

“Bring Honor to God's Name” (Exodus 20:7)

We're in the series of “The Call to Undivided Intimacy.” We've been studying the Ten Commandments. Today we will study the third commandment.

Exodus 20:7 (NIV)

You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.

This commandment is talking about what we are to call God. We shouldn't use the name of the Lord in any way that doesn't reflect His nature. That is the basic meaning of this commandment. We shouldn't talk about God in a way that mocks, despises, or makes cheap of Him.

Let's review the first and second commandments and see the flow of these commandments to the third one.

The first commandment. You shall have no other gods before me. God says, “I am the only God to you, right?” God must be the One at the center of all. Our life must be God-centered, not Man-centered.

The second commandment. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything. This is about loving God as who He is. God says, “Don't seek your image of God, but seek Me and love Me as who I am. I am a jealous God. I cannot allow you to turn your heart to something other than Myself, thinking it is Me. Come to Me. Know Me. Love Me.” God is calling us into undivided intimacy with him.

The third commandment. “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain” (Exodus 20:7 NASB).

It tells us to take God's name seriously with full honor and the highest respect, because he is great and awesome. Otherwise, we will end up losing our intimate relationship with him. Then, we won't glorify him, and we will also damage our self-worth as his children. We will take God's name seriously, because we are very serious about God, and we are very serious about the relationship with him. Why do we do that? Because God is totally serious about us.

Today, first, we will quickly look at God's names. And we will see how or when we use his name in vain. And I will talk about how God enables us to observe this commandment, and then I will talk about how we bring honor to his name.

1. The Name of God

You may wonder, “Why is it such a big deal how we use the name of God?” God wants us to remember who he is to us. We need to remain in intimate relationship with him. This commandment keeps us from straying.

God's name represented the very essence and presence of him.¹ In the Bible, we can find how God revealed himself. Here is a list of the names of God.

- El Shaddai is translated "God Almighty," or "the Sovereign Lord".
- Yahweh-Yireh is appeared in Genesis 22, when Abraham is called upon to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. It means "the Lord will provide."
- Yahweh-Rophe is "the Lord who heals."
- Yahweh-Nissi is "the Lord my banner" (Exodus 17:15). It refers that God is the one who provide security for His people in the presence of their enemies.
- Yahweh-M'Kaddesh is "the Lord of Holiness."
- Yahweh-Shalom is "the Lord of Peace."
- Yahweh-Tsidkenu is translated "the Lord our Righteousness," referring to God's gift of justification through.²

You can add more. The point is this. Each name shows us something crucial about how God relates to us as His children.³

2. Using His Name in Vain

When may we use His name in vain?

- Using it meaninglessly

The first thing I think of is the phrases we often hear in Hollywood movies. When I started to study English and saw those movies, I thought, "Wow, the U.S. is a Christian country after all. Even gangsters talk a lot about God and Jesus." It's no joke, I seriously thought so. Using God's name in a way that doesn't reflect His nature is using his name in vain.

- Underestimate God

By God's mighty hand, people of Israel were released from the slavery of Egypt and they were traveling in the desert. When they arrived at Rephidim, there was no water for them to drink (Exodus 17:1). People grumbled against Moses, "Why did you bring us out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die of thirst? (v.3)" And they tested the Lord saying, "Is the Lord among us or not? (v.7)" They questioned God's provision. In other words, they denied God as Yahweh-Yireh, the Lord will provide. They questioned God's presence. They denied Immanuel, God with us. They misused His name.

God prepared food for them in the desert. Every morning, He gave them special bread, manna. Moses said to them, "No one is to keep any of it until

¹ Mark Mitchell, "Ten: How the Commandments Set Us Free," Discovery House, 2016, [Kindle] location 320

² Michael S. Horton, "The Law of Perfect Freedom," Moody Publishers, 1993, [Kindle] location 1591

³ Ibid., 1559

morning.” But some people didn’t pay attention to him, and kept part of it until morning (Exodus 16:19-20). They denied God as Yahweh-Yireh, the Lord will provide.

Moses said, “On the sixth day, gather twice as much. You can’t find it on the seventh day.” But some people went out on the seventh day to gather it. But of course, they couldn’t find any. They put their belief on their strategy, they trust on what they have more than God’s promise. They undermined belief in the sovereignty of God. They denied El Shaddai, God Almighty, the Sovereign Lord.

