

Honor God's Name Exodus 20:7

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Christians Stand*

1. I want to begin the message today in a different manner.
2. If you profess faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord & Savior – Please stand.
3. You are a “Christian.”
 - a. you have “taken” the *Name* of Christ to yourself.
 - b. today, we’re going to see that *means something* very important – that you have *taken* His name.

B. *Pray*

II. TEXT

A. V. 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.

B. *Set The Scene*

1. Picture the scene –
 - a. the entire nation of some 3 million have been summoned to gather round the base of Mt. Sinai.
 - b. they encircle the mount completely, a massive crowd.
 - c. they’re standing together in families, husbands and wives side by side, mothers holding their little ones, and dads with their hands on the shoulders of their older children.
 - d. they’re all expectant because their leader, Moses, has just told them God is going to speak to them.
 - d. the summit of the mount is obscured by a bright swirling cloud from which comes bolts of lightning and booms of thunder.
 - e. the lightning ends, the last echo of the thunder dies away, and the crowd draws utterly silent, drawing in their breath, ready for whatever is about to follow.
 - f. and then, deeper and more resonant and piercing than the thunder which has just terrified them, comes the sound of the voice of God as He booms forth the words of the 10 Commandments.
2. “You shall have no other gods before me.”
3. “You shall make no graven image to worship & serve.”
4. “You shall not take the Lord’s name in vain.”
5. What goes through your mind in that moment – when you hear the words of the 3rd commandment?
 - a. if it were me, I’d be thinking – “Take Your name in vain?!?! How could I ever do that?”
 - b. “I mean, listen to that voice! I thought the thunder was scary! But now that I’ve heard Your voice, the thunder will never frighten me again!”
 - c. “And Your glory swirling above my head is so awesome, so incredible, I know I’ll be telling my grandchildren about it, trying to describe Your grandeur and glory. But no words I could ever muster could come close to describing it!”
 - d. “Take Your name in vain? No worries on that score. In light of what I’m experiencing right now – that should *never* prove a problem.”
6. And yet, it did prove to be a problem!
 - a. within a month, the people had nearly forgotten all Ten of the Commandments.
 - b. even with the glory of God still manifest on the Mount, they turned away and began to

- dream up their own ideas about God and how to worship Him.
7. This reminds us that no matter how far we've grown in our relationship with the Lord, no matter how spiritually mature we may be or how intense our experiences of God, there is always the danger of turning from Him.
 8. Because we live in a fallen world, in unredeemed bodies, we face a constant battle –
 - a. it's a battle that wants to alter our knowledge of the *nature* of God
 - b. to pervert our understanding of the His *character*,
 - c. and to defame His *name*.

C. Oaths

1. The main thrust of the Third Commandment applies to the taking of oaths.
2. As always, we need to understand what we find here against the historical backdrop of the time in which it was originally given.
 - a. in the ancient world, because they didn't possess writing materials in the abundance we enjoy today, they depended much more on verbal agreements.
 - b. and their memory was far better since they could not write something down and then forget about it, trusting in the written document to keep a record of it for them.
 - c. when two people entered into a legal agreement, they would go to the elders of the city who sat in the gate, and would exchange their vows, pledging to the terms of the contract – all in *verbal* form.
 - d. as a way to seal the solemnity of the agreement, they would invoke the name of a deity, of one of the gods they worshipped.
 - e. this deity was then supposed to hold the parties of the agreement *to* their vow.
 - f. if one of the parties broke their promise, then the deity was supposed to have the release to bring judgment on them.
3. When God gives the Third Commandment, He means when the people make their vows,
 - a. because He has just told them they are to have no other gods, they will invoke *His* name as the witness to their promise –
 - b. therefore they must be certain to *keep* their promise, because unlike the false gods of the pagans, He's real!
 - c. and He will not hold guiltless the one who takes a vow and then breaks it!
4. Now, I know that this is not the way this Commandment has been interpreted today.
 - a. most people think this is a prohibition of profanity, and specifically of taking the Lord's name in vain.
 - b. while that does apply *by extension* – we need to understand the main meaning of this Commandment first.
5. In the OT, oaths taken in God's name were encouraged!
 - a. in Deut. 10:20 we find this –
You shall fear the LORD your God; you shall serve Him, and to Him you shall hold fast, and take oaths in His name.
 - b. God even instructed the prophet Jeremiah to tell the people to swear by God's name as a sign of spiritual fidelity to Him. In Jer. 12:16 we read -
And it shall be, if they will learn carefully the ways of My people, to swear by My name, 'As the LORD lives,' as they taught My people to swear by Baal, then they shall be established in the midst of My people.
 - c. in the OT, oaths taken in God's name were understood as a part of the committed life.
6. But once they were made, such oaths were not to be broken under any circumstance.
 - a. Moses repeatedly warned the people about breaking oaths made to God or in His name.
 - b. Lev. 19:12
And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.
 - c. Num 30:2

