

God's Good Name (Lord's Day 36 & 37)

Reading: Exodus 20:7; Exodus 3:1-15; Matt 5:33-37

When it comes to this third commandment we have no real problem understanding it.

With the second commandment that we looked at last week there was some questioning about its relevance today.

I mean we don't see people bowing down to idols of God.

But what is the picture we have of God in our mind?

What importance do we place on the symbols we have in the place of worship?

Do we feel we can effectively worship God if those symbols are absent?

But this 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.

We get this...we know what it is talking about.

We see how it is relevant for our time and culture.

People everywhere misuse the name of God!

When they are surprised, angry, excited, for any or every reason.

Even in text messages you get the OMG

I've even seen T-shirts with OMG on them.

But while we should be concerned about the common misuse of God's name we need to keep in mind that God is talking to us...to his redeemed, saved people.

Remember how the commandments are introduced...

'I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.'

This is serious business for God...

it seems that no sin provokes God's anger as much as the misuse of his name.

It is huge to read that God will not hold anyone 'guiltless' who misuses his name.

We need to grasp the enormity of what is being said here!

To obey the third commandment in our ungodly society is not easy.

But we need to think through the commandment and its implications for us.

1. The Significance of God's Name.
2. The Protection of God's name.
3. The Proper Use of God's name.

The Significance of God's Name

When we choose a name for our children we don't always think about its meaning.

We think about how it will sound;

how it fits in with our surname;

to make sure the initials don't stand for anything strange or rude.

We think about whether they are family names, with a long history of tradition.

We might use biblical names, to link us with the people of the Bible.
To us, the meaning is of secondary importance.
But to the people of the Bible the meaning of the name was most important.
The name was chosen for what it meant;
Or what the expectations were for that child.
Samuel- sounds like: asked of the Lord (Hebrew)

Through the Bible we read of God changing the name of people, as their lives changed.
Jacob (he grasps the heel; figuratively: he deceives)...
changed to Israel (he struggles with God)
Abram (exalted father)- Abraham (father of many).

And your name was/is your reputation.

People have a good or bad reputation depending on what they have done.
We base how we relate to people based on that reputation.
Good reputation- we will have a relationship with them; do business with them.
Bad- we keep away from them; keep distant; even fearful of them.

And when you have a certain reputation it is hard to shake-
if you are good and turn ugly...people won't want to believe it.
(I can't imagine him/her doing that!)

If you are turning a corner and coming good-
it's hard for people to see you differently;
there is a certain amount of distrust that needs to be overcome.

God's name is his reputation.
God himself reveals himself in his name.

The name that is used here in the third commandment is LORD.

The term 'Lord' is in capital letters, translating God's name Yahweh into English.
He first explained that name to Moses at the burning bush, (Ex 3).
There God said "I am the God of your father – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac,
and the God of Jacob."

Though Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were all dead for hundreds of years, *the Lord had given them promises, and God keeps those promises.*
Now God was busy *fulfilling* those promises.

But Moses still had a question about the name of God.
God answers, "I am who I am." Say, "I am' has sent you.

'I am' the same yesterday, today and forever;
I will always be; I am faithful and will keep my promises.

Don't you hate it when you bump into somebody...they know your name, but, while you can picture the person; while you know them by sight; you only remember their name as you walk out the door.

You know how it goes...you talk with them and nervously wait for someone else to drop their name or for the name that is at the back of your mind comes to the front. It's too embarrassing to ask them their name because, after all, they know yours... so you wait.

Well...we know the name of the Lord...

And God invites you and me to call Him by name.

we should never forget his name, nor should we use it loosely.

The Jewish people, to this day, have problems calling God by name.

It's a little bit like I was when I was first married...

do you know how hard I found it to call Anita's parents mum and dad.

I still struggle with it and so find myself not calling them anything at all.

The Jews did something like that with God.

They did all they could to avoid using the name of God altogether.

Whenever the Jewish scribes and rabbis came across the name "Yahweh" in public readings they automatically substituted for it another word for God – "Adonai."

And, when a scribe was copying a manuscript and came upon the name "Yahweh," he had to observe a set of strict regulations.

First, he washed, then he put on a full dress uniform,

and finally he made sure he had enough ink on his quill

so that he did not have to dip it in the pot half way through.

And, any visitor who interrupted him when he was writing...

even the king himself...had to be ignored.

But God has revealed himself in his name, and he asks us to use that name.

He asks us to use – not misuse or abuse – His name.

Just like we do in our relationships with others...we use their name, but if we want to preserve the relationship we certainly don't go round misusing their name.

The Protection of God's Name

What exactly does God mean when He forbids us to take His name in vain?

Just how do you do that?

The verb translated for us as 'take' means literally to 'lift up'.

We're not to 'lift up' the name of God "in vain".

Those last two words, 'in vain',

describes the notion of lifting up God's name emptily, carelessly.

When I lift up that name, when I take it on my lips, I need to be as cautious about how I do it.

The name of God is to be treated with respect and with reverence.

We know the examples of those who do not treat God's name with respect.

In anger or pain or maybe for no reason at all, they mention God by name.

It fills in a space, or serves as an explicative.

More often than not, those who curse are scarcely aware that they are using God's name, but that takes nothing away from the seriousness of it.

This God who *acts to save*, this God who is *here*, this God who keeps His promises, is treated as if He is a *nothing* –light-heartedly and carelessly.

And that hurts God, offends Him, and He will act to defend His honour.

