

Don't Use God's Name in Vain

Series: Where Life Flourishes: Engaging the 10 Commandments
July 10, 2016 – Brad Bailey

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

"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.... - Exodus 20:7 (NKJV)

Grasping the Significance of How We Speak of God

- 1. The Significance of Names:** Names can represent someone's nature
- 2. The Significance of Naming** - God as the self-existent source and authority over all is never simply "given" a name like any other.
- 3. The Significance of God's Name:** God's name refers to all that truly reveals His Person and Nature... ultimately in Christ.
- 4. The Significance of Our Words:** Words that come out of us reveal what is in us

Luke 6:44a-45

Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. ... A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.

Matthew 6:9 (ISV)

Jesus said, "...this is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy.'" (or "hallowed be your name.")

The Misuse of God's Name...

- 1. Treating references to God _____**

2. Presume God can be contained and controlled by _____.

Isaiah 55:8–9

3. Claiming God's _____ for what is not clearly His word or working.

Matthew 7:21-23 (NLT)

"Not everyone who calls out to me, 'Lord! Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter. ²² On judgment day many will say to me, 'Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed many miracles in your name.' ²³ But I will reply, 'I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God's laws.'

4. Attaching God's _____ to what is not consistent with His nature.

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Intro

Continuing our series... entitled “Where Life Flourishes”...in which we are engaging the 10 Commandments. These are the ten instructions which God gave to Moses after he led the people of Israel out of slavery and into freedom.

As I said last weekend... **many of us may have an aversion to the very word “commandment.”** Some of us may feel “rules were meant to be broken”... we think of “commands as meant to be defied.”

We think that between us and the great open paths to pleasure... lies God... and He has rules...to keep us bound from what will really satisfy.

I propose that we have a **profound misunderstanding.**

They don't reflect **arbitrary rules** but **absolute reality.**

These are not like ‘Eat all your vegetables first’ or ‘do your homework before you play’...but rather like **‘Obey the law of gravity’**... ‘use the **compass** to find your way’...because it will show you true north.

If we thin of these as “rules we can break”...we do well to realize that it's not them that break...but us.

So God begins...

You shall have no other gods before me. - Exodus 20:3

Choose the only true source and center of life.

Only the source of your life and all life is your rightful center...can define who you are...from all the otherwise fragmented pieces of identity.

In the midst of this **past week's reminders of division and destruction...** we do well to take hold afresh of the call to us from ONE God... who unites all as equally emanating from His desire...and love.

He goes on to the second command which follows...

You shall not make for yourself an idol - Exodus 20:4

Don't center yourself in what is not central.

Don't give devotion and power to that which should have no rule over you. As we noted last week, we may not associate ourselves with idolatry when we think of ancient practices of carving icons out of stone and placing up on pedestals to worship...but the truth is....

The nature of idolatry is not the materials they are made of... but the devotion and power they are given.

The truth is that we have a lot that competes for our devotion...and is given power in our lives.

And now He goes on...**third commandment...in verse 7...**

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

Or more traditional language...

Exodus 20:7 (NKJV)

"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain..."

Of the ten timeless instructions given to Moses...this may be **one we initially don't take very seriously**. These words have often been associated with some **general connection to swearing**...and swearing broadly speaking doesn't quite seem to be something we consider so serious a matter.

If this is just about some occasional slips of the tongue...it doesn't seem that serious. As such it's possibly the most neglected because of the tendency we all have to dismiss its significance.

If we associate this with the broader issue of what we think of as common 'swear words...'S' word...or the 'F' bomb...we **hear this as God getting upset about using vulgar or 'bad' words**.

[When my kids were little.... First told me kids at their new school were using what they had known to be "bad language"...I could sense there was a lure into what was cool...a sense of power by the kids who used these "special" words. So I talked about these being words...nothing special... just harsh or crude ways to say something. The point is that they didn't give those who use them power...just poor taste.]

The broad issue of what we now refer to as "swear words"...is **not what is God is speaking about**.

> What God is speaking to...is **misusing His name**...or **not taking His name in vain**.

Since we don't easily grasp the significance of what is at hand... I want to help us in...

Grasping the Significance of How We Speak of God

1. The Significance of Names: Names can represent someone's nature

What comes to mind when you think of a **particular name**...perhaps your **mother's name**.

What thoughts would race through your mind in a minute? feelings arise?

When you hear a name...any familiar name...**thoughts and associations** immediately surface in your mind.

Michael Jordon... Mother Teresa ... Adolf Hitler.

The **names represent** the **nature** of that person and **who they are...or are ultimately to be**.

God even gave new names to certain individuals to capture their most ultimate nature.

He told **Abraham**,

“No longer will be called Abram (“exalted father”)...but your name will be Abraham ..(“father of a multitude”)...for I have made you the father of many nations.” – Genesis 17:5

Jesus took up this process in his earthly ministry... calling Simon to by a new name “Peter”...which means The Rock.

Through Christ...our names can become eternal again...written in the heavenly realm (Book of the Lamb).

