

Commandment 3: Not taking God's name in vain

III. 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."

A. Meaning of the commandment

1. "Name" = a description of one's character or one's reputation

Prov. 22:1 "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, and favor is better than silver or gold."

Gen. 17:5 "No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations."

Mt. 1:21 "She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."

To "take ... in vain" is literally to "lift up ... to vanity, emptiness, worthlessness"

2. Thus, the command forbids any foolish or worthless use of God's name or talk about him.

- swearing

- also any false or unworthy speech about him

- any irreverent speech about him

3. But in a broad sense this command covers all of life: if we bear God's image (Gen. 1:27 "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.") and bear his name (as his people), then our whole life "proclaims" something about our Creator

to other people, to angels, to God himself

Prov. 30:9 "...lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God."

B. Swearing, cursing, obscene language:

What kinds of expressions are wrong, and why?

1. "Swearing": Using God's name "in vain" (in irreverent or dishonorable way) is dishonoring to him

(How do you feel when people misuse your name?)

2. What about substitutes for swearing?

→ the meaning of a word is what it presently means to yourself and your hearers, and this does not necessarily = its historical origin. Examples: Tuesday, Zounds! Gee! Go! Gosh!

(What do people think of when they hear these?)

3. "Cursing": wishing God's judgment or condemnation on persons or things ("D_____ it!" etc.)

a. Persons:

Rom. 12:14 "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them."

Jas. 3:8-10 "...but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so."

b. What if someone curses you?

1 Pet. 3:9 "Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing."

Prov 26:2 "Like a sparrow in its flitting, like a swallow in its flying, a curse that is causeless does not alight."

c. But it is not wrong to commit judgment into God's hands

Rom 12:19 "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'"

(or the government's hands: Rom 13:1-7 For he [the government] is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.)

2 Tim. 4:14 "Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds."

d. Is it OK to curse objects?

→ Why do you want to do this?

1 Tim. 4:4 "For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving"

1 Cor. 10:26 "For the earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof."

4. Obscene or unclean languagea. The problem is one of reputation, cleanliness, bringing reproach on Gospel

Titus 2:10 "...showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior."

Eph. 5:4 "Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving."

Eph 4:29 "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear."

b. Shouldn't Christians generally be known for the purity of their speech?

Phil. 4:8 "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure,

whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”

(contrast the speech of hardened criminals, etc.)

- c. But we need some words to express exclamation, disgust, pain, or strong disappointment.

Phil. 3:8 “Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord ...and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ”

(what about “ouch”?)

- d. This question is not in the same category as taking the Lord's name in vain:

This is mainly a “results” question (How does it affect others? make them think of us? make them think of Christ?)

(Most “dirty” language is simply a more vulgar way of saying something that can also be expressed in language that is commonly acceptable as “clean” in a society.)

C. Drama, films and TV: quoting or portraying unbelievers

1. Note the Bible's quotations of unbelievers:

Ps. 14:1a “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”

Mk. 3:30 “for they were saying, ‘He has an unclean spirit.’”

1 Cor. 12:3 “...no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says ‘Jesus is accursed!’”

(Here, there is no danger of implied approval)

2. Consider effect on hearers:

other people, angels, God

3. Consider attitude of heart: can an actor swear convincingly while in his heart hating to swear?

4. Real vs. imaginary activities: is an actor who swears pretending to swear or actually swearing?

(probably the latter...unlike pretending to murder, etc. on stage)

5. What about watching a movie or play with swearing, cursing, etc?

There is a difference between doing something wrong and watching somebody else do something wrong

- but consider the effect on you

- consider if your presence or your financial support implies approval

D. Oaths (to other human beings) and vows (to God):

Are these wrong?

1. Oaths and vows are not wrong in themselves.

- a. But what about Matthew 5:33-37?

“Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’ But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil.”

→ Jesus’ rebukes a misuse of oaths when people made oaths because nobody believed their ordinary words (they practiced and excused routine lying – see Matt 23:16-22 “Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘If anyone swears by the temple...’”)

