

Class 11e: The goal of this class is to understand the third commandments of the *Decalogue*.

Third Commandment: *"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."* (Exodus 20:7, *ESV*)

- In order to understand this commandment, we must first understand the object of the commandment. The object is *the name of the Lord your God*. At first glance, this commandment might seem pretty easy to keep. We simply must watch out for God's name. That seems easy enough, but when we do a cursory survey of the nature of God's name in the Bible, we find that the commandment is much more complicated. So, what does God's name imply and include?
 - If we look at Exodus 23:20-23, the complexity becomes clear. God promised to send an angel before Israel to protect them and to conquer all of their enemies in the Land of Canaan. Verse 22 shows the source of this angel's strength and authority, which is *for my name is in him*. The angel possesses the strength of God, and the angel demands obedience from Israel. The reason is that the angel bears the name of God. So, we can conclude that the name of God includes God's power and authority. **What else does the Bible say about God's name?**
 - It refers to God Himself in Ex 3:14 and Lev 24:15-16
 - It refers to God's attributes: power, mercy, grace, longsuffering, goodness, truth (Ex 34:6-7).
 - It refers to God's help (Psalm 44:5, 1 Sam 17:45, Prov 18:10).
 - It refers to God's works through which He revealed His glory (Psalm 8:1, Rom 1:20-21).
 - It refers to God's worship. True worship occurs where God chooses to place His name (Deut 5:12). The Lord's Day (Rev 1:10), the Lord's Prayer (Matt 6:5-13), the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:21), and baptism in the triune name of the Lord our God (Matt 28:18-20) are all ways in which God reveals Himself to us.
 - It refers to God's Word. Jesus, the Son, was revealed as the Word of God (John 1:1). God revealed what we are to believe about Him and what duty He requires of us in His Word (2 Tim 3:16-17).
 - It refers to God's revealed will in the casting of lots (Lev 16:8-9, Num 26:55-56, Acts 1:26).
 - **Summary:** Two quotes might be helpful to summarize the use of name. *"We thus understand the name of god to refer to everything by which God reveals Himself and in which He is either praised or despised ... (Acts 9:15)"*¹ *"[God's name] is taken for whatsoever he makes use of, for making himself known, seeing otherwise he has no name: but whatever title he takes to himsel, or whatever thing he makes use of, thereby to make himself known, that is his name."*² Names means the name *God*, also the name *Lord* and *Jehovah*, and it refers to however God reveals Himself in His fullness.

¹ Wilhelmus à Brakel, *The Christians Reasonable Service*, vol 3. 119.

² James Durham, *The Ten Commandments*, 153.

- The next question we need to ask is what does take mean? *Take* more literally means *to lift up*. In the third commandment, *take* refers to whatever use we might make of God's name or his self-revelation.
- In the Hebrew, *vain* has a broad meaning of vanity and emptiness. In the third commandment, *vain* also carries the meaning of falsely. The third commandment forbids using God's name for anything that is false or wrong. It also forbids using God's name in an empty way.
- We need to examine a few ways in which we can take the Lord's name in vain.³
 1. **When we speak slightly and irreverently of his name (Ex 22:28, Deut 28:58; Ps 50:1, 83:18, Luke 24:19).** In the passages listed, the Scriptures demonstrate how we should reverently use God's name. To use His name without the reverence He deserves would be sin. For example, *Jesus is my Home-Boy*.
 2. **When we profess God's name, but do not live answerably to it (Titus 1:16, Rom 2:24).** This would include apostasy (Heb 6:6).
 3. **When we use God's name in idle discourse.** We may only take up God's name with the proper reverence He is due, but in everyday situations, Christians and non-Christians say, "*Oh my God!*," or "*Christ!*" These phrases employ an empty, vain use of God's glorious name.
 4. **When we worship him with our lips, but not with our hearts.** God calls us to worship Him with all our hearts (Prov 23:26). The Lord condemned Israel for worshipping Him externally, *their hearts were far from Him* (Isa 20:13). James encourages us to pray believing. If we pray in the name of Christ but do not believe, we worship with our lips and not our hearts (Jn 14:14, Jam 1:6)
 5. **When we pray to Him, but do not believe in Him (Rom 4:20, 10:14; Ps 86:5).**
 6. **When in any way we profane and abuse His word.** Remember, the Scriptures are God's self-revelation. If we pervert the Word in any way, we misrepresent God.
 7. **When we swear by God's name.** Oaths, sworn by God's name, are right and actually commanded by God under certain circumstances. They serve as a testimony to being a child of God (Ex 20:24, Deut 6:13). 1) Empty oaths are unlawful. We take these when we swear by God's name in our everyday speech, and Jesus addressed these sort of oaths that were the practice of the Pharisees in (Matt 5:34). 2) Swearing horrid things like cursing or swearing to do some evil thing like the murder of Jesus or Paul is unlawful. 3) Perjury is unlawful because it calls God to bear witness to a lie.
 8. **When we prefix God's name to any wicked action.** See Absalom in 2 Sam 15:7, 10.
 9. **When we use our tongues any way to the dishonor of God's name.** When do this when we curse in the heat of anger or wish something horrible upon our selves.
 10. **When we make a rash or unlawful vow.** Vows are good to make (Ps 66:13, 14). Rash vows take the Lord's name in vain (Judges 9:31).
 11. **When we speak evil of God or curse God.** The Israelites received the curse of poisonous serpents when they spoke evil of God (Num 21:5).
- The positive virtues of the third commandment can be summarized: *to speak (and want to hear others speak) of God and divine things with all humility, reverence of heart, and manifestation of respect, to confess the Lord holily and boldly, to glorify God in all that we say or do, to be zealous for His Name and cause, to call upon the name of the Lord, to swear by His name in a holy manner.*⁴

³ Thomas Watson, *The Ten Commandments*, 85-92.

⁴ à Brakel, 128-129.