

The Lord's Name in Vain (Exodus 20:7)

What is the 3rd commandment? Without looking, do you know it? Can you explain it?

If you would turn to Ex 20 I want to share a story of Ted Koppell,

- Some know that name as he was TV anchor of Nightline on ABC 1980-2005.
- He was asked to give the 1987 graduation speech at Duke University. This is a part: 'we have spent 5,000 years as a race of rational human beings... searching for truth and moral absolutes. In the place of truth we have discovered facts; for moral absolutes, we have substituted moral ambiguity... Our society finds truth too strong a medicine to digest undiluted. In its purest form, truth is not a polite tap on the shoulder; it is a howling reproach. What Moses brought down from Mount Sinai were not the Ten Suggestions; they are Commandments. *Are*, not *were*... not just for then or now, but for all time... Which brings me to the First, and, in this day and age, probably the most controversial of the Commandments, since it requires that we believe in the existence of a single, supreme God. And then the Second... prohibits the worship of any other... [he went on to apply idolatry to] false gods of the appeal of success and fame; but now their influence is magnified by television. I caution you, as one who performs daily on that flickering altar [of the screen], to set your sights beyond what you can see. There is true majesty ... [he explained in the 10 Commandments] the Third... forbids that His name be taken in vain.'

Mic drop: these aren't 10 suggestions!

- And our idols can be on the flickering altar of a screen.

I said before how God's Law applies Jesus can change,

- but God's character behind His law always stays the same.

We'll see especially in the 4th command how Jesus transforms it, but we'll see it in the 3rd too.

- Jesus goes beyond God's names we say and beyond a Sabbath day to make it about Him.

I can't sum up better than Ted Koppell did where we've been or where we're going in the next verse: 20:7 (ESV) ⁷ "*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.* [other translations 'will not leave him unpunished who misuses his name']

How many of us know and can recite lines from movies

- but the 3rd commandment didn't come to mind when I asked you?

- If you can recite it, do you know it?

How many names honored on screen do we know but do we know commands on God's name?

- Some never miss an episode of a TV show they follow religiously,

- but not the truth God shows in messages at church.

- We say God's name and sing it, but do we really mean it?

- Is it in vain like the flickering altar's vanity?

Kevin DeYoung says few in church, in some surveys 14% can 'name the Ten Commandments. By comparison... three out of four can name all three stooges, and more than one in three know all six kids from the Brady Bunch, a television show that was cancelled before I was born!'²

But however many you can name, do you know how many times you've taken God's name in vain?

According to a Gallup Poll, even among people who say they believe in the 10 commandments,

- only 1 out of those 6 can even name half of the 10.³

R.C. Spoul said even in Reformed seminary classes (more catechizers),

- not many out of 10 can say the 10.

I want to challenge you as we go to know the 10, not as a checklist, as a heart-check.

Let's learn to discern their depth, our need.

- I fear many of us don't fear breaking v. 7 but we break it.
- If we think of the 2nd command as no statues worshipped
- and the 3rd as no swear words with God's name ... we miss applications for us.

v. 7 may be the most misunderstood of all 10, what it means

**Let's study v. 7 with 2 questions: What is this warning, to not take God's name in vain?
How does the gospel help us honor Christ's name?**

What is the warning?

- End of v. 7 says this sin brings guilt that God can't leave unpunished.
- This is serious to not be held guiltless by God the Judge.
- How can I be guilty of violating v. 7?

1. Phony hypocrisy. OT scholars argue the core idea of v. 7 is a false taking up the name.⁴ *You shall not take...* In Hebrew 'literally "not lift up, bear, carry," means more than "not speak," but includes the broad spectrum of behavioral possibilities, including speaking and living.'⁵

- So the warning isn't limited to talking with certain words,
- it's taking His name but living sinfully.

God says later Israel '*defiled my holy name by their abominations that they have committed*' (Ezekiel 43:8).

So our lives by sin can dishonor His name, not just our lips by saying His name

In the NT, Jesus says '*bear My name before Gentiles*' (Acts 9:15 NASB)

'make disciples... baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit' (Mt 28:19).

