

**Bible Text:** Leviticus 24  
**Preached on:** Sunday, October 5, 2014

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We read together from the holy and inspired word of God, Leviticus 24.

1 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 2 Command the children of Israel, that they bring unto thee pure oil olive beaten for the light, to cause the lamps to burn continually. 3 Without the vail of the testimony, in the tabernacle of the congregation, shall Aaron order it from the evening unto the morning before the LORD continually: it shall be a statute for ever in your generations. 4 He shall order the lamps upon the pure candlestick before the LORD continually. 5 And thou shalt take fine flour, and bake twelve cakes thereof: two tenth deals shall be in one cake. 6 And thou shalt set them in two rows, six on a row, upon the pure table before the LORD. 7 And thou shalt put pure frankincense upon each row, that it may be on the bread for a memorial, even an offering made by fire unto the LORD. 8 Every sabbath he shall set it in order before the LORD continually, being taken from the children of Israel by an everlasting covenant. 9 And it shall be Aaron's and his sons'; and they shall eat it in the holy place: for it is most holy unto him of the offerings of the LORD made by fire by a perpetual statute. 10 And the son of an Israelitish woman, whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the children of Israel: and this son of the Israelitish woman and a man of Israel strove together in the camp; 11 And the Israelitish woman's son blasphemed the name of the LORD, and cursed. And they brought him unto Moses: (and his mother's name was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan:) 12 And they put him in ward, that the mind of the LORD might be shewed them. 13 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, 14 Bring forth him that hath cursed without the camp; and let all that heard him lay their hands upon his head, and let all the congregation stone him. 15 And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, Whosoever curseth his God shall bear his sin. 16 And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the LORD, shall be put to death. 17 And he that killeth any man shall surely be put to death. 18 And he that killeth a beast

shall make it good; beast for beast. 19 And if a man cause a blemish in his neighbour; as he hath done, so shall it be done to him; 20 Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again. 21 And he that killeth a beast, he shall restore it: and he that killeth a man, he shall be put to death. 22 Ye shall have one manner of law, as well for the stranger, as for one of your own country: for I am the LORD your God. 23 And Moses spake to the children of Israel, that they should bring forth him that had cursed out of the camp, and stone him with stones. And the children of Israel did as the LORD commanded Moses.

Turn now to our text this morning, Lord's Day 36, based upon that passage as well as the whole word of God. Lord's Day 36.

Q. What is required in the third commandment?

A. That we, not only by cursing or perjury, but also by rash swearing, must not profane or abuse the name of God; nor by silence or connivance be partakers of these horrible sins in others; and, briefly, that we use the holy name of God no otherwise than with fear and reverence; so that He may be rightly confessed and worshiped by us, and be glorified in all our words and works.

Q. Is then the profaning of God's name, by swearing and cursing, so heinous a sin, that His wrath is kindled against those who do not endeavor, as much as in them lies, to prevent and forbid such cursing and swearing?

A. It undoubtedly is, for there is no sin greater or more provoking to God, than the profaning of His name; and therefore He has commanded this sin to be punished with death.

The Catechism continues to lead us through a consideration of the law of God. We're still dealing with the first table of the law which we're told in answer 93, the first table of the law teaches us how we must behave towards God. This third commandment as well as the whole first table of the law is teaching how we must behave towards God, speaks especially to our worship; speaks not exclusively, not only about our worship, but does speak with regard to our worship. The first and second commandments clearly speak with regard to our worship. The first commandment says, "Thou shalt worship Jehovah only." Of all the gods that one might look unto to worship, only worship Jehovah. The second commandment says: and here is how you worship Jehovah, not through graven images, only through his word and as he has commanded in his word, in that way worship the true God Jehovah. The fourth commandment also speaks of our worship in instructing us as to which day we ought to worship and that there must be one day out of seven consecrated unto God whereby and on which we worship him.