In short, each time they say something to underestimate God, something to undervalue his character, they use His name in vain.

- Empty calling

Matthew 7:21-23

“Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'”

They performed miracles in the name of the Lord. But Jesus said to them “I never knew you. Get away from me, you who do evil!” Jesus said they did evil. What did they do? They used His name in vain. Here the point is not what kind of miracles they did, nor what their work produced. The point is they used his name without having a proper relationship with him.

God knows everything. Jesus must know them. Why did Jesus say “I never knew you.”? What does it mean?

Here is a hint. 1 Corinthians 8:3 says, “the man who loves God is known by God.” In short, they didn’t love Jesus. For them, calling Jesus “Lord, Lord” has nothing to do with what kind of relationship they have with him. Basically, for them, to pronounce Jesus is kind of a magical word, to make things happen.

Calling Jesus “Lord” without submitting themselves to him is an empty calling. Using his name without having real relationship with him is using his name in vain.

- Making others afraid of God

Some people say to children, “God is watching you. He knows all about you. Be careful.” Why do you say to kids “God is watching you”? You want to control them, to manipulate them by threatening them. It is to use His name in vain.

The person who threatens others using the name of God usually believes that he himself is threatened by God. Surely God knows everything. Even when you think only you know, actually God knows everything. Even the things you’ve

forgotten about, God still knows. But, if you are afraid of God because of that, you miss the point.

Actually, the truth is the total opposite. To be known by God is the greatest happiness (cf. Gal 4:9). "Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love" (Ps 31:16). "Do not hide your face from me, ... Do not reject me or forsake me, O God my Savior" (Ps 27:9). Actually, it would be more painful for us if God hid himself from us. This is what we should be afraid of.

When we use God's name wrongly, we may totally mislead others. So, God says don't do that.

3. Calling God "Father"

We have been looking at situations in which we may end up misusing the name of the Lord. Here's one way to look at it: "We may get in trouble if we mention the name of the Lord carelessly, then I might as well keep from mentioning the name of God at all. In this way, I can observe the third commandment. Perfect!" Actually, the Jews thought like this. But this kind of thinking totally goes against God's will.

God released them from the slavery in Egypt. He made them His treasured possession. He made them a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. "What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to him?" (Deut 4:7). Then why could they not call out to God? What was their mistake?

"But Israel, who pursued a law of righteousness, has not attained it. Why not? Because they pursued it not by faith but as if it were by works" (Rom 9:31-32).

Their mistake is they tried to observe this commandment by their work. If you don't mention the name of the Lord at all, then surely you never ever will use His name in vain. But in effect, this doesn't fulfil what this commandment is essentially commanding us to do. But if you mention his name carelessly, you might make mistakes. Then the Lord will find you guilty. So how can we call God?

We must observe this commandment not by works, but by faith. It is not like, "If I believe I can, I can. I can. I can. Yes, I can." It's not like that. When we live by faith in Jesus, we will naturally observe what this commandment is commanding us to do.

Throughout his whole life on the earth, Jesus showed how rich and close his relationship with His Heavenly Father was. Jesus always called God "Father." This reflects how intimate his relationship with his father was. Through his death on the cross, he opened a way for all of us to have the same kind of intimacy with God.

By faith in Jesus, we call God “Abba, father.” Jesus took all our sins when he was crucified. He was punished for all our sins. For all our sins. This included the dreadful penalty for this third commandment.

He redeemed us from the bondage of sin, the rule of Satan, and the power of death. But that is not the main point. The main point of the cross is he reconciled us with himself. He gave us the position of sons and daughters of God. We no longer have to be afraid of God. We no longer have to live in fear, trying to gauge God’s reactions and acceptance.

We have received peace with God. We now rejoice with God. In Jesus, we entered this relationship with God, where we call God “Our father” (Rom 8:15). By faith in Jesus, we call God “Abba, father.”

We are not afraid of calling on the name of God. We can boldly call God “Heavenly Father”. It’s not because if we use those words, we will be spared from any problems. It is not a big deal what words we use to call God. But what matters is relationship. What kind of relationship you have with God must be revealed in how you call Him.

I think fathers love to be called “Dad” by their children. But while calling you “Dad”, if your child actually thinks, “He just needs to give me money. I don’t really care about him” or “He is a pain in the neck”, then I think you will be very sad, right?

