

Lord's Day 36

**25 July 2010**

Sermon Notes by Pastor Paul Goh

Beloved, the purpose of the third commandment is gloriously positive. It is designed to keep alive biblical worship and have a close communion with the Lord. Its purpose is more than condemning the use of God's name as a swear word, but instructs us how and in what spirit we should approach him.

To appreciate the positive purpose we must understand the meaning of the key words. Let us consider the word, "take". In the Hebrew, this word means to lift up, referring to the lifting up of the voice to announce God's name in a religious manner as in a public prayer, or the public reading of Scriptures. This commandment therefore, refers to acts of the public worship. The word "in vain" draws its meaning from the storm rushing across the countryside leaving an empty wasteland. The term means wasted, empty and futile. Do we sometimes use the name of the Lord in vain like in praying or taking part in a spiritual conversation in a thoughtless or mechanical way? If the heart is low in sincerity, or that we have no real feeling for what we are saying, then the whole exercise becomes an empty show and is not acceptable to God. The standard of this commandment applies to all our singing, praying, preaching and tells us that our minds must be completely behind what we are saying, otherwise we greatly offend the Lord. Let us consider the text in Exodus 20.7.

The theme of the sermon is hallowing the Name of God: The object, what is forbidden and what is required.

The object of hallowing is the name of God. A name is a personal label or title. And so by this name, the Lord assures us that he is a personal God, to whom we may communicate. But by describing himself through a name, God tells us that he is a knowing and personal God. Through his name we may approach him in worship and prayer. Oh, we dare not use such a significant name lightly! We dare not pray or praise him or sing to him in such a way that his name registers no meaning to our souls. It is the revelation of his being. He is the infinite and eternal one, who is invisible. This name of the Lord is in all the works of his hands as the psalmist sings in Psalm 8.1: all creation is his handiwork, namely, brute beasts, sun, moon and stars, oceans and streams. Creation is so many letters spelling the name of the Most High. The name of God is God himself. So to love the name the Lord is to love God himself, Isaiah 56.6. And to cause his people to forget the name of God is to forget him, Jer 23.27. To call upon the name of the Lord is to call upon him, as he revealed himself to his people. It is closely related to God himself, Psalm 75.1, Deu. 28.58. God is said to be near, Psa 75.1, holy (Ez. 36.20), and great (Ez 36.23).

And he has named himself. He chose to give himself names to make himself known to us. It is not because he needed them but so that we would know his divine essence by his names. Concerning the truth of God: there is none like God, He alone is God and all that is glorified instead of or beside him is an idol. Hence God did not give himself those names for us to distinguish him

from others which are idols. He is the one only and true God. And now let us consider some of the more important names of God.

His name is LORD. It is the Hebrew, Jehovah, which means the self-existent one. This name was announced in Exodus 3.14, "I am that I am". God is the self-existent One that he does not obtain life and power from anyone or anything outside of himself. Further, he is the only self-existent Being, the source and fountain of all life; the creator of all that exists. He always has existed, and always will. He is the supreme, unchanging God. Another meaning of God's name that flows out of this is he is our Father and Provider. He is whom we must turn for every blessing for without him we are lost. His very name reminds us of his benevolent love and kindness. If we are tempted to conceit and self-sufficiency, then his name will reprove and humble us, telling us that he is the sole fountain of life and power. Thirdly, he is the Lord and Governor of this universe. His name speaks of authority. As Creator, he is king and we are his creatures and servants. To lift up his name involves our recognising and submitting to him as the Lord of our lives and anything less than wholehearted surrender will amount to lifting up his name in vain. Finally, God's salvation of his people is in the name Jesus, which means Jehovah-Salvation. By that name, he makes himself known to us and we enter into fellowship with us, as the God of grace and mercy. By his death on the cross, he blotted out all our sins and forgives all our iniquities. He clothes us with his everlasting righteousness and makes us worthy to dwell in his tabernacle.

What is forbidden in this commandment? Firstly, it is any rash or profane use of the holy name of God. Profanity is to make common that which is uncommon. It is an act of completely destroying the distinction, all and any distinctions, between that which is holy and that which is unholy, between the pure and the impure. And so profanity is to erase all distinction between the name Jehovah and the name of the creature. There is more: profanity is the act whereby we use the name of God in the service of sin and corruption. The sinner not only drags the name of God down to the common level of the creature but he also drags it into the mud of the defilement of sin.

