

The Words of a Covenant

Part 4 - The Third Commandment

April 12, 1998

Exodus 20:7

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. NKJV

- **Review & Introduction**

We continue our study of what is commonly called the first table of the Decalogue. The first table pertains to instruction on our obligations toward God and the second table pertains to our obligations towards others. In this first table, so far, we have been instructed on who to worship, who not to worship and how to worship the True God truly.

- **You shall not *take* the name of the Lord your God in *vain*...**

- One of the best reasons to use a Bible where the translation philosophy is that of formal equivalence rather than dynamic equivalence is that sometimes the meaning of a sentence can be limited by the translators. Such is the case with this verse. The original language uses a very common word which means to take. Literally it means to carry, up, bear or lift.
- The second important word is "vain". This word means empty, false or vanity.
- Unfortunately, many Christians (and non-Christians) believe this to be the commandment which prohibits cussing or cursing with God's name. There is this very common belief that the primary emphasis of this command pertains to the manner in which we speak God's name. However, although the way we speak God's name is included in the command, it is not what is central to the command. We are told not to take on or carry with us the name of God falsely. Therefore, the primary prohibition in this command is a prohibition against hypocrisy. We are not to take on the name of the Lord in a false manner. Which deals more about the way we *live in* the name of God than it does with the way we *speak* the name of God. Now, it is also true that if we are living with the name of God falsely, then it will be no wonder when we speak the name of God falsely. But speaking the name of God falsely is not at the heart of the command.
- Notice also, this command does not pertain to the manner in which pagans use the name, rather this command is given to the covenant people of God, "...the Lord *your* God...". This command is primarily violated by those who bear the name of the Lord, that is, those who are called by His name. Therefore, this is a command which is particularly applicable to us as covenant people abiding in the terms or commands of the covenant.

- **God's Name Is To Be Hallowed**

- God declares that His name shall be great among the nations and that He will declare His own glory (*Malachi 1:11-14*) Later we see our Lord coming in the name of the Father and declaring His name to the people. When Jesus teaches us to pray He begins by hallowing the name of God. The name is to be respected, honored and revered. However, unfortunately, we are often times more appalled by the use of vulgarities or coarse talk than we are by the idle or profane use of God's name.

- **A People Called By His Name**

- The enemies of God will fear those called by His name. - *Deut. 28:8-10*
- God's blessings are promised to the obedient who are called by His name. - *2Chronicles 7:12-14*
- God calls to Himself those who bear His name. - *Isaiah 43:1, 5-7*
- The words of God are a delight for those who are called by His name. - *Jeremiah 15:14-15*
- We stand before Him by His name. - *Jeremiah 33:15*
- Our Righteousness is the Lord Jesus Christ. - *Acts 2:21, 38; 4:12; 11:26*
- Study in John - *John 2:3; 3:18; 5:43; 10:25; 12:13, 28; 14:13, 26; 15:16; 16:23, 24, 26; 17:6, 11, 12, 26; 20:31*

- **Hypocrisy Is A Sin Against God—Not Unbelievers**

- When we bear the name of God, yet live as though we were not His possession or stand in our own righteousness, it is God who is offended. Although the unbelieving world cries foul when they see hypocrisy, it is not really a sin against them as much as it is against the Lord who bought us with the death of His Son, placed His name on us and promised our glory.

- **Living and Speaking In the Name of God**

- The Lord's name is blasphemed among the unbelieving world because those who are called by the name of the Lord speak

against sin but they themselves live in the sin. Here we see the clear connection between the way we *live* in the name of God and the manner in which we *speak* in the name of God. We cannot even begin to understand the damage that is caused by hypocrisy. But if the unbelieving world really hated hypocrisy among believers, the only unhypocritical response would be obedience, not disobedience.

- We can see clearly from the Scripture that if we are living in obedience, the things we say will be obedient. But if we are living in hypocrisy, we will soon be speaking hypocritically. This hypocritical speech will show up in our cursing, taking oaths and coarse talk. If we have good fruit in our hearts our speech will manifest good fruit for our words come out of our hearts. Notice also that trite and idle words will also be judged; this includes using or uttering God's name tritely or idly. Matthew 12:33-37
- We can also violate the third commandment by saying the right thing in worship but living falsely. It is not enough to say the right words, we must also be living the right words. Luke 18:9-14
- On occasion, it may be appropriate and necessary to take an oath or a vow in the name of God. However, we should not do so flippantly or without much fear. If we are going to declare our faithfulness based on the fact that we bear the name of God we should shudder at the thought of breaking such an oath and blaspheming the name of the Lord. Jesus forbids from swearing or taking oaths by created things. In most cases our word should be the basis of our oath; we should live as people who can be believed and trusted by what we say. Matthew 5:33-37 In other places in the Scriptures, we are instructed about how to take an oath or vow properly and in these cases it is a solemn situation where confidence is necessary to end dispute. Deut. 6: 13; Hebrew 6:16
- This is absolutely central to the command: because you bear or carry the name of the Lord, everything you say or do has an effect upon the name of our Lord. We are shaming His name, which is to be hallowed, by every faithless thing we do, say or think.