

3rd Commandment Part 2

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[0 : 00] You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses His name.

Now those of us who were here last week will remember that we began to consider this commandment, but we did so focusing exclusively on the matter of the name, this name that is not to be misused.

Now we did recognize and we reaffirm that the prohibition of the commandment, or if you wish to look at it from another angle, the protection that is afforded to the name of God by this commandment extends to all the names of God as they are revealed to us in the Scriptures.

All are to be properly and respectfully handled. That said, we did focus particular attention, I think legitimately so, on God's special covenant name, the very name He uses as He addresses His people in the giving of these commandments.

I am the Lord your God. I am Jehovah. I am Yahweh. And we noticed last week how the name Yahweh, though in use from the very beginning, we saw at the very beginning in Genesis how this name is used, how this name was explained in a fuller way to Moses at the burning bush.

[1 : 39] And we also stressed that with the coming of Jesus, the name was most fully and vividly revealed. As we noted, Jesus is presented to us by the New Testament writers as kurios, the great Christian testimony.

Jesus is Lord. Jesus is kurios. And that Greek word kurios being the very name used in the Septuagint and the Hebrew translation of the Old Testament to translate the Hebrew name Yahweh or Jehovah.

Well, that was all last Sunday evening. And today we move on to consider two questions that we had already noted last Sunday evening. And that is, how can we trash the name?

And how can we treasure the name? The commandment, in a sense, in the first instance, is talking about the misuse of the name, the trashing of the name.

But as is often done, and particularly in our own catechism, there is the sense in which we don't only look at the prohibition, but also what is required in the commandment.

[2 : 55] And so that really is what we're doing here when we speak about how we can be guilty of trashing the name, but also how we can treasure the name. So that's what we're going to do this evening.

Those two questions are going to be our concern. But before we do consider both of these questions, there is profit in exploring a little the language used in the commandment, the language that is translated in the words that we have just read, you shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, very particularly that first part of the commandment.

Now, our own professor, John L. Mackay, professor of Hebrew and Old Testament at the Free Church College, has a commentary, a very helpful commentary on the book of Exodus.

And he provides a literal translation of these words that we find in verse 7. And a literal translation would be as follows.

So I'll just repeat that, because what we're going to go on to say is built in great measure on an understanding of this language that is used.

[4 : 16] You shall not bear up or lift up the name of the Lord your God to falsehood or to emptiness. In fact, literally the word is to emptiness.

Now, the language of bearing up or of lifting up is not used on its own to refer to speech. And the word name that we have in the commandment refers to more than merely uttering the sound of the word Yahweh.

Now, that is important because really what that highlights is that the primary concern of the commandment is not profanity or verbal blasphemy.

Now, don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying for a moment that a careless expression of the name of God is not considered or is not forbidden by the commandment.

Clearly, it is. But that is not the primary concern of the commandment. Well, if that is not the primary concern, or in any case that is what I'm suggesting or arguing, what is the primary concern of the commandment?

[5 : 31] What is it forbidding in regard to our use of, our handling of, the name of God? Well, bearing in mind what we have just noticed, and particularly this literal understanding of the words that are used in the commandment, it seems to me that this commandment can be applied both in the matter of trashing the name and of treasuring the name in two particular contexts, which I'm going to describe as in here and out there.

Now, when I speak about one context of where this commandment can be broken as being in here, I'm referring to the matter of worship, and specifically Christian worship, because it would be in Christian worship that the name would be used.

So, the name can be both trashed and treasured in here, in the context of worship. But the name can also be trashed, and the name can also be treasured out there.

And when I speak about out there, I'm referring to the bearing of the name, the lifting up of the name, the bearing of the name in public testimony to others.

And that, as we'll notice in a moment, is about how we, who bear the name, present the name to others in the lives that we live.

[7 : 05] So, this is our concern, to consider how we can be guilty of trashing the name, to consider the great and wonderful opportunity we have to treasure the name in these two contexts.

In here, in the context of worship, and out there, in the context of our lives of discipleship. Well, how can we, first of all, trash the name in here and out there?

