


END-TIMES ISSUES



#67 Commandment #3 – The obligations it represents.

1

THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

Taking God's name "in vain" – don't dare to do it!

"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave anyone unpunished who **takes His name in vain.**"

Exodus 20:7 (BSB); also Deuteronomy 5:11.

"You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who **misuses his name.**"

Exodus 20:7 (NIV); also Deuteronomy 5:11.

"Never use the name of the LORD your God carelessly. The LORD will make sure that anyone who **carelessly uses his name** will be punished."


Exodus 20:7 (GW); similar in Deuteronomy 5:11.

2

Some people think "taking God's name in vain" refers only to cursing, swearing, exclamations of surprise or dismay, etc.

⇒ Especially when it involves God's name, or phrases like, "O my God!"

- IN THE PAST:** There was a time when people who did this were considered the worst of sinners, fully deserving of the wrath of God.
- TODAY:** It seems that most people – even many church-goers – couldn't care less. Throwing God's name around has become a standard part of their speech.



Many people no longer care about this command. They use God's name all the time... any way they want to... with no concern or interest in *honoring* God as they do so.

3

❖ Concerning the phrase "O my God", or as some write it, "OMG":

- We can find phrases similar to this (with or without the "O") in several Scripture passages. However, the attitude expressed in Scripture is *totally different* from that of most people today.

MOST PEOPLE TODAY aren't referring to God with *this* attitude!

So I will praise You with the harp for Your faithfulness, **O my God** ...

Psalms 71:22a (BSB)

MOREOVER ...

Do not forsake me, O LORD; be not far from me, **O my God.**

Psalms 38:21 (BSB)

They don't seem to care that God has *promised* to punish them!

★ Misusing God's name in this way is like saying, "I consider God to be worthless." It's like *asking* to be punished. And God promises to give them what they've asked for.

4

❖ Do you realize that the very words you speak will someday be used – either *for or against* you – at the Day of Judgment?

- You may say it's OK to talk this way ... BUT God disagrees.

[OMG] I'M SAVED, SO IT DOESN'T MATTER IF I SAY THIS!

[OMG] "Make a tree good and its fruit will be good, or make a tree bad and its fruit will be bad; for a tree is known by its fruit. You brood of vipers, how can you who are evil say anything good? **For out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks.**"

Matthew 12:33-34 (BSB)

The good man brings good things out of his good store of treasure, and the evil man brings evil things out of his evil store of treasure.

But I tell you that men will give an account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and **by your words you will be condemned.**"

Matthew 12:35-37 (BSB)

5

❖ Yes, it is possible to say "O my God" in a godly way...

- With great reverence...
- With a worshipful attitude...
- While talking (praying) to him...
- Confessing that he is *your* God...

⇒ **BUT PEOPLE HARDLY EVER USE IT THIS WAY.**

THEY PREFER TAKING GOD'S NAME IN VAIN – WHICH IMPLIES ...

SLANDER	MISUSING HIS NAME	IRREVERENCE	ACTS OF DEFIANCE
CONTEMPT	INSULTING COMMENTS		DISRESPECT

PROOF OF WHAT'S IN THE HEART

A FLIPPANT USE OF HIS NAME	LACKING THE "FEAR OF GOD"
	TREATING GOD AS A JOKE

>> WHY DOES THE DEVIL WANT YOU TO DO THIS?? <<

One possible reason is this: He knows he can't get you to attack God *in person* – since God is a Spirit. So he's satisfied with getting you to attack him *verbally* – misusing the *name* that represents him.

6

❖ In reality, "taking God's name in vain" means a lot more than that.

- Like the other commandments, this one represents a category of commands, instructions and examples.
- We can illustrate this by looking at the questions and answers found in a typical catechism.

❖ Looking at a catechism can be the starting point for learning about the concepts represented by this commandment.

- As before, we will use the Heidelberg Catechism to illustrate this.
- As a reminder, catechisms are made by *people* – which means that they *aren't* inspired. God's Word is the final authority.
- In this case, the catechism has a *greater* focus on the issue of "oaths and swearing," and *less* on some of the other issues we have looked at. It doesn't *deny* those other issues; but circumstances at the time the catechism was written created a need for such a focus.

7

>> COMMANDMENT #3 <<

Representing the *category* of commands, instructions and teachings related to our use of God's name, as well as our attitude toward the God who is represented by that name.

"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave anyone unpunished who **takes His name in vain.**"

Exodus 20:7 (BSB); also Deuteronomy 5:11.

