

Exodus 20:7 – Taking the Lord’s Name in Vain

Introduction: Having taken a break from series last week, I want to start with a refresher from the wide perspective of what the Ten Commandments are all about. See many people believe them to be restrictive instructions given by a God who doesn’t want you to live a full life.

- But really the commandments do a few things. They give us a look into the character of God, they give us a look into our own sinful heart, and (rather than restrict) they give us a way to live well in freedom. (see these were given AFTER coming out of slavery, and given as a way to live free)

The Bible says (in Deuteronomy 6:24) a major reason they were given “for our good always” and to “preserve us alive”.

- And I think that should make more sense even to the skeptical among us. Illustration: I am already seeing rebellion and its destruction in my little girl at only 11 months old. She doesn’t want to submit to my authority over her. If she doesn’t want to eat vegetables she will attempt to throw the jar across the room or swat the spoon from your hand . If she doesn’t want to be held and wants to walk (never mind that you are on asphalt, its 100 degrees, and she doesn’t have shoes on) she will try to fling herself from your arms (which is dangerous because she is a hefty girl!).
 - o My point is that I am not oppressing this child by instructing her to eat veggies and not allowing her to blister her feet on the asphalt. I know that in her little mind (that’s in a big ole head) these things feel like slavery. HattieJo “I don’t want to eat veggies I want bread! I don’t want to be carried I want to walk, and Daddy you are keeping me from these things.”
 - And I wish I could get in her mind and say, baby I know it feels that way...but its not that way. I love you, I want good for you, so you need to listen to me.

It is for our good that the commandments were given, and today we look at commandment 3 (for those of you who brought your graven images to burn, bring them next week because then JD will be back preaching on commandment 2). It was for our good that this 3rd commandment (“You shall not take the

Lord's name in vain") was given... (Read Exodus 20:7)not to enslave us but to keep us from the bondage and dysfunction brought by sin.

So many of you are thinking great news! The commandments are for my good and finally here is one that I don't break. Maybe you remember the soap in your mouth or the belt across your hind end for shouting "God" after stubbing your toe as a kid. And since that time you have ceased to say anything like that again and therefore do not break this commandment.

- But I hope you will see today that your conclusion is potentially predicated on a faulty or shallow definition of what it even means to take the Lord's name in vain. And maybe when the definition gets right I believe we will see this command and its application for our lives, in a different light.

What Does it Mean to Take God's Name in Vain? (Read Ex.20:7)Well in short, it means to misrepresent who God is and what He is about. While we should be accurately reflecting God's character with our speech, actions, and very lives...to take his name in vain is to reflect His character in an inaccurate way.

Now to really get that definition, you have to understand that misrepresenting God's name is misrepresenting God Himself. That taking the Lord's name in vain is misrepresenting who God is, because who God is is wrapped up in his name.

When the Bible speaks of God's name it isn't talking about a certain formation of words. I mean God in Russian sounds a lot different than God in English. Rather the Bible speaks of God's name being who He is.

- Illustration: Even now names speak to who people are in a way. My name Andrew means strong, which is evident by my tremendously chiseled features and athletic physique. You never name a child haphazardly. A child's name means something about who they are. My grandfather is named Joe, and it has become a family name for us. So in my family there is Joe, Joey, Jo Jo, Perry Joe, Pamela Jo, Alie Jo, Roby Joe, Tyler Joe and now HattieJo...that name speaks of who she is in that it's where she comes from.

More so, the name of God speaks to His nature and person (Psalm 20:1), His teaching (John 17:26), His saving work (John 1:12 and Acts 4:12), and His power (Acts 3:6). In this sense it is impossible to disconnect God from His name. So throughout the Bible you have verses confirming this like...

- Psalm 113:1-3 – Blessed be the name of the Lord
- Isaiah 24 – give glory to the name of the Lord
- Ezekiel 39 – God will vindicate what? His HOLY NAME.
- Acts 2:21 – everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.
- Matthew 6 – Lord’s prayer. Hallowed be what? Thy NAME!

Now from Scripture we see that the Israelites got the idea of reverence for the name of God. From Exodus 19 they realized even touching the border of the mountain when god descended would be their death, they also wouldn’t touch the Ark of the Covenant, nor would they even write the name of God.

Why? Because God’s name (speaking to who He is) is the most renowned and powerful of all. And through this commandment God is telling us not to use His name in a worthless way as if it were disconnected from His person, presence, and power...because in doing so we inaccurately reflect who God is.

So hopefully with that explanation you see with me that this problem of taking the Lord’s name in vain is far greater than simply saying a curse word. I mean cutting that word out of your vocabulary is good, it eliminates one way that we break this commandment. But if that is all you do then the greater manifestations of command breaking are still thriving.

