command covers.

And then hopefully, thirdly, how we can apply the commandment to our own lives. So firstly, the commandment itself.

[ 6 : 52 ] What does it mean to take God's name as we have it here, in vain? What does it mean to misuse his name?

Why is it so important to God? After all, it's only a name. And what's in a name? Well, if we were to go forward in our Bibles, into the book of Isaiah, in chapter 42, in verse 8, and if you want to turn there, if you have your Bibles, just so as you know that I'm telling you the truth, in Isaiah 42, verse 8, we discover something about God's name.

Isaiah, the prophet, says in chapter 42, in verse 8, he says, I am the Lord, that is my name, and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.

So we see in that verse in Isaiah, that there is a close connection between the Lord, and his name, and his glory.

And God is very protective of his glory. He's very protective of his name. He expects also his friends to do likewise.

[ 8 : 25 ] that may resonate with us, even in our own lives. Our name is something that defines us, isn't it? It belongs to us.

And even we can be very protective about our name. My name is Alan Thompson.

Double L in Alan, no P in Thompson, and woe betide you if you get it wrong, you know my wife Ruth here, and she'll be embarrassed by this, and she'll never really embarrass your wife in public, but recently my wife sent a WhatsApp message out to a family chat, and said, Ruth, R-U-T-H, and Alan, A-L-A-N, will attend.

I was mortified that my wife of 26 years still couldn't get my name spelled correctly. There's a correct way because it defines me.

Companies in our world, don't they, spend millions of pounds ensuring that their names, their brand, is protected. It isn't stolen, or misappropriated, or devalued, or misused.

[ 9 : 47 ] The reason is that we must understand, isn't it, that a name is more than just a label. A name signifies, or stands for a person's character, their reputation, and their authority.

and infinitely more so is the case with God. Now the word vain can mean empty, or nothing, or worthless, or to no good purpose.

We are therefore, in this commandment, forbidden from taking up, or using the name of God, or bearing God's name, in a way that empties that name, of its content, or makes the name of God worthless, or irreverent.

Taking God's name in vain, would mean to use it in an empty, or a frivolous, or insincere way.

Misusing God's name, taking his name in vain, is therefore actually to misrepresent God, as we shall see, who he is, and what he is all about.

That is what this commandment is about. God. Now the two most important names that we have in the Bible of God are Jesus and Lord.

[ 11 : 38 ] The name Lord that we have, as we have even here in our passage, is Jehovah. The name God revealed to Moses at the burning bush.

The I am. You remember when Moses met God at the burning bush, or God met Moses at the burning bush, he says, what is your name?

Moses asked him, and he said, I am that I am. I am Jehovah, the self-existent one. The name Jesus means saviour or salvation.

The apostles in the early church in one of their early sermons said these words, there is no other name given under heaven, given amongst men, whereby we must be saved.

The name itself, Jesus, you remember that name was to be given to the child, means he shall save his people from their sins. That's what Jesus' name was all about.

[ 12 : 55 ] It was all about him being a saviour of sinners. And everywhere in the Bible, the name of the Lord is exalted in the highest possible terms.

Because the name of God comes to stand for God himself. earth. Listen to the psalmist in Psalm 8 in verse 1.

The psalmist David says, O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth. Or in Psalm 29 in verse 2, ascribe to the Lord the glory due to his name.

You see how that's interchangeable? Ascribe to the Lord the glory due to him. But the psalmist doesn't say that. The psalmist says, ascribe to the Lord the glory due to his name.

And when the Lord Jesus taught his disciples to pray, he taught his disciples to say, our father which art in heaven hallowed be thy name.

[ 14 : 08 ] So name is synonymous with the person of God. And God's name is important because it speaks of his character, who he is in his essence.

It speaks of his reputation, what he has done. It speaks of his authority, the sovereignty that he has, the lordship that he has over all our lives.

And we are commanded in this commandment in verse 7, the children of Israel were commanded not to abuse or misuse God's name, not to use it irreverently because it's impossible to disconnect God from his name.

