

The Third Commandment: Honoring the Name of God

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[0:00] Amen. 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. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen. So this morning, I will begin with confessing one of the sins of my youth.

This happened, I think it was the summer of my 14th year. Now, I was not yet a believer, so this is a story from my wild days. I hope you're not too scandalized.

Thank you, Raymond. I was getting out of the car, and as usual, I was closing the car door, right? Now, I might have slammed it a little harder than I usually did.

It all happened so quickly, I don't know if that's the case. But before I knew what had happened, I realized that my finger had been horrifically smashed in the door. Now, our topic being the third commandment this morning, not taking the Lord's name in vain, you probably think that you know where this is going, but there is a twist.

[1:31] Instead of screaming out the name of the Lord Jesus in anger, I calmly said, I think I need to go down the hill and cuss. So I did. And it was ugly.

But, interestingly enough, one thing I did not do at that moment was take the Lord's name in vain. The reason I didn't is that I knew that had I done so, my mother would have absolutely skinned me alive.

See, I was taught from childhood never to take the Lord's name in vain, no matter what. That saying, Oh my God, or Jesus Christ, like a common curse word, was the worst thing that one could possibly say, and one of the worst things one could possibly do.

But what surprised me as I grew up is that not everyone thought that way. Despite my mother giving me the impression that the lightning would strike if I took the Lord's name in vain, I realized pretty quickly that most people didn't think it was a big deal.

In fact, I came to realize that professing Christians often did it. Now, don't get me wrong, I'm not saying this to be self-righteous. My mom teaching me God's law on this point did one of the things that God's law is supposed to do.

[2:45] That second use of the law that we haven't talked a whole lot about in this series. It caused me to get in line out of fear. That's not necessarily bad, by the way. If it weren't enough to think that God might strike me down, and I thought that he might for doing that, if that weren't to happen, I knew that my mom would make sure that I encountered the Lord's discipline in any way.

It would happen one way or another. I do remember saying, Oh my God, once when I was a kid, and interestingly enough, my teenage brother gave me such a scolding for it that it lost any appeal it might have had.

But the third commandment, quite simply, has to be one of the most casually violated of the commandments of God. We are tempted to take the holy, righteous, glorious name of God. Tempted to take the precious name of Jesus. To use it in anger, or to use it foolishly, to use it casually, to use it as we would a curse word. It's bad enough, but understandable that unbelievers would do this.

But what's worse is that so many Christians either don't know what God commands on this point or don't care. We treat so trivially something that is quite literally a matter of life and death.

[4:16] Think I'm exaggerating? I'm not. What does the commandment say? 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.

The Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain. Do you want to know the end result of taking the Lord's name in vain? If we do that, the commandment implies we will stand

condemned before God's judgment seat.

That gets our attention, doesn't it? It's awfully easy to casually throw out the name of God in a profane way without stopping to consider the condemnation and the death that will result.

But it's real and God's word warns us. God will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

Now, this commandment, like the others, also covers more ground than we might tend to think.

Our ACNA catechism addresses this really well. It takes up the reality that we can and do use God's name lightly and irreverently and that there are a lot of ways to do this.

[5:31] So how might we use God's name irreverently and so violate the third commandment? The catechism answers, In false or half-hearted worship, oppression of the poor, and conflicts cloaked with divine cause, people use God's name without reverence for him and only to further their own goals.

Ouch. So, it's that basic problem that the Bible describes as honoring God with our lips while our hearts are far from him.

Anyone ever been guilty of that? I suspect we all have. Let's break it down for a second. One, have you ever paid insufficient attention in worship so that it became a matter of simply going through the motions?

Been there, done that, and I have to say it's particularly easy to do that when you're worried about leading the service. Have you done that? Been there? Well, congratulations, we have all violated the third commandment together.

What about oppression of the poor? We might ask, what does that even mean and what does it have to do with the third commandment? What's the catechism I'm getting at here? I can't help but think of the sins we see described in James 2 where we read this, My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory.

[7:02] For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, you sit here in a good place, while you say to the poor man, you stand over there, or sit down at my feet, have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

We can, unfortunately, as Christians, in the name of God, show partiality against the poor in this way. It's easy for churches to adopt either a spoken or unspoken attitude of not wanting to welcome or reach out to the poor, and even to have some sort of pious excuse for their partiality.

And when this happens, it dishonors the name of God. Or it might look like what we see a few verses later, where we read, if a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, go in peace, be warmed and filled, without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?

We might also throw in a God bless you for pious effect to really put the icing on the cake of the irreverence to God's name in our treatment of the poor. There's another way that we can dishonor the name of God.

What about conflicts cloaked in divine cause, as the Catechism puts it? Well, that's a big topic. It can happen on the scale from international to personal, but since most of us haven't been crusading lately, I'm going to stick to personal conflict this morning.

[8:53] I trust that most of us haven't been on crusades lately, right? Yes. Now, here's a shocker for us. Interpersonal conflict happens even in the church.

Who would have guessed? I know it's scandalous, but it's true. You know, I remember one of my seminary professors saying, that there is no fight as ugly as a church fight.