The third commandment does as well. The third commandment also stands related to these other commandments. It also speaks especially of our worship of God. Worship God alone, worship him the right way, and then the third commandment: worship him using his name and worship him using his name rightly, not taking that name in vain, in our worship, but using it with awe and reverence. The third commandment also applies to other areas of our life, it doesn't speak only with regard to the worship that occurs on the Sabbath day in God's house worshiping him according to the word. The other commandments also speak with regard to other areas of our life. We noticed something of that as we considered them already. The first commandment teaches us: don't trust in things. That applies to our whole life, doesn't it? And all of our life surrounded by all the things of this world, God says, "Don't trust in any of those things but trust in me alone."

And so also commandment two touches upon our whole life: worship God rightly. That's the command and worship God rightly because good holy worship influences and affects the whole of our life. Just from this point of view, if we worship God through an image, a false image of false doctrine, that will certainly have an effect upon our life. Doctrine always influences the life of those who follow that particular doctrine. If, on the other hand, as we do, we worship God in truth and through the word of truth, the true doctrine of Scripture, then that also leads us into a holy life.

The third commandment as well especially applies to our worship. It touches upon the name of God as we encounter it and use it in every area of our life. We consider that more fully as we consider this commandment this morning under the theme "Keeping the Third Commandment." First of all, the meaning. Secondly, the manner. And thirdly, the warning.

The name of God, this commandment has to do with the name of God. "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." The name of God is something spoken of frequently in Scripture. We sang of it already several times in the Psalter numbers that we sang this morning. We sang of the name of God. That phrase "name of God" really refers to God's revelation of himself. Sometimes we think of it more narrowly than that and those narrow considerations also need to be brought up and thought about. We'll come to those shortly, but most broadly, the name of God refers to his revelation of himself; God's making himself known. God needs to make himself known. We cannot understand him. We cannot know him. We know, in fact, nothing of him. Really nothing of him as far as who he is, who he is in Jesus Christ. We know nothing of that except that God discloses these things unto us; opens himself and reveals these things unto his people graciously and powerfully.

God's revelation of himself includes much. There are several different aspects to that revelation of himself. God's proper names reveal himself. Most fully revealed himself unto his people but reveals something of himself even to the ungodly, to the unbeliever, if they understand the meaning of those names, at least intellectually anyway. The proper names of God reveal our means by which God reveals himself. The name Jehovah or as we find it in our King James version so often, the word LORD, in all capital letters, which is really the word Jehovah. Jehovah. By that name, God reveals much about

himself. The greatest name for God in the whole Old Testament was that name Jehovah. God revealed that he's a covenant God in that name; that he is an unchanging God and therefore is an unchanging covenant God. He is a God who is faithful to his covenant promise; faithful to his people; and faithful to save them. By his own power, the name God is a name which reveals God; that he has authority; that he is the one true divine being. The name Almighty reveals that God is powerful, in fact, that God has all might, all power. There is no power apart from his. The name Holy One as we sang of it several times in the Psalter number we just sang, the Holy One is he. The name Holy One is a proper name of God and reveals that God has consecrated unto himself, zealously consecrated to glorifying himself and therefore in wrath, stands over against all unrepentant sin and sinners.

God reveals himself in many proper names. Those are, of course, we recognize only a few. The Scripture is full of the names of God. Those name of God include also names of the Mediator. God reveals himself also through those names, in fact, even with greater clarity through those names. The name Jesus, God takes his Old Testament name, Jehovah which is still, of course, his name, but that name by which he was most commonly known in the Old Testament, the name Jehovah, and he adds to that, he spells out that now he reveals himself in the Incarnate One, in the Mediator, as Jehovah, as our Savior; Jehovah as salvation in the flesh and among us. The name Christ, God reveals himself in the Mediator as our prophet and priest and king; as the Anointed One, called and qualified office-bearer of God who stands over his people, again to save them, to bless them, to guard them and to keep them as prophet, priest and king. The name Word. The name Word is a name of Christ. We read John 1 and we see that made very plain. "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." A name of God in Jesus Christ. The name Savior, the name Lord, Master, all names of the Mediator.