- Peter says *Christian* is the name you bear before unbelievers (1 Pet 4:16 NIV).
- Do you bear His name in vain before the world by acting like the world?
- It's vain to lift up God's name only in your Sunday worship.

It's vain to take His name in baptism, but then not live as a disciple obeying Jesus' commands.

So far all of that is behavioral for those bearing His name, not yet verbal taking it in vain

DeYoung:⁶ 'The worst thing that can be phony about us is us... We go to church. We sing the songs. We say the right things. But it's not reality. Listen, if we are called by the holy name of God, we must not sully that name by living as if our conduct does not concern him or his glory.'

1 Cor 5:11 says don't fellowship with the unrepentant who bear the name of a brother in Christ.

Jesus in Mt 15:7: '*You hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy of you, when he said...in vain do they worship me*'

This should convict us of vain misuse of God's name in worship, repent of phony hypocrisy

2. Pledges not kept. God's name was also used when lifting up the hand to take an oath. In our day we see it still in court as people lift a hand to swear to tell the truth '*so help me God.*' After Exodus is Lev 19:12 *You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God.*

- We don't swear oaths or vows as often as ancient Israel,
- but wedding vows in His name say:

'In the name of God...for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish as long as we both shall live. This is my solemn pledge...with all that I am, and all that I have, I honor you, in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit.'

Every day people swear those vows and for millions God's name proves to be taken in vain

Or more often people pledge allegiance and say they're 'under God,' but for most, it's in vain. As Christians at our church, this is part of the membership covenant we need to take serious: 'Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord...having been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, I do now in the presence of God, most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with other believers of this congregation...I will endeavor, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, To walk together in Christian love, and maintain the unity...watch over other believers ...To walk circumspectly in the world so as to maintain a strong Christian testimony...To bring up those in my care in the teaching of the Lord in my family...To maintain a clear conscience by seeking forgiveness, and forgiving others according to the teachings of our Lord Jesus...'

There's more but each of those take up the name Christian or a name of God

Now go to Mk 7 but if you're not pursuing those one another commands

- in vows you took in His name, you took it in vain.

Before you violate a pledge or vow you made in the name of the Lord, remember:

- God says in His Word He will not leave that guilt unpunished. There's more...

3. Pharisee religion. Mark 7:5 *And the Pharisees and the scribes asked him, "Why do your disciples not walk according to the tradition of the elders [man-made rules], but eat with defiled hands?"*⁶ *And he said to them, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written, "'This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'*

The Pharisees took God's name on their lips but it wasn't on their hearts so it was vain worship.

- & taught extrabiblical legalistic rules as if they were from God, taking His name in vain.

There are homeschooling or parenting books that claim to be 'God's Way' that can violate this.

- Or ways we can bring extra-biblical preferences or precepts of men into worship today.

There's much we can do to give lip-service to the name but our hearts are far away and it's vain

4. Proclaiming God said what He didn't. Moses not only wrote Ex 20, he wrote Dt 18:20:

One *'who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak...shall die.'* Jer 23: *Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Do not listen to the words...filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD. They say continually... 'It shall be well with you' [prosperity preachers on TBN]...I have heard what the prophets have said who prophesy lies in my name...who prophesy the deceit of their own heart...I am against the prophets, declares the LORD, who...declare, 'declares the LORD' [taking the name Yahweh]...I did not speak to them...let him who has my word speak my word faithfully..."*

The word of Christ transforms the 3rd command to using the name of Christ that way too.

