

“TAKING GOD’S NAME SERIOUSLY.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

February 19, 2023, 6:00PM

Heidelberg Catechism: Lord’s Day 36, Q99-100

Scripture Texts: Exodus 20:7; Exodus 3:13-15

Introduction.

“Excuse my French.” You know the phrase, you have heard it often and you know what it means. It’s our cute little cover up for letting slip some expletive or profanity. Of course everyone knows very well that the swear word is in perfectly understandable English.

We live in an increasingly foul, coarse, crude, rude, expletive-filled world. You hear it at the mall, on the ski slopes, in the hallways at school, in the cubicles at the office and out in the shop at work. It fills the airways, the computer screens, social media and the printed page.

Swearing is becoming more and more common place. More adults, more women, more kids and even children. Children are growing up with it more and more in the home and in life.

Sometimes we let loose a word to appear cool, or hip or worldly-wise or secular than thou. Often such words are used more for effect than for meaning.

The air in our culture is getting bluer and bluer. TV and movies push the limits. But one word is no longer particularly concerning. It is rather telling about the time we live in that TV and movie ratings don’t give serious consideration in their rating when God’s name is taken in vain.

And yet Scripture teaches us that, “the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.” And “Whoever blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death” (Leviticus 24:16).

The first two commandments claim for God exclusive worship. True worship must be given to no other god, and to no man-made object or substitute for God. The first two commandments establish true religion in our hearts, that our hearts are not divided, we love only the one true God and we love Him and worship Him with our heart and not objects or images or idols.

Scripture teaches, “Out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45).

The Third Commandment addresses our mouth. What comes out of our mouths reflects what is in our hearts. Our words are to reflect our worship and what we worship.

We turn now from honoring God with our actions, with our head and heart, to honoring God with our lips. Now we come to the commandment which prohibits any misuse of the name of God. The Third Commandment separates God and God’s name out from the rest of our speech.

While we may not take our speech seriously or may dismiss our words as meaning nothing, God takes His name very seriously and He takes promises and oaths very seriously.

To understand this commandment we first need to take it a part and make sure we understand the meaning of the words. To misunderstand the words may lead to misusing them and misapplying them.

Name.

Our names are important to us. It's one of the very first things we say about ourselves when we meet someone. It's one of the very first steps in getting to know someone.

What does your signature mean? Is it just some scribbles on a piece of paper? It's your name but it represents you and your character, your integrity and your commitment to do what you say and follow through on your commitments.

Name means person, they are inseparable. I can show you this very easily by doing a little word association. I will say a name you will instantly match the character and characteristics of that person in your mind. Hitler. Ghandi. George Washington. Mother Theresa. Apostle Paul. Vladimir Putin. Jenny Bakker. Len Honcoop.

In Scripture a name is not just a designation or a label, its a description of character. In Hebrew the name of something reflects its true nature. This was probably going on when Adam named the animals, he named them according to their nature.

This is especially true of God

The infinite, unknowable, incomprehensible God of all of creation whose name is unknown, reaches across the great divide and reveals Himself to us and makes known to us His name.

Exodus 3:13-15 Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" **14** God said to Moses, "I am who I am." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I am has sent me to you.'" **15** God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, '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, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations."

What a profound answer, reflective of the holy mystery of the one who is speaking. Yahweh is God's personal name. It contains each tense of the "to be" verb, I was, I am, I will always continue to be. The same yesterday, today and forever. Eternally changeless, from everlasting to everlasting. Self-existent. I am that I am. God is. No one else and nothing else can say that.

This is God's redemptive name by which He chose His people and delivered them from bondage. This is God's covenantal name by which He makes and keeps His promises with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with Israel and with us.

This is His personal name by which He establishes a relationship with us.

This is the name by which God made Himself know and by this name He is to be worshipped, served, honored, loved, adored, testified about, preached and proclaimed and made known.

We don't worship an unknown or unnamed God. It is a privilege, honor and blessing of inestimable value and benefit to us to know the name of the only God of the universe.

God is holy. Everything about God and everything having to do with God is holy. Therefore, the name of God is holy. Don't take him or any aspect of his being, his name, in vain.

Psalm 8:9 O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

There is no other name like it in all the earth. It is the name above all names, it is holy.

In vain.

So what does it mean to take the Lord's name in vain? In vain means in a way that is empty, frivolous, insincere, trivial, meaninglessly or in any way that suggests that His name is unreal or has little value or no reality.

Other translations use "misuse" the name of God meaning to treat with contempt, irreverence, disrespect.

We take up the name of God in vain when handle it with casual familiarity as if God is our buddy or on our side, as if He is a handy mantra, or as if He is a finite thing.

Warning.

"The Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain."

In modern English, "I wouldn't do that if I were you. It won't end well for you."

This clause is meant to reinforce the seriousness of this command. Anything having to do with the holiness of God is taken with utmost seriousness. To misuse God's name is a great sin, it is a direct attack on God's honor and glory.