First of all, in here, in Christian worship. And I would suggest two ways, and no doubt we could multiply the examples, but I think two fundamental ways in which we can be guilty of trashing the name of the Lord our God in here, in the context of public worship, or gathered, the gathered worship of God's people.

First of all, by lifting up the name falsely. Lifting up the name falsely. And just to give a wee nudge to those who are doing the sheets, listen carefully here.

That's the first way in which we can trash the name in here. Lifting up the name falsely. Now, what do I mean by that? Well, I'm thinking about Christian worship, and specifically, though not exclusively, but specifically preaching, that empties the name of God.

[8 : 30] Preaching that belittles God. Preaching that questions His Word. We know that there is much preaching in our land, where the preacher would be so bold as to question what he reads in the Bible, and to correct God's theology.

Ludicrous, though that may seem. There are many preachers who would read a passage and say, well, this is all very nice, but of course, we don't actually believe that happened, or we don't really believe God is like that.

We don't really believe He's that severe or that harsh. And so, in so presenting God, they are lifting up the name of God to emptiness.

They are emptying the name of God of its meaning. In that manner. In here. We can lift up the name falsely.

Now, this for us isn't maybe too uncomfortable, because we can sit back and say, oh, well, that doesn't happen here. That doesn't happen in the free church.

[9 : 33] We wouldn't be guilty of such things. And in the measure that that is so, well, let us give thanks to God. But it is a danger that we should certainly be conscious of and aware of, even in our own churches, where we would consider ourselves to be Bible-believing, or Orthodox, or conservative.

But there's another way in which we can trash the name of God in here. Not only lifting up the name falsely, but also lifting up the name lightly or hypocritically.

And again, a wee nudge to those who are doing the sheets. Lifting up the name hypocritically. Now, that is much more of a danger for those of us in conservative churches, Bible-believing churches like our own.

The content of our worship, the praise that we offer, the preaching we trust, may be sound. We don't deliberately, or we don't, certainly it's not our intention to misrepresent God verbally in what we say.

But we can still be guilty. Indeed, I'm sure we are often guilty of lifting up the name lightly or hypocritically. Our words are sound, but our hearts are cold.

[10 : 59] We name the name in praise, but we have little genuine resolve to do that which we sing. As someone has put it, I read this in some book I was reading, Christians do not tell lies.

They just sing them in their hymns, or in our case, in our psalms. Or we don't tell lies. We just sing them in our psalms. Maybe as Christians who gather to worship God in a church where certainly the intention is to do justice to what we find in the Bible, we can be, and I'm not suggesting this is true of folks here, but we can be quick to identify any hint of heresy in what is being said in a sermon.

But maybe we can be very slow to apply even the very simple demands of the gospel to our lives. And so we can be guilty of trashing the name of the Lord in worship in here, by lifting up the name falsely or by lifting up the name lightly or hypocritically.

Now, this is nothing new. The people of God were often guilty of such worship, be it false worship or hypocritical worship. To just read a couple of verses from the book of Ecclesiastes in chapter 5 and verses 1 and 2, words of warning to us.

Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools who do not know that they do wrong.

[12 : 43] Do not be quick with your mouth. Do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, and so let your words be few.

The helpful warning that we be careful about what we say, about the words that we utter, the promises that we make, the vows that we would be engaged in taking.

For we can be guilty in these things of lifting up the name of the Lord lightly or hypocritically. Maybe on this matter of considering how we can trash the name of the Lord our God in here.

First of all, we suggested by lifting up the name falsely, secondly, by lifting up the name lightly. And particularly that second aspect, we can give the final word to words that we find in Hamlet.

And I quote, My words fly up, my thoughts remain below. Words without thoughts never to heaven go. Of course, they do often go to heaven, or at least we attempt for them to reach heaven.

[13 : 59] But the danger here, my words fly up, my thoughts remain below, I think is a constant one that we have to be battling with.

So there are some or two ways in which we can trash the name of the Lord in here, in worship. But we can also be guilty of trashing the name of the Lord out there.

Now, I recognize that we cannot falsely divorce in here and out there. We cannot separate in here and out there.

