

Sunday, June 26, 2022 | Ten

Exodus 20:7 | "Our God's Name Is Special"

A couple weeks ago, we kicked off a new 11-week series called "Ten," in which we'll be exploring the first set of commandments given to the Jews in Exodus and how they can still help guide the Christian today. Using parallel passages, we'll discover that the principles God tried to instill in Israel in the Old Testament find fulfillment through Jesus in the New Testament. And how, while the believer is no longer bound to the Law for salvation (i.e., justification), we can still use it to become more like Christ (i.e., sanctification).

In the first week, we studied what Christ had to say about all the commandments rather than dive headlong into the ten commandments. In Matthew 22, we learned that Jesus summed up the duty of man into two sentences: love God with everything and love others as yourself. On these two things, Jesus says, hang all the law and the prophets. Those two commands give context to everything else in the Bible and life. So much so that **a love for God and neighbor brings certainty in a world of uncertainty.** We can still make good decisions in uncertain situations even with no explicit command. The Scriptures can still speak into a 22nd context because its' principles are sufficiently broad enough to encompass all human experience. It is hard to go wrong when you are consumed with love for God and others.

Two weeks ago, we finally got to the titular Decalogue by exploring the first commandment. The Ten Commandments were not created by a committee. They were, quite literally, given to us by the voice of God. They are not the sloppy byproduct of some internet poll but are timeless concepts forged within a divine mind. Therefore, since these ideas come from outside human reasoning, the Decalogue (i.e., the "Ten Words") and all other truths within Scripture embody objective truth. Who better to teach us how we ought to live than a being whose judgment is not clouded by shifting opinions, influenced by fluctuating emotions, or pressured by changing circumstances? And the first word upon which all the other divine words stand is this: Have no other gods but God. **And if there is no god but Yahweh, then we should have no other god but God.** Why would we give anything or anyone who is not a god that sort of devotion that only God deserves? What a waste of worship that would be. And is not Jesus worthy of all of our worship?

Last week, we unpacked the second prohibition in the Decalogue. And unlike the first command, which prohibits the *having* of other gods, the second prohibits the *making* of anything that's supposed to represent God (i.e., idols, icons, images, etc.). It's a subtle distinction, to be sure, but it's no less important. There are so-called "worship practices" in this

world that are wrong. And these practices often make use of things we might call “idols.” Commandment two shows that Yahweh should not be expressed in any manmade thing because he is the one who makes, not the one who is made. However much we may try, the creature cannot create a perfect representation of its Creator. Moreover, that command also reminds us that our Creator has already created images that bear his likeness: *us* (cf. Gen. 1:26; Eph. 2:10). Idolatry, in all forms, not only **downgrades** who God is but it also **diminishes** who men and women were made to be.

Today, we'll unpack the third prohibition in the Decalogue: do not take God's name in vain.

READ: Exodus 20:7 (ESV)

“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.”

The third commandment is an outlier amongst the commandments for two reasons:

First off, while God is the one speaking (cf. 20:1, 18-19), he speaks about himself in the *third person*.¹ Rather than say, “you shall not take my name in vain, for I will not hold him guiltless who takes my name in vain;” he says, “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.” The effect this has on us is that God speaks about his own name as if it was a thing to itself. To be sure, it is not to be detached from God. But the way God frames the sentence, he seems to structure a degree of holiness and respect to His name that one might've thought is due only to God himself. God's name is not some trifling thing to be bantered about thoughtlessly. Just as one would be conscious of God's presence if you could see him in the room (you should, btw, because he is in the room), we ought to be cognizant of God's name when it is on our lips. Why? Because it is a precious gift (cf. Ex. 3:13-15).

Secondly, this one is the broadest of the other commandments. The first and secondments dealt with the fact that God is Israel's God, and he is not to be worshipped through the use of a created object (i.e., idol). And commandments four through ten deal with a specific topic (i.e., Sabbath, parents, murder, adultery, etc.). All of those rules are pretty clear and straightforward. But here, with the third word in the Decalogue, we are given a broad prohibition and a broad consequence if we break that prohibition.