But secondly, what does the command cover itself? How can we take God's name in vain or how can we misuse the name of God?

Well, I submit to you at least in two ways. Firstly, in what we say and secondly, in how we live.

When we come to this commandment, perhaps if you're a Christian or perhaps if you're not a Christian, you thought, well, I'm okay on this one.

[ 15 : 39 ] For you thought or you may think that taking God's name in vain was restricted to outlawing profane language, you might say, or blasphemy.

I don't think I probably need to tell you what capital O-M-G means, because it's blazoned across our televisions and we hear it in soaps and all across our television.

listen, O-My-God or Jesus Christ or for Christ's sake.

This commandment does cover the outlawing of that kind of language for us, but it's far more far reaching than just those words that we might take on our lips.

And remember that this commandment is directed to God's people. Directed to God's people. So we can misuse God's name or misrepresent God through using irreverent language, I submit to you this morning.

[ 17 : 00 ] We can speak about God, we can use our tongues to speak about God in a way that insults him by not taking him seriously, by not taking his holiness and his greatness seriously.

God is not the big man upstairs. He's not the gaffer or the boss, although the Bible tells us that he is sovereign and he rules.

He's not termed in the Bible the head honcho. he is the Lord. He is Jehovah. That is his name. Is it reverent to speak, I submit to you this morning, of the Lord Jesus as that guy, Jesus?

Or your mate? It might be deemed cool and hip and an attempt to be relevant. But the very angels in heaven, the sinless angels in heaven, bow their faces before God and cry, holy, holy, holy is the Lord God almighty.

and if they are reverent in God's presence, so we should be also. He is the one who is high and lifted up.

[ 18 : 38 ] He is different from anybody else or anything else. And so we should be biblical in our language. When we speak slightly of God or his works, he interprets that as contempt and to take his name in vain.

So irreverent language is outlawed in this commandment. But secondly, blasphemy and cursing are, I submit to you, outlawed in this commandment that we have in verse 7.

Blasphemy means speaking directly against God and his character. Or mocking him in directly. In fact, as you read through the Old Testament and the laws that God gave, in Israel, whoever spoke against the Lord was to be put to death.

Now we have to remember that the commandments here were given to Israel for a specific nation at a specific time, in a specific era.

[ 19 : 50 ] but whoever spoke against the Lord, Leviticus 24 and 11, tells us that they were to be stoned to death.

Such was the seriousness of taking God's name in vain, or speaking out against him. the name of the Lord, his character, was holy and not to be blasphemed.

But we can speak against or take God's name in vain by cursing God. What do I mean by that? Well, let me give you an example.

You remember, or you may remember, that there was a man in the Old Testament called Job. And terrible things were brought into Job's life. We can't go into all the details of why that was, but calamity and disaster struck his life.

He lost his health. He lost his wealth. He lost his family. And when all of that disaster came into his life, his wife said to him, and Job was a godly man, his wife said, curse God and die.

[ 21 : 17 ] Job's response was not to murmur or speak out in his heart against God or curse God or call into question what God was doing in his life.

His words to his wife were, should we accept from God only good and not adversity? In all this, Job did not sin in what he said.

You know, sometimes when difficult things come into our lives, even as believers, we can be tempted to speak out in our hearts against God, can't we?

When things don't go our way, things don't turn out the way that we wanted them to turn out, sometimes in our hearts we can have a bitter spirit and as it were, speak out against God and curse him.

we ought not to do that. But a third way in which we can speak out or take God's name in vain is by making empty or false oaths in our life.

[ 22 : 38 ] Moses wrote in Leviticus 19 and verse 12, he wrote these words, You shall not swear by my name falsely and so profane the name of the Lord God.

I am the Lord. You see, when you and I make a promise, swearing by God's name, it's not to be a false promise or one that you don't intend to keep.

We might say, oh, as the Lord lives or as God is my judge. These phrases can become empty, can't they, over a long period of time.

We can misuse God's name when we do that. Our word is meant to be our bond. It's meant to be trustworthy at all times.