I think he was onto something. Wouldn't you agree? And I think the reason that church fights, as we call them, can get so ugly is that we can find ourselves using the name of our God to justify an ongoing conflict, even with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

And when we do, we are violating the third commandment because we have dishonored the name of God. And the New Testament is clear that we're called to a better way. Paul writes in Ephesians 4, And the chapter closes with this.

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[10:11] Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you. Along with all malice, be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

Now, I would suspect that most of us here have, at one point or another, rushed recklessly into a church fight or been party to it in some way. But let's be reminded that in doing those things and pursuing any conflict cloaked in divine cause, that's a tongue twister, in oppressing the poor, in false or half-hearted worship, the catechism rightly reminds us that in doing these things, we are using God's name irreverently and for our own purposes, and we are violating the third commandment.

The catechism also reminds us that we can violate the third commandment by using God's name lightly. List the following examples. Profanity, careless speech, broken vows, open sin, and meaningless exclamations, all cheap in God's name.

These treat God's name as empty of the reality for which it stands. So profanity, careless speech, and meaningless exclamations are often what we think of first when we consider the issue of taking the Lord's name in vain.

I think we've pretty thoroughly covered those. But what about broken vows? Well, we take vows before the Lord as Christians, don't we?

[11 : 56] When we bring our children to baptism, what do we vow? Well, here are a few things. To trust God, to renounce the devil and all his works, and to do everything in our power to teach our little ones to know and love the Lord.

The reality is that these are vows, I fear, that have been far too often broken. If we're baptized later in life, or if we're confirmed, we take vows for ourselves to turn to Jesus as Lord and Savior, to renounce the devil and all his works, to strive with God's help to be obedient to God's commandments.

Another set of vows which I fear are too often broken. What about marriage vows taken before God? Vows of a lifelong, faithful, loving union.

Those get broken too, don't they? If we break the vows that we have taken before God in his name, we have violated the third commandment because we have taken his name lightly.

We also take God's name lightly when we are living in open sin, as the catechism reminds us.

When we profess Christ with our lips and we deliberately live a life that is disobedient to God's commandments, the catechism isn't talking here about the struggle with sin that is typical of the Christian life, the stumbling, falling, getting back up that is inevitable.

[13 : 27] It's talking about open rebellion against the law of God, deliberate, ongoing sin with no intention of repentance. When we profess Christ and we live in deliberate disobedience to him, we take his name lightly, we take his name in vain, and we violate the third commandment.

So, now that we've covered a few of the ways in which we can violate the third commandment, here's a question for you. Feeling convicted yet?

I am. A few months ago in Sunday school we were studying the topic of sin, and towards the end of that particular lesson, one of our participants, I'm not going to say who, but they can identify themselves later if they so choose.

One of our participants said jokingly, I came to church hoping to feel good and now I feel guilty.

When we see our sin, brothers and sisters, here's the reality, we should feel convicted.

We are given that reminder in the third commandment itself when we read, the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

[14 : 46] What does that mean for us? I would be utterly shocked if there is anyone in this room who hasn't in some way violated the third commandment. I have.

What do we read about us? The Lord will not hold us guiltless. That's not good. My friends, here is the stark reality.

In our taking of the Lord's name in vain and sinning against a holy God, we have racked up a bill that we can't pay. And that guilt will be paid for.

The question is this. Will I pay it myself and suffer condemnation? Or will another pay it on my behalf? Will someone else suffer that death that I deserve in my place?

Because there is one who can pay that debt on our behalf and he is the Lord Jesus Christ. The one who can say to the Father, unlike us, I have glorified you on earth.

[15 : 52] Having accomplished the work that you gave me to do. He perfectly honored the name of his Father. And he died for rebels like you and me who have taken God's holy name in vain.

So the question is this. Do I stand guilty before God for taking his name in vain or has Jesus as my Savior washed away my guilt with his blood?

Because what it really comes down to is this. Either we know Jesus as our Savior and we have full forgiveness in his name, or we are still dead in our sins and God will not hold us guiltless.

But I don't want to leave us simply feeling guilty. I have tried very hard to speak clearly and directly about the sin of taking God's name in vain and just how heinous it really is.

But let me be very clear in saying this. no matter what you have done, no matter how horrifically you may have dishonored the name of the holy God, there is forgiveness at the cross of Jesus Christ.

[17 : 08] And you will find it in repentance and faith in Christ. And there is new life for those who are in Christ because the life transforming power of the Holy Spirit is real.

because the Holy Spirit can and does change us from the kind of people who really just live to dishonor the holy name of God.

Changes us from that to the kind of people who live to glorify his name. To the kind of people who begin their prayers to God with, hallowed be thy name.

To the kind of people whose first priority in prayer, whose first concern is that the name of God be glorified. The Holy Spirit can do that. Through the power of the Holy Spirit living in us, we come to see that there is nothing more glorious than the name of God, that there is nothing sweeter or more precious than the name of Jesus Christ, that we can look forward to that day in hope and not in fear when at the name of Jesus, every knee will bow.

that we can look forward to praising his glorious name for all eternity, and that we are called to live to the glory of his name now and forever.

[18 : 34] Because God created us to find our deepest and everlasting joy glorifying him and praising his name. Thank God.

Let us praise his great and awesome name. Holy is he. Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time forth and forevermore. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.