> Names can represent someone's nature...the totality of the person.

It is why there is the phrase “they really made a name for themselves”...or “their name got dragged through the mud.”

So we must understand when we speak of a **name**...we speak of one's **nature**. When we speak of **God's name**...it is how we honor **His nature**.

Anything we attribute to “God”...is to reflect His distinct nature.

2. The Significance of Naming - God as the self-existent source and authority over all is never simply “given” a name like any other.

A name is given by one who is over it.

Adam was given dominion over the animals and He was given the right to name them.

When you are born, **your parents give you a name**.

This is because they are your source... because there was a time when you did not exist and your parents needed something to call you. So they named you.

But no one has dominion over God. No one has the right to name God.

When Moses ask who is sending him...how he should speak of him...God responds..."I Am."
There is no simple English words to capture this profound response...but the essence is that God declares that **He is what is...self existent in nature.**

We are to grasp that God as the self-existing source and authority over all is never simply "given" a name like any other.

God created us in His image...and our greatest deception is thinking we can make Him in our image or according to our ideas.

3. The Significance of God's Name: God's name refers to all that truly reveals His Person and Nature... ultimately in Christ

The very names which God gives to Moses...is as much a declaration of His nature...He is THE ONE WHO IS.

God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob = the one who has been calling and revealing myself to you

"I AM" = He is the eternal one. He is the creator. He is the one who has always been. He is the one who was existing before the creation of the universe and before time existed. He is the great, "I AM."

It implies that He cannot be bound by any name that is bound by our finite understanding...or merely understood by any name we may place on Him. [1]

What God said to Moses is to tell the people that "I am" sent you...In Hebrew it is represented by 4 consonants...**YHWH**. Since ancient Hebrew had no written vowels, it is uncertain how the name was pronounced originally, but there are records of the name in Greek, which *did* have written vowels. These records indicate that in all likelihood the name should be pronounced "**Yahweh**."

Shortly before the first century A.D., it **became common for Jews to avoid saying** the divine name for fear of misusing it and breaking the second commandment so they **substituted another Hebrew word, "Adonai"** (which means "Lord" or "my Lord"), in its place.

Later when these words were written over each other...they got blended into the translation Jehovah.

But it was never simply this name...but what it represented...it represented the nature of the God who is revealed... who has revealed Himself.

And soon...God spoke of sending One who would represent Him...and with whom His own Spirit would be able to dwell with men.

The Christ...anointed one... is born. Jesus would declare that if one sees him...they have seen the Father...that is...they are one in nature.

The Biblical Book of Hebrews explains that Jesus is the exact representation of the nature of God.

And the Bible tells us in John's Gospel that **Jesus came in the Father's name** (John 5:43)...that Jesus **performs miracles in the Father's name** (John 10:25), that we can ask anything in His name (John 14:13), and that we are kept safe in His name (John 17:11). In Acts 4:12, we are reminded that "there is no other name under Heaven whereby anyone can be saved", and that it is "at the name of Jesus that every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." (Philippians 2:10)

When we pray in Jesus name...it is not some magical power in the letters or sounds...it is the authority of the one they are speaking of.

4. The Significance of Our Words: Words that come out of us reveal what is in us

We like to **play down the significance of what we say**... say something harsh or hurtful or worse...and we are quick to say - "**just kidding**"... because we want to avoid a responsibility in general...and responsibility for what comes out of us.

Words that come out of us reveal what is in us.

Show us that what comes out of our mouths is more than a matter of words; it **points to the condition of our hearts:**

Luke 6:44a-45

Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. ... A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.

James says we have the power to both bless and curse.

So having grasped a bit of the ultimate significance of what names represent...and of our words...it shouldn't surprise us that when Jesus was asked about how to pray as he did.

He speaks of that personal space... genuine (not some religious repetition)...and then offers a model...Lord's prayer... and begins...

Matthew 6:9 (ISV)

Jesus said, "...this is how you should pray: 'Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy.' (or "hallowed be your name.")

Jesus says this should be at the forefront of our prayer...to align ourselves with the reality of His holiness...His “above all”ness.

Lord’s Prayer –prayer is about aligning with the orbit of God’s will and ways...and it begins with grasping the rightful place of God. (We have come to think of our need to pull God into our orbit...but we will never find He does...because He is the center and orbit.)

It’s **helpful to understand...**that Jesus declares that He is holy...and high above...**we never make Him holy...we never ultimately “give” him honor...**he bears it by who He is. So when we honor God...we are the one’s being moved into alignment. Though we may speak of “lifting God up”... it means we join the reality of where He is.

When the moon eclipses the sun from being seen by the earth....the sun does not cease to be the center. The sun is the center whose orbit we are rotating around. When the moon passes it is then we see that connection. In the same way, when we see God clearly...the light shines on us... and we can see ourselves more clearly.

Everything flows from God be given the proper place from within our posture.

We’re not to avoid God’s name or abuse God’s name. We’re to use God’s name in a way that honors God."

