

Exodus 20:7

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 January 1985

Preacher: Alex J MacDonald

[0 : 00] Now let's turn to the passage in Exodus where we have the Ten Commandments, Exodus chapter 20 and verse 7, the third commandment.

You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name. Now we've noticed that the first commandments in the list of ten are specifically concerned with God and the worship of God.

The first commandment tells us who it is that is to be worshipped, and the second one tells us something of how he is to be worshipped.

The third one continues that theme of how God is to be worshipped, but particularly it concentrates upon the attitude with which we are to worship God, the attitude of mind we are to have, the way in which we are to worship God in that sense.

Particularly it is concerning the way in which God's name is to be used. Now God's name implies a great deal more than simply the word God or the word the Lord.

[1 : 21] That is the particular name given to God that God revealed was the name of himself, the name Jehovah, which we sound as the Lord.

It means a great deal more than simply that name. Because the name of God stands for what God has revealed concerning himself.

Moses would not have known what that truth about God was unless God had revealed it. No one would know anything of God unless God chose to reveal.

And when he reveals himself, he reveals his name. And his name stands for his self-revelation and all that he has revealed concerning himself.

So when we're dealing with this commandment, we are to recognize that we're not just dealing with a question of using or abusing the name of God just as a word, but rather the whole question of how we use God's revelation, the fact that God has spoken to us, what he has said to us.

[2 : 36] But we may look at the commandment in the usual way of dividing it up into what is here condemned, what is forbidden, and also what is commanded.

So let's look first of all then at what is condemned by this commandment. And I think the first thing that we can see that is condemned here is what we may call blasphemy.

The sin of blasphemy is forbidden by this commandment. Now what does blasphemy mean? Well the word blasphemy simply means slander or speaking ill of someone.

And when it is used specifically of God, it means exactly the same as it would mean using it of a person. Speaking ill, in this sense, speaking ill of God.

Slandering God. Blaspheming God. That is basically what it means. In other words, it is speaking ill of God whom we could not know anything about unless God had revealed himself, unless God had given us his name.

[3 : 52] And so it is totally the opposite response of what God desires to his revelation of himself. God revealed himself to us so that we would come to him, so that we would love him.

But blasphemy is exactly the opposite response. It is rejecting, speaking ill of even that which God has revealed concerning himself.

Now of course, there are all different shades of blasphemy. There is the ordinary, we may say, abuse of God's name in a blasphemous way.

But there are extreme examples of blasphemy in the way in which people might set out to slander God and to speak evil of him.

And it's a strange thing that a great deal of what passes as theology today enters into that kind of sphere. Because in a great deal of theological works today, people will set up this picture that they think of as a laughable, outmoded picture of God.

[5 : 05] And they will make fun of it. And they will point out how ridiculous it is. And that men today cannot accept this picture of God. But that picture that they have set up in mockery is in fact self-revelation that God has given of himself in the Bible.

And what they are doing is blasphemy. A blasphemy far more serious than the thoughtless use of the name of God in ordinary conversation.

Because it is specifically this, speaking ill of God, slandering God, attributing to God motives and ideas that are not God's.

There is a particular example of blasphemy of which we read that Jesus specifically refers to. And that is blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Now that is a particularly difficult passage and a passage that has probably given us a lot of trouble in trying to understand exactly what Jesus means there.

[6 : 15] And it is a teaching in scripture that has caused, I believe, a great deal of heart searching among people, among good Christian people.

And a great deal of worry and anxiety concerning whether, in fact, they have committed this sin, which Jesus specifically says is an unforgivable sin, the only one that is unforgivable.

So we have to look very carefully at what is involved in this sin of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. Now if we look at that passage and examine it specifically in its context, we begin to see something of what Jesus was teaching.

We see that the context was indeed the healing of a man who had been demon-possessed. And in response to this healing of the man who had been under the domination of evil, the Pharisees did not say, what a wonderful thing that Jesus has exercised the power of the Spirit of God in this way to bring healing to the man.