The two contexts are intimately and inextricably connected. And yet, they are also distinct. Connected, but distinct.

And so we can think of particular ways where we can be guilty of trashing the name out there. To lift up the name of the Lord to emptiness out there takes us into the territory of our testimony to the world.

[15 : 06] I'd already suggested that as we introduced the message this morning. But to develop it, this evening rather, but to develop it a little. We are Christians. We are the Christ ones.

We bear the name. The very moment that we identify ourselves to others as Christians, we are bearing the name. We are lifting up the name.

We are saying, look at me. I am a Christ one. I am a follower of Jesus. I am a worshiper of Jesus. I reflect Jesus.

We are lifting up the name in public testimony. Whether we like it or not, whether we feel perhaps rather intimidated by this reality, but whether we like it or not, we are permanently bearing the name.

Given that, how can we trash the name out there? Now, the examples that could be given, indeed, even as we turn to the Scriptures to consider examples would be many.

[16 : 12] But I just want to limit myself to a couple of examples, a couple of texts from both Testaments that illustrate how a Christian can be guilty of trashing the name of the Lord, our God, out there in public testimony to those who surround us.

The first one, the first example of the many we could maybe have chosen to fix our eyes upon, the first relates to the passage that we read in 2 Samuel.

The story is familiar of David, the king of Israel. Now, David as king, very particularly represented Yahweh.

He was Yahweh's king. He formally bore the name of Yahweh before the nations. He bore and lifted up the name as the king of God's people, of Yahweh's covenant people.

And yet this man who lifted up the name, who bore the name, committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered Uriah. And what is the solemn indictment of God through the prophet Nathan to David, the bearer of his name in the light of his sin?

[17 : 32] Well, we read the passage there in 2 Samuel. And this is what God says through Nathan to David. By doing this, clearly referring to the sins that he had committed.

By doing this, you have made the enemies of the Lord show utter contempt. And it's understood for the Lord. You bear the name of Yahweh.

You lift up the name of the Lord. And yet, by your behavior, by your actions, by your sins, you have made others show utter contempt for the name.

You have made others mock the name. You have made others belittle the name. You are guilty of lifting up the name to emptiness that others would say, well, what kind of God must David have?

And so there we have a very solemn example given of how this commandment can be broken, how we can trash the name of the Lord out there.

[18 : 42] We turn to the New Testament and we simply read a couple of verses that also touch on the same theme or that speak of the same way in which we can be guilty of trashing the name of the Lord out there.

First of all, in Romans chapter 2 and verses 23 and 24, we read there, You who brag about the law, you who bear the name, you who pride yourselves in being Yahweh's covenant people, you who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?

As it is written, God's name is blasphemed. Notice the very word that we use when we speak of breaking this commandment. God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.

Now, we might say, well, here those guilty of blasphemy are the Gentiles. That's true. But why? Why do they blaspheme the name of God? Because of the conduct of those who bear the name.

Because of the conduct of those who bear the name but whose lives do not reflect that or whose lives draw this mockery upon the name.

[20 : 00] And one other verse in the New Testament that touches on the same matter in Titus chapter 1 and verse 16. Without much explanation, simply read this verse.

Titus 1 and verse 16. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny Him. They are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for doing anything good.

Now, it's true that in the context here who are being spoken of are those who falsely claim to be Christians. But the principle, I think, is valid. Those who claim to know God, those who name the name, but by their actions they deny them, or deny Him rather.

And that is something we too can be guilty of. So, we trash the name out there. We blaspheme by our sinful lives.

We lift up the Lord to emptiness when people observe us out there and conclude that though we call ourselves Christians, our attitudes and our conduct are not consistent with our profession.

[21 : 09] So, in that manner, we can also be guilty of breaking this commandment, of misusing the name, of trashing the name, in here, but also out there.

Now, the second question, we'll deal with this more briefly because really it's just the other side of the coin of the question. We've just considered how we can trash the name.

And I'm sure even if I left it here and left you to work it out for yourselves how we can treasure the name, it wouldn't be so difficult to do as you think of what's already been said and think of the inverse as it were.

