

JULY 29th
GOD'S NAME MATTERS

*"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***

My formal name is James Sterling Matthews. Neither my father nor I have ever used our formal "James" other than our signature. We've just always gone by "Jim." Perhaps my dislike of given name comes from my sixth-grade teacher "Mr. Fish" (another interesting name) who called me James the entire school year. I was too scared to correct him with my preferred name. Names matter. Even when we don't usually understand the root meaning of our given names, they still matter. Parents scour through name books to find just the right one to give to their baby. Even as we adopted our children, each one of them was given a new middle name by us because names matter. What does God have to teach us here in the third "word" from Exodus 20?

This third command can also be translated "you shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God." What did this mean for the Israelites? More often, this referred to the use of taking an oath. Understand clearly that God does not eliminate the use of His name in taking an oath. In fact, He encourages the use of His name in making a promise. Deuteronomy 10:20 states, "You shall fear the Lord your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear." People often misinterpret what Jesus says in Matthew 5:34-36 as a rebuke for taking oaths, but Jesus is correcting the false interpretation that often happened with God's Law. To avoid the use of God's name in a promise, people were "swearing" by using other objects in His kingdom. Kent Hughes points out correctly that because even these objects are created by God, even those oaths are bound because they point to Him. The point of the oath is that when it is given it is a sacred moment. It is bound by God.

The Israelites took Yahweh's name seriously. So serious that they rarely used it. According to Hughes, the only time "LORD" was spoken out loud was on the annual day of atonement, when the high priest entered the holy of holies to offer sacrifice for the sins of the people. Furthermore, Yahweh was only written by the scribes after they had ceremonially cleansed themselves and retrieved a new pen. Now that's true reverence for God's name!

Men, what does this mean for us today? Generally, we often think of this "word" as outlawing using God's name as a curse word. But is that all there is to it? Can we truly wash away our guilt in this command that quickly? I wonder if God's name has become too casual to us. I wonder if every time we think about or say something about God that we pause for a moment. Without getting legalistic here, it's important for us to consider how special any use of God's name is, because it stands for God's character. That's really the nugget of truth here. Why does God give this command? Because His name represents His character. The positive form of this command is given by Jesus in the disciples' prayer in Matthew 6: "Hallowed be your Name." Another way to say it is: "May your name be respected by all." As men, we stand for something. To state it correctly, we stand for Someone. How we live our lives should point to how magnificent our God is. After all, we are His representatives. Kent Hughes breaks it down well. Will we use this as our guide today? "Hallowed be your name in my mind. Hallowed be your name in my home. Hallowed be your name publicly in my life in the world. Hallowed be your name corporately in my worship within the body of Christ."

Spend some time thinking about ways that you haven't regarded God's name as magnificent and special. Confess to the Lord and ask Him to help you make His name honored by what you think and how you live.

For Further Reading: Matthew 6:9-13