Profanity comes in various forms: first, the thoughtless use of the name of God. This is not accompanied by the fear and reverence for God in the heart. This is seen in the prayers we offer in public where there are vain repetitions and repeated and useless mention of the name of God in our prayers. Secondly, cursing and swearing. This is direct and the most terrible form of profanity. This may be done openly or secretly. You may say, "my God", "my goodness", "good gracious" and "by heaven". The Lord teaches us that heaven is the throne of God, and that to swear by heaven is the same thing as we swear by God himself. The same expression is the thoughtless use of the word, "hell". People use this when they are disgusted. But, hell is a place of God's wrath and when you use the term "hell" in a thoughtless sense, you mean to mock at the place where God's wrath burns eternally. Then there is the most abominable expression of the sinner's profanity by making the holy name of God a plaything, an expression of all kinds of corrupt emotions, of sinful wrath, rebellion, mockery and contempt.

Scriptures has examples of such cursing and swearing. A son of a mixed marriage curses God in Lev. 24.10-16. This is how it happened. After the Exodus, there was a mixed marriage between an Egyptian man and a woman from the tribe of Dan. And their son fought with another Israelite and the son blasphemed the name of God. And the witnesses brought the son to Moses for judgment. And on the next day, Jehovah commanded Moses to bring this son is to be brought outside the camp. And the whole congregation stoned him. The reason why he was stoned was because his act of cursing is the manifestation of the hatred he has for God in his heart. Furthermore, it is an offence to the majesty of God which will be vindicated in the sentence of death. The blasphemer slights and despises God. Job's wife told Job to curse God and die. This is protest against God and to leave God. Slight God and his revelation, turn your back to God. In II Kings 18, Rabshakeh is a title and also a mighty general from the Assyrian army stands before the walls of Jerusalem openly blaspheming the name of the most high God. Will not the Lord avenge his holy name? Yes, he did. An angel smites 185,000 Assyrians in one night. God also avenged the blasphemy of Goliath who defied the armies of Israel. David with a single slingshot killed the giant: the stone sunk in the forehead and he fell to the ground and he cut off his head with Goliath's own sword.

Secondly, the catechism properly puts the focus on us by teaching that we must by our silence become partakers of those horrible sins. First, it is our calling openly and if necessary to publicly condemn the sin of profanity: cursing and swearing, whenever it is committed in our presence and within our hearing. Secondly, there comes a time when we had better cease either privately or publicly to condemn those that uses the name of God in vain repeatedly. This is especially when we have testified against this horrible sin repeatedly and our testimony is not heeded. It is better not to cast our pearls before swine. It is also possible that we make an untimely and confession of the truth. And by this we provoke the enemies of Christ either to condemn or revile the truth, without advancing the glory of God without advancing the glory of God and the salvation of anyone. And if those who would mock the faith and should they ask a reason of our hope, we should not give an answer to him but leave him to himself. For so did Christ before the elders and scribes, "if I tell you, ye will not believe" (Luke 22.67).

Finally, what is required? We use the name of God with reverence and awe that God may be rightly confessed and worshipped by us and glorified in all our words and works. This implies, firstly, in all our walk and conduct we confess and glorify the name of God and Saviour Jesus Christ. This means that we develop, maintain and defend the truth of the Word of God against all heresy. That we do so privately and individually in the midst of the world and over against the apostasizing church. And we maintain the truth over all false doctrine in the preaching of the Word and in our official confession. Secondly, we instruct our children in the knowledge of Jehovah in our homes. And thus we fulfil the promise we made when we presented our children for baptism. Thirdly whenever we use the name of God, we shall do it in consciousness of God, that we stand in his holy presence and be filled with a sense of his glory and of his holiness.

How can I keep this commandment perfectly? No, we are unable to keep it according to the testimony of Scripture and our consciences. Rather, we confess that we have a small beginning to the new obedience. And according to our old nature, we are still profane and frequently break his commandment. Therefore, it is good, that we realise by faith that we are not under law but under grace, so that we may face the threat that is connected with this commandment (that we will be guilty if we take his name in vain) to the cross of Christ. In Christ, we know that we have the forgiveness of sins and everlasting righteousness. Not only are we redeemed from the guilt of sin by the blood of the cross but we are also delivered from the power and dominion of corruption, so that we confess, "O how love I thy law, it is my meditation all the day long". And we bow ourselves ourselves him with perseverance and holy fear, with the prayer "Hallowed be thy name". Amen.