It's the promise of the third commandment: "the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain."

It isn't only unbelievers who fail to use God's name with reverence and awe.

Simply "sitting through a church service", falling asleep during the sermon, yawning your way through the songs, your body may be there but your mind is miles and miles away.

This is much less innocent than most of us are inclined to think.

In fact, meaningless worship is an insult to God and His name for anyone who calls on the name of the Lord must do so only with reverence and awe.

Let me also talk about promises made in God's name.

Every professing member of the church makes a promise before God and His people to serve and worship God above all.

Every bride and groom married in church make a promise before God and His people to love each other until death do them part.

At baptism, Christian parents make a promise before God and His people to do all in their power to instruct their children in the Christian faith.

When pastors and elders and deacons are installed, every single member makes a promise to honour these men for the sake of their offices.

Yet, we all break these promises.

Anytime we break one of these promises made in God's name we are breaking the third commandment.

Another part of Q&A 99 points to our silence.

Are you offended when people misuse the name of the Lord in front of you?

It teaches us that God's Name can be blasphemed not only by sinful speech, but equally by sinful silence!

With blasphemy so rampant in our language, our entertainment, our media, our politics, and even in our own conversations with friends and team-mates, co-workers and loved ones, it ought to grieve us, as it grieves God.

We should not just shrug it off, or laugh along as if it's no big deal.

Rather, it ought to grieve us to know that the name of the LORD our God (and all that He stands for) is not being glorified and honoured and revered as it should.

And we ought to speak in defence of God's name.

When we hear someone blaspheme, but stand by and say nothing, we share in this terrible sin, because to remain silent is to give approval to it.

Ask yourself, 'Do I do all I can to help prevent and forbid cursing and blasphemy?'

True, many times you are powerless to prevent it, like when you are walking in a crowded shopping centre, but what about when you're with friends or people you know?

Do you uphold the honour of God's Name, or do you fear being embarrassed, or ridiculed for defending the honour of God's name.

Have you ever asked someone (in private or publicly) to refrain from using Christ's name in a derogatory fashion?

Sadly, fear is what inhibits Christians the most when it comes to speaking against blasphemy: fear of what someone may think of us,

fear of what they might say to us;

fear of how that might affect our relationship.

And so the real question becomes, do we fear man more than God?

The Proper Use of God's Name

To be sure, we are still permitted to take God's Holy and glorious Name upon our lips. God does not forbid His people from using His name;

He merely forbids us from using His name lightly,
or in a thoughtless and reckless manner.

We are to use God's name in worthy singing, hearty praise and general living.

There are also times when we are called to swear an oath.

According to the Catechism there are two instances when it is permissible for us to reverently swear oaths in God's name.

The first instance is when the government demands it.

The second instance when it is permissible for us to reverently swear oaths in God's name is...when necessity requires it, in order to maintain and promote truth and trustworthiness for God's glory and our neighbour's good.

Have you ever been asked to swear an oath?

Join the military, enter public office, testify in a court of law, become a citizen, and you end up swearing an oath.

What is an oath?

An oath is a solemn appeal to God testifying that a statement is true or that a promise is binding.

When someone swears, in the name of God, that they are telling the truth...
that is an oath.

When someone swears, in the name of God, that they will keep a promise...
that is also an oath.

The Catechism tells us that "oaths are approved in God's Word and were rightly used by Old and New Testament believers" (A 101).

Where are they approved?

(Deut 6:13) Fear the LORD your God, serve him only and take your oaths in his name.

I think we all realize that God's "Yes" is always "Yes" and God's "No" is always "No." God's Word and promises are always sure.

There is never any doubt about them.

Yet, we see something remarkable in Scripture:

on occasion God Himself used an oath to certify the truth of His Word.

In fact, each of God's covenants involved an oath-bound promise!

So even God, Whose Word is always true, used the oath.

What is the purpose of oaths?

What we have to recognize is that we live in a sinful world.

Sin has affected and infected everything and everybody in the present world.

It has poisoned all of our talk and communication so that man's words are no longer reliable.

The net result?

Most people take statements by politicians with a grain of salt.

Every normal person is suspicious of advertisers' claims.

In most public conversations we automatically wonder where a person is coming from, what they know or don't know about the subject at hand,

and if they really mean what they say or are they only giving lip-service to something

Sad, isn't it?

Trust is the basis of human society.

But we can't trust everyone in our sinful world.

We often find out the hard way who and what we can believe.

In the midst of all this distrust, deceit, lies, misinformation, and exaggerated claims, the oath is a beacon of light.

For what happens when we swear an oath?

First of all, we make a confession about our own sinful unreliability:

I cannot trust you, and you doubt my truthfulness.

Second, in an oath we place ourselves before the face of Truth;

In a court of law, and in certain special cases, we have learned we cannot trust each other anymore, so we need to call on God to be our witness.

In our sinful world we know that our only foothold on the truth depends upon God and His Word.

Human society, human words, human communication, are all worthless, unreliable, and untrustworthy apart from the faithfulness of God.

So the oath gives our words worth and dignity.

Conclusion

As we have been looking at the third commandment, we see both a negative and a positive thrust.

Negatively, we are not to misuse God's name by blaspheming, cursing, perjury, or using illegitimate or unnecessary oaths.

Positively, we are to use God's name only with reverence and awe.

And, don't forget why we are to do this:

because we have been saved by God's grace towards in Jesus Christ.