But no, they said exactly the reverse. They attributed that healing of Jesus not to the Spirit of God, but to the power of the devil himself.

[7 : 43] They said in verse 24 of Matthew 12, it is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons. Now apart from anything else, as Jesus pointed out, that kind of charge was completely ludicrous.

How could a house that was divided like that stand? And certainly the power of Satan stands in this world in one form or another.

How could it stand if in fact one part of the power was being used against itself in that way? But apart from that, Jesus goes on to treat that statement as being far more serious than just a stupid, irrational statement.

Because he sees that what they are doing exhibits a mind that is set and hardened against God. And so he goes on to say that people speaking words against him, that will be forgiven.

But people who are blaspheming or slandering the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. What does he mean? I think it's clear that he means specifically this.

[9 : 02] Those who are attributing the work of God, the work of God's love and kindness, the work of God's grace, God's revelation of himself in Christ, those who are attributing that not to God but to Satan.

In fact, turning the whole of God's revelation on its head and saying that what is good is evil and what is evil is good.

And doing so persistently as the Pharisees were doing. That it would appear from this passage looked at in its context, comparing it with other passages of Scripture, that is what the sin against the Holy Spirit means.

And it is this extreme form of blasphemy against God. And as I've suggested, it exhibits a mind that is set against God, hardened against God.

And we know that the person who does not repent, the person who is set against God, that person is not forgiven. Because without repentance, there is no forgiveness of sins.

[10 : 17] So then, there we have the most extreme form of blasphemy. But it underlines for us how serious blasphemy of any kind really is.

Speaking evil of what is good. Speaking evil of God's love. Speaking evil of God's grace. Speaking evil of God's grace. Speaking evil of God's grace.

Speaking evil of God's grace. Then we have, of course, the ordinary, what we may call ordinary blasphemy, in the sense in which we've already dealt with it speaking to the children. But I'd like to just add this to that particular point.

And perhaps our priorities in regard to swearing have not always been just right in line with God's word.

Perhaps so often in our attitude, we have considered obscenity to be more disturbing than blasphemy.

[11 : 23] But in fact, that is not the order of scripture. Blasphemy is far more serious than obscenity. I'm not saying that obscenity is not serious.

It is, of course, also a sin in reviling God's good gifts to us in so many ways. But obscenity may be considered as an attack upon God's creation in the form of other people or in the form of things.

But blasphemy is an assault upon God himself and upon his own name. And so, no matter how lightly the name of God may be used in conversation, it is an extremely serious thing.

And it shows the way in which we in the 20th century have so much lost our way that the name of God can be used freely in a profane way in the media.

But it perhaps still causes some shock if obscenities of various kinds are used. Now that shows how values have been confused and turned upon their heads in the world in which we live today.

[12 : 37] And we as Christians ought to try to reestablish some sense of priorities in this. And we ought to be more hurt by the use of God's name and blasphemy than by obscenity.

Although we ought to be hurt by that as well. But so often it has come to be the other way around. Well then, secondly, what is condemned by this commandment is magic.

Now what I mean by magic is not what we may call the sleight of hand kind of magic, which is just a form of entertainment. But what I mean by magic is in fact what we may call black magic and what used to be known as magic.

And this had a great deal to do with the use of names. Use of names giving particular power. Using of spells, those kinds of things.

Now whatever we may think about that whole phenomenon, there is no doubt that there is a great power in such a thing. We know that in primitive societies even today, and in perhaps not so primitive, there is this use of black magic or of voodoo that uses names and spells to cause great evil.

[13 : 58] Now we don't perhaps fully understand how these things work, but there certainly is a power there. And no doubt, as in all these cases of the occult, the evil one himself is behind it, using it and engineering it.

But the point that I would like to draw attention to here is that part of what was being forbidden by this commandment was the abuse of God's name in any magical way.

You see, the idea of magic is that if you know the name, if you know the secret, then you can wield power. You can use that name to get your own way in some sense.

