Section: Law (Commands)

Teacher: Scott Waterman

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**TEACHING NOTES**

**Q47. Why does God give the third commandment: You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God?**

So we will respect and honorGod as the worthy and holy One.

**Exodus 20:7** “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.”

**Psalm 29:2** Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness.

**Psalm 139:19-20** Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God! O men of blood, depart from me! They speak against you with malicious intent; your enemies take your name in vain.

**Revelation 15:4** “Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship you, for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

# Introduction

Good evening and welcome to midweek. Tonight, I have the pleasure to unpack for you the third commandment. Let’s go ahead and read our catechism question and answer: Q47. Why does God give the third commandment: You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God? So we will respect and honor God as the worthy and holy One.

Let me read the third commandment, found in

Exodus 20:7 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.

Do not take the name of the Lord in vain. At first glance, we may be tempted to think that names are fairly inconsequential in nature. After all, it’s just a word. How important can it really be? And yet, that is what I aim to help us look to tonight. I want to help us understand the weight of God’s name, in particular.

But, before we dive into His name, think for a moment of the presidents in recent history – Clinton, Bush, Obama, Trump, to name a few. These names may resonate with you with thoughts of praise or irritation because of *who* they are and *what* they represent. And because of that – we start to see the importance of name. Name is representation. But the Lord’s name is altogether different.

As a side note, Pastor and Author Kevin DeYoung has written a helpful book from which I will be quoting tonight.

He says, “The first commandment prohibited the worship of false gods. We can understand why that’s a big deal. After all, you can’t go around worshiping the wrong god. And the second commandment prohibited worshiping God in the wrong way. That makes sense too. An invisible God has the right to determine how he is to be made visible (or not). The first two commandments seem pretty foundational.

If we’re honest, though, when we come to the third commandment, we feel like we can let our guard down just a little. “Watch what you say. Don’t swear. Be careful with your OMGs.” Got it. The third commandment feels less like a bedrock principle and more like a good reminder.”

It's common in our culture, and likely for many of us, to casually use God’s name in vain. But should we be casual about it? Turn with me to Leviticus 24:16, “Whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him. The sojourner as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death.”

Given our framework for understanding law, we know that this command to put these sinners to death is positive law given to a specific people (Israel) for a specific purpose (to be set-apart and holy) for a specific time (pre-atonement). This law is abrogated for us as we are not bound to the civil aspects of the Mosaic Law. But what is the general equity in this verse? What is the principle that teaches us about God’s character? While we, in this time and place, shall not enact the death penalty for blasphemy, we do understand that God’s name is representative of Divine Majesty. This law in Leviticus surely shows us just how weighty this matter is—who weighty our God is. It shows us how careful we need to be in a right thinking and speaking about God. And, it encourages believers showing us once again, just how awesome and holy our God is!

That said, surely, we’ve all blasphemed God’s name. It’s interesting to note that in this Leviticus 24 passage God addresses ALL people. God addresses not only Israel, but also the sojourner. God takes His name seriously.

Think for a moment. If you transgressed your friend, what would the penalty be? If you transgressed the mayor, what would the penalty be? What about God, who is pure, holy, and undefiled? The punishment for the transgression against the Sovereign One would be heightened drastically because of who He is, and this is why the penalty was death in the Old Covenant. This is also why the wages for sin is death.

Let us dive deeper into the what behind the third commandment.

# What is forbidden in the third commandment?

Exodus 20:7 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.

We are prohibited from taking the name of the God in vain. But, what is vanity? The Webster’s dictionary of 1828 defines vain as: *1. Empty; worthless; having no substance, value or importance. 2. Fruitless; ineffectual. 3. Proud of petty things, or of trifling attainments; elated with a high opinion of one's own accomplishments, or with things more showy than valuable; conceited. 4. Empty; unreal; 5. Showy; ostentatious. 6. Light; inconstant; worthless. 7. Empty; unsatisfying. 8. False; deceitful; not genuine; spurious. 9. Not effectual; having no efficacy*

We are forbidden from taking the name of God in a disrespectful or worthless or useless manner. To do so is wicked. We are not to link God’s name to anything that is false or deceitful. This goes directly against the character of God. Remember the Scriptures tell us that God does not lie. The command here is that we do not connect the name of the Lord to anything that is not true of His character.

We see in the Old Testament several ways in which the third commandment can be violated. The most notable is blasphemy, as we’ve already seen in Leviticus 24, but there is more.

