

Bearing God's Name

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Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 00] Does everyone know what day it is this week? The horse, yeah, cup day, yep. I think I may have mentioned to you before, I can't remember, but I was actually born on cup day, 76, and apparently a journalist burst into my mother's room and asked if she'd remembered to place a bet.

And then the journalist asked my mother whether she would name me after the winning horse that year. The winning horse was a horse named Vanderham. So standing before you today could have been Vanderham Price, which is actually better than being named after the 1985 winner.

That horse's name was What a Nuisance. Thankfully, though, my parents opted for Andrew. But names actually matter, don't they? A person's name carries with it a person's reputation, their character, their identity.

And when you think of a person's name, you often think of who they are, whether it's for good or for bad. So sticking with the cup theme, if I said the name Farlap, and you knew who that was, then immediately that name conjures up a whole identity, doesn't it?

It's a famous race-winning horse. Or negatively, if I said the name Hitler. That name conjures up a whole identity, character, and reputation, but not a positive one.

[1 : 23] In fact, some names now are banned because of the identity they carry. So after 9-11, a family living in Germany actually wanted to call their...

They were anti-America. And they wanted to call their son Osama bin Laden. And the German government would not let them register that name because of the character and identity the name carried with it.

We even have sayings and laws that demonstrate the connection between name and character.

For example, if you say you're dragging their name through the mud, what you're really saying is you're having a go at this person, who they are, their character.

We even have defamation laws where you can be sued if you make offensive marks about a person's name or reputation. Well, today we come to the third commandment of the Ten Commandments, which is all about God's name.

And for those of us who have missed a few or if you're visiting today, let me remind you that we are doing a series on the Ten Commandments. And I should also point out that these commandments are like topics.

[2 : 31] So we don't...we can't just work through a particular passage. We're going to have to do...see a lot of Bible references to build up a picture about this topic.

Most of them I'll put on the slide. And I also need to remind you that Israel was to obey these Ten Commandments in response to God saving them.

So just like we heard from Candice today, God first forgives us and saves us when we believe in Jesus. And then we are to follow him in response.

I still meet many people today, even some at churches, who think to get a place in God's kingdom, to get a spot in heaven, you have to obey all his laws first and then earn your place in God's kingdom.

But God doesn't operate like that, does he? No, no, we can't ever earn a place because we can never be good enough. As we heard from Candice, we are all selfish at heart. And so what God does is he generously or by grace gives his son Jesus to die for us.

[3 : 37] It's all about what he has done. We believe in him. We are given a place in his kingdom. We are saved. And then in response, we are to follow him. And that's exactly the same for Israel.

That's why the Ten Commandments actually begin in verse 1 with a reminder about God saving them from Egypt. Now, I know you know this, but I'm still surprised about how many people forget it.

And so we need to make sure it's clear in our minds. But now that Israel has a relationship with God, now that they are his people, these laws now show them how to live out that relationship with God and with each other.

In other words, it helps them to love God and love others as his people. Now, as I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, Christ has actually fulfilled the law, hasn't he? Which means we no longer have to.

We don't technically have to keep God's law in the Old Testament, including the Ten Commandments. And yet, Jesus did not come to abolish the law either.

[4 : 37] So it still has a place for us. And I said to you a few weeks ago that the law does three things. One, it teaches us about God's character, what he is like. Two, it teaches us about Jesus and helps to understand his work as a sacrifice.

That's all Old Testament law language. And priests, that's Old Testament law language. And thirdly, it helps us to know how to love God and others. And you might remember I gave you four questions and worked through some examples to teach you how to apply God's Old Testament law to us today.

And those questions are now on your outline, although I've combined the last two. And you'll notice our outline today is rather full up than usual. But again, that's because it's a topical sermon.

And so we've got to pull in references from different places. So we're at point one in your outline. Who does this third commandment about not taking God's name in vain? Who does it help us to love?

It's quite easy, isn't it? So I'll let you answer. God. Yeah, it's God. Because like us, God's name is also tied to his character. And let me show you from earlier in Exodus.