In Mt 7 Jesus warns of people prophesying in the name who the Lord never knew. Go to Mt 6. Al Mohler has written how we can 'take the Lord's name in vain by the sheer triteness and cheapness of so much of how we speak when talking about God. "God told me," "God showed me," ... are commonly used expressions ... Forms of disguised idolatry come among us when without any ... Scriptural word, we speak as if God has spoken to us ... a new revelation ... the misuse of God's name [Mohler says includes] where we would dare speak where God has not spoken ... The Lord's name is taken in vain when we say things like, "We know why God did that," or "I can tell you why [God] let you have cancer" ... be careful little lips what you say'⁷

It's also vain to twist God's word or to use His name for our own gain

Ryken: ‘People often try to boost their own credibility by claiming that God is on their side. His name has been used to endorse everything from the Crusades to the slave trade, from political parties to social causes...using God’s name to advance our own agenda. Some Christians say, “The Lord told me to do this.” Or worse, they say, “The Lord told me to tell *you* to do this.” ... [scripture warns of taking His name for vain words]...We become so certain that God is on our side that we refuse to listen to other believers or to submit to spiritual authority in the church.’⁸

Better to say ‘I think best/feel led, but I’m open to scriptural wisdom from you or others’

5. Praying or praising in vain. We can mindlessly habitually praise or pray in God’s name. 6:7 “*And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases...*” [NKJV ‘vain repetitions’]...⁹ *Pray then like this: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. ¹⁰ Your kingdom come, your will be done [i.e., ‘not mine’]...*

I’m convicted I’ve often mindlessly mumbled His name to my shame before I eat my desire

Be careful with vain repetitive prayers or praise songs, or religious phrases for what you want. Don Green explains if we explain we “prayed to God about it,” using that ‘to justify a sinful or grossly unwise action... is really nothing less than taking God’s name in vain. It calls God as a witness to justify something...a spiritualized and manipulative way of saying, “I’ve decided what I want to do and I hereby preclude questions that would hold me biblically accountable.”’ He’s dead right and it’s deadly serious to reject biblical warning saying ‘I prayed in His name.’

It’s vain to speak the word “God” if we don’t seek the Word of God and shepherding

Be careful even in prayer not to just fill in empty space (ex: “Father God” every 4 words).

- Even phrases like *in Jesus’ name* can become vain repetition
 - o if it’s just a thoughtless way to wrap up.
- I’m convicted of times I pray in the Lord’s name,
 - o honoring with my lips, but my heart is far off.

In vain I can worship Him, singing words in His name I don’t really mean or don’t think about. I’m as prone to wander in my mind as anyone, when it happens, pray God forgive and help me.

I’m not guiltless of those Jesus said ‘*their heart is far from me. In vain they worship...*’

6. Profane or careless use. Go to Mt 12 and this is last but not least. This list hits all of us. Not just cuss words, careless words. 12:36 *I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.* It’s serious to be careless with words tied to God’s name taken in vain (OMG, 9/11 footage). Don’t say God if you’re not reverently talking to Him or about Him, or Jesus or Christ or both.

- Be careful with things like ‘By God, I’m gonna...’ ‘
- We say ‘I swear to God,’ or joke about God or say for laughs ‘dear God,’ or ‘good Lord,’
- Or ‘God help you’ (like comedy or just casually careless words not really to God).

Some use God’s name like a comma, others as a comment when surprised, others as a curse word.

When scared, no one swears ‘Buddha.’

- Or ‘Mohammed’ if mad, or ‘Joseph Smith’ if a hurt toe!

But many take in vain the name of our precious Jesus. Even atheists can’t escape God’s name.

- Damnation to hell is what God speaks on judgment day,
- but not for us to speak or bring God’s name into it.
- When people say it, it’s as if to cheapen or weaken the fact God does damn to hell.

Jesus says not just profanity of the holy, careless use of words with His name brings judgment on us

The law in Ex 20 condemns. In closing, how does the gospel help us honor Christ's name?

The 3rd commandment says God will not leave guiltless or unpunished His name taken in vain. This is personal against His name (His nature or character), which requires Him to punish guilt. The OT penalty was death. Bad news is we're all guilty, good news is there's One who wasn't.

- Pilate said of him 'I have found in him no guilt deserving death. I will therefore punish...him.' Lk 23:16.
- More than that, on the cross on Christ, God punished sin against His name and Christ didn't die in vain.
- Isa 53 says 'the punishment that brought us peace was upon him...his life a guilt offering' (v. 5, 10 NIV)
- None of us are guiltless, we're all guilty, vile, and helpless, but God saves us for the sake of His name!
- Acts 14:15 says 'we bring you **good news**, that you should **turn from these vain things** to a living God'
- 10:43 *prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins in his name*
- 4:12 says of Jesus 'there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.'
- God's name, His character requires sin be punished, and He did on Jesus for all who call upon His name
- Jesus died and rose and at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue confess He is Lord!