The third commandment also forbids empty or false oaths. When you take an oath or make a declaration and swear by God’s name, it must not be a false promise or one you do not intend to keep. Leviticus 19:12, “You shall not swear by my name falsely, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.”

The third commandment also prohibits false claims of prophesy. Those who claimed to speak for God were held to a strict standard of judgment. Look at Deuteronomy 18:20, “But the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die.

It was also a violation of the third commandment to sacrifice children to the false god Molech. Leviticus 18:21 You shall not give any of your children to offer them to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the LORD. Kevin DeYoung says of this, “The Israelites were to stone the man who sacrificed his children in this way. Failure to do so would allow for uncleanness to permeate the camp, thereby besmirching the name of the Lord, who dwelt in the midst of his people.” We may indeed find a modern day parallel here with the abortion problem that plagues our world. Many people today aren’t sacrificing their unborn children to Molech, rather they are sacrificing their unborn children to the false idol of ease and comfort. To do is an offense to the Name of the Lord. Also, to the Christian: If you support (on any level) this heinous and unbiblical practice, then you too are guilty of violating this command (and many others as well).

It was also a violation of the third commandment for the priests of Israel to participate in lawful sacrifices when unclean. Lev 22:1-3 And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, “Speak to Aaron and his sons so that they abstain from the holy things of the people of Israel, which they dedicate to me, so that they do not profane my holy name: I am the LORD. Say to them, ‘If any one of all your offspring throughout your generations approaches the holy things that the people of Israel dedicate to the LORD, while he has an uncleanness, that person shall be cut off from my presence: I am the LORD. One commentator says, “This is the very ground of the prohibition, that they might preserve in their minds a holy reverence for the Divine Majesty. Hence when they approached unto him, they must be free from every legal impurity. If great men are to be approached with respect, how much more must Jehovah be approached with holy reverence!”

The third commandment, like the other commandments, goes deeper than we realize.

The Westminster Larger Catechism says:

1. “The sins forbidden in the third commandments are, the not using of God's name as is required; and the abuse of it in an ignorant, vain, irreverent, profane, superstitious, or wicked mentioning, or otherwise using his titles, attributes, ordinances, or works, by blasphemy, perjury;
2. all sinful cursings, oaths, vows, and lots; violating of our oaths and vows, if lawful; and fulfilling them, if of things unlawful;
3. murmuring and quarrelling at, curious prying into, and misapplying of God's decrees and providences, misinterpreting, misapplying, or any way perverting the word, or any part of it, to profane jests, curious or unprofitable questions, vain janglings, or the maintaining of false doctrines;
4. abusing it, the creatures, or anything contained under the name of God, to charms, or sinful lusts and practices;
5. the maligning, scorning, reviling, or any wise opposing of God's truth, grace, and ways;
6. making profession of religion in hypocrisy, or for sinister ends;
7. being ashamed of it, or a shame to it, by unconformable, unwise, unfruitful, and offensive walking, or backsliding from it.”

We must see that to dishonor the Lord’s Name in any way shape or form is a violation of this commandment.

# Why is it forbidden?

Hopefully you’re starting to understand exactly why violating this commandment is a serious violation against our God. Let’s dig deeper so that we start to understand exactly why it’s forbidden.

Turn with me to the book of Exodus 3. Recall Moses speaking with the Lord in the burning bush: Exod 3:13-15 Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?”14 God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”

Take note of a few things here. God proclaims His name to be “I AM WHO I AM” This is remarkable. God simply states that He Is. This is a very bizarre interaction, if you consider it for a moment. If someone were to ask you what they should call you, you would give them your name. I would say, Scott. Perhaps I may give some additional data to bolster my identity, I am Scott, son of James the Psychologist. But you would think I’m nuts if I simply said, “you can call me the self-existent one.” God is not like us, however. He is the Sovereign One, He is the Self-Existent One. His name is altogether unique and set-apart, His name is the embodiment of His nature. He is I Am.

Look with me at Exodus 33:18-19: Moses said, “Please show me your glory.” And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The LORD.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.

Take note that at Moses’ request to see God’s glory, God’s response is to make all His goodness pass before him and proclaim his name, the LORD. DeYoung says, “To know the name YHWH, the merciful and gracious one, is not to merely know something about God; it is to know God himself (Ex. 34:6–8). God shows himself by speaking his name.”