[5 : 45] So if you've got your Bibles there, turn with me now to the beginning of Exodus, to chapter 3. It's on page 58. And it says, sorry, Israel are in Egypt.

They're slaves in Egypt. And God's about to send Moses to rescue them. And Moses is making up excuses. Moses says to God, suppose I go, verse 13, to the Israelites and say to them, the God of your fathers has sent me to you.

And they ask me, what is his name? Then what shall I tell them? God said to Moses, I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites.

I am has sent me to you. And God also said to Moses, say to the Israelites, the Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob has sent me to you.

This is my name forever. The name you shall call me from generation to generation. Now, there's two things worth noticing here. Firstly, God's name comes in verse 15.

[6 : 49] It's the Lord with capital letters. But the word Lord in our English Bibles really means the name Yahweh.

That's actually God's name. Yahweh. So why do our English Bibles put Lord in capital letters here? Well, it's because the Jews actually never said out loud Yahweh.

They were so scared of breaking the third commandment about taking the name of God in vain that they decided it's safer just never to say it. And so they never pronounced Yahweh out loud.

And because they never pronounced it out loud, we're not even sure it's pronounced as Yahweh. It's just our best guess. Instead, what the Jews would say was Adonai, which means Lord.

And that's why Lord appears in our Bibles. But God's name is actually Yahweh. The second thing to notice is that his name represents who he is.

[7 : 47] So have a look at verse 13 there. Exodus chapter 3, verse 13. Moses asks for God's name. And before God gives it, you know, before he says the Lord or Yahweh, God firstly says, I am who I am.

That's a strange answer, isn't it? But you see, before God tells Moses his name, Yahweh, God wants Moses and all of Israel to know that his name is bound up with who he is.

It's as though he says, my name represents who I am. See, God could have chosen any name for himself, any name he wanted.

But he deliberately chose the name Yahweh because in the Israelites language, the Hebrew language, it's very similar for the word I am. Why? Well, so that Israel might know that his name represents who he is, his character.

Do you see the connection? So later on in Exodus chapter 34, on the next slide, we read these words. Do you see what God proclaims?

[9 : 15] He proclaims his name, the Lord, but then he also proclaims his character. Do you notice that? Because his name represents who he is.

It's kind of like those novelty mugs. You know those novelty mugs where you have the name up the front, at the top, and then underneath is a meaning and a description of the character. I've got a slide here, I think, of one on the next slide.

Here we go, Paul. We've got a couple of Pauls here. And the meaning of the name Paul is humble. And then underneath on the cup, there's a little description about the character.

And it says about Paul, you're a genuine person. You're really a dear, humble, straightforward, and truly sincere. Now, I mean, that sounds like our Pauls today. Where are they?

They're hiding. It's that kind of thing. Or to be fair, I'll put out my name up as well, though we've got another Andy here as well. The name Andy means strong.

[10 : 07] And it says you're self-confident, totally secure. You've got inner strength and will endure. Your admirers think you've got macho appeal. My wife laughed at that point, too.

But on the next slide, if we were to do one for God, then we'd have the Lord. That's his name. The meaning is Yahweh. And we'd have a description of his character, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness.

You see, like us, God's name is tied to his character. And so as we come to the third commandment, it's clearly about loving God because his name represents him.

So point two, then, what is the loving principle here? How are we to love God? Well, it's by not misusing his name that represents him. If we were to dishonor his name, then we are to dishonor him, his very being, his very self.

And misusing God's name included much more than simply using God as a swear word. In fact, the first part of the commandment can be translated in different ways. So on the next slide, it says, Do not take, which can also mean lift, carry or bear, the name of Yahweh, the Lord.

[11 : 28] No, no, no, go back. Your God in vain. And vain can mean falsely or emptily. Okay, we'll just leave that there for a second. Do you see what it means? So to take means we can bear God's name in a vain or empty way.

Just like you have a vain hope that is an empty hope and so on or a false hope. And as we look at the Old Testament examples, we find they seem to fall into two main categories. You know, first there's lifting God's name to justify false speaking.

And then secondly, there's bearing God's name with empty living. So let's have a look at the first way and we'll see some examples of this. So on the next slide, one example of lifting God's name to speak falsely was in an oath that you broke.

