

Worship from the Heart

The 3rd Commandment Exodus 20:7



Now we begin looking at the 3rd Commandment: *“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.”*

Normally, whenever this commandment is considered, the attention is drawn singularly to one thing we must not do – that is, cursing and swearing, using coarse or undignified language including the name of God and of Jesus. And once we have thought about that we do not usually give any further thought at all as to the fact that God is also making a strong positive command to us here as well.

Worship with Attitude

What is this commandment telling us to do? You’ll remember that as the 1st Commandment taught us *who* we are to worship, who is to be our God in life; and as the 2nd Commandment taught us *how* we are to worship this one and true God, how we are to live before him; the 3rd Commandment is all about the *attitude* we are to have in our worship and what is to be our demeanor as we live in the world.

The judgment, the wrath, the vengeance of a holy & righteous God are laid out for all to see.

One of the things that should be plain to you by now is that worship is not limited to just 1 or 2 hours a week on the Lord’s Day and while you are in a certain building. It means much more. That which we do together on the Lord’s Day as a congregation we call our formal worship unto the Lord. But it is just as true that your entire life is worship to the Lord your God – you are worshipping him when you go to work or school, when you speak to others, each and every day, wherever you are.

Now, the key element to true worship focuses on the name of the Lord. When we gather together for the purpose of worshipping God, much of what we mean by that is our calling on the name of the Lord. Even from the very beginning of history when man saw his need to come before God in worship he did so by calling on the name of the Lord (Gen. 4:26b). In much the same way, the name of the Lord identifies the rest of our lives as worship because we conduct ourselves as men, women, boys and girls who have taken on the name of the Lord. We are Christians.

What do we mean by the *name* of the Lord? What is the name of the Lord? Actually, there are many names given of God in Scripture, aren’t there? Can you think of some of them? What do all these names have in common? They mean something. They tell us something

about God. They reveal who God is to us. They are his attributes. When we speak of the name of God in worship we are declaring his wondrous works, his infinite mercies, his absolute faithfulness, his power, justice and holiness. And because he has given us his one and only Son, and we have been given his name, Jesus, we not only know that we are saved from our sins by his name but that his is the only name by which anyone is to be saved.

What then, do you think it means, when we take up this high, glorious & wonderful name? It means that, in faith, we claim the person and the power of God in Christ to be our

It should be plain by now is that worship is not limited to just 1 or 2 hours a week - your life is your confession of faith.

own that we are identified with Christ, that we stand under his cross and blood. In formal worship, it means we enter into the presence of Almighty God not according to what we have done for him but rather on that which Jesus has done for us. In the worship of our lives, it means that we recognize that we live, move and have our being for only one reason: the pleasure and mercy of God. (Acts 11:26)

Do you remember our married couple? Our tradition dictates that when a young woman gives herself to her husband in marriage that she take his name upon herself. That new name means something to her, and its meaning is brought out both when she is with her husband and when she is out alone in the world. She has taken on the name of her husband because that is who she is - his wife.



In the same way, when a person publicly professes his faith he takes up the name of Christ upon himself - because that changes everything about him - whether in formal worship or out in the world - he is now, first and foremost, a Christian.

And what is the *benefit* of taking up that name upon your lips, worship, life? The words of the commandment make that very clear: in the grace of God, the one who takes up the name of Christ is the one God holds absolutely guiltless - he is forever forgiven of his sins.

And because the name of Christ is so meaningful, so powerful, so able to deliver, God instructs us to be actively telling others of this name as well. But it is more than just an invitation, the gospel is the command of God. Men everywhere must take up the name of Christ not only because in that name alone is salvation to be found but also because it is by that name alone that all men will be judged.

“What a Difference a Word Makes”

So far, we have seen the positive command in the 3rd Commandment:

*“You shall take the name of the Lord your God,
for the Lord will hold him guiltless who takes his name.”*

Can you see why this commandment is so important? This commandment is the gospel. The name of God reveals God to us - his holiness, justice, goodness, mercy, his name reveals his covenant, his love for his own in the world - and in the name of his one and only son, Jesus we have the one and only way given to us for salvation. And so, when you take up the name of Jesus you are worshipping God and confessing your sins and claiming the work of Christ on the cross for yourself and knowing him as Lord and Savior of your life.