> We start with the "do not" aspect of this command. <

Q. What is the aim of the third commandment?

A. That we neither blaspheme nor misuse the name of God ...

- "Blaspheme" – see the next page.
- "Misuse" – As we've seen previously, a person's attitude toward God's *name* reflects his attitude toward *God*.

8

❖ What does it mean to "blaspheme" God's name?

- Here is an "official" definition:

Blasphemy – The profaning, desecration and taking in vain of the name of God, or the reviling of any of his works or deeds. It is strongly forbidden by God as dishonouring to his name.*

- Last time, we saw that "taking God's name in vain" referred to any *misuse* of his name – *any* time we use his name in a way that does not *honor* him.
- Since God's name represents God himself, and his power, our attitude toward God's *name* represents our attitude toward *God*. Blaspheming his *name* is the same as blaspheming *God*.
- People can "blaspheme" God, not only by their words, but also by their conduct. See: Ezekiel 20:27-28; 1 Timothy 1:13.

* (Manser, M. H. (2009). Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies. Martin Manser.)

9

- Warning:** The *sinful* conduct of people who *claim* to follow the true God can result in other people blaspheming God's name.

... you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who forbid adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who boast in the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law?

As it is written: "God's name is **blasphemed** among the Gentiles **because of you.**"

Romans 2:21-24 (BSB)

- "**Blasphemy of the Holy Spirit**" – the "unforgivable sin" – is a situation in which a person is totally convinced that the Holy Spirit is the devil, and the devil is the Holy Spirit. This sin involved people who *claimed* to be following the true God, yet accused Jesus of being demon-possessed (instead of Holy-Spirit-possessed). Scriptures that mention this: Matthew 12:31-32; Mark 3:22, 28-30; Luke 12:10; John 10:20.

10

[We are now given three examples of misusing God's name.]

... by cursing, perjury, or unnecessary oaths, ...

👉 What does Scripture say?

- Cursing or blaspheming** God's name: Scripture gives us an example of someone who did this. It is such a serious sin, that he had to be *put to death*.

The son of the Israelite woman **blasphemed the Name** with a **curse**. ... Then the LORD said to Moses, "... you are to tell the Israelites, 'If anyone **curses his God**, he shall bear the consequences of his sin. Whoever **blasphemes the name of the LORD** must surely be put to death; the whole assembly must surely stone him, whether he is a foreign resident or native; if he **blasphemes the Name**, he must be put to death.'"

Leviticus 24:11a, 13a, 15-16 (BSB)

11

- Perjury** involves *lying* under oath. The person has promised (sworn) to tell the truth... but chooses to lie, instead.

- ✓ The person who does this **profanes** God's name.

You must not swear falsely by My name and so **profane the name of your God**. I am the LORD.

Leviticus 19:12 (BSB)

- ✓ There are other ways to profane God's name – such as by not obeying God, or not acknowledging God for who he is.

"You are to keep my commands and do them; I am the LORD. You must not **profane my holy name**; I must be treated as holy among the Israelites. I am the LORD who sets you apart, the one who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God; I am the LORD."

Leviticus 22:31-33 (CSB)

12

- **Oaths:** Regarding oaths, the key word is "unnecessary" – and any such oath would be a violation of this third commandment.

This catechism takes the view that some oaths *are* necessary – and these would *not* violate this command. (For more about this issue, see the following slides.)

- ✓ Swearing is to be done *in God's name*, not in the name of anything created. This was a common theme in the Old Testament, to warn people against taking oaths in the name of a false god (or something else).

Fear the LORD your God, serve Him only,
and take your **oaths in His name**.

Deuteronomy 6:13 (BSB); see also 10:20.

... nor share in such horrible sins by being silent bystanders.

- When people around us are taking God's name in vain, how should we respond? Should we ignore it... or something else? (We will look at this later, in one of the follow-up questions.)

13

❖ CONCERNING SWEARING AND OATHS.

- People use these words in a variety of ways. Sometimes it may be an expression of rage, wishing harm to come upon another person. But it may also refer to making a binding promise (in the sight of God, and often for legal purposes) to do (or not do) something, to tell the truth, etc.

Oaths – Solemn, binding promises, the truth of which are affirmed by appeal to God as witness. God himself makes solemn oaths to individuals. Scripture makes clear that oaths should be made wisely and not be broken. *

People **swear** by someone greater than themselves, and the **oath confirms what is said** and puts an end to all argument.

Hebrews 6:16 (NIV)

(In Israel, the "someone greater" was to be God.)

* (Manser, M. H. (2009). Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies. Martin Manser.)

