

God's Last Name Is Not...?
The Third Commandment
Exodus 20:1-21

Today we focus on the third commandment which teaches us to not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord is very serious when his name is used or attached to something or someone. When God's name is honored so is everyone and everything else.

The first four commandments deal with our relationship primarily with God. They are vertical. They are directed upward. They deal with our respect and reverence for the living God. And while these vertical commandments deal with our reverence for God, they directly affect our horizontal relationships with our world and neighbors.

Both the vertical and horizontal go hand-in-hand like two sides of the same coin. They fuel and propel everything toward being a civilized people living in a civilization that does not mass produce misfits and reprobates.

If you've ever heard Sandi Patti's recording of the song *How Majestic Is Thy Name In All The Earth* you'll remember that it's based on Psalm 8: "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth."

Today's sermon is about the reverence we have for God, and for the pledges and commitments we make in the name of God.

Now, unlike our society and culture today, in biblical times names were used for a reason. They meant something. A name would identify character. That's why this morning we sang **How Great Thou Art**. The song reveals something about the character of the God in whom we place our faith and trust.

Jesus taught us to pray and say, "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name." Holy is the character of God. When we have reverence for God's name, then we don't disregard it or profane God's name.

A study of the epistle of James teaches us the power that words can have. They can be used to bless people or beat them up. Which do you think honors God? The taming of the tongue is one of the hardest assignments in life's journey. Speech can be used to bring comfort to us or challenge us or it can be used to curse others and bring the power of cynicism into our lives.

It was T. S. Eliot who wrote, "we live in a culture which teaches us the price of everything but the value of nothing. Where is the wisdom we have lost to knowledge?"

Many times people say "let your conscience be your guide." A conscience is a great thing when it's informed by the truth and power of God, but it's a dreadful thing when its values and knowledge are shaped solely by us.

In that spirit I want to share two things with you today about this third commandment and how it relates to our everyday walk and witness. First, it teaches that **we should never treat God's name with irreverence.**

God's name is good. It represents holiness. It represents God's character. To profane God's name means to take something that was meant for good and turn it into evil. Words were given to us to express our relationship with him and to him.

When we profane the name of God we break that relationship. We express something about God's character that is not true. God does not have a bad last name. Our mind,

which is to engage our mouth in living praise to God, becomes a cesspool when we misuse God's name. It means that something is wrong in our heart.

We can't clean up our mouth until we allow God to clean up our heart. If my inner character is reflected in my speech, then I want my speech and language to be the best.

Second point: **to take God's name in vain is to empty it of its content and power.**

The taking of God's name in vain also means we must never give a false report. God's name must never be taken lightly. We must never reject the reality what the name "God" represents. In Ezekiel 39:25, we read: "I will be jealous for my name."

I can remember well a contractor who was furious with the job his workers had done. He said, "Reverend, I do not want my good name associated and represented by such sloppy work." All the more true when we represent God and make a promise to God.

When I was in scouting I learned that "My word is my bond and my bond is my word." It represents me--my character--the values I hold dear.

Many of you, in fact most of you, came before the Session and were examined for membership here at Providence. Then you stood at the front of this sanctuary and made this promise?

You took sacred vows. You gave your word! You promised to support this church with your time, your talent, your treasure. You made a promise.

The good news of the gospel is that God keeps his words and promises. He sent his son Jesus. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Even when Christ died on the Cross, God the Father was faithful in keeping his promises to the human race.

Therefore in Philippians 2:9-11, we are assured that: God exalted him to the highest place, and gave him the Name that is above every name, that at the Name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

All that because of a name! Some names are very powerful! Some names make all the difference in the world. Some names are to be handled with care and with sincerity, not sloppiness.

When God's name is honored, so am I. The psalmist was correct when he wrote "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is thy name in all the earth!" Amen.