

The Exclusive Dignity of God's Name

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“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.” Exodus 20:7

Everything regarding God is holy. His names are descriptions of His person and attributes, and are thus holy. Therefore, they are to be used in a holy and reverent manner.

To use any man's name in a careless, disrespectful manner dishonors that man. If this is true for sinful creatures, how much more it is true for our sinless creator! God is dishonored when His names are used in a meaningless way, used carelessly, or as an expletive expressing surprise, disapproval, anger, hatred, disdain, or any other human passion.

Not only God's names, but all that is true about God is holy. The means by which He makes Himself known—His names, His word and His acts—are sanctified by their attachment unto Him. Therein they reveal Him, and are to be accorded the reverent dignity due unto Him.

There are two legitimate uses of God's names, works and words. First, worship. Second, to proclaim His person and work. Not only these, but the whole creation proclaims God, and should be used for this purpose. “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork” (Psalm 19:1). “Let every thing that hath breath praise the LORD. Praise ye the LORD” (Psalm 150:6). Other uses are unnecessary misuses His name, and transgress the third commandment.

The *Larger Catechism* of the *Westminster Confession of Faith* insightfully affirms with regard to the Ten Commandments, “where a duty is commanded, the contrary sin is forbidden; and, where a sin is forbidden, the contrary duty is commanded: so, where a promise is annexed, the contrary threatening is included; and, where a threatening is annexed, the contrary promise is included.”

Applying this truth, we conclude the following from the third commandment:

1. God's name must not be used in irreverent, meaningless and unnecessary ways;
God's name must be used in reverent, meaningful and necessary ways.
2. Holy things of God must not be spoken of meaninglessly or irreverently;
Holy things of God must be acknowledged meaningfully and reverently.
3. Unholy things must not be treated as acceptable, normal or amusing;
Unholy things must be rejected as unacceptable, abnormal and unamusing.

How, then, do we respond to the third commandment?

1. We praise and extol His name, works and acts—all that has to do with Him (Psalm 150).
2. We obey His commandments, thus reverencing His name, word and acts. “Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams” (I Samuel 15:22).
3. We acknowledge Him with continual God-consciousness that honors His name. “In all thy ways acknowledge him” (Proverbs 3:1-7).
4. We abhor sin and all that is unholy, irreverent, and that fails to acknowledge Him (Psalm 101:3-5; 139:22).