

THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

Exodus 20:7

By Andy Manning

The title of this sermon is “The Third Commandment.”

God created us with the desire for respect.

I don’t mean admiration; I mean simply respect.

For example, we don’t like it when people insult us; we don’t like it when people don’t look at us when we’re talking to them, or when they walk off when we are trying to tell them something.

We take offense when someone forgets to tell us please, or thank you, or when someone speaks harshly to us, or when we say “Hi” to someone and they do not return the greeting.

These are all forms of disrespect. These are ways of treating us like we are not important; like we are not valuable.

And when we are disrespected, we feel violated. We feel outraged. We feel wronged.

The reason we feel that is because we are valuable; we were created in the image of God; we were created to respect others and to be respected; and when people don’t respect us, we feel wronged.

As valuable as we are, being created in the image of God, God our creator is infinitely more valuable. As much as we deserve respect, God deserves respect infinitely more so.

And one of the most important ways we show God respect is in the way that we speak about God and the things of God.

And that’s what the third commandment is about. It is about showing proper respect to God by how we speak about Him.

Our text for today is **Exodus 20:7**. “Do not misuse the name of the LORD your God, because the LORD will not leave anyone unpunished who misuses his name.”

When I was a child there was a song that we used to sing. It like this:

Be careful little lips what you say,
Be careful little lips what you say,
For the Father up above
Who’s looking down in love,
So be careful little lips what you say.

That song teaches little children an important lesson. Our words matter.

Jesus said in Matthew 12:36 (CSB), “I tell you that on the day of judgment people will have to account for every careless word they speak.”

God cares about our words.

Why? Our words have power.

Our words can build people up, or tear them down; they can teach people, or lead people astray. And with our words we can honor God, or we can insult Him.

But of all the things that we must make sure that we don’t do with words, the most important is that we must not misuse the name of the Lord.

Unfortunately, people today, even many Christians, are not very careful with their words about God. In fact, many, if not most Christians are even careless with their words about God.

The commandment that we are studying today is probably the most violated commandment of all. And yet it is very serious.

A story in the Old Testament illustrates this. In Leviticus 24 two men got in a fight, and one man cursed and blasphemed God's name. So they arrested the man until the Lord told them what to do. **Leviticus 24:13-16** says:

13 Then the Lord spoke to Moses: 14 "Bring the one who has cursed to the outside of the camp and have all who heard him lay their hands on his head; then have the whole community stone him. 15 And tell the Israelites: If anyone curses his God, he will bear the consequences of his sin. 16 Whoever blasphemes the name of the Lord must be put to death; the whole community is to stone him. If he blasphemes the Name, he is to be put to death, whether the resident alien or the native.

You might be thinking, "That's harsh!" All the man did was curse and blaspheme the name of God, and not only did God sentence the man to death, but death by stoning!" But that's the point I am trying to make. People today are not very serious about their words about God. But God takes His name very seriously.

So let's talk about how to keep the third commandment. Let us answer three questions about the third commandment.

3 QUESTIONS ABOUT THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

1. What does the third commandment restrict?

In other words, what does the third commandment forbid, or tell us not to do?

Well, it's very simple. **Exodus 20:7** says, "Do not misuse the name of the LORD your God...."

Let's start by defining a couple of terms.

What does the word "**misuse**" mean?

Most people are more familiar with the old King James Version: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain...."

The word “vain” means emptiness, falsehood, trivial, light, inconsequential, small, disrespectful, dishonorable.

So to misuse God’s name means to use it in a way that is empty, false, trivial, light, inconsequential, small, disrespectful, or dishonorable.

What about the word “**name**” – “Do not misuse the NAME....”?

What “name” are we supposed to avoid misusing?

To start with, what is God’s name?

We find out in God’s conversation with Moses. Moses asked God what His name was. **Exodus 3:15** says, “God also said to Moses, ‘Say this to the Israelites: The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is my name forever; this is how I am to be remembered in every generation.’”

What is God’s name? The LORD.

Let me show you the same thing in several other places. **Exodus 15:3** says, “The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is his name.” **Exodus 34:5** says, “The LORD came down in a cloud, stood with him there, and proclaimed his name, “the LORD.”” **Isaiah 42:8** says, “I am the LORD. That is my name, and I will not give my glory to another or my praise to idols.”