God’s name is directly related to His character. When we misrepresent God’s name, we misrepresent His character. When we violate this commandment, we are blaspheming and slandering God. We must consider that our names, as important as they are to us, are different than the name of the Lord. God’s name relates to His being, whereas our names do not.

Throughout scripture the name of the Lord is exalted in the highest way possible:

* Ps 8:1 O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens.
* Ps 29:2 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of holiness.
* Acts 4:12 And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”
* Rom 10:13 For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”
* Phil 2:10-11 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

There is a holy importance of God’s divine name that Scriptures will not let us forget!

# How can we obey this commandment?

DeYoung separates the violation of the commandment into three categories. He says, “There are three points: we violate the third commandment when we take up the name of God in service of (1) what is false, (2) what is frivolous, or (3) what is phony.”

Violation 1: God’s name in service of what is false.

Again, DeYoung, “Whenever we attach God’s name to lies, half-truths, or ill-conceived purposes, we break the third commandment. This means perjury is a serious sin because under oath we swear to “tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help me God.”

Think for a moment, what are ways that you and I profane God? Often, we will say that God opened this door for me and so it’s His will that I walk through that door. It may be God’s will for you *or not*, but we ought not act like we know. These are the sorts of falsehoods that we ought to be very careful with. Do not assume that somehow you have access to God’s divine *hidden* will. You don’t. And, we shouldn’t speak in a way that indicates that we do.

Phil Ryken says, “A more serious way to break the third commandment is by 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.” This is false prophecy! God has already said whatever he needs to say to us in his Word. Of course, there is also an inward leading of the Holy Spirit. But this is only an inward leading, and it should not be misrepresented as an authoritative word from God.”

DeYoung says, “When we claim absolute divine authority for our human plans and decisions, we violate the third commandment. God’s name is holy, and it must not be added willy-nilly to our prudential decisions, no matter how sincere or important the decision might be.”

We also profane the name of the Lord when we maintain false doctrine. Think about this for a moment. Teachers and preachers of the Word speak from authority, and when they misunderstand, misinterpret or misapply the scriptures (intentionally or not), it is a violation of the third commandment. Think of the heretical prosperity movement that is so popular, the leaders of these movements absolutely claim to speak on behalf of God and His word. They project their message from a place of authority. They do great harm to the name of the Lord by spreading lies about God.

We should also seek to be cautious of how we represent the triune God in our prayers. I see so many Christians fundamentally misunderstand the trinity. We should not thank God the father for dying on the cross! To do so is to falsely misrepresent Him and thus violate the third commandment. We should push ourselves to have a theologically accurate understanding of the triune God and each Divine Person’s role.

*Violation 2: God’s name in service of what is frivolous.*

We break the third commandment when we use the Lord’s name carelessly.

The uber-popular “OMG” (or Oh my god) slang in certainly frivolous—it is sinful—in light of what we are seeing it does not respect and honor God. We must not conform to the world in this. Don’t use God’s name flippantly. The only time we should say “O my God” is when we are truly, intentionally, worshipfully calling out to Him in praise, prayer, or song.

Psalm 38:21

Do not forsake me, O Lord! O my God, be not far from me!

Psalm 40:8

I delight to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.”

In consideration careless speech also consider that Jesus warns against empty phrases. Matt 6:7 “And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words.

We are all guilty of this, I know I certainly am. In the midst of our familial chaos, I’ll quickly belt out a prayer before bedtime or before a meal. I’m not engaging the Lord; I’m merely checking a box. Jesus was not aiming at our young children learning to pray, that isn’t his concern in the passage. Rather, He is seeking for us to engage God with a pure heart. Certainly, we can be encouraging one another to pray earnestly at all times. If it means we violate the third commandment by saying a heartless, hasty prayer before a meal, then we should not pray. Rather, we should reflect upon our heart and seek the Holy Spirits conviction in order to help refine our intentions – and then seek Him in earnest prayer.

What about cursing? Cursing certainly is using God’s name in service of what is frivolous. What does it say about the state of our heart if we so casually speak the name of the Lord as a curse word? I know that I have struggled with this for many years. We ought to see how small we make God to be when we carelessly and frivolously use His name.

We should also consider humor. Do we casually make Jesus the butt of our jokes? There is a subset of Christian culture that is quick to make memes out of Jesus. I have to ask, if you think so highly of your Lord, then why are you so quick to demean him to our fleshly humor?

