

a sermon on EXODUS 20:7

ON THE THIRD COMMANDMENT – DO NOT TAKE GOD’S NAME IN VAIN!

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I. A PROPOSITION

The Name of The LORD GOD is holy, and is therefore to be employed by men in earnest reverence, pious prayer, respectful worship, humble adoration and joyful song!

II. THE TEXT – EXODUS 20:7 – THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

[1 And GOD spake all these words, saying...]

7 Thou shalt not take The Name of The LORD Thy GOD in vain; for The LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh His Name in vain. ¹

III. INTRODUCTION

Here in EXODUS 20, The Almighty speaking His Law to Moses and recording Them upon tablets of clay that men might learn again to obey and reverence Him, we find The Third Commandment: “Do not take The Name of The LORD GOD in vain!” Wycliffe observes that The Third Commandment “...prohibits the use of GOD’s Name in the service of unbelief and lying... [or] To substantiate our falsehood by an appeal to GOD, [which] will bring [His certain] judgement. Here also may be found force for the injunction to Christians to...,” as Saint Paul declares in EPHESIANS 4:1, “...walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called!” ^{2 3}

But what does this mean? Is this merely a prohibition against speaking a Name of The Creator inappropriately? Is it actively taking His Name by our words written or spoken as a word of exclamation, or worse yet, as a curse? Does this extend to a prohibition against dishonouring The Name of The LORD in our actions which violate His holiness? Shall we also say this forbids wicked thoughts and intentions which cause affront to Who He is? For The Almighty sees into the very hearts of men!

In fact, as we shall see, it covers all these things! For if we take The name of The Almighty in vain in thought, word or deed, we are in fact questioning His holiness, doubting His decrees, rebelling against His sovereignty, defaming His glory, showing unthankfulness for His blessings and rejecting His love. For if we disrespect GOD in any of His Names in The Father, The Son or The Holy Ghost, then we are disrespecting Him, His Covenants, His Revelations both General and Special and Him for Who He is!

IV. DEFINING THE SIN OF TAKING GOD’S NAME IN VAIN

Here we must put The Third Command into perspective within The First Table – the first four Commandments – of The Ten Commandments, which direct men to their proper reverence to GOD. As Wycliffe puts it, “The First Commandment ...guards the unity of GOD, The Second His spirituality, and The Third His deity... [from the abuses of sinful man]. In The First, we are forbidden to make GOD one of many when He is The only One; in The Second to liken Him to a corruptible image when He is The incorruptible Spirit; in The Third to identify Him in any way with the creature when He is

¹ 1, KJV, EXODUS 20:7.

² 2, Wycliffe, EXODUS 20:7, page 69.

³ 1, KJV, EPHESIANS 4:1.

The Creator.”⁴ The taking of GOD’s Name in vain attacks all of these – GOD’s unity, spirituality and deity.

All forms of taking GOD’s Name in vain may be considered within the meaning of the word “blasphemy.” Noah Webster defines blasphemy as “An indignity offered to GOD by words or writings [and we may add also by intents, thoughts and deeds, which are] reproachful, contemptuous or irreverent[ly] ...uttered impiously against JEHOVAH.” It is “...an injury offered to [- no, hurled at! -] GOD, by denying that which is due and belonging to Him, or attributing to Him that which is not agreeable to His Nature.”⁵

V. THE REBELLION BEHIND TAKING GOD’S NAME IN VAIN

As the Catechism of The Catholic Church states so well, the prohibition commanded here means that we abstain from “every improper use of The Names of GOD [The Father,] JESUS CHRIST [The Son, and The HOLY SPIRIT], ...[as well as that] of the Virgin Mary and all the saints.”⁶ Taking The Name of The LORD in vain in any such way is a rejection of GOD Himself and the many great works of Grace which He has brought forth in love for the blessing and salvation of mankind.

GOD forbid that any Christian man should think himself free from obeying The Moral Law of The LORD, which He took such great pains to lay down in tablets of stone through His servant of Old Moses on The Mount! For as The Anglican Thirty Nine Articles of Religion so rightly confess, “...Although The Law given from GOD to Moses, as touching Ceremonies and Rites, do not bind Christian men..., yet notwithstanding, no Christian man whatsoever is free from the obedience of The Commandments which are called Moral!”⁷

The man whose heart’s desire is to dwell before The Presence of The LORD, in both this life and the next, will be - as David proclaims in PSALM 24:4 - “He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.”⁸ Those that are of the opposite desire are those who, in taking GOD’s Name in vain in the hardness of their hearts, lift up their souls in vanity and rebellion before Him. Therefore, of The Saviour JESUS CHRIST, Saint John writes in JOHN 1:5, “And The Light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not!”⁹

For, if a man desires to fulfill his duty towards GOD - which should be the object of all men - he is to start by keeping The Ten Commandments. And a man who can not or will not keep himself from taking The Name of The LORD in vain is not a man who loves GOD, nor can he then truly love his neighbour, who is made like him in GOD’s Image. The rebellion behind taking GOD’s Name in vain then lies in these words of the

⁴ 2, Wycliffe, EXODUS 20:7, page 69.

