

Upholding the Honor of His Name (Deuteronomy 5:11)

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Ours is an age infatuated with justice. Pick a topic of debate. Someone will claim the moral high ground by framing the issue as a matter of justice. Affordable housing is a justice issue. Environmental stewardship is a justice issue. Preschool education is a justice issue. Raising the minimum wage is a justice issue.

The problems with approaching life that way are manifold. For one, it turns every wisdom issue where thoughtful people may arguably disagree into a matter of moral right and wrong. Agreeing with me makes you “good.” Disagreeing with me makes you “evil.” For another, do we really know what our vaunted cries for justice entail? What exactly is justice?

It's a moral concept that only makes sense within a biblical framework. God commands us to practice justice because he is a God of justice. Practicing justice means treating your neighbor with the dignity God requires, a dignity grounded not in what the person in front of you has done or not done, but in the character of their Creator. Every person you will ever encounter bears his image. Thus, justice means granting, and refusing to withhold, the honor they are due by virtue of who God has made them to be.

If justice is all about giving someone the honor they are due by virtue of who they are, then it necessarily involves more than what I owe you or you owe me. It begins with what all of us owe our Creator. What do the four living creatures around the throne of God in Rev 4:8 never cease to say? “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!” And what do the twenty-four elders fall down and say in response? Rev 4:11, “Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.” No one in the universe is more worthy or more glorious than the Triune God.

Here's what that means, friend. The greatest injustice in the universe is not how Europeans treated American Indians, white southerners treated black slaves, or Hutus treated Tutsis in Rwanda. It's how all of us have failed to give the Lord the glory and honor due his name. Mal 1:6, “A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name.”



You want to contend for justice? Here's what justice requires. **Justice requires living in a way that upholds the infinite worth of our Lord Jesus Christ.** That, my friends, is what it means to keep the 3rd commandment. "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." Justice demands God be exalted in all we say and do in light of who he is.

Remember, if something is prohibited in God's law, the opposite is commanded. Take the second commandment for example. By prohibiting us from worshiping him for whoever we imagine him to be, he commands us to worship him for he has revealed himself to be. What's the opposite of taking the Lord's name in vain? Bearing, using, or speaking of God's name as if it is of little or no value? It requires significantly more than watching your OMGs. It's Ps 29:2, "Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name."

God is passionately committed to glorifying his name. The question is, are you? What's the testimony of your life? Would someone observing your life conclude God is of little worth? Some worth? Or supreme worth? To understand what it means to not take his name in vain we need to answer three questions: What is God's name? How do we profane his name? How do we honor his name?

1) WHAT IS GOD'S NAME?

When we think of a person's name, we often think of it as a label. An important label, a label we want to remember, but a label nonetheless. It's something that can be changed or altered without tampering in the least with who that person fundamentally is. If you decide to introduce yourself with your middle name, a shortened version of your first name, or a family nickname, it doesn't change who you fundamentally are.

Some parents spend serious time researching the meaning of various names. In our case, we chose our boys' first names because we liked the way they sounded, the meaning wasn't problematic, and it didn't create any awkward initials. Ethan, Micah, and Tyler. Our approach with their middle names was a bit different. We used family names like Taylor or Thomas that represented their connection to parents, grandparents, and relatives. Their middle names say something about who they are and the specific family into which they were born.

The way we chose their middle names hits closer to how Hebrew culture in Moses' day thought of a name. A name was more than a label. It was even more than a

family connection. It captured something of the fullness of who a person was, the essence of their character. Take Jacob, for example, the father of the nation of Israel. His name means “he cheats,” which is exactly what Jacob did when he stole the birthright from his brother Esau. Decades later, after he finally learned to look to God to give him life instead of other people, the Lord renamed him accordingly. He became Israel, or “he strives with God.”

The same principle is true when it comes to the way God describes his own name. **It’s a way of capturing in a word something of the fullness of who he is.** In Ex 3:13-15, Moses asks God a piercing question when the Lord enlists him to lead the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt.

“Then Moses said to God, ‘If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?’ God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM.’ And he said, ‘Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” God also said to Moses, ‘Say this to the people of Israel: ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.”