14

(Our focus here is on *legitimate* forms of swearing/oaths, not the *sinful* cursing and swearing that is so often done by the unsaved.)

- **God swears – and in his case, there is no one greater to swear by, than himself.**
- Examples of God swearing – Luke 1:72-73; Acts 2:30; Hebrews 3:10-11; 7:17-28. (Each of these New Testament passages refers to an Old Testament event. It illustrates that Scripture's perspective on swearing didn't change when Jesus came.)

When **God** made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, **he swore by himself**, saying, "I will surely bless you and give you many descendants."

Hebrews 6:13-14 (NIV)

Concerning the phrase "God is my witness":

This is a form of taking an oath. Implied is something like, "May God punish me if I am not telling the truth."

15

- **Angels can swear** – An example:

Then **the angel** ... raised his right hand to heaven. And **he swore by him [= God]** who lives for ever and ever, who created the heavens and all that is in them, the earth and all that is in it, and the sea and all that is in it ...

Revelation 10:5-6a (NIV)* see also Daniel 12:7.

- **There are many examples of God's people swearing and taking oaths.** (This includes calling on God to be a *witness* in a matter.)
- ✓ This is done in a variety of situations – such as when making a vow to God, or in legal matters. But it may also be done when a person's integrity is being questioned – such as when Paul's enemies were attacking his credibility.

I call God as my witness that it was in order to spare you that I did not return to Corinth.

2 Corinthians 1:23 (BSB)

16

- **Jesus had to oppose the religious leaders living in his day.**

- ✓ **Scripture** warns us to be careful when swearing or making an oath. *They are not to be taken lightly or broken.*
- ✓ But **the religious leaders** had invented tricks and technicalities that would enable them to break their oaths and (in their minds) *not* be sinning. This way, they could make promises that they *planned* to break... and (in their minds) it was OK.

"Woe to you, blind guides!

You say, 'If anyone **swears by the temple**, it means nothing; but if anyone **swears by the gold of the temple**, he is bound by his oath.'

And you say, 'If anyone **swears by the altar**, it means nothing; but if anyone **swears by the gift on it**, he is bound by his oath.'

Matthew 23:16, 18 (BSB); see the full passage, vs. 16-22.

17

- **In reality, truthfulness should characterize our lives.** People should be able to trust us, *whether or not we swear an oath* (as we might have to, in a legal matter). We should **never have to** swear an oath, in order for people to **know** that we are being truthful!

- **An example from Paul:** He had planned to visit Corinth, but then didn't do so. Because of this, some people started claiming that he didn't really mean what he said.

When I planned this, did I do it carelessly? Or do I make my plans by human standards, so as to say "Yes, yes" when I really mean "No, no"? But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not "Yes" and "No."

2 Corinthians 1:17-18 (BSB)

- ✓ In this situation, since some were questioning his integrity, he affirmed what he said with an oath – and God was his witness. (See v. 23, which we have already commented about.)

18

❖ **HERE IS THE INTERPRETATION PROBLEM** that probably influenced what questions were included in the catechism:

- There are two passages that tell us to "not swear at all." In each case, the context involves the types of fake oaths that the religious leaders were using – involving verbal tricks, as well as swearing by *created things*, rather than by *God*.
- The two passages are in Matthew and in James:

"Again, you have heard that it was said to the ancients, 'Do not break your oath, but fulfill your vows to the Lord.'

But I tell you not to swear at all: either **by heaven**, for it is God's throne; or **by the earth**, for it is His footstool; or **by Jerusalem**, for it is the city of the great King. Nor should you swear **by your head**, for you cannot make a single hair white or black.

Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' Anything more comes from the evil one.

Matthew 5:33–37 (BSB)

JAMES PASSAGE

19

Above all, my brothers and sisters, **do not swear**—not **by heaven** or **by earth** or **by anything else**. **All you need to say is a simple "Yes" or "No."** **Otherwise you will be condemned.**

James 5:12 (NIV)

- **What people agree about:** Our lives should be characterized by truthfulness. We shouldn't *have* to make an oath, before people are willing to believe us. When we say "yes" or "no," people should know that what we are saying is truthful.

❖ **The issue: "Are there times when swearing is *legitimate*?"**

- **YES?** Many (such as those who wrote the catechism we are using) say "YES." They might point out: ① The various Old and New Testament passages that illustrate – and sometimes command – this action. ② The verses that contain these prohibitions are dealing with the distortions that the religious leaders practiced. ③ These passages pertain to day-to-day interactions that people have with each other, not to matters such as legal obligations.

