

Colossians 3:17 *And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

This is the Word of the Lord.

Lord's Day 36

Q & A 99

Q. What is the aim of the third commandment?

A. That we neither blaspheme nor misuse the name of God by cursing, perjury, or unnecessary oaths, nor share in such horrible sins by being silent bystanders.

In summary,
we should use the holy name of God
only with reverence and awe,
so that we may properly
confess God,
pray to God,
and glorify God in all our words and works.

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Do you ever wake up and think, "How will I honour God's name today?" If we did, it might change our lives. It most definitely would. If we took the words our text this morning to heart, it would change how we live: *whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.* If we made that the aim of our life—whatever we do—doing it in the name of Jesus, doing it because of Jesus, doing it for Jesus, doing it to glorify him and not ourselves, life would be different.

I told you when I started this series, that I'd use the same four points each week.

1. Revelation—what this commandment teaches us about God.
2. Confrontation—what it teaches us about our own sinful tendencies.
3. Instruction—what it teaches us about being better disciples.
4. Promise—what it teaches us about how God's work in Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit can help us.

Revelation

So, what does this third commandment reveal about God? We might say, I have no idea! It doesn't seem like that big of a deal to misuse God's name. Is God so vain that he says don't use my name in vain? What's the deal here? The translation of this commandment from Exodus 20:7 in the NIV says,

Ex 20:7 You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God....

It's the older translation from the King James where we get the word "vain."

Ex 20:7 NKJV 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.

One commentator says, “If we were to translate the Hebrew of this passage most literally, we would see that this law is telling us that we “shall not lift up the name of God to emptiness, worthlessness or vanity. Often in Scripture, the same Hebrew term translated as ‘in vain’ means ‘wickedness’ or ‘evil’ ([Job 11:11; 31:5](#)).” (ligonier.org)

So perhaps we need to hear God saying to us, “Don’t associate me or my name with evil.” That makes sense, right? Our holy, righteous, just, good and loving God doesn’t want us to associate him with wickedness or sin. We should be aware that God’s call for us to honour, exalt or glorify his name is good for us.

That’s the case with every single commandment God gives to us. God doesn’t say, stay away from idols and don’t worship me through idols—the first and second commandment—because he’s protecting himself. No, he’s protecting us.

Daryl and Sheri now have four young children. When they want their kids to go outside and play alone, they send them into the backyard, right? Why do parents do that? Because the backyard is safe. There’s a fence to keep the children safe. Little children who don’t know about danger might wander into the street to play if there isn’t a fence. They could get hit by car. Or maybe a stray dog might come into their yard and bite the children. The fence protects the kids from dangers.

And that’s how the commandments work for us too. God loves us and doesn’t want us getting hurt by our own sinful desires. So, he gives us commandments like fences for our own good.

Do you remember when Moses met God at the burning bush? He asked God “What is your name?” And God said, “I am who I am.” That sounds weird to us. But it was God saying, “I’m a God of my word. I’m a covenant making and covenant keeping God.” We heard about that in regard to baptism already this morning too. God’s name should not be represented with anything that makes him look bad. Why? First of all, because that’ll be bad for us. But it’s also because God loves the world and he wants people to know who he really is.

He’s the God who comes to us in our brokenness. He came to Israel when they were slaves in Egypt. He raised up Moses to deliver them from Pharaoh’s bondage. He told Moses, “I’m am who I am” in order that Moses could tell Israel that God would keep his promises. He would deliver them. He would protect them. He would lead them into a land of freedom. And God did all of that for them. He kept his word.

All the while, the nations around them are watching. God reveals himself as faithful and loving. That’s what his covenant is about. That’s what his name reveals. And that’s what we’ll sing about later in the lyrics, “cause nothing has the power to save, but your name.” God is a saving God. That’s what his name reveals.

Confrontation

So how does this third commandment confront us then? What does it teach us about ourselves and own sinful tendencies?

Boys and girls, look here at my cactus. Or my cacti. One cactus is a cactus but more than one are called cacti! That's a free English lesson. 😊 Is there something weird about my cacti? I think so. The taller one always grows straight up. This littler guy, however, always leans toward the sun. That's not bad because that's how this particular cactus is made. But people are lot like this littler cactus with respect to sin. We have a natural desire to lean toward it.

Our text says,

Col 3:17 ...whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

So the third commandment reminds us that our sinful tendency is to do what we do for ourselves. We don't naturally do things for Jesus. We naturally lean toward ourselves and our selfish desire. If that wasn't the case, our text wouldn't have to tell us to lean toward Jesus instead and do everything in his name.