How precious is the name of God to us, for in it is life! It is expressed in exactly the same way in the New Testament: God “now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the man whom He has ordained.” (Acts 17:30-31)

Too many times people are told that the gospel only invites a person to be saved or worse, that all it takes to be saved is for you to invite Jesus into your heart. But that is to take the name of Jesus so lightly, so trivially that the idea, the desperate need, the urgency of the gospel is virtually emptied of its true meaning and calling. It violates the 3rd Commandment to

The one who takes up the name of Christ is the one God holds absolutely guiltless.

regard the hope of salvation so lightly. It is the same as saying “there really isn’t any judgment or hell”. It is the same as saying “the name of Jesus really isn’t anything special, valuable or glorious.” It is the same as saying “I’m really not a sinner and the Bible really isn’t true.” The gospel is a commandment and that for one simple reason: there is no hope of escaping the wrath of God without it – you must be saved!

So, we have examined several key words in this commandment – “take”, “name”, “guiltless” – but there is one more word that we must add and know about here: “vain”. “Vain” means empty, void, worthless, meaningless. And notice how the addition of that word changes the whole complexion of the commandment:

1) It changes the positive command of the gospel and makes it a negative – “Whatever you do, do not take the name of the Lord in vain!” When something is important we urge with the positive: “Be sure you buckle up when you get in the car!” But when something is urgent, critical and must be heard, you speak in the negative: “Do not put your hand on that hot burner!” Here, and in many other commandments, God speaks to us in the negative.

2) It changes the glorious promise of the gospel into a warning of complete and utter condemnation.

Now remember, this commandment is about your *attitude* in worship and in life and so this one word “vain” also effects everything else we’ve studied already. Worship is calling on the name of the Lord. But if you call on the name of the Lord vainly - if your heart is not right before God in the worship of his name, if you come into the service of the congregation unprepared to worship him, if you let your mind be filled with distractions & other things, if you do not give your attention to the singing, prayer and preaching, if you do not leave the service meditating on what you learned, you have broken this commandment.

And, remember, your life is to be your confession of faith. But if you live your confession in vain -if there is no obedience to his Word, if there is no profession of his name before men, if there is no faithfulness in the things of God – you have likewise broken this commandment (Jms. 1:21-22,25). And if your worship and your life are in vain – empty, worthless and meaningless - then so is your hope in God in vain (Mt. 7:21-23).

Is it any wonder why God warns us so clearly in this commandment? Do not let your worship, your life, your hope be in vain! Paul warns us of this with these words: “Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.” (2 Cor. 13:5) James says “Do not deceive yourselves.” Do not be hypocrites. The Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who takes his name in vain. How shall you escape if you ignore so great a salvation?

Worthless Treasure

Do you remember that as the 1st Commandment taught us *who* we must worship, and the 2nd Commandment taught us *how* we must worship, the 3rd Commandment teaches us about our *attitude* in worship. And, that the Bible defines worship in two ways – the formal times we gather together and call on the name of the Lord, and all the other times when we live as those who have taken up the name of the Lord for ourselves. We are to be constant and faithful witnesses of the power, glory, majesty of God, representing his name in the world and also the call of the gospel message which must be declared to all men: “for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12)

This commandment is the gospel – you must be saved!

In fact, the gospel is precisely what this commandment is about: “You shall take the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will hold him guiltless who takes his name.” But then we were confronted by the fact that this commandment is stated clearly in the negative – it is meant, first and foremost, as a dire and desperate warning to all men: “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 judgment, the wrath, the vengeance of a holy & righteous God are laid out for all to see in this commandment and it must not be ignored by anyone.

And yet, how many, so very many, do just that? In their hearts, they *defy* God – they hate him, they despise him, they deny him. And in their lives, they *reject* God – they refuse him, they forsake him, they live boldly to offend him. And in their speech, they *mock* God – they do not take up the name of God, they cast it down, they trample on it, they abuse it, they consider it vain, worthless, empty. I was in a line once, not long ago, and the man behind me was talking to someone else and he was using the name of Jesus in vain – again and again and again and again. He wasn’t angry, it was just normal conversation. The rebellion in his heart toward God became a habit of his speech. I was beyond being personally offended by the man. I mourned for his soul because I knew that God was counting every single time he spoke and that God would not hold him guiltless for it.