But then, too, when God speaks of his name in this commandment, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain," God means not only his proper names, God means not only the names of the Mediator, Jesus Christ and the other names, but God means also those attributes which belong to him. His perfections. Those also are names of God. Think of the word and the attribute "holy," again, reminding ourselves of the way the Lord speaks of himself through the prophet Isaiah, through the Psalter number we just sang. "The Holy One," he says, "that's my name. That's who I am. I am the Holy One, the one defined by, characterized by holiness," which is one of God's attributes.

God is a good God and therefore the name or the word "good" applies to God, and some will say, "Oh my," and then say, "Goodness" afterwards and say, "See, I didn't take God's name in vain." They play with this commandment. The word "goodness" or "good" is a description of God and even just in how it sounds. Of course it's very close to the word "God" and how it sounds in the English language. The one who carelessly uses the word as an exclamation, uses that phrase as an exclamation, truly takes God's name in vain. But so too with the word "gracious," with "holy," with "good," with "gracious," with God's proper names, the names of the Mediator. The word "merciful." Sometimes we hear people using that word as if they're saying, "Well, I'm not really taking God's name in

vain." That is a name of God that as far as it is a description of God's attributes and perfections.

The same thing is true with regard to the actions that are exclusive to God. In other words, those things, those activities that only God can do: saving and damning. Those are things reserved for God alone and those words, then, must be used with holy awe and reverence. One may not use those words as simply to express frustration, especially the second word that we spoke of, the word "damning." One may not use that word or some version of that word to express their frustration or anger over something in life without truly taking God's name in vain. God reveals himself through those activities.

God reveals himself also in the Scripture. God reveals himself in the Bible. The Bible, the Scripture is the word of God. The whole Bible is, as it were, one long name of God. God writes out his name on every page of the Scripture so that as we read it, we see and know who he is through his name which he has given to us in the inspired Scripture. God reveals his name in the creeds, the three forms of unity that we hold to and have been given as a precious possession through generations previous. God writes his name there. God reveals himself to us there with great clarity, and really all the doctrines that we derive out of the Scriptures and that we speak of and that we hold to and that we love, in all of those doctrines, we see God revealed and they are then as so many names of God again. The name of God includes also the songs that we sing, meaning the good and godly songs that we sing, the songs in the Psalter taken and slightly changed so as to make them singable but taken in their meaning straight from the Scripture, from the word of God. Therefore when we take those Psalter numbers and we sing them, we're singing the name of God as God reveals himself unto us and to one another as we sing those beautiful songs.

These are all ways that God reveals himself. They are all, then, the name of the Lord our God. The calling of the commandment is that we may not take them in vain. That is, we may not take them with lightness, with emptiness. We may not use any of these things as if they're devoid of meaning; as if they're empty of weighty substance. That's the command of God negatively, at least, and that because those names of God, all of those names of God and others besides which we have not mentioned this morning, all of the names of God are holy. That is, they're consecrated to the use of God; they are consecrated to use to glorify God; they are special; they are set apart, to use another definition of holiness. They are set apart for special use as the things in the temple and that pertain to the Old Testament service of God were set apart, consecrated, different from the norm, so that God's people could remember God is not average, God is not common, God is holy, set apart from that which is common and usual.

So, too, now we have those things that God has given to us by which we know him and serve him and that those things we referred to, of course, are his names or his name if we take all of them together. They must be used, then, as special, as holy, not common and ordinary therefore the Catechism says that there may be no cursing or perjury or rash swearing. Cursing refers to using God's name as an expletive or in some other way using God's name improperly other than the way that he commands that we use his name.

Perjury refers to lying under oath. There may be no cursing, that takes God's name in vain, acts as if God's name is light, meaningless, and may be used to express whatever strong emotions we have coursing through us at the given moment. The same thing is true with regard to perjury. When we lie under oath, we're taking God's name and we're saying, "In the name of God and with God as my witness, I swear this is the truth," when in fact, it is a lie and we know that. That takes God's name in vain. Rash swearing, the Catechism mentions next. Rash swearing refers to swearing by God's name, again, making an oath or expressing a vow but doing that hastily, carelessly, as one who is trying to tell a story and trying to excite others with the story that they're telling and so they'll add into the story, "I swear this is true." Carelessly, rashly swearing, and perhaps even using the name of God as they swear to the veracity of their outlandish story. This is rash swearing and this takes the name of God in vain.