So God says, Do not swear falsely by my name. In other words, saying, Look, I promised by the name of God to do this. And then not keeping your promise. Because to do that is to profane the name of your God.

To offend it. Or Jeremiah at the bottom there. God says, Though Israel say, As surely as the Lord lives, still they are swearing falsely.

[12 : 40] In other words, the Jews would make an oath and they say, As surely as the Lord lives. You know, cross my heart, hope to die kind of thing. I will do this. But then they wouldn't keep their promise.

And so they took God's name in vain, you see. They swore falsely. But some also did this in prophecy. So they would take God's name for false prophecy.

So on the next slide, Ezekiel 13. God is saying to Ezekiel, Say to those who prophesy out of their own imagination, Hear the word of the Lord.

This is what the sovereign Lord says to these false prophets. Woe to you foolish prophets who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing. Their visions are false and their divinations are lie.

Even though the Lord has not sent them, notice what they say. They still say the Lord declares. They use God's name, you see. And expect God to fulfill their words.

[13 : 42] Do you see what's happening there? People would declare things in God's name that God never said. They were lifting God's name to justify false prophecy, you see. But it wasn't just false oaths or false prophecy.

The Jews would also use God's name as a false magic charm. So on the next slide from Jeremiah 7. This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel says.

Reform or repent your ways, Israel, and your actions. And I will let you live in this place, this land. God was warning them. This is before they went into exile.

If you remember our series from Daniel. And he says, Do not trust in deceptive words and say, Oh, the temple of the Lord. The temple of the Lord. The temple of the Lord. There's their magic chant. You see, Israel were mistreating each other and being selfish. And God says, If you keep going, I'm going to send Babylon to take you into exile and judge you.

[14:43] So he sends Jeremiah the prophet to tell them to repent or reform. But they would then use this magic chant like a lucky rabbit's foot as protection.

It's as though Jeremiah would say, Look, judgment is coming, guys. So you better repent. And they would say, Oh, no, we'll just say temple of the Lord three times and we'll be safe. You see, they lifted up God's name as a false charm of protection, you see.

What they really needed to do was repent and believe. You see, taking God's name in vain is much more than just using it as a swear word. Even in the Old Testament, it means lifting God's name to justify false oaths, false prophecy and false charms.

But it also includes bearing God's name in empty living. So Israel would do this. They would be known as God's people. They would bear his name, but then they will follow other gods.

So on the next slide from Ezekiel 20, I think it is. Next one. Yep. And this is what God says. As for you, people of Israel, this is what the sovereign Lord says.

[15:53] Go and serve your idols, every one of you. But afterward, you will surely listen to me and no longer profane my holy name with your gifts and idols.

You see what they were doing? By serving other idols, they're actually profaning God's name. God had saved them from Egypt. God had made them his people.

Everyone in the ancient world knew that the Jews were the Lord's people. They bore his name. And so to turn around and serve other gods? Well, that was to profane God's name.

It was to live a life that was empty of godliness. God's name.

And they got all these guns out to show the kids, right? Machine guns, hand pistols. They weren't loaded, although OH&S; these days would probably frown on that as well. But then this one kid tried to sneak a handgun into his bag.

[17:18] It's always one. And the reason teachers are so worried about their behavior is partly because of their safety, taking a gun home, but also because they were wearing their school uniform, which has what on it?

The school name. The logo. And so their behavior would reflect on the school. They represented the school, you see. They could either bring honor or dishonor to the school they represented.

And it's the same here. The Israelites bore God's name. They were known as the Lord's people. But instead of living lives full of godliness that brought honor to God's name, they lived lives that were empty of godliness and so brought dishonor to God's name.

You see, to take the name of the Lord in vain includes bearing God's name with empty living. Well, that's what it meant for Israel in the Old Testament. What does it mean for us today?

Point three in your outline. Well, as we come to the New Testament, we actually find similar examples for all these things. So in our second reading, we heard Jesus say not to swear an oath by anything.