So God’s name is the LORD. In Hebrew it is spelled YHWH.

It is sometimes called the tetragrammaton because it has four letters.

In modern Hebrew it is sometimes translated Yahweh, but we’re not sure exactly how it is pronounced because in Hebrew it has no vowels.

Some people, like the Jehovah’s Witnesses, insist that the correct pronunciation is Jehovah, but that is not true.

Jehovah is an Anglicized version of God’s name.

When the Hebrew was translated into English, the Y became a J, the W became a V, and the vowels were added so that it was pronounced Jehovah. So you can use the name Jehovah, but I prefer Yahweh because it is more accurate.

What does God's name, Yahweh, mean?

His encounter with Moses in the burning bush tells us.

When Moses asked God His name, before God said "Yahweh," God said "I AM." **Exodus 3:14** says, "God replied to Moses, 'I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: I AM has sent me to you.'"

Then in the next verse God said to tell the Israelites that "Yahweh" has sent him.

So God's name "Yahweh" means "I Am."

The Hebrew for "I Am" means "I am who am; I will be who I will be; I exist." It means that God is self-existent; He is eternal; He is uncreated; and He is sovereign. He will be who He will be; He will do what He will do. God's name is Yahweh.

But the third command isn't simply speaking about God's personal covenant name, Yahweh.

God's name refers to all of God's titles, all of His attributes, and all the words that He has chosen to reveal Himself to us.

For example, in the Bible God isn't merely called Yahweh; God revealed Himself with many names.

In the Old Testament He is known as God (Heb. Elohim, strong one);

God almighty (Heb. El Shaddai, God Almighty);

the Most High God (Heb. El Elyon);

the everlasting God (Heb. El Olam);

the Lord will provide (Heb. Yahweh Yireh);

The Lord is my Banner (Heb. Yahweh Nissi);

The Lord is Peace (Heb. Yahweh Shalom);

The Lord of Hosts (Heb. Yahweh Sabbaoth);

the Lord your sanctifier (Heb. Yahweh Maccaddeshcem);

the Lord my shepherd (Heb. Yahweh Roi);

the Lord our righteousness (Heb. Yahweh Tsidkenu);

the Lord is there (Heb. Yahweh Shammah).

God is also referred to as Lord (without all caps), which is the Hebrew name Adonai, which means master and owner.

In the New Testament Yahweh is called God (Gr. Theos);

He is called Lord (Gr. Kurios, pronounced koo-ree-os);

God is called Master (Gr. Despotes);

and God is called Father (Gr. Pater, pronounced pa-tayr).

And in the New Testament God reveals Himself in the person of Jesus Christ, who is God in the flesh. .

The name “Jesus” means “Yahweh saves.”

And “Christ” means messiah.

And Jesus is given many titles. We don't have time to list them all; there are over one hundred.

Just to name a few He is called *Kurios*, or Lord, which is the Greek rendering of Yahweh; He is called the Bread of Life; the Good Shepherd; Immanuel; the King of kings and Lord of lords; the Lamb of God; the Bridegroom.

And then in the New Testament we learn that God is not just Father, not just the Father and the Son, but the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is God, and He has many titles and names, such as Spirit of God; Spirit; Spirit of truth; and Counselor.

The point is that keeping the third commandment is not as simple as not misusing the name "Yahweh." It prohibits misusing any of God's names and titles.

But that's not all.

As we read the Bible, we find the God's name also refers to His attributes and His works.

For example, **Psalm 7:17** says, "I will thank the Lord for his righteousness; I will sing about the name of the Lord Most High."

This verse equates God's name with God's attribute of righteousness.

So God's name also refers to His attributes; His character – righteous, holy, love, compassionate, merciful, almighty, heavenly, etc.

So this means that you must also not misuse God's attributes – the words He uses to describe Himself to us.

Isaiah 63:16 says "Yet you are our Father, even though Abraham does not know us and Israel doesn't recognize us. You, Lord, are our Father; your name is Our Redeemer from Ancient Times."

This verse equates God's name with God's work of Redemption.

So God's name also refers to His works of redemption, salvation, creation, inspiration, sanctification.