Our tongues have great power for sin and evil, and can lead us into sin and judgment. Transgressors will not go unpunished apart from genuine repentance. God took His name seriously then and He still does.

So what? What does this mean for us?

As we saw this morning in baptism, we bear the name of God. We are baptized in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. We bear the name of Christ as Christians.

Our words and actions must reflect the reality of the living God in our lives. Nothing in our speech must speak hypocritically, or suggest God is less than real or revered or honored or loved.

How should we behave and act and, in this instance, speak? How can we keep from taking God's name in vain? Let me offer *five brief applications*.

Six applications.

First, we must avoid using God's name in cursing or swearing or as an expletive or profanity. To use the holy name of God as a swear-word is blasphemy against the person, the character and nature of God Himself.

We give titles to dignitaries to reflect honor and reverence, your majesty, your excellence, your honor, and these to mere men. How much more must we honor God and His name?

If His name is not being used in worship or faith or honor then we are murdering or assassinating the character of God.

Second, we must avoid using God's name in a way that is irreverent or insincere, in a way that is entirely lacking in the seriousness and holiness of the subject, in a way of disrespect or insulting, as a part of jokes or poor humor. Don't tell or listen to any joke with any member of the Trinity in it.

What about bumper stickers, T-shirts. Saying "Praise the Lord" when we don't mean it? What about politicians who say "God bless America" but have no reverence or love for God?

Third, we must break the habit of using God's name in idle talk or loosely as in a minced oath. We are all guilty of this, me included. What is a minced oath?

A minced oath is a expression formed by misspelling, mispronouncing, or replacing a part of a word to make it less objectionable or more socially acceptable. To mince your words, means to choose words so as not to offend anyone.

Every curse or swear word has several minced variants. A minced oath is just a more socially acceptable or polite way of swearing.

Like gee, golly, gosh, oh my gosh, omg, darn, dang, heck. Yes even words like goodness gracious, mercy sakes, holy cow, are all expressions that mince, or make light of serious spiritual realities and truths.

A minced oath is sort of like saying how far can I get to the edge without sinning. But that is always the wrong question. Why are you trying to get as close to the fire without being burned? Why not instead ask the question, how can I speak in a manner that most glorifies God? We are missing the spirit of the law which is God is holy and to be feared and revered and hallowed.

Fourth, we must avoid speaking evil of God or assigning evil or sin to Him.

When we become angry with God and rail against Him. Our anger says we believe God to have acted wrongly toward us.

Fifth, and finally and most importantly, we must avoid worshipping God with our lips but not our hearts.

Worship that is careless, casual or insincere dishonors God's name. Worship that lacks reverence or awe, that forgets to tremble before His majesty, dishonor's His name.

This happens frequently in our worship. There is a saying that Christians lie the most when they are singing. How often do we sing or pray thoughtlessly; or we sing and pray but don't believe what we are singing; or pray but don't believe by faith that He hears and answers our prayers?

We violate this commandment when we worship or pray in an unbelieving or faithless manner. Or when we take God lightly.

Or we pray very selfish, self-centered prayers and then attach Jesus' name to the prayer. Or we say the Lord's Prayer while thinking about Saturday or Monday.

Or we come to the table with little reflection on who Jesus is and how great a forgiveness He has gained for us. Or we come here and go through the motions. Or we go through the week bearing the name Christian but being lazy and slothful and neglecting Scripture and prayer.

Having God on our lips but not in our thoughts or on our hearts is disrespect. There is nothing casual, frivolous or trivial about God. One writer called this "the weightlessness of God" (David Wells). Fear God and let it show in your words.

Matthew 15:7-9 You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said:
8 "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me;
9 in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men."

The heart is essential to true worship and true faith. Believing hearts give glory to God, unbelieving hearts mock Him and take Him in vain.

May the fruit of our lips be pleasing to God and honoring of His glory, majesty and honor. May all your words concerning God and the things of God reflect sincere affection, adoration, love. May we feel the weight and glory of God's name.

Conclusion.

Let me close with this encouragement. When the Jews tried to keep this commandment, over the years they put more and more restrictions on saying and using the name of God. It got to the point that they would not write it or speak it. They did all of that in the name of trying to keep this commandment. But they ended up in going in the wrong direction, and sinned in their lack of use as much as in any misuse or abuse.

The name of God is His power and His presence. Our hope and our help is in the name of the Lord, not in avoiding it. It is no help to run away from the grace of God in hopes of not abusing it. To whom shall we go if not to Him? Our only refuge from the judgment warned in this commandment is in the name of the Lord, in calling on the name of the Lord, in a far greater turning to the name of the Lord in repentance, in faith, in worship and adoration.

With His name on our lips and true faith in our hearts nothing will be able to separate us from His love and power.

Prayer: Holy Father, in the name of Jesus and by the sanctifying power of your Holy Spirit would you cause the desire of all our hearts be to that all the words of our mouths and all the meditations of our hearts be wholly acceptable in your sight, O Lord our Rock and Redeemer. May all our words bring glory and honor to you and be edifying to those who hear us.