20

- **NO?** There are those who claim that swearing and oaths are never permitted, not even for legal purposes (such as in a court of law).

- ✓ This includes various groups, such as the Mennonites and Amish, Quakers and a few others.
- ✓ In a court of law, these people may be willing to "affirm" to tell the truth; but they won't "swear" to tell the truth.
- ✓ There are often background issues that influence the perspective these groups have – views about the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, the types of changes that Jesus brought (or didn't bring) to the N.T. church, the relationship between church and government, etc.
- ✓ Many of these groups came into existence around the time this catechism was written. So this is probably why the catechism had a greater focus on this specific issue.

21

- **One final suggestion:** Those passages that tell us to *always* have our "Yes" mean "Yes," and our "No" mean "No," are simply telling us to *obey the Ninth Commandment!* *This applies even to people who swear/make oaths.*

IN A
COURT OF
LAW

"You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor."

Exodus 20:16 (NIV); see also Deuteronomy 5:20.

AS
INDIVIDUALS

" **Do not lie.**
" **Do not deceive** one another.

WHEN
SWEARING

" **Do not swear falsely by my name**
and so **profane the name of your God.** I am **the LORD.** "

Leviticus 19:11b-12 (NIV)

(Note that this involves *false* swearing, not swearing in general.)

- ✓ Two New Testament examples: Colossians 3:9; Revelation 21:8.

22

> **Now for some of the command's implied positive obligations:** <

In summary, we should use the holy name of God only with reverence and awe, ...

❖ **What does Scripture say?**

- "Reverence and awe" points to our attitude regarding God and his name.
- If our goal is to *honor* God in all things, we will be less likely to violate this command!
- ✎ The "Lord's Prayer" (Matthew 6:9-13) illustrates the desire of such a person:

'Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be Your name.'

Matthew 6:9 (BSB)

YES! Use my name!
But only in this manner.

23

- Many Scripture passages describe the reverence and awe (and other attitudes) that are the appropriate response toward God and his name, in the various activities of life. Here are a few...

"My covenant with him was one of life and peace, which I gave to him; it called for **reverence**, and he **revered** Me and stood in **awe** of **My name**."

Malachi 2:5 (BSB)

IN REFERENCE
TO PHINEHAS
(REPRESENTING
THE TRIBE OF LEVI)

Therefore, since we are receiving an unshakable kingdom, let us be filled with gratitude, and so worship **God** acceptably with **reverence** and **awe**. "For our God is a consuming fire."

Hebrews 12:28-29 (BSB)

The LORD reigns;
let the nations **tremble!**

Let them praise Your great and **awesome name**—
He is holy!

Psalms 99:1a, 3 (BSB)

24

- Such an attitude will affect our conduct toward God (not just toward his *name*). For example:

... so that we may properly confess God, pray to God, and glorify God in all our words and works.

What does Scripture say?

- ✓ **CONFESSING:** We *acknowledge* God, who he is, our loyalty to him, etc. If we do this, it will influence how we live.

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of **praise**, the fruit of **lips that confess His name**. And do not neglect to **do good** and to **share with others**, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

Hebrews 13:15-16 (BSB)

- ❖ See also: Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:9-10. Our willingness to acknowledge Jesus before other people will have an impact on what happens to us in eternity.

25

- ✓ **PRAYING:** This is an aspect of worship, and involves talking to God and letting the Holy Spirit use his Word to change us and make us more Christ-like.

- ❖ Scripture has much to say about this topic. As far as our attitude toward God is concerned, *godly* prayer wants God and his *name* to be honored *first*, more than anything else we may pray for. The "Lord's Prayer" illustrates this (Matthew 6:9-13).
- ❖ The opposite of this would be self-centered prayer. This type of prayer treats God and his name as being of little value, when compared to us. We may even treat God as *a servant* – here, only to grant us our every wish.
- ❖ As we saw when we examined the first commandment, the very nature of prayer involves communication directed toward *deity* – never toward *any created entity* (including humans, dead or alive).

26

- ✓ **GLORIFYING GOD IN ALL THAT WE DO:** God created us for this purpose; and he made us capable of doing so.

- ❖ Though we have rebelled and (by nature) *dishonor* God, he has offered to save us and change us, so that we can once again do what he created us for.

So whether you eat or drink or **whatever you do**, do it all **to the glory of God**.

1 Corinthians 10:31 (BSB)

And **whatever you do**, in word or deed, do it all in **the name of the Lord Jesus**, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

Colossians 3:17 (BSB)

Glorifying God in all that we do is the obligation of all people; but only followers of the true God will ever learn to do so.