We all know how unbelievers take the name of the Lord in vain in their speech. Some do it on purpose – they do so to make some point, to be intentionally offensive to others, to show off, to attract some sort of rebellious attention to themselves – they do so because they think, by swearing in such a way, they are showing how grown up, callous, and insensitive they can be, how tough, independent and unbridled they are from anyone who would dare to tell them what to do, to seek to restrain their wickedness.

Others do so out of ignorance – children, for example, who have heard others, perhaps even their own parents, take the name of the Lord so carelessly and it doesn’t seem to matter. But still it sounds so deliciously evil that they desire to take up the habit themselves. And then the children of those who sin this way begin to imitate their parents, and the children of others who hear and learn from them – take and cast down the name of the Lord and think nothing of it.



But whatever the reason, on purpose or in ignorance, the judgment of God against them is the same – they shall be held guilty before the Lord and God’s damnation awaits them. The words they use so flippantly is, in truth, their own destiny.

But what about us? What about those who have taken up the name of the Lord? How much worse it is for those who are known and loved by this holy God and for whom God has paid the ultimate price, how much more shame and grief it brings to our God and to us to take the name that has become so precious and cast it down just like the wicked do.

Will God hold us guiltless for that? Do we have special dispensation for that? God says he will not hold anyone guiltless. What about us?

Could mere words, perhaps spoken in anger or frustration, bring us into judgment? Listen to what Jesus has said about this:

“A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.”
(Luke 6:45)

You see, what you say isn’t just something that comes out of your mouth from nowhere. It is something you have first stored up and treasured in your heart. That means, the attitude of

*Do we have special dispensation for casting
down the name of the Lord just like the wicked
do?*

dear and what you store. If you love the Lord, you will reject such language. Instead, you will store up in your heart delight for him and ways to express yourself to his praise. But if you despise the Lord, you will store such language up as hurts the name of God and brings him down and makes your heart a shame to his eyes and your mouth a shame to his ears. You will use what is stored in your heart and it is the heart that God will judge.

“Oh, but I don’t mean anything by it” you say. “It is just an expression. It doesn’t mean anything. It is meaningless.” But listen to what Jesus says about your meaningless words:

“But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”
(Matt. 12:36-37)

Christians should not expect that just because people in the world (and sometimes, even other Christians!) take such language lightly that God does not. For what is in your heart reveals your standing before God – what comes from your heart either condemns you or it bears witness to the change that has happened in you brought about by the Holy Spirit - to delight in the name of the Lord.

If you understand and embrace the gospel – that you must confess the name of the Lord or else you will perish – then you already know what it means to acknowledge that you are a sinner before a holy God, and that by confessing the name of Christ your sins are forgiven, that you are justified in his grace and that you have the gift of eternal life. And if that is the case with you then you know how you resolve in your heart of hearts not to be impressed into the mold of the world, and not to give in to the carelessness and rebellion in the hearts of people around you. You will do all you can to distance yourself from such talk because to purposefully, intentionally avoid even a hint of it on your lips is what you truly want to do out of your love for your Lord.

And you will not tolerate even those words that are abbreviations or short-cuts for the name of the Lord - words like "Oh, my Gosh" and "Gee" because you know that those words come from lips that just don't want to get into trouble with other people while their hearts still rebel against God and hate him.

The Lord has taken up your name for himself and has not cast it down. Instead, he carved your name on his hand, and has called your name blessed.

Have you fallen into that habit, that trap? You should not take it lightly, my friends. You should heed the warning of this commandment. Repent of your sins. Ask the Lord to be gracious and forgive you. And then resolve to change your ways. A Christian is not one to be mastered by his laziness and his habits.

Instead, you will wish to honor the Lord of all glory, honor, power and dominion - the one who has taken up your name for himself and has not cast it down in just judgment but has, instead, carved your name on his hand (Is. 49:16), has called your name blessed and has spoken the words of promise to you that your name is forever precious in his sight. You will honor the name of him who has written your name in his book of life forever.

From *Studies in the Book of Exodus*, by Pastor Dave Barker, February, 2001.

New Covenant Presbyterian Church

Preaching God's Sovereign Grace to a World of Need

128 St. Mary's Church Rd., Abingdon, MD 21009

410-569-0289

www.ncpres.org

www.ephesians515.com