The point is that God has many titles and attributes; and these all fall under the umbrella of the name of God.

God's name refers to God Himself, all of His titles, all the titles of Christ and the Holy Spirit, and all of His attributes.

With that in mind, this is an explanation of what the third commandment restricts: **The third commandment tells us not to speak in a way that makes light of God or dishonors Him; to avoid using God's name, His attributes, or the things of God in a meaningless or irreverent way.**

So let's talk about some common ways that people misuse God's name.

We break the third commandment when we...

1) Use God's name without **reference** to Him.

- In our everyday conversation we often use God's name even though we are not speaking to Him or about Him.
- We say things like, "Good Lord! Lord have mercy! OMG. Good God. God help us. Jesus. Jesus Christ. Jesus H. Christ. Lord have mercy."
- Most of the time we are saying these things without any reference to God, and that is a misuse of God's name.
- Don't speak of God or the things of God without reference to Him.

2) **Misrepresent** God.

- This is when someone takes action in God's name, but the action does not represent God's character or purposes.

- For example, a terrorist who says he is serving God by blowing up an abortion clinic.
- Or when a Christian speaks in a hateful way to sinners and calls it “evangelism.”

3) Flippantly use God’s **attributes**.

- Many Christian, to avoid misusing God’s name, will misuse His attributes.
- “Mercy. Mercy me. Gracious. Goodness. Holy smoke. Holy cow. Merciful heavens. Hell. What the hell!”
- We often use those words to express shock, or horror, or surprise.
- “It’s going to rain all week.” “Goodness gracious.”
- But remember that the name of God refers not only to God’s personal name, but to all His titles and attributes and to the things of God.
- God’s attributes are not meant to be used flippantly as expressions of shock, disgust, or anger.

4) Use God’s name as a form of **profanity**.

- As an expletive.
- We should not use profanity, but when we throw in God’s name, it makes it infinitely worse.
- “GD” is a very popular example. We hit our thumb with the hammer and we say, “GD.”

5) Use God’s name without proper **reverence**.

- For example, God’s name should not be used in lighthearted jokes.

- There's a popular joke that goes like this. What is God's name? Harold. Our Father in Heaven, Harold by thy name.
- Jokes are funny, but that doesn't mean they are appropriate.
- I have made this mistake many times.
- There's fun kids song that I used to sing. It goes like this:
 - i. Verse: "I think I'm gonna throw up. I think I'm gonna throw up. I think I'm gonna throw up, my hands to the Lord. I think I'm gonna do do. I think I'm gonna do do. I think I'm gonna do do, the will of the Lord. I think I'm gonna hurl. I think I'm gonna hurl. I think I'm gonna hurl, my sins out the door."
 - ii. Chorus: "Throw up. Throw up. Throw up. My hands to the Lord."
 - iii. Again, it may be cute, but it is irreverent.
 - iv. Just recently my kids and I were having a fun conversation and Lydia was trying to convince us that it is important to scrub the bottom of your feet when you take a bath, and I said, "Do you think Jesus scrubbed the bottom of his feet?"
 - v. Again, that's irreverent.

Leviticus 18:21 says, "You are not to sacrifice any of your children in the fire to Molech. Do not profane the name of your God; I am the LORD."

Do you know what the word profane means?

Profane doesn't mean dirty. To profane something is take that which is sacred, and treat it irreverently.

Blasphemy means the same thing.

To profane or blaspheme God's name is to speak irreverently about God.

It doesn't have to be negative; it doesn't have to be cursing God's name; just speaking irreverently is to profane and blaspheme God's name.

The name of God should only be used with the utmost reverence and respect.

6) Engage in **false** teaching.

- Whether intentional or not, when you teach people falsehoods about God you are breaking the third commandment.
- **James 3:1** says, "Not many should become teachers, my brothers, because you know that we will receive a stricter judgment."

7) Engage in false **prophecy**.

- When someone claims to speak a message from God that is not from God, they are violating the third commandment.
- In the Old Testament the punishment for this was severe.
- **Deuteronomy 18:20** says, "But the prophet who presumes to speak a message in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods—that prophet must die."

8) Make false **oaths**.