Now that is specifically what the Hebrews were being forbidden to do. They were being forbidden to think that because God had revealed his name to them, because God had spoken to them, because God had made a covenant with them, because God had given all his commandments and his regulations to them, that therefore they could just use that, giving them some sort of power, even power over God, that just by going through the right mechanics of the rituals, using just the name, the sound of God's name, that by doing that, they would somehow compel God.

They would have power, even over God himself, that they were forbidden to do and to think. Now that is still something to say to us today, because it reminds us that we are not to think that just by using God's name in prayer, that just by going through the right mechanics of the thing, that we are actually truly worshipping God.

[15 : 58] We are being forbidden to think that. And we are being forbidden specifically to think that we can have in any sense a power over God by what he has revealed to us.

We are forbidden to think that simply by praying to God in a certain form of words, we are going to get our own way, whatever we are praying for. We are being forbidden to think that.

Because we have to pray in accordance with what God has revealed concerning himself. We are to pray in accordance with the fact that God is God.

And God is in control over all of life. And God is sovereign. And he does what he wills. He has asked us to pray to him.

He has revealed himself to us so that we can pray to him. But it must always be with the thought, not just at the back of our minds, but at the front of our minds, that God will answer our prayers as he sovereignly desires.

[17:06] We pray for what we see to be right to pray for. But we must recognize that God sometimes answers no to our prayers.

Even though they may have been perfectly legitimate prayers to pray, yet God may indeed answer no to them, because he in his sovereign wisdom sees that what we wanted was not going to be good for us or for other people.

But he works all things together for good to those who love him. And then, thirdly, this commandment condemns hypocrisy.

And that follows on in some sort of way from what I've been just saying already. Because the expression here that is, you shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, could be translated, you shall not take the name of the Lord your God falsely.

This idea of some kind of falsehood or dishonesty is coming into this. And we're being told we ought not to worship God falsely in any sense, or dishonestly.

[18:21] Now, one of the clear examples of this kind of thing, of course, is taking false oaths. And that's part of what's involved here. In other words, taking an oath by the name of God that what you say is true, but what you're actually saying is a lie.

In other words, swearing that you are telling the truth, but in fact you are lying. Now, that is a clear example of something that is forbidden by this commandment.

And the Lord Jesus talks about this whole question, again in the passage we read in Matthew chapter 5. Because there, the Lord Jesus was dealing with a particular phenomenon of his day, and one that perhaps has not died out altogether.

That was the idea that only oaths that were taken in the name of the Lord, only they were binding. And if you took oaths by any other thing, they were just not considered just to be quite so serious. And you could get out of them. That's why there's the reference to swearing by heaven, or by earth, or by Jerusalem, or whatever. That people thought by doing that, they could get out of it.

[19:34] They read this commandment with the emphasis not upon the words, taking God's name in vain or falsely, but they read it with the emphasis upon the name of the Lord.

That if you use something else in an oath, or swearing to tell the truth, not by God, then you could sort of wriggle out of it.

Now the Lord Jesus was specifically speaking against that. And he was saying that the simplest thing is simply to be a man of your word.

A man who is honest and true. So that when you say yes, in answer to a question, people know that what you're saying is true. Or when you say no, they know that what you're saying is true.

You don't need to add things on. You don't need to add oaths and swears to try to convince people if in fact you are truthful. Now we know that Peter himself fell into that kind of trap because when he was asked about whether he was a follower of Jesus, remember as he sat in the courtyard when Jesus was being tried, he answered lying that he did not know Jesus.

[20:49] He wasn't a follower of him. He added oaths and curses. An indication really that what he was saying was untrue because of all these additions that he was making.

And all too often we can see that in other people and maybe in ourselves as well. That when we know that what we're perhaps saying is not exactly the truth, we go out of our way to try to emphasize that we are telling the truth.