- Illustration: Let me draw an illustration from this North Carolina cultural phenomenon y’all call the North Carolina State Fair.
 - o Now growing up we didn’t go to the State Fair in Jacksonville Florida, we always went to the Clay County Fair. At the county fair there is stuff like cow patty bingo, bullfrog racing, and alligator wrestling. But I will say this, the NC State fair has my fair beat on food...never in my life had ever thought of someone eating a deep fried candy bar, deep fried bacon, or deep fried roll of butter.
- Now imagine someone, and you all know the people (maybe you are that person) who goes to the fair and have a deep fried candy bar in one hand with an elephant ear in the other, and then order a diet coke!
 - o Yes its good that you order the diet coke, but I think it’s the funnel cake clogged in you artery that is going to kill you!

- And cutting out a certain word from your vocab is good, but don't neglect all of these other ways that we break this commandment because the definition is more about misrepresenting God.

Are We Guilty of Breaking this Commandment? So in light of our definition and explanation of the commandment, specifically how are we guilty here? Well, as Christ followers we take on and bare the name of Christ (who is God). Literally Christian means Christ one. So here is the rub, we take on the name of Christ but then misrepresent who God is in living out our lives. So let me show you some things here that may be a little more specific to where we may be and how we might be struggling here.

We may to make our name famous rather than God's.

- Even after taking on God's name we are reluctant to lay down the desire to make our name great. Although it is the name of Christ that should be named among the nations, many times we want our name to ring out to the world. And we inverse the famous words of John the Baptist (John 3:30) and say I must increase, and God you must decrease.

We may swear by God's name when the oath will not be fulfilled.

- First of all we use this language carelessly. We say, "I swear to God" as if it means nothing at all that we are swearing by a name that cannot lie and whose word can never be broken...but then we break it by sometimes not fulfilling the oath. It could major as in breaking the vows of a marriage or it could be simple as in just not following through in your word.
- Further, Jesus spoke to his followers (Mathew 5:37) that they should let their yes be yes and their no be no. Why? Because as ones who have taken on God's name already and if we lie or break our word we are misrepresenting God already.

We may associate God's name with things it ought not be associated with.

- A great example here is something like the Crusades. Associating God's name and rallying people with it for a cause maybe associating God's name with something it shouldn't be, and thereby misrepresenting him.
- How do we do this today? We certainly attach God's name to political parties and ideologies.

We speak on behalf of God when he hasn't spoken.

- This is a concept we all know well. Forgery and ID theft are basically speaking on behalf of someone who really hasn't spoken. Illustration: Before Facebook there was Myspace (I know its creepy now). I had a Myspace back then but it got hacked and sent messages to everyone I knew, from me...but I didn't send them. This spam was sent as if I had sent it.

- In a similar way we speak, then say it was God that spoke, but did he really speak? Guys did you ever tell a girl God told you to break up with her? Really! Did you ever tell a boss you were quitting because God was telling you to move on? Really! (I am not saying God doesn't speak to us, but I am saying we throw that around a lot sometimes just to make things easier.

We slap God's name on merchandise.

- Let me put this one back in the negative sense and lets have a bit of fun here. "Thou shalt be very careful before putting my name on a T-shirt or bumper sticker".
 - o T-shirts: Jesus is my homeboy, Air Jesus the Ultimate High
 - o Bumper stickers: God is my co-pilot, Are you following Jesus this close?
 - o Church signs: Stop drop and roll won't work in Hell, (and I am stealing this from Bruce Ashford an elder at our church that has apparently seen this) Come to our "Holy Ghost Winnie Roast"
- I am certainly being light hearted here, but do we really want the very name of God as an advertising gimmick? Or is some of this (and I stress SOME) misrepresenting who God is?

We use God's name lightly.

- Although I am trying to show you that this is not the only application it is still an application. People stub their toe on a table and blurt out GD, but off course you are not actually asking God to damn the table le are you.

We don't worship in a way that honors God's name.

- We take on the name of God, and then worship in sloppy apathetic ways. Our minds wonder, we come in late, were texting...as if nothing has been done for us at all. And our lack of excitement and enthusiasm in worship misrepresents God's name.

We openly live in sin even after taking on God's name.