- An oath is when you promise to God, or in the name of God, or as God is your witness.
- "I promise to God. I swear to God. I swear on the Bible. I swear on a stack of Bibles. So help me God."
- There is a proper place for oaths, such as in a wedding ceremony, or in a court of law, or when a politician is being sworn into office.
- But when you break your oath, or when you take an oath with no intention of keeping it, God takes it very seriously.

- **Leviticus 19:12** says, “Do not swear falsely by my name, profaning the name of your God; I am the Lord.”

In the New Testament Jesus said to avoid all oaths. **Matthew 5:33-34** says, “Again, you have heard that it was said to our ancestors, You must not break your oath, but you must keep your oaths to the Lord. 34 But I tell you, don’t take an oath at all...”

Some groups in history such as the Anabaptists and William Peen believed that this meant you should never take oaths, not even in marriage or a court of law.

But that’s not what Jesus was saying.

God commands us to take oaths in His name.

Deuteronomy 6:13 says, “Fear the Lord your God, worship him, and take your oaths in his name.”

Paul made oaths. **Romans 1:9** says, “God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in telling the good news about his Son—that I constantly mention you.”

Jesus is talking about our everyday conversation. This refers to pointless swearing in your daily life, when you regularly try to get people to believe you by saying, “I swear to God; I promise to God.”

You should save your oaths for the most solemn occasion.

This also refers to false oaths, which I already mentioned; when you take an oath than you don’t mean, or when you break an oath.

9) Use God’s name **insincerely.**

- When you use God’s name without really meaning it.
- We do this all the time when people sneeze. What do we say? “God bless you.”

- We're not really praying for God to bless them; it's just the polite thing to say. But it's not polite to God.
- We're also insincere when we sing praise songs in church without really thinking about what we are saying, or without really meaning what we are saying.
- As well, we're insincere when say a memorized prayer, like the Lord's Prayer, without really thinking about what we're saying. That's a violation of the third commandment.

10) Act like **hypocrites**.

- Claiming to be a Christian but not acting like it.
- When you claim to be a Christian, you are wearing the name of Christ; you are representing Christ; so you better represent Him well.
- **Colossians 3:23** says, "And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."
- If you claim to be a Christian, do everything in the name of Jesus – only do what would please Him, and only do it in a way that would please Him.

11) Use God's name to **manipulate**.

- This is when you use God's name to advance your own agenda.
- Christians are famous for this.
- Sometimes they excuse their actions by saying, "God is leading me to do it."
- Sometimes they say, "God told me to tell you such and such."

- Or even worse, “God told me that you should do such and such,” or “God told me that we should do such and such.”
- A word of caution to the singles out there. If ever a guy or girl comes up to you and says, “God told me that we should date,” or “God told me that we’re supposed to get married,” run away. When someone uses God’s name to manipulate others it is called spiritual abuse.

12) **Insult God.**

- When people say things like “God doesn’t exist,”
- “The Bible isn’t true,” “Jesus isn’t real,” “The God of the Bible is a cruel monster.”

So in summary, the third commandment tells us not to speak in a way that makes light of God or dishonors Him; to avoid using God’s name, His attributes, or the things of God in a meaningless or irreverent way.

Jl Packer said this command touches on three things.

First, **irreverence,** or “speaking or thinking of God in a way that insults Him.”

Second, **bad language,** or using God’s name as a swearword to express your unholy feelings.

And third, **promise-keeping.** “If we have invoked God by name in order to give our words credence, it is monstrous irreverence if we then go back on them.”

The **Westminster Shorter Catechism** says, “The third commandment forbiddeth all profaning or abusing anything whereby God maketh himself known.”

The **Heidelberg Catechism** says, “What is the aim of the third commandment? That we neither blaspheme nor misuse the name of God by cursing, perjury, or unnecessary oaths, nor share in such horrible sins by being silent bystanders.”

Not only should we not misuse God's name, but we should speak up in God's defense when others do so.

This means there are really **on three legitimate reasons to use God's name**:

- To glorify Him – "God is great!"
- To talk to Him.
- And to teach others about Him.

Don't get caught up in trying to figure out what words to say, and what words not to say.

Here's a good rule of thumb. If you're not sure if a word or phrase is a misuse of God's name, then just don't say it. Err on the side of respect for God's name.

