

USING THE DIVINE NAME

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Exodus20:7 KJV Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

Exodus20:7 NEW KJV 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

Exodus20:7 NIV You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

When the Lord God appeared to Moses in the ‘burning bush’ and gave him the commission to lead Israel out of Egypt, Moses responded by asking him a question: “What is Your Name?” We may ask why Moses responded with such a question. Was it because he was so scared, and thus spoke nervously in that situation? That indeed might have played a part, but Moses asked this question sincerely. The name signified who the person was, hence, the authority he had to make such a statement.

The Lord God assured Moses that He had that authority by telling Moses His Name, Yahweh, translated “I Am that I Am,” or, “I Will be What I will be.” To Moses’ thinking, this answer assured him that he was in the Presence of the Creator of the Universe, the Eternal One, the Living and the True God, and that this All Powerful Deity, greater than the Egyptian Army or the Egyptian Pharaoh, was also A Person with a Name.

Now the Lord God gives His chosen servant, Moses, the ‘ten words’, the Decalogue, the Ten Commandments; and the third commandment deals with the use of the Divine Name. He says: “Don’t take My Name in vain; anyone who takes my name in vain will be punished.” (Literally the Hebrew says, “Will not go unpunished.”)

This leads us to the question: **WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO TAKE THE NAME OF THE LORD GOD IN VAIN?** Literally, according to Barclay in his book *THE TEN COMMANDMENTS TODAY*, “in vain” is a phrase that means ‘for unreality.’ He also says that the phrase is used in Ps. 24:4, of the man who lifts up his soul to vanity; and is also used in Exodus 23:1 for a false report. But I like the definition of George Dana Boardman best, in his Lectures to the students at the University of Pennsylvania in 1899 as *falsely, insincerely, deceitfully*, or

emptily, frivolously, profanely. Boardman puts these definitions in three categories that are as follows:

FALSELY—This way of using The Lord’s Name is by pledging His Name and Character to a lie. As you perhaps know, the Jews were fond of adding the Almighty’s Name to their oaths. Later on, because they felt the Name of God was too sacred to us and said, *adonai*, a word we translate ‘Lord’. Certainly they would not add the Divine Name to an oath, so, they would swear by the altar of the temple, or by the temple itself, or by other means to make their oath more believable.

Boardman quotes the Philosopher Maimonides as saying, “If any one swears by heaven, by earth, by the sun, etc., although it is the intention of him who swears in these words to swear by Him who created these things, yet this is not an oath; or, if one swears by one of the prophets or by one of the books of Scripture, although it is the purpose of the swearer to swear by Him who sent that prophet or who gave that book, nevertheless this is not an oath.” Apparently many of the Jews felt it was alright to swear and say such things as “by heaven” or “by the altar” and so on in their oaths, but it was not correct to swear to God for that would be breaking this third commandment.

Jesus, however, reminded us in Matthew 5:33-37: ³³“Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.’ ³⁴But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne; ³⁵nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black. ³⁷But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one. (New King James Version).

Clearly, then, Jesus is reminding us that our lives should themselves be a reflection of our commitment to the truth. Before we met Jesus, perhaps our statements were like sandwiches between two oaths. We felt that, to be believed, we had to swear, and do so by invoking the Name of Deity. Boardman says, in effect, that the need for oaths itself is a good indication of the fallenness of man.

He also says that swearing or affirming in court cases are not opposed necessarily to this teaching since God swore by Himself, Heb. 6:13,18; Paul said, ‘God is my witness’ Rom. 1:9; the angel of the Apocalypse ‘sware by him who liveth for ever and ever’ that time would be no more, Rev. 10:5-6; and the high priest said to Christ, “I adjure thee by the Living God...” Boardman says of Jesus speaking of oaths in the Sermon on the Mount, “What He condemns, then, is not the solemn religious or judicial oaths, but the practice of taking oaths in common conversation, and especially of swearing by secular objects.” We are not to use God’s Name FALSELY. We perjure ourselves before the great Eternal Judge when we use His Name falsely.

INSINCERELY or HYPOCRITICALLY.

Mark 7:6 He answered and 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.
7 And in vain they worship Me,
Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.'*

Above all other sins, Jesus hated hypocrisy. Time after time He condemns this sin in the life of the Sadducees and the Pharisees.

Mt. 23:13 But woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in.
14 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater damnation.
15 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye compass sea and land to make one proselyte, and when he is made, ye make him twofold more the child of hell than yourselves.
16 Woe unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing; but whosoever shall swear by the gold of the temple, he is a debtor!
17 Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?
18 And, Whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing; but whosoever sweareth by the gift that is upon it, he is guilty.
19 Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?
20 Whoso therefore shall swear by the altar, sweareth by it, and by all things thereon.
21 And whoso shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein.
22 And he that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and by him that sitteth thereon.

These men were very religious men, but they were hypocrites. We have men today hiding behind the Name of God, manipulating the public, selling their souls for the money the poor will send in to their so called ministry or ministries.