[18:23] Do you remember that? You see, what the Pharisees would do was they would swear oaths by different things. And depending on what it was, well, they could break their word or keep their word.

Let me show you on the next slide from Matthew 23. This is what Jesus says to the Pharisees. He says, you Pharisees say, if anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing.

You can break your word. But if anyone who swears by the gold of the temple, well, they are bound by that oath. They have to keep their word. Do you see what they were doing?

Depending on what they swore by, it would change whether they had to keep their word or not. And he says, you blind fools, what is greater anyway? The gold or the temple that actually makes the gold sacred in the first place?

You see, they were using oaths to actually get out of keeping their word. And so Jesus says in our second reading, just don't swear an oath at all.

[19:22] Instead, just tell the truth. Let your yes be yes and your no be no. I saw a nice summary of this on a church bulletin one time on the next slide. It says, let your yes be yes and your no be no.

Be so trustworthy that no other words are necessary. That's the application for us. Be so trustworthy that no other words. We just never need to swear an oath.

Well, the New Testament also picks up the idea of not using God's name to justify false prophecy. So on the next slide, we have these examples in 2 Peter 1.

He says, just as there were false prophets among the people of Israel, so there will be false teachers among you today. And he says to Timothy, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer.

They want to be teachers of the law, but they don't know what they are talking about. So we'll just leave this up for a moment. Here are people who claim to be teachers. They teach in God's name. But they are false teachers who teach false doctrines not found in God's word.

[20 : 29] And that's taking God's name in vain, is it not? In fact, someone from our congregation recently visited a Pentecostal church not far from here. And the preacher said, if you want God to do something for you, you have to first do something for God.

And then he gave the example of giving money. Now, is that what the Bible says? Thank you, Philip. No, that's false teaching.

But the moment he gets up and says, God says, he's actually taking God's name in vain, is he not? He's lifting up God's name to justify false teaching.

And when Peter warns his church about false teachers in 2 Peter, he says, be on your guard. Grow in the truth so you might recognize what is false. And Paul says to Timothy, to have nothing to do with false teachers.

Now, can I get a little bit controversial for a moment? You can shoot me later in love. I suspect that even includes places like Hillsong.

[21 : 38] Which, I don't want comments either way, but I've listened to a fair bit of Brian Houston, and it's a mixed bag, right? It's very slippery. There are some things that sound biblical, but there are other things that are not.

And this is not me wanting to have a go at a big church. This is me as your pastor, just warning you that big doesn't equal right. And I myself continue to be surprised at how many pastors are out there, even amongst our own Anglican churches, who lift God's name to justify what is actually false teaching.

So please, be on your guard. Always test everything. Not against what I say. Against what God says in the Bible. And if you hear something, false flee from it.

So the New Testament talks about not lifting God's name to justify false oaths or false teaching, but it also even talks about false charms. Did you realize? So there's this slightly amusing story in Acts 19. It's a long slide.

It's on the next one, I think. From Acts 19. Ryan. Here we are. So listen to this.

[22 : 49] He says, Some Jews went around driving out evil spirits, and they tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, not who they know, I command you to come out.

Now, seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. One day the evil spirit answered them, Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?

Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered all seven of them. And he gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.

I guess that's what happens when you use the name of Jesus as a lucky charm. But it's not just people like that. It's people even today who claim to be Christians.

Perhaps one of the scariest verses, some of the scariest verses in the Bible are on the next slide from Matthew 7. And it says, Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

[24 : 00] Many will say to me on that day, day of judgment, Lord, Lord, do we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you.

Away from me, you evildoers. You see, it is possible, and we'll just leave that up for a moment, it is possible for some people to claim they believe in Jesus' name, to even do things in Jesus' name, to help the sick, give money to the poor, but not really trust in Jesus as their Lord and Savior, as Candice has done.

Take someone who came to our church one Easter, this was about two years ago, after the Easter service, they spoke with me at the door, and they asked why we didn't have communion on Easter Sunday.

I explained that we had it on Good Friday, which is where we particularly remember his death, so it kind of goes together, kind of communion, death, Good Friday. And then they responded by saying, I have come to this church every Easter for the last 20 years and have never missed communion once.