If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind himself by some agreement, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.

d. Deut. 23:21

When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it; for the LORD your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin to you.

7. As with the rest of the law, the rabbis took the Third Commandment and elaborated on it in such depth, adding so many additional rules to it that it ended up becoming buried under a pile of regulations.
8. They added so many amendments that the purpose behind it was lost – which was to enforce the idea that God’s people, like their God, must be truthful and full of integrity.
9. That’s what God meant in the Third Command – that His covenant people would be men and women of integrity; that they would mean what they say, say what they mean, and do what they promise.

That His covenant –people would be covenant-KEEPERS.

10. But once the rabbis were done with their interpretations and additions to the Third Commandment, instead of it being a *guarantee of integrity*, it had become a clever means of *deception*.
 - a. they said that an oath was not binding *unless* it contained the name of God.
 - b. the *Mishnah*, which is a collection of Jewish writings making commentary on the Law, has an entire section on oaths defining which are binding and which aren’t.
 - c. the swearing of oaths degenerated into an endless debate over when a person could and couldn’t lie & cheat.
11. We see how this debate had grown at the time of Christ when He dealt with it in the Sermon on the Mount. Matthew 5:33-36

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.’ ³⁴ But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God’s throne; ³⁵ nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. ³⁶ Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black.

- a. Jesus identifies these particular oaths because they were in use at that time.
 - b. the rabbis said that an oath taken with heaven, earth, or Jerusalem as a witness weren’t binding because they didn’t invoke God’s name.
 - c. a person who wanted to *sound* sincere but who in fact was only trying to trick someone into entering an agreement, could swear by one of these without fear of divine wrath when they broke their end of the agreement or so the rabbis said.
 - d. a shyster, a con-man could say, “With heaven as my witness” and it meant nothing.
 - 1) “As earth is my witness!”
 - 2) “I promise on the city of Jerusalem!”
 - 3) these were empty, vain oaths; and while they appeared to be marks of integrity, they were in fact masks behind which deception grew.
 - e. but the rabbis said they did not hold a person bound to the promise because they did not invoke God’s name.
12. Jesus showed the error of such thinking.
 - a. heaven is God’s throne,
 - b. earth is His footstool,
 - c. and Jerusalem is His city!
 13. In fact, there’s nothing anyone could ever swear by that isn’t ultimately an invocation of God’s name because as the Creator of all things – It all *belongs* to Him.
 14. His Name is the basis of all that is!