⁵ 3, Noah Webster’s 1828 Dictionary, “Blasphemy,” noun, page BLA – BLA, pages not numbered.

⁶ 4, Catechism of The Catholic Church, # 2146, page 576.

⁷ 5, Book of Common Prayer, Anglican 39 Articles, Article VII. Of The Old Testament, page 611.

⁸ 1, KJV, PSALM 24:4.

⁹ 1, KJV, JOHN 1:5.

prophet Samuel in I SAMUEL 15:23, “For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry...”¹⁰ At the heart of the hardened habitual blasphemer is the rebellion of idolatry.

Such a man does not believe in GOD, nor fear Him, nor love Him with all his heart, mind and strength. Nor does he truly worship GOD, nor give Him thanks, nor put his whole trust in Him, nor truly call upon The LORD. Nor does such a man truly serve The Almighty, for to dishonour GOD’s holy Name is to disbelieve GOD’s holy Word and all that is revealed therein.¹¹ Therefore to keep GOD’s Name in holiness and reverence is the beginning of fulfilling one’s duty to GOD Himself!

VI. THE SIN OF USING GOD’S NAME IN BLASPHEMY

The most commonly understood form of taking a Name of GOD in vain is no doubt overt blasphemy. The Catechism of The Catholic Church declares that blasphemy is the “...uttering against GOD – inwardly or outwardly – words of hatred, reproach, or defiance; in speaking ill of GOD; in failing in respect toward Him in one’s speech; in misusing GOD’s Name... [And not only this, but it also using] language against CHRIST’s Church, the saints, and sacred things... [And not only this, but also the] use of GOD’s Name to cover up criminal practices, to reduce peoples to servitude, to torture persons or [without justifiable warrant] put them to death...!”¹² This includes the use of The Names of The LORD as curses, which is common in today’s shameless foul speech, so common that it has become in this time and place a part of the unconscious language for many!

VII. THE SIN OF USING GOD’S NAME IN EVERYDAY CASUAL SPEECH

The American Founding Father Benjamin Franklin once wrote of our society that “...bad examples to youth are more rare in America, which must be a comfortable consideration to parents. To this may be truly added, that serious [Christian] Religion, under its various denominations, is not only tolerated, but respected and practiced. Atheism is unknown there; infidelity rare and secret; so that persons may live to a great age in that country without having their piety shocked by meeting with either an atheist or an infidel!”¹³ Indeed, how times have changed!

The use of The Names of GOD in everyday common and casual speech is also a taking of His Name in vain. Keil and Delitzsch observe that The Third Commandment “...prohibits all employment of The Names of GOD for vain and unworthy objects, and includes... trivial swearing in the ordinary intercourse of life...”¹⁴ Go to any public coffee house, restaurant or public square in our land today, and your ears, if they be

¹⁰ 1, KJV, I SAMUEL 15:23.

¹¹ 5, Book of Common Prayer, A Catechism, Question: What is your duty towards GOD?, Answer..., page 586.

¹² 4, Catechism of The Catholic Church, # 2148, page 576.

¹³ 6, America’s GOD and Country Encyclopedia of Quotations, Benjamin Franklin, text of his pamphlet, “Information To Those Who Would Remove to America,” written to Europeans who were considering a move to this country, or intending to send their young people... [to America], page 247.

¹⁴ 7, Keil and Delitzsch, Volume I – The Pentateuch, The Second Book of Moses, Ver. 7 – The Third Word, page 118.

zealous for The Lord, will not fail to hear the hurtful abuses of The Creator's blessed Name being taken – not only routinely as a curse word – but in conjunction with a multitude of unrepeatably foul mumblings that froth forth from the mouths of both the impious heathen and even the supposedly pious faithful! Add to this the sad use of GOD's Name in casual speech, even apart from these other outrages, as a common word of no greater importance than the time of day or the state of the weather!