Say what you mean and mean what you say. You see, God keeps his word. God keeps his promises and so should we.

[ 24 : 00 ] He is faithful and so should we be also. So we can take God's name in vain in a number of ways in our speech.

But we can also misuse God's name by our actions and our lifestyle. Just as we can sully our own family name.

you know, it's interesting, isn't it, that the palace does not want to be associated, it seems, with Prince Andrew.

Because Prince Andrew's name is associated with the royal family. And so whatever he has done, they are distancing himself, they are distancing themselves from him and their reputation.

And it's just possible also that we can sully the family name of Christian by our actions. We can bring shame on God's name by our actions and lifestyle.

[ 25 : 18 ] as believers, we are part of God's family. God is our father in heaven. And we are his adopted children.

And we are called as his children to bear his name. It means we are to be God like, Christ like. We are to be holy as he is holy.

We are to, in the words of the New Testament, put on Christ. Be like the Lord Jesus. We are to bear the fruit of the Spirit.

That's what we are called to do. But we can misuse God's name by an ungodly lifestyle. When we call ourselves Christians, but live an ungodly lifestyle. You remember that product that used to be on the telly, Ron Seal, you may have used it.  
[ 26 : 30 ] And the strap line for that advert was Ron Seal does exactly what it says on the tin. That's what we are meant to be like as Christians if we take the name of Christ, if we call ourselves believers.

we are meant to be that. We are meant to be Christ like. You see, because when you call yourself a Christian, you carry the reputation or the name of Christ with you. And if you and I are not living in a way that brings glory to God, God, then you and I will be carrying his name in vain. And that's what this commandment covers.

When one family member does something dishonorable, that lets the family down, doesn't it? It brings disgrace on the whole family.

Why? Why is that the case? Because they share a name. And names signify reputation. You know, it's interesting, it was in the New Testament, when people were first called Christians, it wasn't that they called themselves Christians.

[ 27 : 54 ] It was the unbelievers roundabout in the days of Acts, they called them Christians first at a place called Antioch.

it was people from the outside who recognised that these people were Christians, that they were Christ-like in their lifestyles.

Christians. And so we need to be careful how we live if we call ourselves Christians, so that we don't carry God's name in vain.

But we can fall foul of this commandment with a hypocritical life too, can't we? We're all guilty of this sin of hypocrisy, aren't we?

If we're honest with ourselves. What is a hypocrite? Well, we get our word actor from the word hypocrite. An actor is someone who plays a part, who pretends to be something or someone that they are not.

[ 29 : 12 ] And when we say one thing and live another, we are practicing hypocrisy.

We are not to act out our Christianity. When we honour God with our lips, but not with our hearts, God sees that.

unbelievers also see that too, don't they? They are not fooled completely either.

God says of his people in the Old Testament, in a judgment, he says, this people draw near with their mouths, and honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

How is your heart this morning? Is it close to God? Does your lifestyle marry up with what your lips profess?

[ 30 : 25 ] It's one thing to come to a church like this, a building, a meeting like this, and call yourself a Christian or a believer.

Christian. But is your lifestyle, is my lifestyle out of this building any different? Is it Christ-like? Have you ever been caught out by your work colleague or friend who said to you as they looked at something that you did, oh I didn't expect a Christian to do that.

often they set the bar higher than we set for ourselves don't they sometimes? So we mustn't be hypocritical, we mustn't take the name of God on our lips and live as hypocrites.

That is taking God's name in vain. The prophet Micah in chapter 4 and verse 5 says these words, all the nations may walk in the name of their gods.

We will walk in the name of the Lord our God forever. We obey this third commandment by living as Christians by speaking and doing everything according to the family name.

[ 32 : 00 ] For when we do all that we do and do it in Christ and for Christ and through Christ we then show that his name is the name we value.

The name that we love. and the name that is above all other names. Dumfries needs people like that.

Glasgow needs people like that. The United Kingdom the world needs people like that.

how do you fare this morning? Let's pray together. Let's pray together.