¹ Kass, Leon R., *Founding God's Nation: Reading Exodus*, (New Haven & London; Yale University Press, 2021), p. 314.

The broad prohibition of the third commandment stems from two of the Hebrew word used. The first is what is translated as "take" in our passage. Obviously, "take" indicates something is taken and therefore carried about. But it can also mean to bear as in, I bear the name of my father.² It is a word used to distinguish someone from someone else. The second is what is translated as "vain." And, once again, it will surprise no one that "vain" means something is empty. But it can also refer to something that is a lie, a deception, or false testimony. I prefer Wright's translation which reads, "You shall not lift up the name of Yahweh your God to worthlessness."³

The broad consequence of the third commandment stems from the fact that no specific punishment is given. God says that he will not hold the one who takes his name in vain "guiltless." Meaning they will be guilty and deserving of punishment. God doesn't tell us exactly what that punishment will look like. In a sense, this is far worse than if God had attached a specific consequence. At least then we'd know what was coming. It seems that God will mark each misuse of his name and punish according to each instance.

Broadly speaking, we break the third commandment in two ways:

i. When we speak God's name in an irreverent way.

In Scripture, there are three ways in which we speak God's name in an irreverent way:⁴

- Using God's name as an explicative.
- Breaking a promise made in court or to an individual (cf. Deut. 6:13; Jer. 4:2; 12:16; Psa. 127:1; Matt. 5:33-37).
- Preachers claiming a message is from the Lord when it isn't (Deut. 18:17-22; Jer. 23:9-40).

Speaking a name is a form of "taking." And once we possess something, there are consequences for how we use it. For instance, he will react to my tone depending on how I speak my son's name. If I'm upset, he'll feel alarmed. If I'm happy, he'll feel joy. How he hears his name pronounced is a way for him to know what I'm thinking. Likewise, if we're indifferent to God's name and use it irreverently, he is displeased because he is deserving of all the deference and reverence we can muster. This is why the third word in the Decalogue is so

² Durham, John I., *Exodus*, The Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 3, (Grand Rapids; Zondervan, 1987), p. 287.

³ Wright, Christopher J.H., *Exodus*, The Story of God Bible Commentary, (Grand Rapids; Zondervan Academic, 2021), p. 364.

⁴ Wright (2021), p. 364-365.

important: "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." (Ex. 20:7)

The Lord's name was not something we discovered on our own; it was a gift to humanity. When Moses asked for his name, God said he was, "I AM" (Ex 3:14). To be sure, this is a curious name, and I doubt we'll ever truly understand everything it means. But, at the very least, the Lord's name speaks of his always present essence, or what theologians call his "omnipresence." Just as he was there with Moses in the wilderness, he is here with us in our present. There has never been a moment where God wasn't near.

So, what does this have to do with taking his name in vain? Whenever we take his name in an empty way, we testify about something that God has never been: empty. He is the I AM, and the whole earth is filled with his glory (Isa. 6:3). Go to the bottom of the ocean; he is there. Go to the top of the world; he is there. Go to the ends of the universe; he is there. Our God is everywhere.

Given, it's easy to forget this. I imagine if God showed up as a burning bush as he did with Moses, I doubt we'd use his name flippantly. But that desert shrub was nothing more than an illustration. Just as it was shrouded by fire, Moses was surrounded by God's presence. And if God is everywhere, his name should never be used flippantly. Every place we walk is hallowed ground (Ex 3:5). We may not perceive him with our eyes, but we know he is wherever we are. Heaven itself is God's throne, and we are at eye level with his footstool (Isa. 66:1).

If one stood before a powerful king, they'd be careful how they addressed him, or they might regret it. So, we ought to think twice while ever-standing within God's vicinity.

Yahweh takes his name seriously.

ii. When we bear God's name in an irreverent way.