The question Moses anticipates – “What is his name?” – wasn’t a way of asking, “What does God want us to call him?” It was a way of asking, “Who is he? Who is this God of whom you speak, Moses?” And God tells Moses exactly what to say. I AM WHO I AM or I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE. His the self-existent one, the eternal one, the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end. The Almighty Creator with whom we have to do.

But there’s more. He’s not just the self-existent I AM. That alone would make him worthy of praise. He’s also the LORD, or YHWH, the covenant-making, covenant-keeping God. The self-existent one broke into Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob’s life, calling them and their descendants to himself as a people for his own possession.

YHWH is his covenant name, his personal name, the name by which the I AM revealed himself to Israel. YHWH reminds us God isn’t a universal spirit pulling strings up in the sky. He is the God who pursues relationship with his people for his glory and our good. Ultimately, he’s the God who makes himself known by taking on human flesh and being born as a man, the Son of God incarnate. His name is Jesus, which is the Greek version of the Hebrew name, Joshua, or “Yahweh saves.”



God's name isn't a label. It's who he is. He's the Lord who draws us into relationship with himself through the new covenant in his blood. The Lord who lived, died, and rose from the grave to give us spiritual life! God's name is a revelation of his nature, the essence of his character. It's how God tells us who he is and what he's like.

Kevin DeYoung says it well: "The way to see God's glory is to hear his name. To know the name YHWH, the merciful and gracious one, is not to merely know something about God; it is to know God himself. God reveals himself to us by speaking his name."

So when Scripture speaks of trusting in the name of the LORD or calling upon the name of the LORD, it's not talking about using a magic formula or the right religious words. It's talking about trusting and calling upon God for who he really is! Ps 20:7, "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God." Joel 2:32, "And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."

The way we treat his name, or use his name, or speak of his name, is an expression of how we are treating God himself. It's personal. But that's not the only reason God's name is significant. **It's more than a revelation of his nature. It's also our identity as his people.** What was true of Israel under the Old Covenant – they were God's people called by his name (2 Chr 7:14), is even more true of the church under the New Covenant! When God gives sinners spiritual life, who we are fundamentally changes!

In Isa 62:2-4, the prophet anticipates God's chosen people receiving a "new name" on the coming day of redemption. "The nations shall see your righteousness, and all the kings your glory, and you shall be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will give...You shall no more be termed Forsaken, and your land shall no more be termed Desolate, but you shall be called My Delight Is in Her, and your land Married; for the LORD delights in you, and your land shall be married."

One of the sweetest privileges of being united to Christ through the work of the Spirit is that his identity becomes our identity – not in the sense that we become God, but in the sense that we are adopted into the family of God. As beloved sons and daughters, we bear our Father's name! It's why Jesus commands us in Matt 28:19 to baptize new believers "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."



God has given us authority as a church to speak in his name (Matt 16), to act in his name (1 Cor 5), to reflect the glory and beauty of who he is (2 Cor 3), because we are called by his name (Acts 15). As Spirit-filled witnesses (Acts 1), the great and glorious purpose of our life, KingsWay, is to proclaim the excellencies of Christ, the Treasure of our souls (1 Pe 2). As Paul declares in 2 Cor 5:20, "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ." We are identified by our relationship with him, now and for all eternity.

In our individualist culture, we tend to think, "I don't represent anyone else but me. I speak for myself. I act for myself." Friend, when you become a Christian, God grants you the incredible dignity of bearing his name. You are not part of a spiritual people or a religious organization. You become part of God's people, commissioned and empowered to image him, represent him, and show the world what he's like. God's name is both a revelation of his divine nature and our identity as his people.

2) HOW DO WE PROFANE HIS NAME?

What does it look like to treat God's name as something vain, as something of little worth or value? In his book on the 10 commandments, Kevin DeYoung provides a helpful list of categories, some of which I have included in the following.

First, we take God's name in vain when we malign his character with our words. In Deut 1:27, Israel grumbles against the Lord in response to the bad report her spies brought back from the land of Canaan. "And you murmured in your tents and said, 'Because the LORD hated us he has brought us out of the land of Egypt, to give us into the hand of the Amorites, to destroy us.'"

Was that true? Not in the least. He didn't rescue Israel because he hated her. He rescued her because he loved her! It was a complete lie. That's what unbelief does. It embraces lies about the character of God – that he's not sovereign, loving, or wise – and then uses our conclusions to justify our anger or rejection of his authority. That's a violation of the 3rd commandment. We're taking his name in vain, relating to the Lord as someone of little to no beauty or worth.