Now that's something of what is involved here in this commandment. But particularly, we are being told that when we are on oath to tell the truth, for example, in a court of law where we swear to tell the truth, then what we say ought indeed to be the truth and not to misuse God's name in that way. But most importantly, I think, in this aspect of the commandment, the hypocritical worship of God is forbidden.

That is what Jesus was so clear to speak against in his day when he talked in Mark chapter 7 of the scribes and the Pharisees worshipping God, worshipping them with their lips, but their hearts were far from him.

[22:15] Worshipping God, but doing so according to the commandments of men and not according to the commandments of God. He said, they have made vain the worship of God.

They've made it empty or they've made it false. The same idea of in vain that's used in this commandment. In other words, their worship was not genuine.

There may be a variety of reasons for that. A variety of reasons for it in the day in which Jesus lived. But particularly at the root of it was the fact that the Pharisees did not want to accept what was the

clear indication of God's word concerning the great need of the Christ.

The great need of the Christ and the recognition of that person in Jesus Christ himself as the one who was going to by his authority overcome evil and by his death bring forgiveness for sins.

In other words, they would not accept God's way as it was completely revealed. Now, ourselves today, we may fall into that same kind of sin.

[23 : 23] We may be guilty of hypocrisy in worship or not being genuine in our worship. We may, like the scribes and Pharisees, have the right form of words, may have the right form of doctrines.

We may, taking our own church, we may be very proud of the fact that the free church stands for what the Bible teaches. But the question that we have to ask ourselves, is our worship of God real and genuine?

Are we really worshipping God from our hearts or is it only lip service as in the case of the scribes and Pharisees? Is it going through the motions, the outward motions of worship going along with what we say, yes, is the best form of worship but in fact our heart is not in it because our heart is not really in the right place as far as God's word is concerned, concerning Jesus Christ himself.

These then are many ways in which this commandment applies to ourselves. Things that are condemned, practices, thoughts that are condemned by this commandment.

But then we need to look secondly at what is actually commanded, what is urged upon us here as the good way to live by this commandment because we must never present these commandments simply in a negative way that we're being told just to avoid things but rather there is a positive way of life that has been set before us here.

[25 : 08] A positive way of life which we ourselves in our own strength will fail to do. But by the grace of God, by the love of Jesus Christ and the forgiveness through him, the Christian will be enabled by his spirit to walk that way.

So these words are not only words to condemn us, to show us that we are sinners and we need salvation. In that sense they're the schoolmaster to lead us to Christ, but these words are also words for the Christian to show to us how we are to please God and how we are to live for him.

Let's look then at what's commanded here. Well, if the false worship of God is forbidden, then of course the right worship, the right attitude in worship is commanded here.

What is the right attitude for worship? Well, the Lord Jesus himself gives us that in the passage we read in John chapter 4.

He said that the time had now arrived when people were no longer to worship God in Jerusalem or on this mountain, Mount Gerasim where the Samaritans thought they should worship God.

[26 : 31] That time he said was past. Those who worship God must worship him in spirit and in truth. Now, this ties in exactly with what this commandment is saying because it tells us that we are to use rightly the name of God.

And as we've seen, the name of God is God's self-revelation. So, we are to worship him in spirit and in truth. Now, let's break that down into the two parts.

Worshiping in spirit and then worshiping in truth. To worship God in spirit means that we are worshiping him as those who are spiritual beings.

Jesus was saying people have been attempting to worship God in what we would today call mechanical ways.

They've been attempting to worship God simply by going through the rituals, simply by going through a list of regulations. And they thought that by following out these to the letter, they were really worshiping God.

[27 : 50] Jesus says, no, those who worship the Father must worship him in spirit. They must recognize that we are not machines or animals that can just live according to dictated laws, but that we are persons made in the image of God.

That's why we're called spirit, spiritual beings, and we're to live as spirits in the presence of God and in the service of God. We are to live and worship as those who have been created to have a likeness to God so that we can speak to God, so that we can hear God speaking to us, so that there will be a living and vital communication and fellowship between God and us.