The NT never says accept Him in your heart, it's confess Jesus is Lord (that's His name)

Our hearts must repent (better word than accept), but Jesus said our words condemn or justify, Rom 10 agrees: 'confess with your mouth that **Jesus is Lord**...with the mouth one confesses and is saved [not just believing in our heart He died for sin and was raised, 10:13] "everyone who **calls on the name of the Lord** will be saved.'" 2 Cor 6:1-2 'we appeal to you **not to receive the grace of God in vain**...behold, now is the day of salvation.'

Today by the authority of His name, I call any unsaved to confess your sin and come to the Lord

In 1 Cor 15 Paul reminds them of the gospel that saves but he says '**unless you believed in vain**...But by the grace of God I am what I am, and **his grace toward me was not in vain**... my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that **in the Lord your labor is not in vain**.'

That's the encouragement for true believers taking up His name, by grace it's not in vain in Him

Grace doesn't mean it's ok to misuse His name,

- grace motivates us to labor in love to honor His name in our work and words.
- The application for believers is honor the name of your Lord God.

We need to not take in vain or lift up in vain the name of Jesus who is highly exalted

- and has the name above every other name,
- far above every name that is named in this age or the next.

The gospel saves us in His name, and it also changes us to obey Col. 3:17: *And whatever you do, in word or deed, do **everything in the name of the Lord Jesus**, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

- Good news of the gospel: there's a good Shepherd who leads in paths of righteousness for his namesake!
- That's Ps 23, Ps 25:11 is how to pray: **For your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my guilt, for it is great.**
- 79:9: **Help us...for the glory of your name; deliver us, and atone for our sins, for your name's sake!**
- 109:21: **O GOD my Lord, deal on my behalf for your name's sake; because your steadfast love is good**
- 119:7 says God's law revives the soul. 143:11 prays **Revive me, O LORD, for Your name's sake!** (NKJV)

Thomas Watson story if have time?

By grace let's pray that we would hallow the name of our Father in heaven and Son and Spirit

¹ www.crisismagazine.com reprinted from the July-August 1987 issue of Duke magazine. Also quoted in Time magazine, "Now, A Few Words from the Wise," 22 June 1987.

² Kevin DeYoung, *The Ten Commandments* (Crossway, 2018), 16.

³ Gallup Poll, 1988, cited by Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of Grace: God's Ten Words for a Vital Spiritual Life* (Crossway, 1993), 13.

⁴ 'While the root meaning of the term is up for debate, it is clear from usage in the Old Testament that the nuance of the noun carries the negative connotation of "deceit" or "falseness ... The term is used to refer to a "false" report (Exod 23: 1), a "false" witness (Deut 5: 20; Isa 59: 4; Hos 10: 4; cf. Ps 144: 8,11; Prov 30: 8), "false" worship (Ps 31: 6[7]); Isa 1: 13; Jer 18: 15; Hos 12: 11 [12]; Jon 2: 8[9]), and "false" prophecy (Lam 2: 14; Ezek 12: 24; 13: 6-9,23; 21: 23[28], 29[34]; 22: 28; Zech 10: 2)... Any invocation of the Lord or calling on His name that is insincere or needless is simply perfunctory and constitutes taking God's name in vain.' -- Mark Rooker, *The Ten Commandments: Ethics for the Twenty First Century* (B&H, 2010), 61-62.

⁵ Eugene Carpenter, *Exodus: An Evangelical Exegetical Commentary* (Lexham Press, 2016), 44.

⁶ DeYoung, *Ten Commandments*, 62.

⁷ Albert Mohler, Jr., *Words from the Fire: Hearing the Voice of God in the 10 Commandments* (Moody Press, 2009), 69-73.

⁸ Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory* (Crossway Books, 2005), 585-586.

⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:2, 10, 58.