It doesn't feel right. Now, I don't know their heart, only God does, but I do know they called themselves Christians, yet I've only ever seen them at Easter and Christmas.

[25 : 19] And for them, what's important is not following Jesus, but communion. Communion on Easter Sunday had become like a lucky charm for them, you see.

Now, I'm worried for them because I can sadly imagine them standing before Jesus on that last day and saying, Lord, Lord, do we not go to church at the important times of the year, Easter and Christmas?

And Lord, Lord, do we not have communion in your name every time, except for that time that jolly minister didn't have it? But Jesus will say, you trusted the wrong thing.

You trusted in communion instead of the person that communion points to. Do you see the difference? That's lifting the name of God in a false charm sort of way.

In the end, of course, speaking false oaths, speaking false teaching and using false charms, they all really fit under the last category of bearing God's name with empty living. You see, God spoke about people from all the nations who would one day bear his name.

[26 : 27] So on the next slide, we have a reading from Acts 15, the next one. Yep. God says, The rest of mankind may seek the Lord, even the Gentiles who bear my name.

See, as Christians, we bear God's name. And in particular, we bear Christ's name. I mean, even the word Christ is in the word Christian, isn't it? Candice this morning was baptized in the name of Jesus Christ as a symbol that she bears his name.

And so we are not to bear it in an empty way by claiming to be Christian on the one hand and then living lives that are empty of following Jesus on the other. Rather, we have to live lives that are full of godliness, lives that we bring honor to the name we bear.

And so on the next slide, Paul prays that the Thessalonian Christians might live good lives. And notice the reason, so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you.

And similarly, down the bottom, he speaks to those who were slaves in those days. And he says, Now that second verse down there is clearly directed to slaves, which is a bit different to the slavery of Wilberforce.

[27 : 52] It was more often a type of employment. And so this verse particularly applies to us who work and have bosses. But the principle really applies to us all. You see, we all bear the name of Christ if we are Christian.

And so we can all live in a way that either brings him honor or dishonor. Just like the school kids who bore the name of their school and their behavior could either bring honor or dishonor to the school. And it's the same for us.

Because I remember as a teenager driving with a Christian friend, we were on our P plates. He was driving, but he had his parents' car. And the car had one of those Christian fish stickers on the back. Have you seen those ones? I've got a picture of it, just to jog your memory. So it had it on the back of the car. So it was like the car bore Christ's name in a sense, I guess. But then what we do was we hoon in and out of the traffic and do silly things that I've confessed enough anyway.

And then it occurred to me, this is so hypocritical. We're bearing the name of Christ and then living a completely empty life. And so one solution, of course, is just to get rid of the fish sticker, isn't it?

[29 : 00] I must confess that was my first thought. But the real solution is to drive in a way that just honors Christ, isn't it? To live in a way that honors him, fish sticker or not.

Because if we live in a way that dishonors him, then that's to take the name of God in vain. And that's not how we love God. So as you can see, let me wrap up.

The commandment is much, much bigger than just not using God or Jesus as a swear word. But it includes that. But it's much more than that. It's speaking in a way that does not defame Christ's name, but lifts it up.

It's acting in a way that does not dishonor God's name, but honors it. Even in sickness and when trouble hits. In fact, particularly in those times. I know of people, many from our church, who have suffered greatly.

And yet they continue to honor Christ through their suffering. And it's been a powerful witness to their non-Christian family and to the nursing staff of the hospital they've been in. Perhaps we need to ask ourselves, does my life make Jesus look good to my work colleagues, friends and family?

[30 : 11] Or does my life make him look bad? And then, thank God that he always forgives us. Because the chances are, we've all at some point made him look bad by our behavior.

And do pray that his spirit might work through our conscience to help us love God with this commandment. By living lives that honor the one whose name we bear.

Jesus. Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we thank you that you save us. And make us your people. Not because of how good we are.

Not because of anything we have done. But all because of what Jesus has already done for us at the cross. But Father, we pray that in response to that, you would help us to love you.

By living lives that honor Christ's name. For we ask it in his name. Amen.