But let's just comment on it briefly. How can we treasure the name of the Lord our God in here, in gathered worship of God?

Well, we can treasure the name in here, in what we might call true worship, in true worship. Again, for those of you who are doing the sheets, you might just want to pay attention here.

[22 : 15] We treasure the name of God in here, in true worship, where there is biblically faithful preaching and praise that lifts up the name of God in a manner that does justice, or a measure of justice to who He is.

It would be a very foolish thing to imagine or to presume that the preaching, indeed that is preached in this pulpit, does full justice to the name.

Far from it. But in the measure that it does some justice to the name, in the measure that there is a genuine concern to do justice to the name, in this true worship, then we treasure the name of the Lord our God.

In true worship, but also in heart worship. Again, this is the inverse of what we've been talking about, about false worship and light or hypocritical worship.

The reverse is true worship and what we can call heart worship. We treasure the name of the Lord our God where there is heart worship, where the worship is the worship of those who love the name, the worship of those who treasure the name, the worship of those who long to lift up the name and honor the name and glorify the name of the Lord our God.

[23 : 37] And such worship cannot be turned on like a light switch at half past ten on a Sunday morning or at half past five on a Sunday afternoon.

We can't say, oh, I'm going into church. I'm going to switch on my worship mode that my worship would be acceptable to God. Such heart worship must be the outward expression of lives dedicated to the worship of God.

And as we come to public worship, we come prepared. As we look back in gratitude on a week of faithful service and look forward expectantly to a new week of gospel opportunity.

In that manner, we come and we engage in what we might call heart worship. Heart worship where we treasure the name of the Lord our God.

So in here, we can treasure the name in that manner. What about out there? Well, we treasure the name out there. In public testimony to others, we treasure the name out there by winsome, humble, attractive Christian lives lived in the presence of God and in the service of others.

[24 : 54] There is no other way to lift up the name of the Lord to fullness out there. Now, such a life must involve the naming of the name of Jesus.

We certainly must walk the walk, but we must also, most assuredly, talk the talk. So we treasure the name out there as we tell others of Jesus, as we enthuse over His person, as we share of the wonder of His saving work, as we share a word in season concerning Jesus and His love with others who surround us.

And as we do that, as we do that, out of loyalty to Him, out of love for others, we are treasuring the name. We're treasuring the name. We are doing what this commandment requires in the language of the catechism.

So the question for us is, do we treasure the name of the Lord our God out there? You know, we read this commandment, and if we think of it simply as a prohibition of profanity, we can feel very self-righteous.

Well, I don't do that. I don't do that. Other people do that. Oh, the young people today and teenagers and television. It's shocking. All the profanity. I don't do that. But I think we've realized that there are so many ways in which we, we who have greater responsibility, can be guilty of misusing the name of the Lord our God.

[26 : 27] In here. Yes, even in here. But also so often out there. Do we treasure the name of the Lord our God out there?

Will we, in this year that has begun, resolve with God's help to do so, to treasure the name of the Lord our God? A final word concerning the final part of the commandment that we haven't even touched on, and we will do so very fleetingly now.

The full commandment is, you shall not use, sorry, you shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord your God will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses His name.

God is telling us that it is a serious matter to misuse His name. God is telling us that to lift up His name to emptiness is a serious matter, and it carries guilt upon us when we are guilty of doing so.

If then we are guilty of breaking this commandment, as I would hope and imagine, and I'm sure we all have come to that conclusion in the light of what we have seen, what can we do?

[27 : 48] What can we do with this guilt that is upon us? We are guilty. With David before Nathan, we have to say, I have sinned against God. I am guilty of breaking this commandment.

What can I do? Well, we can do no other than go to the cross. We can do no other than go to the cross where the offended one, the one we have offended, where the offended one bore our guilt.

The cross where in the most extraordinary way the name of the Lord was lifted up. Lifted up that He might draw all men, guilty men like you and me, to Himself.

There is where we must go, and there is no other place that we can go, and there our guilt is wiped away. Let us pray. On the other hand of you, What? ■■■'s husband and Wendy –