It profanes and abuses the name of God, these activities do. That's the Catechism again. We not only by cursing or perjury, but also by rash swearing, must not profane or abuse the name of God. We're not profane, that is, make common, make ordinary, that holy and set apart name of God. When we take God in these ways, cursing, perjury, rash swearing, we act as if God's name is simply an ordinary commodity made to be used as we would use the earthly things of this world and we abuse the name of God. We treat it without the respect that it deserves, the dignity that it demands.

As we speak of cursing and perjury and rash swearing, the taking of God's name in vain, it's good to point out that there is certainly a difference between taking God's name in vain and using four letter words or barnyard language as sometimes it's called; not endorsing the use of such language. That's not the point in making the distinction. There are reasons why some of that language is certainly forbidden God's people, others of it not very helpful in displaying the grace that God has worked in us. But the fact of the matter is, it's different. Those things are different from taking God's name in vain. We ought to have that clear in our own minds and in the minds of our children so that we don't just lump it all together as naughty words in the minds of our children; bad language that ought not to be used. Certainly there is that general heading over a good share of the world's language not to be used by the child of God, but we need to recognize the specific importance of God's name and the specific horror of using God's name in vain, and that different from, far worse than using some of this other language that the world uses to express itself and its feelings.

We must use God's name positively then in all of our use of language. We must use God's name with fear and reverence. That's the positive command here. Don't take God's name in vain, the commandment says, but use God's name with fear and reverence. That speaks, first of all, of saying his name. Saying the name Jehovah, God, Almighty. Saying the names of the Mediator. Speaking of the attributes of God. We must not say those things or use those things except with fear and reverence. Not a fear that is terror, not a fear which restrains itself from ever using those terms, not that sense of fear, but a carefulness as we use the word of God.

When the Catechism speaks of using the name of God with fear and reverence, it means also that we must use the name of God. We take the name of God in vain too when we don't say the name of God on occasions when we must. There are circumstances where we don't want to use the name of God, maybe to hide our identity as a child of God within the company of unbelievers or for whatever reason. That's really taking the name of God in vain as well. We must use the name of God but use it always with fear and reverence.

That means then when we handle the word of God. When we speak of the things of the Scripture and we use the word of God, we must do so with fear and reverence and utmost care. We ought not use the word of God, speak of the names of God or the Scripture as if it's just another thing in this world, "The Bible is just another book. I've got a lot of books and I've got a Bible too." But we use the word of God and we speak of the word of God as if it is what it is, a book entirely different from any other book made by men. Whether that be a holy book written by a godly man or whether it be the most corrupt and depraved writing the word knows, this Scripture is in an entirely different category. It's the very word of God and we must use it, must open the word of God, read that word of God, ponder that word of God, discuss that word of God with one another and do so always at all times with fear and reverence. The devil wants to have us do anything but that. On a daily basis, open the word and spend time in the word of God, and how easy it is for us to give way to that temptation, whether it is by leaving the Bible on the shelf, we don't have time for it today, no time for devotions, we don't have time to open it and read it carefully and meditate upon the truths of it. Or perhaps as we fool ourselves, we pull another weighty tome off the bookshelf, an important book, a book of good godly doctrine but always repeatedly we reach for that or other books rather than the word of God. It's good to read, good to read godly literature but not at the expense of taking God's name and using it with reverence by opening that name as it is most clearly revealed in the Scripture, and reading it there and meditating upon it as we have in the inspired and infallible Scriptures.

We also must use the name of God with fear and reverence in our worship. The commandment applies, we said, especially to our worship. Through worship of God, beloved, we're reminded again, we know this, we always need to be reminded of it: true worship of God is not simply appearing in church on a Sunday; appearing with our family dressed up and there we sit in the pew and we listen and we take hold of the word of God and we analyze the Scripture as it's proclaimed to us through the preaching. The true worship of God is using the name of God and standing with awe and reverence before the name of God as it is brought to us through the word of God as that word is explained in the preaching.