Among far too many Christian today, the name of Jesus is used to get what we want. They misuse Jesus' name for selfish reasons. A preacher wants to get money for himself, so he tells people, "If you send me money, God will bless you with health. He will double your investment. He will restore your relationship with your children." That sort of thing. These crooks misuse God's name for their own gain. They promise things in the name of Jesus that they can't deliver and that Jesus never promised to us.

Do you think that maybe we all do that sometimes? We confess that God is holy, all-wise and worthy of our complete trust. But then we don't like something that we read in the Bible and decide it doesn't apply to us. We say to ourselves, "I know the Bible says that I need to be honest, but if I just cheat only a little in my business dealings, then I'll make more money for myself. Certainly, God knows I need the extra cash and this is probably his way of providing for me." A man I knew some years ago said that it was God's will for him to have an affair with another woman. Confessing Christians do things like this all the time when it comes to ethics and morality. We misrepresent or change God's word to suit ourselves or get our sinful and selfish ways. That's misusing God's name.

We misuse God's name when we do NOT do everything to honour God but to get our way, for our own glory.

Instruction

So, what can we learn then? How does the third commandment instruct us? I'd say it reminds us that we really should try to know God better. Author Nathan Stone once wrote, "There is little real knowledge in these days of the one, true God." He's talking about how so many people today misunderstand who God is and what it means to follow Jesus. We treat him like he's here to help us accomplish our agenda, which as I just said, often has a selfish and greedy side. We expect Jesus to follow us, rather than us following him.

Today is wonderful. It's so great to know that people are still coming to Jesus and learning how to follow him. God is faithful. He is always stirring people's hearts and drawing us to himself. From that point forward, though, our desires must be shaped by God's desires. We receive his awesome salvation from our sin by his amazing grace. Then we turn our back on sin, recognizing that's God's ways for us are always going to be better for us than following our selfish desires. And that's an ongoing, daily process. Not once and done!

Taking God's name seriously means taking him seriously. Waking up every morning and saying, "God, how can I lift your name high today? How can I honour you in everything I say and do today?" Then praying for the Holy Spirit to help you do that. That's what discipleship is about.

Think about this when you head out the door each morning. How can I use my mind at school to honour God's name? If I say I'm following Jesus but cheat to get ahead, that dishonours God's name. How can I use my influence at school or on social media to help the lonely students rather than trying to improve my own social status? When I go to work and put in fair day's work that honours God's name. If I confess Christ as Saviour and Lord, my life ought to reflect my confidence in God. How people see me live is going to reflect on what they think of God. So honouring God's name should be our aim at home, school, work and play.

Some days you'll do better than others. Our best efforts will always still have weaknesses. We will still lean at times, like the cactus, to what comes natural, our sinful desires. But it's not about success in the sense of earning something from God. That's done. It's about simply making it our goal to honour God's name, even though we might still fail.

Promise

That brings us to our final point. The promises of God in relation to the third commandment are important. It is Jesus alone who fully honours God's name. Jesus alone overcame our sin by his perfect obedience, fulfilling all righteousness for us. That's what we celebrated this morning in baptism. That's why we profess our faith. We aren't coming to God for baptism saying, "God, I promise that I will love you perfectly." No, God comes to us and say, "I promise to love you perfectly." That includes restoring our relationship after sin has broken it. He has come in Jesus to reconcile us to himself. That work is done for us, friends. Jesus is our Saviour.

That's what we celebrate in baptism and that's the reason we respond in faith. Professing to follow Jesus is not a declaration that we'll do it perfectly. It's a declaration that we know we cannot do it perfectly. We are pledging to follow Jesus because he alone saves us by his grace. We are freely saved because he paid for our sins. We cannot do that. And he continues to forgive our sins. That's why we seek to honour him with our lives in gratitude for all he's done for us. That's how we lift up his name.

And we don't need to do that alone, do we? Jesus also provides the Holy Spirit to us to give us the power to increasingly honour God's name. The song we'll sing shortly reminds us how that goes:

Jesus in Your Name we pray
Come and fill our hearts today
Lord give us strength to live for You
And glorify Your Name

Our Lord Jesus is our Saviour and he saves us fully. Our response is to seek his strength to glorify God's name. And that strength is also from his gift of the Holy Spirit living in us.

Congregation, the more we are seeking to honour God's name instead of our own, the more we will realize how great our Lord really is. How great his grace is and how much we need it. That's how we'll also increasingly know how worthy Jesus is of all the praise we can give him in everything we do.