Second, we take God's name in vain when we denigrate his character with our actions. This is what the Lord puts his finger on in Ezek 36 when he describes Israel as profaning his name among the nations. How did she do that? She was called by God's name, his chosen ambassador of blessing to the nations, but she refused to obey his Word. She spurned her identity as his people.



Through hypocritical worship, shameless idolatry, economic exploitation, and sexual perversion, persistent patterns of sin in Israel's life lied about what it meant to be God's people. Ultimately, her actions lied about the character of the God she represented and whose name she bore. Her actions suggested Yahweh was not holy or set apart, that he was no different than every other pagan deity.

Feel the weight of this, friend. If you're a Christian, you bear the name of Jesus. And if you do something that rejects the authority of his Word or is out of step with God's ways, you are taking his name in vain. You are saying through the way you live that God is not worthy of being trusted or obeyed. You're saying something or someone is better than him.

We tend to narrow the impact of the things we do wrong to the people who got hurt. In reality, the one who is most affected and grieved by our sin is always the Lord himself, for it is his goodness our sin rejects, his wisdom our sin questions, and his love our sin denies.

What did King David say after he committed adultery with Bathsheba and murdered her husband Uriah? Ps 51:4, "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight." How could he say that? Didn't he sin against Bathsheba, Uriah, and their family? He certainly did. But David knows that horizontal injustice pales in comparison to the vertical injustice of dishonoring Yahweh, profaning God's name, by disobeying his Word.

How did David profane God's name? David's adultery said, "Lord, your name is not good. The wife you already gave me isn't enough." David's murder said, "Lord, your name is not just. I can avoid the consequences of my actions through human cunning and deceit." Instead of upholding the Lord's goodness and justice, honoring his name, David profaned his name.

We say to ourselves, "But no one got hurt! What's the big deal?" That's not the question that distinguishes right from wrong. Here's the critical question. As one who bears God's image, are my actions upholding the beauty and worth of my Creator? Is the way I'm living declaring the glorious truth of who he is or not? We take God's name in vain whenever we denigrate his character with our actions.

Third, we take God's name in vain when we coopt his authority for our purposes. How we love to take our plans, our ideas, our preferences, and tack God's name on to justify doing what we want to do! We can use his name as a spiritual trump card to silence anyone who questions the wisdom of our actions.

It's what we do when we say, "God told me to get a divorce," or, "God released me to look for a new church," or "God told me I should start a new business." Is it ever appropriate to start a business? Are there biblical reasons to pursue membership in another church? Might you have biblical grounds to pursue a divorce? You might, but you might not.

Phillip Ryken, "A more serious way to break the third commandment is by using God's name to advance our own agenda. Some Christians say, 'The Lord told me to do this.' Or worse, they say, 'The Lord told me to tell you to do this.' This is false prophecy! God has already said whatever he needs to say to us in his Word. Of course, there is also an inward leading of the Holy Spirit. But this is only an inward leading, and it should not be misrepresented as an authoritative word from God."

Fourth, we take God's name in vain by using it in a flippant way. Saying "God" or "Jesus Christ" as a curse word takes what is holy and drags it into the cesspool of sinful anger. Saying "Oh my God!" to express surprise or excitement is similar. It treats the Lord's name as a casual thing, a mere expression or exclamation that through its very repetition undermines the reverence he deserves.

Fifth, we take God's name in vain by using it in a thoughtless way. Consider how easy it is to mindlessly sing songs on Sunday morning. We say God's name with our mouth. But there's no awe in our hearts, we're treating his name as something of little worth or value. Or consider how often we repeat God's name in our prayers. "Father God, we just thank you, Lord, because Jesus you're so amazing." What am I doing? I'm turning his name into spiritual jargon, a religious habit of speech.

Matt 6:7, "And when you pray, do not heap up empty phrases as the Gentiles do, for they think that they will be heard for their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. Pray then like this: 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.'"

Finally, we take God's name in vain by using it in a deceitful way. Friend, if you lie under oath in a court of law, or you say, "I swear to God," to convince someone you're telling the truth when you're not, you are tossing God's name in the gutter. Remember, his name isn't a label. It's personal, which is why the 3rd commandment isn't about playing spiritual word police. It's about the orientation of our heart toward God. To revere his name is to honor God. To profane his name is to dishonor God. We take the Lord's name in vain whenever speak or act in a way that is unworthy of his name.