With fear and reverence, then, we receive the word, but also that's true with regard to all of our worship as we sing the Psalter numbers. We sing not simply to have our voice heard but we sing thinking about the words; thinking about the meaning; thinking about the names of God that we sing as we sing the Psalter numbers. As we sing again and again, "The Holy One is he." I think of the meaning of that. We meditate upon that, but briefly, but we meditate upon that. We apply that to ourselves.

That's using the name of God with fear and reverence in our worship, and so it is with every element of our worship: with the prayers that we offer; with the collections that we give. Everything. We do so with fear and reverence the Catechism says. That is the calling, the command the child of God strives for and which God brings to us in this commandment. To do that, then, we ought to always examine our speech. God cares how we speak. God cares what words we use. God is very concerned with what comes out of our mouth. The Scripture is very plain about that. Sometimes we get the impression and the world leaves us with that impression too, it's just the activity, it's just the actions that you do. You haven't done anything that hurts anybody. You really haven't sinned that bad. That's not how God views it, beloved. God is extremely concerned with our speech and we ought to examine that speech and be sure that as we speak, we are using the name of God not in a false pious way, not in a self-righteous way, but with fear and reverence. Never carelessly, thoughtlessly, never to express frustration, anger, shock over some earthly thing that has taken place. These ways the world speaks are not for the child of God who looks upon God as the Holy One and the God whom he reverences and loves.

We must be engaged, then too, in diligence perseverance to be rid of speaking foolishly and carelessly of God's name and using God's name sinfully. It brings us back always to that same calling: repent. Repent with a true sincere sorrow for sin. Repent with me. With all of God's people we repent. We confess that we do not use his name with such fear and reverence as is due to him. We never do. Even if we're not walking openly and unrepentantly in some way of taking God's name in vain, still we do not come to the height of the requirement of this commandment no matter how holy we may be and so the calling to repent, to believe that we are forgiven, by faith to take hold of the righteousness of Christ which is ours and to grow in grace, to grow in the grace of using a sanctified tongue and handling the things of God and the word of God and the ways and places in which he has written his name, to use those as he commands, never with carelessness, always with reverence and over and over again, that calling applies to us. Repent. Believe in the forgiveness of sins and grow in grace and over and over.

But also in order to use God's name rightly, we ought to prepare for worship. We ought to prepare for worship. Beloved, it's not right for us and it's not helpful and it's very harmful and we cannot properly worship God, taking hold of his holy name, if all week long our minds are filled with the things of this earth and Saturday night is the high point of our week and we're filled with the pursuance of earthly things, even if they are right in themselves. Sunday morning, we sleep as long as we can, get up, quickly get on our clothes and rush out the door and sit down in church and then say, "I'm ready," and use the name of God with nothing but fear and reverence. It can't be done. We need to prepare properly for worship, take time throughout the week to remind ourselves, "Sunday is coming. I need to be prepared for that moment when, again, I come before him and use his word." That is, then, all week long I'm working on this commandment to use God's name with holiness and with fear and reverence and Sunday morning we pray. We pray as we take our place in the pew often. We pray that the Lord will help us to be ready to worship. Better yet, we pray also at home before we come. Perhaps we open the word of God and we spend some time thinking about that word of God and the holy name

of God and the God who we worship, the God who will be here, present with us in the worship, and the requirement to walk before him with reverence.

Then we need to work hard during worship. We need to be ready to work hard during worship. That's our calling. Come to worship not to relax, not to take our ease, and not to rest from an earthly point of view. We rest but we rest spiritually. We rest in the finished work of Jesus Christ but that's hard work. We come to church prepared to do that hard work, putting off our sin, taking all of the word of God by faith, appropriating that word of God into ourselves and applying it to our lives rigorously.