- The meaning of James 5:12 is probably similar: “But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your ‘yes’ be yes and your ‘no’ be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

→ Note problem today of Christians who give their word, then break it, often with explanation that God is “leading” them to do something else

Ps. 15:4: “...who swears to his own hurt and does not change...”

- b. Some examples of people taking oaths (or calling God as witness to what they say):

Rom. 1:9 “For God is my witness...”

2 Cor. 1:23 “But I call God to witness against me...”

Phil. 1:8 “For God is my witness...”

Matthew 26:63-64 “But Jesus remained silent. And the high priest said to him, ‘I adjure you by the living God (evxorki,zw se kata. tou/ qeou/ tou/ zw/ntoj), tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.’ Jesus said to him, ‘You have said so. But I tell you, from now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.’”

Heb 6:13-18 (God himself takes an oath) “For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself...”

(see also Luke 1:73 “the oath that he swore to our father Abraham...”)

2. Vows to God are not necessary: Deut. 23:22 “But if you refrain from vowing, you will not be guilty of sin.”

3. If you make one, be careful to fulfill it.

(if it doesn’t cause you to sin):

Eccl. 5:4-6 "...Pay what you vow. It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. Let not your mouth lead you into sin..."

Deut. 23:21-23 "If you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay fulfilling it, for the LORD your God will surely require it of you, and you will be guilty of sin."

- But vows/promises to do something sinful, or which would cause you to sin, should be broken.

Acts 23:12-15 "...the Jews made a plot and bound themselves by an oath neither to eat nor drink till they had killed Paul..."

Matt 14:7-11 "...he promised with an oath to give her whatever she might ask. Prompted by her mother, she said, 'Give me the head of John the Baptist here on a platter.' And the king was sorry, but because of his oaths and his guests he commanded it to be given..."

Judges 11:29-40 (Jephthah's foolish vow) "Jephthah made a vow to the LORD and said, 'If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, then whatever comes out from the doors of my house...I will offer it up for a burnt offering.' ... Then Jephthah came to his home at Mizpah. And behold, his daughter came out to meet him..."

4. In the Old Testament, people sometimes needed approval of the head of a family: Num. 30:1-16 "...But if her father opposes her on the day that he hears of it, no vow of hers, no pledge by which she has bound herself shall stand. And the LORD will forgive her, because her father opposed her..."
 - A principle: parents can free children from foolish vows, promises
5. Are these ever appropriate in our Christian lives today?
 - Marriage vows
 - Oath of the President of the United States

E. Humor

1. In several places, the Bible has a positive view of laughter as an expression of joy, delight
 - Gen. 21:6 "And Sarah said, 'God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me.'"
 - Ps. 126:2 "Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy..."
 - Eccl. 3:4 "a time to weep, and a time to laugh..."
 - Eccl. 10:19 "Bread is made for laughter, and wine gladdens life..."
 - Luke 6:21 "...Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh."
 - Isn't laughter often the spontaneous expression of great joy, happiness in life? (even though life is serious, it is also fun!)
2. What about Eph. 5:4?
 - "Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving."
 - This verse does not forbid all humor, but the kind that
 - a. causes offense
 - b. encourages positive thoughts of immoral behavior (see vs. 5 "For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.")
 - c. crowds out helping conversations and thanksgiving
 - d. speaks disrespectfully or falsely of God, Christ, Holy Spirit (Exod. 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.")
 - Therefore, think about the results of what you say:
 - Ephesians 4:29 "Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear."
3. A danger: Beware of using too much humor in leading Bible studies, doing Bible teaching, preaching, etc., esp. if it ruins serious parts of message, or distracts from worship, or quenches the work of the Holy Spirit.
4. Problem of tacit ("silent") approval:
 - > When does listening imply approval?
 - Goal: We should show some disapproval for wrongdoing, lest we seem to endorse it, but this *can* be done gently (often with facial expression, shaking of head, or brief word) without cutting off the relationship completely.
 - (Sometimes you may have to walk away, leave the room)
 - (Regular prayer and Scripture meditation will help here)

All of the class lessons and outlines are posted on the class website <http://www.christianessentialsbc.com>.