

“THE THIRD COMMANDMENT: HONORING GOD’S NAME”

**I. Introduction**

- A. We take the way that people handle our names quite seriously.
1. We are pleased when someone whom we have recently met remembers our name.
  2. We correct people when they mispronounce our name or misspell it.
  3. We take offense when someone makes fun of our name.
  4. The way a person treats our name says something about their attitude toward us.
  5. If they can't be bothered to learn what our name is and how to pronounce and spell it, then we must not be very important to them.
  6. If they mock our name, then they must not have any respect for us.
- B. It should not be a surprise to us that God takes our treatment of his name very seriously.
1. After all, if large corporations secure trademarks and hire lawyers in order to preserve the integrity of their names, then why wouldn't God be concerned to protect the integrity of his name?
  2. He has the name that is above every name.
  3. His name should be honored and adored by all of his creatures.

4. As we study the third commandment today, I want us to look at it in three respects.
5. First, we will consider the substance of the third commandment.
6. Second, we will look at how Christ fulfills the third commandment.
7. And third, we will think about how the third commandment applies to our lives as Christ's people.

## II. The Substance of the Third Commandment

- A. In the Bible, there is a close connection between a person's name and his character.
  1. The names of the human characters in Scripture often tell us something about that person.
  2. At times, God even changes an individual's name in order to demonstrate that he is doing something that will bring about a fundamental change in that person's life.
  3. We see this in Genesis 17, where God takes Abram, a name that means 'exalted father', and gives him the new name Abraham, which means 'father of a multitude.'
  4. This new name was bound up with God's promise to make the patriarch the father of many offspring.
  5. Abraham's name had to be changed because his very identity was transformed by God's promises.
- B. The names by which God reveals himself tell us something about his character.
  1. The name *Yahweh*, which is translated as 'LORD' in most modern Bibles, is derived from the Hebrew verb for 'to be'

and it points to God's self-sufficiency and self-existence.

2. The name *Elohim*, which is translated as 'God', emphasizes God's power.
  3. The name *Adonai*, which is translated as 'Lord', identifies God as master over all.
  4. *El Shaddai* tells us of God's sovereignty.
  5. *Yahweh-Jireh* reveals that he is the God who provides for his people.
  6. *Yahweh-Nissi* tells us that he keeps his people secure.
  7. These and the other biblical names of God essentially constitute a confession of faith.
  8. They tell us who God is, what he is like, and what he does.
- C. When God forbids us from taking his name in vain, he is telling us that we have to treat his name with reverence and respect.
1. "Vain" means empty.
  2. To use God's name in vain is to treat it disrespectfully or lightly.
  3. The most blatant way a person can do this is by using God's name as a curse word or as an exclamation when they are excited about something.
  4. This is blasphemy, and it even includes things like the texting abbreviation "OMG" and the casual use of the phrase "Thank God."
  5. Blasphemy is also committed whenever God's name is cheapened or made light of.

6. This brings to mind the trivial manner in which God's name is used on some Christian bumper stickers and t-shirts.
  7. God's name is taken in vain whenever he is turned into a mascot, a logo, or a slogan.
- D. Blasphemy is one of the ways that the third commandment can be broken, but it is not the only way.
1. This commandment is also broken whenever a person ignores God or neglects him.
  2. To do so is to demonstrate that you hold God in low esteem.
  3. The third commandment is broken when people engage in superstitious practices, when they say false things about God, and when they show themselves to be hypocrites.
  4. As with the other commandments, this one extends beyond what it explicitly says.
  5. It is not only about how we use God's name.
  6. It also applies to all of the ways in which God reveals himself to us.
  7. As our Shorter Catechism explains, the third commandment requires us to make reverent use of God's "names, titles, attributes, ordinances, Word, and works." (WSC 54)
  8. This portion of God's law calls us to praise God's name, to proclaim his name to others, to believe what he says about himself in his Word, to pray to him with faith, and to attend worship on the Lord's Day with attentive hearts and minds.
- E. As with the second commandment, the Lord annexed a reason to this commandment.