3) HOW SHOULD WE HONOR HIS NAME?

The second half of Deut 5:11 contains a sober warning. “The Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.” God takes the way we treat his name very seriously. It is not a light thing in his eyes. Yahweh promises he will not overlook, or turn a blind eye, or fail to deal with those who take his name in vain.

So, what does it look like to honor God’s name? To bear his name, use his name, and speak of his name in a way that upholds the infinite worth of God? **The first step in exalting the name of the Lord is calling upon the name of the Lord.** It means recognizing you need someone to deliver you from the death you deserve on account of your sin. It means recognizing Jesus is the Savior you desperately need. And it means choosing to trust Jesus accordingly as the only one who can give you spiritual life!

Honoring the Lord’s name begins with confessing Jesus Christ is Lord. The obedient Son, the crucified Lamb, the risen King - he is Lord. He is your hope. He is your life. He is your salvation – not your good works, or your therapist, or your self-improvement strategy. And as you do that, remember two things.

First, we have the incredible privilege of representing Jesus in all we do. I love watching the Olympics or the World Cup because the athletes represent something bigger than themselves. They represent their country. They represent their people. And it really affects them. They feel the weight. They feel the privilege. Their postgame interviews are different. They don’t just talk about themselves. They talk about team USA or team Brazil or team Korea.

Christian, you have the unspeakable privilege of representing the King of Kings. He has called you by name and you are called by his name. Wherever you go, whatever you’re doing, you do it as a representative of King Jesus. When you call your first client tomorrow morning, you represent Jesus. When you see your first patient, you represent Jesus. When you dress your sleepy child, you represent Jesus. When you speak to a store clerk or a waitress at a restaurant, you represent Jesus.

We are God’s ambassadors, brothers and sisters. Our local church is an embassy of heaven on earth. The way you live, the way you speak, the way you act when everyone is watching and when you think no one is watching, either declares the

truth of Jesus' worth and beauty or declares a lie. That fact alone would be a crushing weight were it not for the second things we need to remember.

Second, God is faithful to vindicate his name in us and through us. He does not send you into the world, Christian, with a stern warning, "Don't mess this up!" He sends you into the world in the power of the Spirit. And it's the Spirit who causes us, enables, and empowers us to walk in God's ways and obey his Word. That's the good news of the gospel!

Ezek 36:23-27, "And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. I will take you from the nations and gather you from all the countries and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules."

Yes, justice requires living in a way that upholds the infinite worth of Christ Jesus, our Lord. He will be exalted among the nations. But that isn't ultimately our work. That's a work God accomplishes in us and through us through the power of the Spirit. And it's only through the power of the Spirit that we are able to keep the 3rd commandment!

I'm not talking about letting go and letting God. No! We reject the false theology that says, "I'm waiting to obey until the Lord changes my heart." Jas 4:17, "Whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin." I'm talking about exchanging the anxiety of trying to make much of Jesus on our own for the joy of honoring his name through the power of the Spirit. Phil 2:12-13, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."

Christian, you must choose to obey. Choose to flee. Choose to walk in a manner worthy of the gospel. But do it with the joyful confidence that it is the Spirit will empower you, sustain you, help you, and transform you every step of the way so that the testimony of your life – not perfectly, but faithfully – declares, "Jesus is worthy of praise!" Our life individually and collectively is about so much more than



making it through another day. We get to testify of the priceless worth of Jesus through wholehearted obedience of his Word in the power of the Spirit.

CONCLUSION

That's what the 3rd commandment requires of us. Perhaps the best summary is found in Paul's letter to the Colossians. Col 3:17, "And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

Speaks words that uphold the infinite worth of Jesus. Take actions that uphold the infinite worth of Jesus. Whatever you do, in everything you do, answer this question. How can I show my world, right here, right now, the treasure of Jesus?

Don't ask, what will other people think? Don't ask if anyone will get hurt? Don't ask what do I feel like doing or feel like saying? Ask this. How is God seeking to uphold the infinite worth of his name through me, right here, right now? We have been given the family name, brothers and sisters. Let us act accordingly, confident in his power.