That's something of what's involved in this statement that we are to worship God in spirit. We are to come in the wholeness of our personhood as human beings and come to God as that, not simply seeing worship as a sort of part, compartment into which we can put everything that's religious or spiritual, but rather we come as those who are spirit to God who is spirit.

And there in that real and genuine worship we are fulfilling this commandment and we will not be worshipping God in vain.

So there's this emphasis upon the living and vital reality of worship, not a dead form of some kind, not a ritual that's just repeated, not just a habit that's gone through, mechanically, but it is something real and vital because the person loves the God whom he is worshipping.

[29 : 54] And that leads us on to the second part, those who worship God must worship him in truth. Now I think that means a deal more than simply what I've been saying about genuine worship.

It's not just saying that we must worship him truly, it's saying that we must worship him in truth. And the truth has been revealed to us by God.

It's saying we must come to God in the way in which he has told us to come. Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

No man comes to the Father but by me. We must come by the truth. truth. And the truth is more than just a list of regulations or commandments.

The truth is summed up in a person, in Jesus Christ, in what he is in himself and in what he did upon the cross. So when we are to worship God in truth, we are to come by the way God has revealed.

[31 : 05] we've been talking already about God's name being what God has revealed concerning himself. Well, we are to come to God by that way.

And that way is Jesus Christ himself. So we cannot keep this commandment unless we come to God through Christ.

And we cannot go on keeping it unless we go on coming to God through Jesus Christ. Christ. And here we see the way in which the law and the gospel dovetails together.

They fit together. They are not two things that should be always set at opposite poles, as it were.

But we see here that what is commanded by the law can only be fulfilled by us, can only be kept by us, if we come by the way of the gospel, by the way that God has revealed in Jesus Christ.

And when we come through Jesus, then we are worshipping God in truth. Then we are not taking God's name in vain, but we are taking God's name rightly.

[32 : 18] And we are accepting and believing what God has revealed concerning himself, and we're coming that way. Now here again, as we've seen so often, and we will continue to see, no doubt, because it's there fundamentally in scripture and of fundamental relevance to us today, we see that there is only one way to come to God, and that is the Lord Jesus.

There is only one truth, there is only one name of God in that sense, the one way that God has revealed. And this is where this commandment and this teaching of Jesus stands in contradiction to the spirit of the age in which we live.

A spirit of the age which is really a blasphemous spirit which says there are many ways. It says it doesn't matter what you believe in or who you believe in, there are many different ways.

But Jesus says no, there is one way, I am the way. The commandment says we must use God's name rightly, and there is no choice about it. It is God's name or none.

So then the command comes to us today showing us the way of salvation, linking it in with what Jesus says concerning himself. It brings us God's message of salvation.

[33 : 44] And the question comes to us just the same as it came to the Israelites long ago at Mount Sinai. The question comes, are you going to obey what God has commanded?

God commands us to come by the Lord Jesus Christ, to come by that way. No man comes to the Father except by him. The question is, are we to accept that invitation and respond to that command?

That is the only way of salvation. And without our response, without our believing in that and repenting of our sins, there is no salvation.

But for every person who does that, for every person who does respond in faith to that command, they know the life that is brought by the keeping of these commandments.

Do this and you shall live, is the message of Old and New Testament. We discover that we cannot do it in our own strength, we cannot do it in our own way, but we discover that we can do it.

[34 : 52] We can keep the law, not perfectly, but we can walk that way substantially, we can do it through the grace of Jesus Christ. Do this and you shall live.

The person who walks that way begins to know the life of God. Let us not pretend that his life suddenly becomes totally happy with complete absence of all kinds of problems, sadness, or all

kinds of sadness is not so, but he knows life and he knows that he is on a journey that has a definite destination, the destination of his eternal home.

And if he's walking that way by the Lord Jesus Christ, he is on his way to heaven and indeed he may know heaven here on earth at various times in his experience as he walks that way in pleasing God.

Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray. Let us pray.