



*7 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. (Exodus 20:7)*

We should take heed that these are the very Words of God which He spoke from Sinai. There is no translator's error, or transmission breach to which the Higher (read LOWER) Critics can point. Every clause, phrase, and term is of the highest importance and meaning.

Today we examine the Third Commandment of the Ten Commandments. If I were asked to name the Commandment most often violated, I would name the Third Commandment – not for the vulgar abuse of the derelicts on the street in cursing and blasphemous malappropriation of God's Name, but for a wholly different class of people – those who profess the Name of Christ both inside and outside the doors of the Church. But the greater violation, I believe, occur inside Church every worship hour and, especially, on Sundays. How can this be, you might ask?

For so many years of our childhood, we were taught the Third Commandment was all about using God's name as a by-word which was termed 'cursing.' Drunks and others of a wicked disposition were exemplified as the most common offenders of the breach of using God's name in an irreverent manner. Were our mentors totally correct in teaching us, or did they leave the greater number of offenders (perhaps even themselves) out of the equation? Perhaps the greater numbers of offenders are those who use God's name with a measure of reverence in Church with amazing regularity! Who are these gross offenders? Well, friend, it is me, and, unless you are very unusual, YOU as well!

Remember, again, that it is God's voice relating these Commandments. He is Almighty and all-Sovereign. He merits, and demands, our most profound respect before His Throne. His Name is Holy – so Holy that the ancient Hebrews refused to pronounce it in fullness. They used the Tetragrammaton – only the four consonants of Yahweh – to designate that Holy Name. The name by which many Christians know God is that of Jehovah – but that is not consistent with the Hebrew alphabet – there is no 'J' in that alphabet. Therefore, the proper Name is probably closer Yahweh, 'Yehoshua'! Because of their deep respect and reverence for God, the Hebrew writers removed the vowels and used only the four consonants of Yahweh (YHWH) to designate that Name considered too Holy to be pronounced by mortals. But we have somehow lost that high regard and reverence for God, so we use the various designators of God with impunity. I do not believe God takes umbrage at the more

accurate pronunciations of His Name, but I do believe He expects us to use His Name with particular respect, meaning and understanding. We would not address the Queen of England as 'Lizzy' would we? But God expects even more than an accurate pronunciation – after all, He knows what we mean in our hearts even if we mispronounce His Holy Name. The heart is the key to the mystery of avoiding use of God's Name in vain.

In practically every church (there may be notable exceptions), prayers are offered every Sunday to the Lord. In liturgical churches, the Lord's Prayer is recited and so are other prayers requiring the address of God's Person. When we, with seeming genuine reverence, repeat the Lord's Prayer, what do we MEAN by 'Our Father'? Are we consciously and consistently meditating upon the Holiness of that Name when we pronounce it, and are we consciously appealing to the One whom we KNOW to be our Father in Heaven? Or are we simply, with boring repetition, saying the words that are expected of us? If we do not mean "*Our Father who art in Heaven,*" have we not taken the Name of the Lord in vain? Surely we have! The same example is true of the Apostle's Creed – "*I believe in God, the Father Almighty.*" Are we actually making a serious and conscious statement of faith (which the Creed is), or do we repeat the words in abandon of their deep, spiritual meaning. Please do not tell me that you have never been guilty of this! What about the benedictory conclusion of every prayer – "*All these things we ask in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen*"

Have we really thought through the Commandment that constrains is take God's Name seriously with each reference to it? Such neglect would be more easily understood of little children who are memorizing the prayers they make to God. Their minds are simple and innocent. There is never a doubt that they revere God and love Him. But those of us who are "brought up" in the faith have no excuse for taking a light and casual view of the Name of God in prayer, in worship, in thought, or in deed. A related issue, though it borders on a violation of the Ninth Commandment as well, is the flippant remark, "Oh, yes, I will certainly pray for you," and then not give another thought to the matter until we meet our petitioning friend again face-to-face.

We have, in our church, a Sunday Report that records many needs of prayer of people both within, and outside, our own church. It is a fantastic tool to solicit the prayers of the faithful – and there are no publicly false declarations of planned prayers. It is simply a list to which we can refer in the privacy of our prayer closets when no one is looking. I believe more genuinely faithful prayers are prayed from that list than in most church services because those prayers are real and reverent – not intended to impress our fellow worshippers.

Of course, it is necessary and purposeful that we utter public prayers in public worship, but should those prayers not be as reverent and sincere as those we utter in our prayer closets? Should we not attach the most exalted importance to the Names we use to designate the Sovereign of the Universe?

The vile and vulgar among the lost souls of the wilderness will use terrible words of cursing against God, but most do not claim to truly know Him; however, those of us who DO know Him should have a deep and abiding reverence for the God whose Name we may carelessly toss about. Even in song, we may offer our highest respect to His Name: "*Sing unto God, sing praises to his name: extol him that rideth upon the heavens by his name JAH, and rejoice before him.*" (Psalms 68:4)

God's Name stands on its own. It is not a suggestion of who we may think He is, but it clearly, and without equivocation states WHO HE IS! Every utterance of the name should be an act of worship. Those who swear falsely and habitually profane that Name may do so out of a mind deformed by sin and lack of knowledge as to the Person they

have defamed; but the Christian professor should know better!

God's Name reveals His attributes. He is all-Powerful, All-Knowing, and Omnipresent; but He is also All-Merciful! He made all things, and He is very much interested in His Creation – in you and me! His Name was not known in the antediluvian world except by the term Lord. Even Abraham was not privileged to know His sacred Name, but God is One whose revelation of Himself is as gradual as a budding rose. Should the rose burst open into full bloom at once, there would be no time for its lovely fragrance to germinate and mature. So, unto Moses, at the proper and best time, God revealed His Name: *“And God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I am the LORD: And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by the name of God Almighty, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them.”* (Ex 6:2-3) It was not out of any disregard for Abraham that God did not fully reveal His Name, but owing to the maturity of the time for His people. At the coming out of Egypt, it was high time that the intimate relationship between those people who are the seed of Abraham should better know the True Seed by Name.

Perhaps you are wondering just how to add reverence to your prayers in the use of God's Name. Since I am as much offender as any reading this devotion, I cannot give an answer with total authority; however, it might be a good starting point to pause momentarily with each mention of the Lord's Name or Title when praying. Think deeply about the great Personage to whom you address your prayer before proceeding. Yes, that is a simple approach, but Christ loves simplicity and child-like innocence. Why not give a far greater emphasis on the Name of the Person to whom you pray, and wait to see if your faith does not silently grow in the rich soil of your deeper heart?