15. And that's why Jesus concludes by saying in v. 37 –
- Let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.**
- a. Jesus gets back to the original intent of the Third Commandment
 - b. which was to communicate the idea that the people of God must be like Him;
 - c. trustworthy, truthful, a people of integrity who keep their promises.
16. If you say you will do a thing – do it! If you say you won't do a thing, don't!
17. God's people don't even really need to invoke His name in their oaths, or when they make a promise because as His people, His name is already on them!
18. If you're a Christian – The Name of Christ is ON you!
- a. and He Who *IS* the Way, the Truth, and the Life is our God, our All.
 - b. therefore, there is no other course, no option for us than to be a truthful, promise-keeping people.
19. Does God keep His promises? If we are *His* people, will we?
20. Does God keep His covenant? *If* we are His people, will we?
21. Jesus said, **“Let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.”**
- a. if I make a promise to you, and feel like I have add oaths to it, what does that say about me?
 - b. it says I've given you reason to *doubt* my integrity,
 - c. so I have to add solemn words to *make* you believe I *really* mean what I'm saying.
 - d. on the other hand, if all my life I've always been truthful and trustworthy, then when I make a simple promise to you, you have every reason to believe me,
 - e. and I feel no need to add oaths to it because in my heart and mind, I fully intend and plan to follow through.
 - f. but if I'm making all kinds of additional oaths to how much I mean it – you know something's going on!
 - g. as Shakespeare has one of his character's saying when he detects deceit – “Thou protests too loudly.”
22. Christian – Let's heed the Third Commandment because it goes right to the heart of what it means to be the people of God in this world.

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.

23. We took the Lord's Name the moment we were born again.
- a. as adoptive children “take” the name of the father who adopts them –
 - b. we have taken the Name of God – Jesus Christ!
 - c. we cannot bear that name lightly – it's a glorious name!
 - d. a Name that speaks of truthfulness and trustworthiness.
 - e. it is a covenant-keeping name.
 - f. we must be men & women who are trustworthy, true, and faithful.

D. The Name

1. While the Third Commandment finds its primary application in the taking of oaths, it's premised on the reality of the holiness, the specialness of God's name, which represents His Being.
2. The covenant name of God – Yahweh, is an exceedingly precious Name!
3. In fact, so sacred, so special was God's name to the Jewish people that they wouldn't utter it out loud.
 - a. when reading the scriptures, when they came to the word “Yahweh”, they would bow their heads, and reverently intone, “Ha shem = the Name.”
 - b. they would refer to God by his generic title, *Elohim* but not by His covenant name; it was too holy for human lips to speak.
 - c. in fact according to Jewish practice, only one man could utter God's name, and then, only once a year, the high priest on the Day of Atonement as he stood before the ark of the

- covenant would say the name.
- d. when the scribes were copying the scriptures to a new scroll, when they came to the name Yahweh, they would rise from their place at the desk, take a bath, put on clean clothes, take a fresh quill and then write the name.
4. This is the kind of reverence for the name of God that developed among the Jews.
 5. You and I are called to no less a respect and honor for the Lord.
 - a. not that we would feel the need to change our clothes every time we read His name,
 - b. but that the Lord would hold such a holy place in our thinking that it would never, ever cross our minds to do anything that would defame or discredit Him in the minds of others.
 6. The only way that I will live a life of holiness is if I first see and honor the Lord as Holy!
 7. The honor I live *by*, is determined *first* by the honor I *give* to the Lord.
 8. Listen to the words of the Third Command again –