Just as speaking was a form of "taking," so, too, is bearing a form of "taking." If I were to go into Walmart and I was looking for something and couldn't find it, what do you think I'd do? Would I track down some dude dressed as I was and ask him where the lightbulbs are? No. Of course not. Instead, I'd find a person wearing one of those blue vests with the "how may I help you" embroidered on the back. Likewise, those who name the name of God and call themselves his followers ought to be easily recognizable as God's people. However, we do not wear vests; instead, we are known by our *conduct*. What we *do* is like a fashion statement about our spiritual allegiance. And should we choose to wear the Christian's colors, our behavior had better reflect our fashion sense.

In the book of Isaiah, there's a particular passage that condemns Judah for living contrary to their worship:

READ: Isaiah 1:10-20 (ESV)

¹⁰ Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom! Give ear to the teaching of our God, you people of Gomorrah! ¹¹ “What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the Lord; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats.

¹² “When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? ¹³ Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations—I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. ¹⁴ Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. ¹⁵ When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood. ¹⁶ Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your deeds from before my eyes; cease to do evil, ¹⁷ learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause.

¹⁸ “Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool. ¹⁹ If you are willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land; ²⁰ but if you refuse and rebel, you shall be eaten by the sword; for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.”

What we do reflects the one we follow. If Sunday morning does not carry over into Monday morning, it is evident by our actions that Sunday is the show and Monday is reality. A people called out by God and given his name will behave as God behaves. They will not come and sing the praises of God during church but then curse his name through unholy living throughout the week. Hypocrisy is a form of blasphemy, for though it claims to know the name of Jesus Christ, it will still choose to live otherwise.

Example: Alexander the Great pardoning a deserter named Alexander with the words, “Young man, change your life or change your name.”⁵

So, what's the takeaway?

We, as Christians, are to live as our name implies: like Christ.

READ: Acts 11:19-26 (ESV)

¹⁹ Now those who were scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to no one except Jews. ²⁰ But there were some of them, men of Cyprus and Cyrene, who on coming to Antioch spoke to the Hellenists also, preaching the Lord Jesus. ²¹ And the hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number who believed turned to the Lord. ²² The report of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch. ²³ When he came and saw the grace of God, he was glad, and he exhorted them all to remain faithful to the Lord with steadfast purpose, ²⁴ for he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith. And a great many people were added to the Lord. ²⁵ So Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶ and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. For a whole year they met with the church and taught a great many people. And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.

Antioch was a city over 400 miles to the north of Jerusalem. Today, it is on the border of Turkey and Syria and is situated 16 miles from the Mediterranean Sea. During the first century, it was a major metropolitan area with Jews, Greeks, and Barbarians all mixing together. And as the followers of Jesus fled there to avoid persecution, they brought with them the Gospel. Thus, in this melting pot of ethnicities, a new group emerged, one which was, like Antioch itself, a fusion of various cultures. The people outside this new group needed a name to designate them (often because they wanted to complain about them), so they chose a variation of their leader's name and called them "Christians." Notice that this was a designation given by the people of Antioch and ***not*** by the Christians themselves. And they were given this title because they kept talking about one person: Jesus Christ. The residents of Antioch wrongly assumed these people were trying to make their own political group and so named them after the manner of other political icons (i.e., followers of Herod the Great were called "Herodians," followers of Augustus Caesar were called "Augustinians," etc.).⁶ Meaning that these followers of Jesus in Antioch kept talking about the Lord, and they were so different in a society known to be diverse that people needed a way to refer to them.

So, what's the takeaway?

We, as Christians, are to live as our name implies: like Christ.

⁶ Bock, Darrell L., *Acts*, The Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, (Grand Rapids; Baker Academic, 2007), p. 416.

Video Description

Ten | Week 4 | "Our God's Name Is Special"

TEXT: Exodus 20:7

Today, we'll unpack the third prohibition in the Decalogue: do not take God's name in vain. And while it may seem like a straightforward command, it isn't. Out of all the commandments, this one is the broadest and, therefore, one of the hardest to keep. This is not to say it is impossible. After all, we have Christ living inside us. And it is in our weaknesses that we find that the Lord is strongest (cf. 2 Cor. 12:10). But we must be mindful of obeying God's leading with this commandment. And why not? **We, as Christians, are to live as our name implies: like Christ.**

Pastor's manuscript can be found here: