

—Westminster Shorter Catechism—

Lesson 70—What does the Third Commandment Forbid? Qs.55-56

The sins forbidden

- I. We take the name of God in vain:
- A. When we speak lightly or irreverently of His name, Dt 28.58; Ps 83.18. The name of God is *always* to be revered and therefore *never* to be spoken of as if the Most High, Most Holy, Most Powerful, Most Awesome, Most Just, Most Terrible, Most Pure God were not behind it.
 - B. When we profess God's name but don't live answerably to it, Tit 1.16; Rom 2.4. Pretended holiness is merely double wickedness.
 - C. When we worship God with our lips but not with our hearts, Pr 23.26; Isa 29.13. The heart is the chief thing in religion. It draws the will and affections after it as the sun draws all the planets after it.
 - D. When we use God's name as a swear, Lev 19.12; 24.10-16.
 - 1. We're commanded to swear *by God* or *before God* (Dt 6.13; 10.20) so that all our oaths will be oaths of truth before the face of God, Josh 2.12-13; 9.18-19. So to use the name of God *as a swear* is a dreadful sin, Rev 13.6.
 - 2. It's also a terrible sin to use the name of God to confirm a lie or to bind oneself to sin. We do this when we confirm our lie by saying something like, "I swear to God", or when we say, "I'll be damned if I don't do this or that," or when we say, "God damn it" about a thing that's angered us. This, says Boston, is to prostitute or abuse God's holy name to serve men's hellish passions.
 - E. When we commit blasphemy. This is an atrocious sin against God, Lev 24.10-16. We commit blasphemy when we:
 - 1. Attribute to God anything unworthy of Him, as for example, unfaithfulness or injustice, 1Sam 2.12-17, 22-30; 3.11-14; Lk 22.64-65; Rom 2.24.
 - 2. Deny to God anything worthy of Him, as for example, righteousness or holiness, 1Tim 1.13; Mk 3.29.
 - 3. Attribute the incommunicable attributes of God to any other, Mk 2.7; Jn 10.36.
 - F. When we speak evil of God, Num 21.5.
 - 1. We speak evil of God when we murmur against His providences, as if He dealt wrongly with us. Murmuring accuses God's justice, wisdom, love, and faithfulness.
 - 2. When we make a promise with "as God is my witness," but never intend to keep it. This is using the name of God to dismiss and cover up sin.
 - G. When we use God's name idly in conversation, as for example, "*Oh my God!* or *Jesus Christ!*" It's a grievous sin of irreverence to use God's holy and awesome Name as a filler in our speech.
 - 1. Whyte, quoting Rossetti, "I suppose the primary meaning of the phrase "in vain" points to indifferentism at least as obviously as to antagonism. "In vain" suggests not irreverence only, but voidness, nothingness, the bringing in for no cause but to round a sentence or fill up a gap, of that Name which was proclaimed before Moses in majesty and mercy; to utter simply for the sake of saying something, that Name which Isaiah foresaw as coming from afar burning with divine anger. It is to pronounce that Name as though it were a mere word, not standing for any person, to bring it in when another word would actually serve our purpose as well."

The reasons annexed

- I. The Lord presses this commandment upon us by repeating it in the reason annexed.
- A. This shows us how zealous God is for our obedience in this matter, but also how prone we are to take this matter lightly. Of all the commandments this is one in which there's no punishment from men for committing it. No one thinks anything of taking God's name in vain. How frequently do we hear men say, "*I swear to God, God damn it, or O my God,*" and no one thinks anything of it? Because men's hearts are so careless about God and lack a reverence for God, their tongues are given the liberty to say whatever comes to mind and whatever the passions find pleasing to voice.

Men profane the name of God and hardly know they've done it, because they're so accustomed to it and no one blushes anymore about it. But although these sins are molehills in the eyes and ears of men, they are mountains in the eyes and ears of God.

- II. The Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain.
 - A. Here we see that the Lord promises to take vengeance against the breakers of this commandment. He won't delegate this punishment to another, but'll take it upon Himself to carry it out. Men may overlook this sin and not punish it, but God keeps track of it and punishes it Himself. Sooner or later God will call men to a reckoning for their sins. They've profaned God's name, and God will have the indignity offered to His honor wiped off in His judgments upon them.
 - B. Why is this such a grievous sin?
 - 1. Because it's a sin directly against God, against His glorious greatness and infinite majesty. Angels adore His name and demons tremble before it; shall men profane it and not be punished?
 - 2. It's a direct violation of the law of God, Lev 19.12.
 - 3. It flies directly in the face of our chief end in all things, namely, that God's name be hallowed, Mt 6.9.

Applications

- I. Watson, "Methinks these words, "The Lord will not hold him guiltless," should put a lock upon our lips and make us afraid of speaking anything that may bring dishonor upon God, or may be taking His name in vain. It may be that men may hold such men guiltless, when they curse, swear, speak irreverently of God, may let them alone, and not punish them. But God Himself will take the matter into His own hand and He will punish him who takes His name in vain."
- II. Watson, "If God doesn't execute judgment of the profaners of His name in this life, then their eternal doom is sure, because the Lord will not remit their guilt. And if God lays a man in prison, where shall he get bail? God will take His full blow at the sinner in hell, for it's a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God, Heb 10.31."
 - A. Let's all repent for breaking this commandment and flee to the blood of Christ for pardon. However guilty we are, God will forgive us if we confess our sin and seek our refuge in the satisfaction which Christ made for sinners, 1Jn 1.9.
 - B. Let's put a door over our lips and guard our hearts against this sin, Ps 141.3; Pr 4.24.
 - C. And let's beware of setting a bad example before our children by speaking lightly of God *or* by not living a life answerable to the name of God put upon us in baptism *or* by swearing by God's name *or* by murmuring about God's providences *or* by using God's name loosely in conversation, Eph 6.4.
 - D. Let's pray for more holy intentionality in our speech as well as in our conduct, that the name of God might be honored by our speech and glorified in our lives, Gen 17.1-2; Job 1.1; Gal 2.20.