27

> Some questions that clarify the issue of "swearing." <

{ This question is about us tolerating sinful swearing/cursing, when others do it. }

Q. Is blasphemy of God's name by swearing and cursing really such serious sin

that God is angry also with those who do not do all they can to help prevent and forbid it?

A. Yes, indeed.

No sin is greater or provokes God's wrath more than blaspheming his name.

That is why God commanded it to be punished with death.

- ❖ We need to immediately point out that this "punished with death" issue is a *civil* matter. It is not our duty, as *individuals*, to kill offenders. (Also, no government that exists today will be willing to do this – although some will kill you if you blaspheme their *fake* god.)

28

- Is God *really* angry with people who *don't* try to stop others from blaspheming/profane God's name?

- ✓ The Scripture passage used in the catechism (Leviticus 5:1) was based on a misunderstanding of the phrase "the voice of swearing" (KJV). This actually refers to a person being placed under oath, in order to testify in court. (This may be similar to what happened to Jesus, in Matthew 26:63-64.)

- ✓ We can look for *other* passages that deal with this issue. Might it depend, in part, on the circumstances?

- ✓ Something else to consider: If we *refuse* to get involved, is that love for God and neighbor? Does it honor God?

ARE THESE
LEGITIMATE
RESPONSES?

"IT'S OK FOR PEOPLE TO
CURSE GOD, AS LONG AS IT
ISN'T ME DOING IT!"

"NOT MY
PROBLEM!"

29

{ Next, a question is about the legitimate type of swearing. }

Q. But may we swear an oath in God's name if we do it reverently?

- A. Yes, when the government demands it, or when necessity requires it, in order to maintain and promote truth and trustworthiness for God's glory and our neighbor's good.

- ✓ This last phrase basically says that it is legitimate to do it when it is an expression of love for God and neighbor.

Such oaths are grounded in God's Word and were rightly used by the people of God in the Old and New Testaments.

⇒ (We've already looked at this issue.)

30



{ Finally, in who's name are we to swear? }

Q. May we also swear by saints or other creatures?

- A. No. A legitimate oath means calling upon God as the only one who knows my heart to witness to my truthfulness and to punish me if I swear falsely. No creature is worthy of such honor.

(The apostle Paul used this phrase on a few occasions.)

⇒ **The issue:** This deals with the nature of legitimate oath/swearing.

- Only God knows our hearts. Only God can truly know the truthfulness or falseness of what we say (and he will *justly* punish those who swear falsely).
- *No creature has the ability to do this.* No creature has such understanding, power and ability.

31

Our MISSION!

- ❖ There is so much more we could say about the Third Commandment. This amount should enable us to see the importance of our attitude toward God's name... and its relationship to our attitude toward God's person.

➔ **Let us grow** in our appreciation of this issue, and of what it means to not "take God's name in vain" (both positive and negative aspects of the command).

➔ **Let us pursue** obedience to this command; for doing so has *eternal* consequences!

32

> Some other random Scripture passages. <

{ There is so much involved in the Third Commandment, that we cannot completely cover it all. }

- His name – it is glorious and awesome, and should be feared/revered – Deuteronomy 28:58-59.
- An example of a reverent use of God's name in prayer – Deuteronomy 32:3-4.
- His name deserves to be glorified – Psalm 29:2.
- Praising God's glorious *name* is equivalent to praising *God* – 1 Chronicles 29:10-13.
- God's name and his Word are exalted – Psalm 138:2.
- God's works are also to be praised – Job 36:24; Psalm 107:21-22.
- Be careful about making hasty or rash vows before God – it's something that *fools* do – Ecclesiastes 5:1-7.
- God's works, ways, name, character, and actions are interrelated – Revelation 15:3-4.

33

AN EXAMPLE OF A DIFFERENT CATECHISM THAT HAS A GREATER FOCUS ON SOME OF THE ISSUES WE HAVE EXAMINED.

{ The "Westminster Larger Catechism" has less focus on the "swearing/oaths" issue, and goes into greater detail on some of the other issues we have examined. Here is their list of the "positive" things that are implied by the Third Commandment. }

Q. What is required in the third commandment?

- A. The third commandment requires that the name of God, his titles, attributes, ordinances, the Word, sacraments, prayer, oaths, vows, lots, his works, and whatever else there is by which he makes himself known, be treated as holy and reverently used in thought, meditation, word, and writing, by a profession of faith accompanied by holiness and a consistent lifestyle, to the glory of God and the good of ourselves and others.

(There is also a section about *forbidden* practices.)

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