VIII. THE SIN OF USING GOD'S NAME IN FALSE VOWS AND FALSE OATHS

If we make promises to others, taking a Name of GOD as a witness of our intent to do what we vow and then intentionally and especially with premeditated forethought not keep those promises, is also a violation of This Commandment. This is because, as The Catechism of The Catholic Church says, "...GOD's Name engages The Divine honour, fidelity, truthfulness and authority... To be unfaithful to ...[a Name of GOD in this way is no less than] to make GOD out to be a liar!"¹⁵

Further, making a solemn oath sealed by a Name of GOD which we do not intend to honour, or which is for evil purposes clearly contrary to His Commandments and Word, or which is in the service of overt wickedness, are all taking of GOD's Name in vain as well. For when we take His Name as a testimony of the truthfulness of our own oath, we had better be sure that we are not misusing The Witness of Divine Truth, lest we cause the truthfulness of The King of The Universe to be questioned before men! For "a false oath [of any kind made in GOD's Name] calls on GOD to be witness to a lie!"¹⁶

To take GOD's Name in vain for the purposes of making false solemn oaths is to deny the truth of The very Holy Scriptures themselves – upon which those solemn oaths even today are still made by men in our land – and therefore to deny The One Who is The Author therein, JESUS CHRIST. So Saint John says in I JOHN 5:10, "He that believeth on The Son of GOD hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not GOD hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that GOD gave of His Son!"¹⁷

IX. THE SIN OF ATTRIBUTING WICKEDNESS TO THE NATURE OF GOD

In MATTHEW 12:22 we read that the people had brought before JESUS CHRIST "...one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and He healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw."¹⁸ When the Pharisees heard of this, they accused The Lord of casting out the devil from this man and restoring his sight and speech by the power of the devil. Here is The Saviour first explained that a kingdom divided against itself can not stand, and that He had therefore not cast out the devil by use of the devil's power.

But what these Pharisees were in truth saying is that a work done by the power of The HOLY SPIRIT by the command of CHRIST was in fact done by satan, the enemy of both GOD and man. This JESUS warns is the awful blasphemy against The HOLY

¹⁵ 4, Catechism of The Catholic Church, # 2147, page 576.

¹⁶ 4, Catechism of The Catholic Church, # 2151, page 577.

¹⁷ 1, KJV, I JOHN 5:10.

¹⁸ 1, KJV, MATTHEW 12:22.

SPIRIT which is an unpardonable sin! So The Lord declared in MATTHEW 12:31, “Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against The HOLY GHOST shall not be forgiven unto men!”¹⁹ This is the attributing to the devil and to wickedness what are the good works of GOD, and the attributing of wickedness to the works and Person of GOD Himself. This is just as much sinful usage of GOD’s holy Name in vain as when men invoke His Name for magical purposes, incantations, overt witchcraft or subtle charms!

X. THE SIN OF USING GOD’S NAME TO COVER RELIGIOUS HYPROCRACY

To take upon oneself a holy Name of GOD in one’s life - thus sealing one’s soul as a servant and follower of The LORD - and then to live one’s life in thought, word or deed that brings dishonour to Who He is before men and angels is itself taking GOD’s Name in vain. For a man who calls himself a Jew and lives a life of overt rebellion against The Law of Moses is taking The Name of GOD in vain with his every breath! And a man who calls himself a Christian and lives a life of overt rebellion against The Grace of CHRIST is taking The Name of GOD in vain with his every step! As the prophet Nathan rebuked King David for his sins of adultery and murder in II SAMUEL 12:14, “Howbeit, because by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of The LORD to blaspheme...!”²⁰

This is the Doctor who is seen to piously read from The Torah in his synagogue and then goes off to his abortion clinic to murder The LORD’s unborn; he breaks The Third Commandment in his hypocrisy! This is the military officer of an occupation army who is seen to reverently kneel to receive The sacred Elements of Communion in his Church and then goes off to mow down innocent civilians; he likewise takes GOD’s Name in vain! This is the seminary student who hungrily takes hold of every crumb of religious knowledge he can consume and then turns about to abuse and rip apart his colleagues for the purpose of building up himself rather than The Body of CHRIST; he no less blasphemes against GOD’s Name! Here Saint James laments in JAMES 2:7, “Do not they blaspheme That worthy Name by the which ye are called?”²¹ By such is The Name and thus The Person of GOD put to derision before heathens!

Likewise the nation which professes to be a servant people of The Almighty and plasters “In GOD We Trust!” on its money and monuments, but then turns to tear down The Ten Commandments of Moses and The Crosses of CHRIST from its public squares, that forbids school children from uttering prayers to The Almighty over their meals and criminalizes the reading by their teachers of The Holy Scriptures within its schools, that enacts laws directly contrary to the clear Revealed Word of GOD to institutionalize evil as good and good as evil! What shall we say of such a nation? They also are taking GOD’s Name in vain! As the prophet recorded in ISAIAH 29:13, “Wherefore The Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near Me with their mouth, and with their lips do

¹⁹ 1, KJV, MATTHEW 12:22.

²⁰ 1, KJV, II SAMUEL 12:14.