Before closing... I want us to consider more specially some ways we can engage in..

The Misuse of God’s Name...

To use God’s name in “vain” means to use in a way that is worthless, empty, inconsequential or false.

1. Treating references to God lightly

“We can do this in the most obvious ways... it’s become common for Western culture to hear God damn it.”

[Many children today may be surprised to know that God’s last name is “damn it.”]

But we can do this in so many other ways...

We refer to God just to make exclamations...with no meaning...just to srve to splash a little flavor into our point.

It may come out in surprise...or anger... or any number of ways... "God!" or "Jesus!"—as well as speaking about him in trifling and flippant ways.

Could be even just phrases with...“OMG”... “Jesus”...”Geez”...”Lord knows...”

Some of us may think, “This is **not my intent**. I’m **not thinking** like this.” That may be **precisely the problem**. God does want us to think about this. If you are carelessly and thoughtlessly using God’s name then his significance is not gripping your mind and heart.

We will do well to slow down... grasp our patterns of speech...and begin to change them

2. Presuming God can be contained and controlled by our minds and words.

God gave us reason... reflection... and we **should use every bit** to engage what He has revealed. The **problem lies** not with using our minds...but **presuming that we as finite creatures** can fully understand the infinite. We begin to **reduce God to our ideas**. We speak of Him as the object subjected to we who are the subject.

Words can be a means to contain and control something. We “name and claim”. We need to stop and realize that the nature of God cannot be contained or controlled by our ideas or words.

Isaiah 55:8–9

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.

[See also...Job 26:14 - Behold, these are but the outskirts of his ways, and how small a whisper do we hear of him! But the thunder of his power who can understand?; Psalm 147:5 - Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure.]

We serve a God that thinks about our lives, our world, and his creation on a completely different level than even the smartest human has the capacity to think.

We would all do well to say: “I have an amazing capacity to think...but my understanding cannot be compared to God’s.”

3. Claiming God’s authority for what is not clearly His word or working.

A name can be “called upon”...to claim association and authority: We are to grasp that it dishonors one’s “name” (reputation) to claim their authority when we do not represent it.

Have you ever discovered someone was fraudulently using your credit card? Feel violated. We can use God’s name ...fraudulently.

Matthew 7:21-23 (NLT)

“Not everyone who calls out to me, ‘Lord! Lord!’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of my Father in heaven will enter.”²² On judgment day many will say to me, ‘Lord! Lord! We prophesied in your name and cast out demons in your name and performed

many miracles in your name.’²³ But I will reply, ‘I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God’s laws.’

4. Attaching God’s reputation to what is not consistent with His nature.

Perhaps the **most common issue** we have to consider in reflecting God’ high name and nature...is that **what we do in His name.**

Once we “take His name”...the incongruity between God’s nature and of what we are, say, and do...requires the humility to be clear about the difference.

"The hypocrisy of the church is far worse than the profanity of the street." – Greg Laurie

Many of us would probably have a clearer sense of violation if we created and sold a bottle drink out in the public square...and called it Coca Cola... than we do about our claims to represent God.

Closing: I believe that we live in a world that has both lost it’s reverence...and is dying for it.

We live in a time when people trivialize God...but long for a Creator who is anything but trivial. They don’t need people who have a sense of superiority... but they appreciate a sense of seriousness.

Do we take God seriously?

Let’s close reading these words as a prayer aloud...

“Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy.” – Jesus (in Matthew 6:9)

Resources: Book: The Tender Commandments by Ron Mehl; Read more thoughts from others than usual, and afraid kept less track of what I may have drawn from, but recall some from John Piper, Mark Driscoll,

Notes:

1. Regarding the developing way the name of God was pronounced, one Catholic site explains:

In Hebrew the name of God is spelled YHWH. Since ancient Hebrew had no written vowels, it is uncertain how the name was pronounced originally, but there are records of the name in Greek, which *did* have written vowels. These records indicate that in all likelihood the name should be pronounced "Yahweh."

Shortly before the first century A.D., it became common for Jews to avoid saying the divine name for fear of misusing it and breaking the second commandment ("You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain," Dt 5:11). Whenever they read Scripture aloud and encountered the divine name, they substituted another Hebrew word, "Adonai" (which means "Lord" or "my Lord"), in its place.

Eventually Hebrew developed written vowels, which appeared as small marks called vowel points and were placed above and below the consonants of a word. In the sixth or seventh century some Jews began to place the vowel points for "Adonai" over the consonants for "Yahweh" to remind the reader of Scripture to say "Adonai" whenever he read "Yahweh."

About the 13th century the term "Jehovah" appeared when Christian scholars took the consonants of "Yahweh" and pronounced it with the vowels of "Adonai." This resulted in the sound "Yahowah," which has a Latinized spelling of "Jehovah." The first recorded use of this spelling was made by a Spanish Dominican monk, Raymundus Martini, in 1270.

<http://www.catholic.com/quickquestions/is-gods-name-yahweh-or-jehovah>