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.
 9. “You shall not **take** the name of the Lord your God in vain.”
 - a. you shall not TAKE it!
 - b. do we? – do we take it in vain? – not do we USE it in vain – do we **take** it?
 - c. when God’s name is being defiled and defamed by those around us, do we **take** it?
 - d. even worse, are we **entertained** by it?
 10. Many minority groups today are exerting their collective muscle to resist what they see as historic abuse and prejudice.
 - a. they say they aren’t going to **take** it anymore.
 - b. decades and sometimes even generations of abuse aren’t going to be tolerated any longer –
 - c. they’re going to stand up for themselves and not just sit back and take it.
 11. I think it’s time we adopted that mentality as far as the abuse of God’s name in the popular media.
 - a. one of the most common profanities you hear today is the abuse of God’s name.
 - b. when *Gone with the Wind* came out in the 30’s, it created a firestorm of debate all because of the use of one profanity at the end of the movie – when Clark Gable uttered the word “damn.”
 - 1) newspapers printed editorials about the **debasing** of culture.
 - 2) sermons were preached all across the country.
 - 3) the hew and cry was loud and long.
 - c. today – “damn” is not even one of the words censors care about!
 - d. it’s used by nearly everyone in the popular media, even many moral conservatives.
 12. And as a result, it’s lost its meaning!
 13. *Damn* comes from *damnation*, which refers to the assigning of someone to hell.
 - a. it’s a curse! The wishing and pronouncement of doom.
 - b. when someone “damns” something or someone, what they’re saying is they want that person or thing consigned to hell.
 - c. now think about it – isn’t this the very opposite of the desire and will of God?
 - d. didn’t Jesus come to save us from hell? Didn’t He endure the cross all so that we might be saved from such a fate?
 14. Friends, the devil has concocted an effective strategy for making light of the work of Christ by gutting the word **damn** of its real meaning and then spreading it so liberally through modern speech.
 15. And there’s no denying that public conversation has become profane in the extreme.
 - a. in the last month, there have been several times when I’ve been in public with my family or friends and overheard others engaged in conversation that was lewd and offensive.
 - 1) usually it’s men,
 - 2) but just this week while waiting for my Americano, I overheard two women, who were making no attempt to be quiet, speaking the grossest vulgarities!
 - b. *Gone With the Wind* had 1 profanity and created a massive debate –

- c. the new Affleck-Lopez movie contains 164 profanities!
 - d. and you know what? The critics will simply say it's a **bad movie** – virtually no one will be shocked at the content or the dialog.
16. One of the most common verbal abuses is the use of God's name in a profane way.
 - a. the overall effect is to make God so common that He becomes trivial.
 - b. the repeated use of His name desensitizes people to His reality and holiness.
 17. Think about it –
 - a. Men, how would you like people using your wife's name as a profanity? Or your mother's name?
 - b. Ladies, how would you like your husband's name, or you son or daughter's name bantered about by millions of people in an empty, yet mocking fashion?
 18. No – we'd be outraged – and every time we heard it, it would grate on our ears like fingers on a chalkboard! Like a dentist's drill bearing down on our tooth.
 19. And yet, we will sit in a theater, and listen to one abuse of God's name after another and hardly even notice.
 20. It's time we **stopped** taking it – stopped taking His name being used in vain, as a profanity.
 - a. Jesus died for my sins, and I am not going to sit here and listen to you throw His name around like some kind of despised thing.
 - b. I love Him, and no longer will I just sit back while He is defamed.
 - c. one day, at the mention of His Name, every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that → He is Lord!
 - d. I'm not waiting for that day – I will say it now! – Loud and long, and when I hear it emptied of its fame, gutted of it's glory and turned into nothing but a mindless profanity, I will not take it, I will not sit idly by and let it pass without comment.
 21. I have been told that if you get up and leave a movie before the half-way point – go to the theater manager and tell him/her why you are leaving, they will refund the cost of your ticket or give you a pass to a different show.
 - a. they record these protests --
 - b. and nothing is supposed to weight more heavily in the producers' and studios' minds than such protests.
 22. We ought not be offensive or mean-spirited in our opposition to the misuse of the Lord's name.
 - a. as in all things, we must be gentle and polite.
 - b. if we're going to stand up for His name then we'd better represent it as something lovely and winsome, not prudish, angry or hostile.

III. CONCLUSION

A. Positive

1. This commandment, as with the previous two, is put as a negative “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain,” but it implies a positive – “You **shall** Honor His name.”
2. There is no greater honor we can show the name of God than through worship, not just in the songs we sing, but in the lives we live.
3. Worship is more than singing – that's just one form of worship.
4. The truest worship is a life lived before the Face of God – being conscious of the Lord's presence 24/7/365.
5. Let's carry the Name of Our God, Jesus Christ, in this world, high.