1. He says that he will not hold the person who takes his name in vain guiltless.
  2. In other words, God will not allow this sin to go unpunished.
  3. The same thing holds true with regard to all aspects of God's law.
  4. God never acquits the guilty.
  5. This is why we need Christ to bear the penalty of the law on our behalf.
- F. Still, we might wonder why God added this special warning to the third commandment.
1. It is interesting that we find similar warnings and/or promises annexed to the second, fourth, and fifth commandments.
  2. Commentator J.A. Motyer suggests that these things were added because these are the commandments that are the easiest for people to make light of.
  3. It is pretty hard for us to rationalize murder or stealing, though people certainly do try to do so.
  4. But it is pretty easy for us to think that taking God's name in vain isn't really all that big of a deal.
  5. It may be that the reason for this additional word of warning is because God knew this commandment needed to be reinforced.
- G. If we truly examine our lives in light of all that is required and all that is forbidden in the third commandment, we will see that we fall short of keeping it in countless ways.

1. Who among us can say that we have never questioned God's wisdom, God's power, God's holiness, God's justice, God's goodness, God's truth?
2. Who is there who has never grumbled under God's hand of providence?
3. Who can say that he has never rushed headlong into sin while presuming upon God's mercy?
4. What person is there who has always heard and read the Bible in a reverent and attentive manner?
5. Who is there who has never repeated a prayer without thinking about what he was saying?
6. Who is there whose mind has never wandered during a worship service or a time of prayer?
7. Who can say that he always acts in a manner that adorns the gospel and makes it more attractive to the people around us?
8. Remember, this commandment is not only telling us that it is wrong to use God's name as a curse word.
9. It is calling us to honor God in all that we do, all that we say, and all that we think.

### **III. Christ's Fulfillment of the Third Commandment**

- A. As with the other parts of God's law, the third commandment drives us outside of ourselves to Jesus Christ.
  1. This is why it is important for us to consider how Christ has fulfilled the third commandment on our behalf.
  2. One place where we can see this very clearly is in John 12, where Jesus talks about his approaching death and then says, "Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour'? But for this purpose I have

come to this hour. Father, glorify your name." (vv. 27-28)

3. At the cross loomed ahead of him, Jesus was troubled at the prospect of being made sin, at the thought of having the Father look upon him as the vilest sinner who ever lived, at the notion of having to endure God's holy and just wrath.
  4. We cannot begin to imagine what that would have meant for the eternal Son of God.
  5. He was feeling the crushing weight of sin's burden and the utter despair of sin's curse.
  6. Yet he did not grumble or complain.
  7. He did not focus upon his own desires.
  8. Instead of asking for deliverance, he prayed, "Father, glorify your name."
  9. His supreme concern was the glory of God's name.
  10. We should be eternally grateful that God has provided us with a Savior who so perfectly fulfilled the law on our behalf.
  11. And we should be utterly amazed at the fact that Christ's perfect hallowing of God's name is counted as our righteousness in the sight of God.
- B. Jesus also fulfilled the third commandment by being perfectly reverent toward God.
1. Reverence is at the very heart of the third commandment.
  2. Listen to these words from Hebrews 5: "In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence." (Heb. 5:7)

3. Listen to that last phrase again: "he was heard because of his reverence."
  4. That is something that can only be said in reference to Jesus.
  5. While it is true that God's people can and should be reverent God when we pray, none of us could ever say that God heard our prayer because of our reverence.
  6. The most reverent prayers that we pray are never reverent enough.
  7. God hears our prayers because they come before him through Christ our Mediator.
  8. He hears us for Christ's sake, not because of anything that is inherently good in us.
  9. But the Father heard Jesus' prayers because they were offered in perfect reverence.
- C. Another way in which the third commandment relates to Jesus is that Jesus has perfectly manifested the name of God to us.
1. As he prays in his high priestly prayer in John 17, "I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world." (Jn. 17:6)
  2. To manifest God's name is to reveal God's essential nature.
  3. Jesus could do this because he is God in human flesh.
  4. "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation." (Col. 1:15)
  5. "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature." (Heb. 1:3)
- D. One other point to make about Jesus' fulfillment of the third commandment is that, as a result of his faithfulness, Jesus has been



given the name that is above all names.