2. What does the third commandment require?

Remember that every commandment is both positive and negative.

The third commandment is expressed in the negative – do not misuse God's name – but a positive is implied.

What is the positive command in the third commandment?

It may be best expressed in the Lord's Prayer.

Matthew 6:9 says, "Therefore, you should pray like this: Our Father in heaven, your name be honored as holy."

Most people are familiar with the King James Version: "Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name."

To hallow God's name, or to honor it as holy, is to set it apart from all other words.

It is to treat it with more respect, more reverence, more affection, more seriousness, more sincerity, than all other words.

It is to speak of God and the things of God with more respect and reverence and care than all others words.

Phil Johnson said that the third commandment “requires us to sanctify the Lord’s name in our hearts. We must exalt God’s name in our hearts.”

The **Westminster Shorter Catechism** says, “The third commandment requireth the holy and reverend use of God's names, titles, attributes, ordinances, word, and works.”

The **Heidelberg Catechism** says, “We should use the holy name of God only with reverence and awe, so that we may properly confess God, pray to God, and glorify God in all our words and works.”

The **Dake Reference Bible** says, “This commandment is against all false swearing, blasphemy, and all profane, vain, trivial, light, and irreverent use of God’s name in ordinary life. It also refers to using God’s name in false religions, witchcraft, conjuring – any abuse of the sacred and holy name whatsoever. The right use of His name is confined to that which is sacred – prayer, praise, prophecy, teaching, worship, and communion with God and saints.”

John Calvin said, “The purpose of this commandment is – God wills that we hallow the majesty of His name. Therefore it means, in brief, that we are not to profane His name by treating it contemptuously and irreverently. To this prohibition duly corresponds the commandment that we should be zealous and careful to honor His name with godly reverence. Therefore, we ought to be so disposed in mind and speech that we neither think nor say anything concerning God and His mysteries without reverence and with much soberness, that in estimating His works we conceive nothing but what is honorable to Him.”

3. What is the reason for the third commandment?

The third commandment contains a warning.

Let’s read it again. **Exodus 20:7** says, “Do not misuse the name of the Lord your God, because the Lord will not leave anyone unpunished who misuses his name.”

God is not specific about the form of punishment, just that the person who misuses God's name will be punished.

This warning is intended to freak us out.

Hebrews 10:31 says, "It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

Jesus said in **Matthew 10:28**, "Don't fear those who kill the body but are not able to kill the soul; rather, fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

We should be terrified to do something that might incur the wrath of God.

We should want to avoid God's extreme anger at all cost.

This is what God told the Israelites before they entered the Promised Land.

Deuteronomy 28:58-60 says, "58 If you are not careful to obey all the words of this law, which are written in this scroll, by fearing this glorious and awe-inspiring name—the Lord, your God— 59 he will bring wondrous plagues on you and your descendants, severe and lasting plagues, and terrible and chronic sicknesses. 60 He will afflict you again with all the diseases of Egypt, which you dreaded, and they will cling to you."

God is serious about His name.

Why? Because He deserves the utmost respect; but when you disrespect His name, you disrespect Him.

Our God is a good, good Father. He kind, compassionate, merciful, and generous. But He is holy. He desires, deserves, and demands our utmost respect. And when we don't give it to Him, He will not leave us unpunished.

CONCLUSION

Let's be honest. We have all broken the third commandment multiple times. And that means that we deserve the wrath of God, which is ultimately eternal torment in hell. That's what we deserve.

But the good news is that God sent His Son, Jesus, to die for our sins so that we could be forgiven, and reconciled to God, and have eternal life.

John 3:36 says, “The one who believes in the Son has eternal life, but the one who rejects the Son will not see life; instead, the wrath of God remains on him.”

Notice that the punishment of God’s wrath is not reserved for those who misuse God’s name, but for those who reject Jesus Christ.

All have sinned; all have misused God’s name; but Jesus died for our sins; and we can be saved by believing in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Are you sure that you are saved? Are you sure that you are going to heaven?

You can be.

It’s as simple as **ABC**.

Admit you are a sinner in need of a Savior.

Believe in Jesus Christ who died and rose again, as God’s payment for your sins.

Call on Jesus to be your Savior and King.