²¹ 1, KJV, JAMES 2:7.

honour Me, but have removed their heart far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the precept of men!”²²

XI. FOR THE LORD WILL NOT HOLD HIM GUILTLESS

GOD having revealed the glory of His Name to mankind, one would think that the prohibition against all manner of taking His Name in vain by men would be naturally obvious! Throughout The Torah, GOD is revealing Himself to His chosen servants and people – most particularly to and through Moses personally - and thereby the glory of His Name. We read in EXODUS 3:14, “And GOD said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM...!”²³ And in EXODUS 6:2-3, “...GOD spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I am the LORD: And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by The Name of GOD Almighty, but by My Name JEHOVAH was I not known to them!”²⁴ And in EXODUS 34:5-6, “And The LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with ...[Moses] there, and proclaimed The Name of The LORD. And The LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD GOD, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth!”²⁵

Sadly, the natural reverence for The Creator and The Names whereby He has revealed Himself to men is absent in the unregenerate heart, for the fallen heart of man is totally corrupted by sin. So David in PSALM 14:2-3 declares, “The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand, and seek GOD. They are all gone aside, they are all together become filthy: there is none that doeth good, no, not one!”²⁶ Therefore GOD found it necessary to decree This Commandment, attaching the promise of Divine judgement and punishment on those who so blaspheme against His Name. As Keil and Delitzsch state, “The natural heart is very liable to transgress This Command, and therefore it is solemnly enforced by the threat, ‘for JEHOVAH will not hold him guiltless’ (leave him unpunished) who takes The Name of The LORD in vain!”²⁷

XII. THE PROPER USES OF THE NAMES OF GOD

What then are the proper uses of The Names of GOD? Keil and Delitzsch offer that the proper and “...true employment of The Name of GOD is [rightly] confined to invocation, prayer, praise and thanksgiving, which proceeds from a pure, believing heart.”²⁸ So the daily life of the faithful Christian man should reflect the proper and reverent uses of The Names of GOD. Therefore, should it not be that “the baptized person dedicate... [every] day to the glory of GOD and call... on The Saviour’s grace ...[thereby enabling] him to act in The Spirit as a child of [GOD] The Father?”²⁹

²² 1, KJV, ISAIAH 29:13.

²³ 1, KJV, EXODUS 3:14.

²⁴ 1, KJV, EXODUS 6:2-3.

²⁵ 1, KJV, EXODUS 34:5-6.

²⁶ 1, KJV, PSALM 14:2-3.

²⁷ 7, Keil and Delitzsch, Volume I – The Pentateuch, The Second Book of Moses, Ver. 7 – The Third Word, page 118.

²⁸ 7, Keil and Delitzsch, Volume I – The Pentateuch, The Second Book of Moses, Ver. 7 – The Third Word, page 118.

²⁹ 4, Catechism of The Catholic Church, # 2157, page 578.

The Catechism of The Catholic Church reminds us of exactly this: “The Christian begins his day, his prayers, and his activities with the Sign of The Cross: In The Name of The Father and of The Son and of The Holy Spirit...”³⁰ Indeed, every moment that The Almighty deems to grant us the breath of life, every day that He gives us here on this earth to serve, worship and praise Him, the sum total of our lives as adopted Sons and Daughters of GOD in JESUS CHRIST should be a living Sign of The Cross!

XIII. IN CONCLUSION

We have looked at the many ways in which men do sin in the taking of GOD’s Name in vain. And we have peered into the unregenerate heart of the man that dares to rebel against Who GOD is, against His sovereignty and against His holiness, all of which lie behind the sin of taking GOD’s Name in vain. And we have seen that the wickedness of violating The Third Commandment may take many forms in men by intent, thought, word and deed: There is the sin of using a Name of The LORD in open or silent blasphemous speech. There is the sin of using GOD’s Name as a common phrase in everyday casual speech. There is the sin of using The Name of The Almighty in our false vows and false oaths. There is the sin of attributing wickedness to The Nature of GOD Himself.

For all these blasphemous abuses of GOD’s Name - by which the impious man dares to assail Who GOD is in His unity, spirituality and deity – bring injury and affront to His Name. And as we have noted, The LORD will not hold such a man guiltless! But in contrast to the sinful uses of The Names of The Almighty, there are the proper and upright uses of His Name by men. For as we have seen, The Name of The LORD GOD is holy, and is therefore to be employed by men in earnest reverence, pious prayer, respectful worship, humble adoration and joyful song! Therefore, as it is written in EXODUS 20:7, “Thou shalt not take The Name of The LORD Thy GOD in vain; for The LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh His Name in vain!”³¹ In The Name of GOD The Father, and The Son, and The Holy Ghost, AMEN!

³⁰ 4, Catechism of The Catholic Church, # 2157, page 578.

³¹ 1, KJV, EXODUS 20:7.

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