We can call God “Father”. That’s our privilege. But if we call him “Father” just because we think we can observe the third commandment by calling him that way, then we are actually using his name in vain. It’s perhaps the most painful thing for God.

“Heavenly Father.” This calling testifies that you have a close relationship with God. When you call God “Father,” you know he loves you. You know he is very happy to hear your voice. It shows that you have an intimate relationship with God. Sometimes God may rebuke you or sometimes you may feel God is far away, but whenever you come to him and call upon him, you know God will hear you and looks after you with tender loving care more than anyone else.

In Jesus, God is inviting us into an abundant life of honoring and enjoying our Father’s name. In Christ, we are God’s children. God calls each one of us by name. And we call Him, “Abba, Father.” Why should a child hesitate to call on his father? Why should he be afraid of calling his father?

Moses said to the Israelites: “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God” (Exodus 20:7). Now Jesus teaches all of us, “When you pray, say: ‘Father, hallowed be your name, may your name be honored’” (Luke 11:2). May your name be honored!

4. Bring Honor to God's Name

How do we bring honor to God's name? Whenever we trust in God our Father, who cares for us and gives us strength to face any challenges, we are keeping the spirit of the third commandment.⁴

We are made children of God through the cross of Christ. We are brought into relationship with God, where we can call this great, holy God "Abba Father". This is wonderful.

But it doesn't mean our lives will be all rosy, everything will go well and we'll have no problems or trials. No, the total opposite is the reality. Jesus said to his disciples, "All men will hate you because of me" (Mark 13:13). "Since they persecuted me, naturally they will persecute you" (John 15:20).

And promises like this follow. "If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you... if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name" (1 Peter 4:14,16).

We may be hated, persecuted and criticized, because we love Jesus and follow him. This is very sad, hard and painful. But when we continue to move forward with the help, protection and support of the Holy Spirit, God's name will be glorified. We cannot do this by our human strength. Our human hearts are unwilling to do this. That's natural. But God calls us to super-natural. Only the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ who is in us can enable us to do this.

Taking this into consideration, think about this. As God's children, we are entrusted the authority to use His name. By the Holy Spirit, making the heart of Christ our own hearts, we use the name of the Lord. And God's name will be glorified. Now how can we use this authority to bring honor to his name in situations where we may be hated, persecuted and criticized because we love Jesus and follow him?

Matthew 18:18-19

"I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. ¹⁹ Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.

We can pray in the name of the Lord Jesus. Our Father God will answer our prayers (John 15:16). And what kind of prayers does he talk about here, Matthew 18:18-19? It is to "loose". God has entrusted us with the authority to loose. It is we who can decide whether to loose or to bind. If we leave it bound, God will let it be so. If we loose, God will let it be so. Are you with me?

What does "loose" mean here? It is clear from the context. It is to forgive (Matt 18:15-35; cf. John 20:23).

⁴ Mark Mitchell, 398

It is, in the name of Jesus, to forgive someone who sinned against you. It is to release that person from the punishment of sin. To release him from the guilt. And to release yourself from judging that person, blaming that person. And in the name of Jesus, by this entrusted authority, you release yourself from that pain and fear and anger.

We don't pray this prayer alone. You shouldn't. You pray this together with brothers and sisters in the Lord, with hearts united, in one Spirit. This is the prayer of the church. This is the call to undivided intimacy. The Lord is also there with us (Matt 11:20). Where the Lord is, the glory of the Lord is revealed. Where the Lord's will is sought in prayer, the glory of the Lord is revealed. Only children of God can do this.

I'd like to invite you to join the prayer Jesus taught us. Let us pray:

"Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come. Give us each day our daily bread. Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. And lead us not into temptation" (Luke 11:2-4 NIV).

For Self-Reflection and small groups

1. How is the name of God misused in our society? Think about a case of Using it meaninglessly, or Underestimating God, or Empty calling, or Making others afraid of God.
2. Have you ever used God's name in vain? How?
3. Read Matthew 18:15-35.
 - 1) V.35 is the conclusion. What does it say?
 - 2) For considering this conclusion, how can we use the authority of "loosing and binding"? (see v.18-20). Who will decide whether to loose or to bind? What is the danger of binding - unforgiving?
 - 3) What is the difference between praying for forgiveness with other believers, and doing it alone? Imagine if you do it with a prayer partner, what would be your thoughts and feelings while praying to forgive someone? What kind of role may the partner play for you?
 - 4) How would you use the name of God to bring honor to Him?