LIGHTLY or TRIVIALY is the last category Boardman mentions. This method of using the Divine Name is at worst detestable, and at best 'air-headed.' This type of profanity surely betrays the lack of vocabulary that many possess. This kind of profanity reflects coaches who curse their players, the angry

that hurl out obscenities, and the average person who may or may not aware that they are doing something quite offensive to the Lord God.

Obviously, however, the worst sin of this kind is the sin of praying for trivial things, or taking the Lord God too lightly in our worship. **The greatest sin of Christians is that of not fully reverencing the Almighty.** The Lord God is not the Hollywood description of “the man upstairs.” He is the Holy and the Righteous Living God who created us and created our Universe. Not only do we pray to him too shallowly we live for Him too shallowly and we think of Him too shallowly. Even the term GOD has somehow become trivialized in our secular society.

What we fail to look at are the Effects of Trivializing the Name of God in that we actually hurt ourselves. The first effect of using God’s Name in Vain is to **ALIENATE OURSELVES FROM GOD.** To use God’s Name in our too often vulgar and empty ways is to assail the very Person of God, and the Character of God. Carelessness in the use of the Divine Name shows little respect to the Creator and Redeemer of the world, who sent His only begotten Son Jesus into the World. The fact that our race murdered the only Son of God shows us what a pitiful condition humanity is in. The Preacher was right: “Vanity of vanities saith the preacher!”

I said last week and I say again, “We are at war with the Divine God.” No wonder that we use His Name in vain and assail His Character in word and in deed! As one great theologian said, “We are not just at enmity with God; we are enemies with weapons in our hands.” By assailing the Character of God we are further and further alienated from the Living God. We are on a downhill spiral away from Him who is Life Itself. The Bible declares to us “Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that He will not hear.”

In the process of using God’s Name in vain we also **DIMINISH OUR TRUE SELF-HOOD.** David said, in Psalm 32:

³ *When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.*

⁴ *For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah.*

The more distant we get from the True Character of God, the more distant we get from ourselves. Tillich was right in saying that the Living God touches us in our innermost being; therefore when we lose or forget God, we also lose our true self-hood. We were created in the Image and Likeness of God. That is a spiritual fact that we cannot ever totally eliminate from our consciousness; but in our loss of the True Character of God, we can come very near losing our true self

completely. God is a Spirit, THE SPIRIT; and we are spirits created In His Image.

This downward spiral from the Lord God leads to the **DEHUMANIZATION OF OURSELVES AND OTHERS**. In the loss of our True Self, we also lose, not only our relationship to God, but we lose our humanness. God's Name is trivialized, and we lose a little of Who God truly Is. The more this is done the less we know the Lord God. The more that Holy Name is emptied of its True Character in our lives the less human we become. That is why Jesus put our duty to God and our duty to human beings as two parts of one reality.

The best example of that dehumanization is in the story of the Gadarene Demoniac. He is a being without Self-Hood, not knowing which of the legions within was truly him. When Jesus came to Him, cast out his demons, and set him in his right mind, how different he appeared both to himself and to those who had seen him before as less than a human. Our lack of respect and Reverence for the True Nature of God causes us to lose our True Nature as well, leads in fact to the dehumanization of ourselves and of others. There is great danger in using the Divine Name Vainly.

One final thought: **HOW SHOULD WE SPEAK THE DIVINE NAME?** The only three words that I find adequate are **RESPECT, REVERENCE, AND HUMILITY**. We are first of all to respect the Name of the Lord God. In His Name He reveals Himself. In His Name He shows Himself to us. In His Name we understand something of His holiness. Therefore the first word I can think of is RESPECT for His Name.

We must be careful in conversation, in sermon, in prayer, in teaching, in everything we say, to Name the Name of Deity with utmost respect. We are not speaking about some human being when we converse about Deity. We are not chatting with a friend when we Discuss the Divine. We are not debating the merits and demerits of faith in the Divine when we speak of His Name. Rather, the Lord God alone is above us and we are simply His creatures.

When the great Apostle Paul spoke of the ways of the Divine, he cried out in Rom 11:33 "O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!" And Paul concluded in verse 36, "For of Him, and through Him, and to Him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen."

To speak that Name in Respect is to gain **REVERENCE FOR THE HOLY**. Rudolph Otto was right: He is the great Thou, the Eternal I Am. We are to Reverence the Name of our God. He is righteous. He is holy. His ways are past finding out. He is the great mystery that draws the human heart and mind to Himself who is the Answer to His own Infinite Being.

To patient Job, who sought the reason for his human predicament, God appeared, and God was the Answer. As Isaiah 55:9 says, *For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.*

True, this reverence for God and His Name means that we ‘fear’ Him, but it also means we Love Him, love Him enough, in fact, to treat His Name with respect and reverence.

HUMILITY is the final attitude we should show to the Divine Person and the Divine Name. We should speak it with humility and confess it with deep contrition. For we can never attain unto His holiness, but we can Honor, and Magnify, and Glorify His Holy Name. For the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His Name in vain.