1. As Paul writes in Philippians 2, "And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 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." (Phil. 2:8-11)
2. This does not mean that Jesus became any more divine, or that he was any more glorified as far as his divine nature is concerned.
3. Jesus has always existed as fully God.
4. What it means is that after he completed the work for which he was sent, he was glorified as the God-man, the covenant Mediator between God and man.
5. As Louis Berkhof explains, "It did not give Him any power or authority which He did not already possess as the Son of God; neither did it increase His territory. But the God-man, the Mediator, was now made the possessor of this authority, and His human nature was made to share in the glory of this royal dominion." [*Systematic Theology*, 411]
6. This means that, at his ascension, Jesus brought our human nature into heaven in a glorified state.
7. He has been given the name that is above every name as a reward for the obedience that he rendered when he took on the form of a servant.

#### **IV. The Third Commandment in the Christian Life**

- A. As we turn now to consider the application of the third commandment in the Christian life, the first thing that I want to

point out is that we are saved by calling upon the name of the Lord.

1. Proverbs 18:10 says, "The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe."
  2. At the end of his Gospel, John tells us that he has written of these things "so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." (Jn. 20:31)
  3. Jesus says in the Great Commission that Christians are to be baptized into the name of the Triune God.
  4. The book of Revelation tells us that the final stage of our salvation will entail being marked indelibly with the name of God.
  5. As it says in Revelation 22:4, "They will see [God's] face, and his name will be on their foreheads."
  6. These passages tell you that if you are a Christian, your very identity is bound up with the name of God.
  7. God is the only one who has the name above every name, but in Christ he grants you the blessing of being called by that name.
- B. The third commandment tells you that your supreme concern as a Christian should not be for your own happiness, your own comfort, or your own security.
1. Your supreme concern should be the hallowing of God's name.
  2. The first petition in the Lord's Prayer is "hallowed by thy name."
  3. This should be your first priority in all things.

4. As Paul says in Colossians 3:17, “whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”
- C. “Everything” is a pretty big category, so it is important for us to consider some of the specific ways in which we can honor God’s name with our lives.
1. First of all, you should strive to hallow God’s name in your worship, whether public worship, family worship, or private worship.
  2. Guard yourself against formalism in worship.
  3. Formalism is the tendency to go through the motions when you are singing, praying, or hearing or reading God’s Word.
  4. It is so easy for us to slip into formalism.
  5. Endeavor to have your heart engaged in all aspects of your worship.
- D. Second, you need to honor God’s name by keeping your word.
1. Keep the oaths and vows that you take in his name.
  2. This includes your marriage vows, church membership vows, vows when your children are baptized, oaths taken in a court of law, and anything else along those lines.
- E. Third, watch out for conduct that would bring reproach to the name of Christ.
1. As Paul wrote to Timothy, “Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.” (2 Tim. 2:19)
  2. Don’t call yourself a Christian and then live in a manner that contradicts your profession.

3. That is hypocrisy.
  4. Instead, strive to adorn the gospel by the way in which you live your life.
  5. And when you fail to do so, admit it and repent of it.
- F. Fourth, you can hallow God's name by speaking about him to others.
1. Your willingness to point others to Christ testifies to the value that you place upon him.
  2. It demonstrates your zeal for God's name.
- G. Lastly, be careful not to profane God's name by grumbling about your trials, sorrows, and frustrations.
1. To do that is to murmur against God's wisdom and his hand of providence.
  2. Instead of grumbling and complaining, cultivate the habit of hallowing God's name by giving thanks to him in all circumstances.

## V. Conclusion

- A. Down through the ages, there have been many Christians who, when forced to decide between death and dishonoring the name of Christ, chose death.
- B. They made that choice because they believed the Bible when it says that it is a great blessing to be counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Christ. (see Acts 5:41)
- C. You may never be called to be a martyr, but the Lord gives you all sorts of opportunities in your ordinary, day-to-day life to honor his great and glorious name.

- D. Remember the words that Jesus speaks to his church in the book of Revelation: "I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name... Hold fast what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. The one who conquers, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God. Never shall he go out of it, and I will write on him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name." (Rev. 3:8, 11-12)