DeYoung says on this point, “There is no place for using “Jesus Christ” in flippant humor or irreverent sloganeering. I remember seeing a Christian T-shirt, playing off the familiar beer advertising slogan, that said “This blood’s for you.” Someone was too clever for his own good. Or what about our use of Christian words and phrases in sarcastic ways? Like breaking into the “Hallelujah Chorus” when our team scores a touchdown. Or spilling our coffee and saying with a smirk, “Thank you, Jesus.” Or making people laugh with our purposefully ill-timed “Praise the Lamb!” interjection. There are better ways to be silly than with such serious things.”

*Violation 3: God’s name in service of that which is phony*.

Consider worship. I understand that we may get distracted from time to time during worship, but do you believe the words that you’re singing? Or are you just singing them with a numb mind? Are you genuine about your worship or not? When we sing praises to the Lord, we ought to believe the words we sing and see them as genuine expressions of our heart.

In fact, all of our service to the Lord should be seen in this light. This convicts me terribly! How often does our service to the Lord turn into a check the box scenario? It’s got to get done, so I’ll just phone it in. I’ll give a phony half-smile while I serve and mermer how great the Lord is even though in my heart of hearts I don’t believe a word of it. I resort to just “getting it done” without really thinking about what I’m doing. This is what is at the heart of this commandment, are you rightly representing the Lord’s name in service to His kingdom? Or, are you maligning His name in disservice to His kingdom?

We must understand that we who have been bought by Christ’s blood bear a great privilege and responsibility. We should not act in a way that indicates that we are ashamed of our God – no, God calls us to be genuinely committed to Him.

Again, DeYoung makes this salient point, “The worst thing that can be phony about us is us. That may be where some of us are. 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.”

# Final Notes

The Westminster Larger Catechism says, “The third commandment requires, That the name of God, his titles, attributes, ordinances, the word, sacraments, prayer, oaths, vows, lots, his works, and whatsoever else there is whereby he makes himself known, be holily and reverently used in thought, meditation, word, and writing; by an holy profession, and answerable conversation, to the glory of God, and the good of ourselves, and others.”

Scripture summarizes this commandment well, look to 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.

How does the third commandment relate to the great commission or disciple making? Matt 28:19-20 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

It is every Christians duty to be a light to a dark world. I understand we all may not go to unreached people groups but pay close attention to the words you speak to non-believers of all types. If we are proclaiming false things by word or deed, then we are not being a blessing but a curse. We are not relating the character of God in truth.

If your conduct at work is immoral, what is that communicating to the non-believer you share an office with? If you are not righteous in word and deed, will they think your God is righteous in word in deed? Are you quick to succumb to the fear of man? Or are you solidly firm in your foundation as a Christian?

At the end of this, my urging to you is this: be considerate of who it is you represent. Do not lower Christianity to the meme filled farce that it seen to be online. Take the noble route and engage the timeless and eternal God through His inerrant and infallible word. If there is something that I want you to get from this tonight, it is this: You represent the King of the Universe, do not downplay that. Do not take it for granted. We are ambassadors of Christ; we communicate and preach His truth to all. Let us do so with caution and care.

*Encouragement*

Studying these commandments can be empowering for some people as they may be seeing truth that they had previously never considered. But, for others, studying these commandments can be a convicting and difficult pill to swallow. Perhaps you are seeing all manner of sin which you have blindly neglected for a lifetime. I would like to speak to the later group for a moment. My aim is to encourage you.

Brothers and Sisters remember the gospel. Remember that Christ paid the price for your sin. If you are His, you *are* forgiven! Does that mean that you ought to sin freely and abundantly, no. But, if any time we are caught in a transgression we have an opportunity to look to Christ and glory in the forgiveness and mercy of God through the atonement.

We must see that we are no longer slaves to sin. We must echo Paul’s words in Romans 8:15: For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, “Abba! Father!” The only way to break the bond of sin is to look to Christ. We may be overwhelmed in the moment by the gross darkness that is exposed by Biblical light, but that reality should not push us to hide in our flesh. No, we should seek to bring brothers and sisters around us who can help us seek the Lord together and pray for us. Don’t do this alone!

My prayer for us this evening, as we go to our groups, is that you would strive to honor the Lord in your words by confessing your sin. Confess the ways by which you have violated this commandment and praise Him for His mercy and grace in the face of your heinous sin.

*Conclusion*

Q47. Why does God give the third commandment: You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God? So we will respect and honor God as the worthy and holy One.

Let us strive to represent God with respect, honor and worth.