- Illustration: Paul was this redneck dude that went to my high school. He tried his best to be the real thing, Carharts and Wranglers even in the Florida heat, never without a dip in, had taken sandpaper to the back of jeans so he had that Skoal can ring, belt buckles the whole bit, and as all Southern men are he was a “Christian”. But along with the redneck image went a badboy attitude, the boy was a hellion. Girls, always drunk, fighting, etc...
 - o I remember once at baseball practice saying, “gosh” after missing a ball and the guy called me out on it. “Hey Bo, we don’t take the Lord’s name in vain around here”.
- And I think about the even now because actually what he should have said was, “we don’t take the Lord’s name verbally, or in that way, around here”. But not cursing with the name of God doesn’t mean you are not taking it in vain, because if you are misrepresenting God with blatant sin in your life that’s taking it in vain. By living as one who is called a Christ follower but in actuality lives like the world, you are putting on Christ’s name but doing it in vain; you are misrepresenting the character of God.
 - o You may not be a redneck so if you are in open rebellion it could look differently, are you?

We make a bunch of rules in God’s name.

- Think about the Pharisees. In Luke 18 they wanted to do more than the law in tithes and more than the law in fasting, but they totally missed the Messiah. Rather than trusting in the gospel for our righteousness we live and preach to the world a checklist of things you can do or not do to gain God’s favor...but that misrepresents God.

See the thing is, we do this; we break the 3rd commandment. When seen in the proper framework the weight of this commandment sits on. Certainly as ones who have taken on the name of Christ we break this commandment, but even if you are not a Christian you were created to bare His image. You were created by Him and for Him and in that way you take the name of God in vain also when you misrepresent who God is.

- And suddenly maybe the one we didn’t think about much according to Dr. Mohler is the one most often broken.

(Read Ex.20:7b) Why have I been trying to show that we are 3rd commandment breakers? Because if it is true that we break this commandment then it is also true that God will not hold us guiltless for it.

- It was in Genesis 2 that the decree went forth, if you sin then you will also experience death...if you misrepresent the name of God, if you take His name in vain, then you will experience death because you are guilty.
- The question is, is there a way out of guilt? Maybe a more potent question is...

Can Jesus Spring Us from Our Guilt? (Gospel) Yes He can! And the reason is because Jesus Christ is the person in history to live up to the name that was God gave Him. Jesus did justice to the name Christian because he never took the name of God in vain.

Even at the point of His death the question was still swirling of what name should be attached to Jesus. He was asked in Mathew 26:64, “are you the Christ, the Son of God?” And he owned that name, and lived up to it to the point of death.

Jesus came to earth and lived the life (perfect, never taking the name of God in vain)... but then he died the death I had been condemned to die, in my place. He absorbed in his perfect life the curse of my death.

- There was a curse on sin that justice demanded had to be carried out. God had said in Genesis 2:17 that the one who sins would die. God can’t lie or break His word.
- Christ died; He satisfied the curse. Justice was served. But because He was innocent man who died a cursed death, I can be released from my curse. Because He shared in my death; I can share in His resurrection. Because He died for me; I can live in Him.
 - o The truth of the Gospel message is that Christ suffered God’s wrath in our place and that all must therefore repent of their sins and put faith in Jesus if they are to be saved.
- On the cross, Jesus “wore” my name, so that I could wear His. On the cross he “wore” the name guilty (sinner, condemned, 3rd commandment breaker), so that I could wear guiltless.
 - o He who was guiltless died as guilty so that I, the true guilty, could live in guiltlessness.

Do you see the irony that is here? Ultimately Jesus died because of the name that he claimed...yet in the end (because he was right) it is that very name that we now claim so that we won’t face eternal death.

(Missional) We know the name of Jesus is sufficient for salvation because Jesus didn’t take God’s name in vain. Ministry then is done for the sole purpose of making that name famous throughout the world.

- You are part of a church that just mobilized 100's of volunteers to serve the community, that plants churches around the US and the world, and the gives a lot of money away to such efforts for one reason...to make the name of Jesus known all around the world
 - o Because in claiming the name of the one that never misrepresented God, the fact that we misrepresent God is covered...and that's a message the world needs to know.

Conclusion: In coming to the 3rd commandment by and large we have taken one application (in not cursing with the name) and missed the heart of this commandment, to revere God's reputation and His name.

(Non Christian) Maybe you have heard the Gospel for the first time this morning. Maybe you realize that a guiltless man was held guilty so that you being guilty could be declared guiltless. Paul speaks of these commandments as a mirror into our sinful hearts. They were given by his grace, in order that we would see our need. We don't live up to God's standard and therefore need a savior.

- Will you accept this message even today?

(Christian) You realize "I do this" (I realized that this week). So what is the answer for us? Do we make a list (I won't use His name lightly, I won't put a weird bumper sticker on my car). But the answer isn't a list. Do we just man up and stop? The answer isn't just to stop. These commandments show you what your heart looks like, that in this world we are prone to wonder.

- The answer is, we must recognize the greatness that is in the name of God. That it speaks salvation over us, it speaks love and mercy and grace. Great is His name and greatly to be praised. Seeing that puts us on the path of sanctification in not taking his name in vain, but rather living in reverence and honor to it.