Then, too, the calling of the third commandment is that we must prevent and forbid the taking of God's name in vain as much as lies in us, as much as we are able. It applies especially among ourselves. That's the focus I want to have this morning. There is an application, too, for how we live with regard to those around us in the world but certainly among ourselves, we must speak, beloved, when a fellow saint sinfully uses God's name in vain. Children, listen too. The world is constantly opening its mouth in blasphemy against God and if we listen to that long enough, we hear that long enough, it can slip out sometimes. It ought not ever but sometimes among some it will. Those who hear such a thing must correct that classmate, that friend, that brother or sister. We cannot simply walk away and pretend we never heard it, for then we are guilty of their sin of taking the Lord's name in vain.

God attaches to this commandment as well as to the one previous, a sharp warning that we do well to give heed to. God says, "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain," and then he adds this warning, "for the Lord will not hold him guiltless," guiltless, "that taketh his name in vain." What God means to say there positively is: God will hold him guilty who takes his name in vain. God will maintain that individual's guilt and God will look at him as one who is guilty, guilty of a very serious breaking of God's commandment; guilty of showing carelessness with regard to God; showing a lack of fear and reverence as he ought. And that guiltiness means punishment. Guilt means, according to its definition, among other things it means "liable to punishment." One who is guilty must be punished.

That's God's word and that's brought out also in, first of all, in the Heidelberg Catechism. The end of Lord's Day 36 which speaks of the profaning of God's name is a very serious sin, that's question 100. It undoubtedly is very serious sin and therefore the answer ends, and therefore he has commanded this sin to be punished with death. That's God's requirement. One who breaks this commandment must be punished with death and that's brought out also in Leviticus 24:15 and 16. God says to Moses, "thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, Whosoever curseth his God shall bear his sin," meaning, "I will hold him guilty. I will not hold him guiltless. He shall bear his sin." "And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the LORD, shall be put to death." That's God's explanation to Moses with regard to the specific situation of one who had blasphemed the name of the Lord in the camp of Israel. And God says in verse 14, "Bring forth him that

hath cursed without the camp; and let all that heard him lay their hands upon his head, and let all the congregation stone him." Verse 23, we read the end of the matter, "Moses spake to the children of Israel, that they should bring forth him that had cursed out of the camp, and stone him with stones. And the children of Israel did as the LORD commanded Moses." That's how God commands that the taking of his name be dealt with, very seriously.

That's applied to us personally as well. If we personally take God's name in vain, maybe no one else knows about it but we've done that and we continue in that, God's judgment upon that is he will lead one who does that more and more to take holy things as if they're common things; holy things will more and more become profane, ordinary to the one who walks that way, and his irreverence will grow and he becomes, in that way then too, more and more guilty and the punishment of judgment is heaped up upon itself. We take great comfort then, don't we, tremendous comfort in knowing that our Lord Jesus Christ stood in our place. He stood in the place of every one of us who are those who have taken God's name in vain. No one here this morning can say or ought to say, "I am innocent of breaking this commandment." Every one of us says, "I am guilty and God's word of holding me not guiltless applies to me. I ought to be held guilty. I ought to be punished with death, not only in this life but everlasting death in hell. That's what I deserve but that's not what I'll receive because God has given to me a Savior and God looks at me through that Savior and God has forgiven me all my trespasses."

So in thankfulness to God for the cross of Jesus Christ and for the forgiveness of this sin which is our sin, we seek to grow. Humbly but also full of the joy of forgiveness, we seek to grow in use, holy, reverent use of the name of our God and in our worship and in all of our life. May God so fill us with that grace. Amen.

*Father, we thank thee for thy word and we thank thee for the promise of grace in Jesus Christ, that thou hast forgiven us all of our sins and that thou dost fill us with the knowledge of that forgiveness and fill us with thankfulness so that we seek more and more to conform our lives to thy holy will and render unto thee that which we owe thee, a diligent, careful life of walking according to thy commandments and this commandment, too, the keeping of thy name and the using of thy name with fear and reverence as thy children and those whom thou dost love and whom thou dost forgive in Jesus Christ. We pray this in his name alone. Amen.*