

## Reverence God - Exodus 20:7

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Today, we continue our series, *The Big Ten*, taking a closer look at the Ten Commandments and re-discovering their validity and application within today's world and in our daily faith walk. Today we look at the Second Commandment.

**Slide #1** - Exodus 20:7 – “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.”

**Slide #2** - *The Second Commandment* – You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.

*What does this mean?* – We should fear and love God so that we do not curse, swear, use satanic arts, lie, or deceive by His name, but call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.

All you need to do is hear the name Judas Iscariot or Hitler or the Green Bay Packers and strong negative images come to your mind. Some names make us laugh like Dweezil Zappa and his sister Moon Unit. Some people are assigned nicknames by the media like “Octomom.” Names are a big deal though, aren't they? We search for just the right name for our children. Have you ever noticed that celebrities seem to go out of their way to choose names that are very unusual? Here are some actual celebrity baby names that I came across: Dandelion, Fifi Trixibell, Jeronimo, and Ocean.

What you call God is a big deal to Him because His name reflects His nature and He's spent eternity building His name. We could say that its copyright protected. According to Christian economist Gary North, in *Chronicles: A Magazine of American Culture*: “One way for a modern American to begin to understand this commandment is to treat God's name as a trademarked property. In order to gain widespread distribution for His copyrighted repair manual—the Bible—and also to capture greater market share for His authorized franchise—the Church—God has graciously licensed the use of His name to anyone who will use it according to His written instructions. It needs to be understood, however, that God's name has not been released into the public domain. God retains legal control over His name and threatens serious penalties against the unauthorized misuse of this supremely valuable property. All trademark violations will be prosecuted to the full limits of the law. The prosecutor, judge, jury, and enforcer is God. God's name is copyrighted!”

So, I show respect for God when I handle His name with care. We don't attach a lot of weight to the importance of a name. It is primarily an identification tag. That is not the case in Scripture. The name of God is not just a name; it is who He is.

- It validates His existence.
- It represents His character.
- It promotes His reputation.
- It communicates His dignity.
- It declares His worth.
- It identifies who He is.

**Exodus 3:14-15:** God said to Moses, “I am who I am.” And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I am has sent me to you.’” God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘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, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.” God's name is to be revered. The ancients Jews took the name of God revealed to Moses very seriously. Today there is little to no respect for God's name.

## Misusing the Name of God

So, how is God's name misused in our society and even by Christians?

### 1. We misuse God's name when we use it in profane ways.

Little Mary, attending Sunday school for the first time one Christmas season, eagerly listened as her teacher told of the birth of God's Son. She was thrilled to hear the story of the angels, wise men, the star, and the gifts. Then the teacher added, "And they shall call His name Jesus." Mary looked over at the person beside her and asked "Why did they have to name such a sweet baby a swear word?" It was the first time she had ever heard His name used outside of a curse.

People can blatantly misuse God's name in profanity, and you know what I mean. But there are less obvious ways, for instance, when in anger or frustration, we say "Jesus Christ, what is wrong with you?" Or when we say things like, "I swear by the God in heaven, I did not do that," we are using God's name carelessly or even flippantly. We need to be careful how we use God's name.

### 2. We misuse God's name when we carelessly invoke His name.

People use God's name when it has no real significance in their lives. Yale Law School professor Stephen Carter makes this point in a book on the role of religion in public life, suitably titled *God's Name in Vain*:

"In truth, there is probably no country in the Western world where people use God's name quite as much, or quite as publicly, or for quite as many purposes, as we Americans do. Few candidates for office are able to end their speeches without asking God to bless their audience, or the nation, or the great work we are undertaking, but everybody is sure that the other side is insincere . . . Athletes thank God, often on television, after scoring the winning touchdown, because, like politicians, they like to think God is on their side. Churches erect huge billboards and take out ads in the paper . . . God's will is cited as a reason to be against gay rights. And a reason to be for them. God is said not to tolerate poverty. Or abortion. Or nuclear weapons . . . Everybody who wants to change America, and everybody who wants not to, understands the nation's love affair with God's name, which is why everybody invokes it."

### 3. We misuse God's name when we engage in meaningless worship (Is. 29:13).

### 4. We misuse God's name when we make false oaths and promises.

Pastor Philip Ryken, in his book *Written in Stone*, wrote:

"What does it mean to 'lift up' God's name? This term had a fairly technical meaning. It was used in legal situations to refer to the taking of an oath. When witnesses needed to confirm their testimony, instead of swearing on a Bible, they lifted a hand and swore by God's name."

It was a common practice among Jews to invoke the name of the Lord when making an oath. Leviticus 19:12 warns against swearing falsely and profaning God's name. Jesus did the same in our Gospel lesson today from Matt. 5:33–37.

Martin Luther in his *Small Catechism* states: "We are permitted, and even required, to take an oath by God's name when an oath is necessary for the glory of God or the welfare of our neighbor. Examples include the following: testimony in court, oath of office, wedding vows."

## 5. We misuse God's name when our profession doesn't match our lifestyle.

It is one thing to say you are a Christian; it is quite another to *be* a Christian. Many people claim to be Christians, but there is no evidence of it in their lives. When we are not living in obedience, we call ourselves hypocrites. But even more serious, we are taking God's name in vain. Rom. 2:23–24 says "You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. For as it is written, 'The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.'"

Did you know that according to George Barna, 66% of American Christians fall into the category of "Casual Christians?" Here's what he says: "Casual Christianity is faith in moderation. It allows them to feel religious without having to prioritize their faith...To them, Casual Christianity is the best of all worlds; it encourages them to be a better person than if they had been irreligious, yet it is not a faith into which they feel compelled to heavily invest themselves" (barna.org).

Taking up the name Christian is a big deal because it means "little Christ." When we are called Christian it means that we are called by Christ's name to follow Him and we now represent Him to a watching world. We are the keepers of God's reputation in this community, in this county, in this country, and in the world.

### Honoring the Name of God

So, how can we honor God's name? Again, Martin Luther tells us "we should call upon God's name in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks."

1. We honor God's name by reverencing Him. Matt. 6:9 – "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."
2. We honor God's name by praising Him. Ps. 8:9 – "O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!"
3. We honor God's name by giving Him the credit He deserves.
4. We honor God's name by living a life that brings glory to His name.
5. We honor God's name when we proclaim His glory to the unbeliever.
6. We honor God's name when we exalt the name of Jesus. Phil. 2:9–11 – "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so 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."
7. We honor God's name when we *genuinely* call upon the name of the Lord for salvation. Acts 4:12 – "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given by men by which we must be saved (but Jesus)."

"O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth." May we always bring honor and glory to God's name and call upon it in every trouble, and by it pray, praise, and give thanks. In Jesus name. Amen.