

“Love God by Keeping Your Promises”
(Exodus 20:7)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

God gave His Law to a redeemed people –
Those He saved from slavery out of Egypt –
But a largely unconverted people –
Most of them didn't know Him:
They ultimately perished in the wilderness.
Maybe that's why He couched the Law in negative terms
Because they were more likely to break it than keep it –
There is a love of gratitude
When you believe the Lord
Has done something kind for you,
But that gratitude can only take you so far.
When it wears off,
You return to the way you were.
But there is a love
That is created by the Spirit
That makes you want to do
What the Lord calls you to do
Because you love Him
And because you want to do what's right.

All of them had something of the first,
But very few had the second.

In the New Covenant, God gives His Law
To a people –
To us –
Who are both redeemed –
Not out of grip of an earthly king,
But out of devil's kingdom and power –
And converted –
Whose hearts have been renewed
By the indwelling of God's Spirit;
Who by His Spirit love Him and His ways.
The Law still teaches us what not to do –
And we need to know this
We still have remaining sin in our hearts,
We still want to do things that are wrong –
But now it's what it tells us to do
That interests us more: How to love God –
The One who has loved us from all eternity,
Who sent His Son into the world
To live and to die for us.

How does *He* want us to love Him?

First, He wants us to receive Him as our God –

To love Him most of all –

Far more than any other –

To devote ourselves *fully* to Him,

To look to Him and trust Him alone

To meet all our needs and to satisfy our hearts.

Secondly, He wants us to worship Him –

To love and serve Him

In the way that pleases Him:

More narrowly in our public worship –

Reading and hearing His Word preached;

Praying to Him;

Singing songs that honor Him for what He's done

And express love and gratitude for His mercies;

Remembering the death of His Son

For us and for our salvation

By celebrating His Table;

And remembering His resurrection from the dead

By spending the entire day with Him

And by meeting together to worship Him

And to fellowship together –

And more broadly in the way we live –

By seeking to honor Him
In everything we do,
By seeing and doing things as He tells us to,
And not as the world does –
Paul tells us we are to present ourselves
To God as living sacrifices,
That we are not to be like the world,
But transformed by the renewal of our minds
Which only happens when we read and study His Word
With the Spirit as our Guide.

These first two commandments
Really summarize everything
The Lord wants us to do:
Love Him with all your heart,
Serve/worship Him with your whole life.
This is the “complete surrender”
Eric Liddell was referring to
As what the Christian Life is all about.

B. Preview.

As I said before,
The commandments that follow
Simply spell this out a bit more fully.

This evening, let's consider

The third commandment

To learn more about how

The Lord wants us to love Him.

It tells us at least two things:

1. That we are to use His name reverently.
2. That we are to keep the promises we make to Him.

Let's consider first, what the commandment calls us to do,

And second, why we should do it.

II. Sermon.

A. First, what does this commandment call us to do?

1. God says, "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain," (v. 7).

Understanding how this is literally translated

Can actually make what He's saying a bit clearer:

"You shall not lift up the name of the Lord your God to vanity/falsehood."

It means what the Lord said in our meditation:

"You shall not swear falsely by My name, so as to profane the name of your God; I am the LORD" (Lev. 19:12).

To swear is attest to the truth of something –

To take an oath to the fact that something

Actually did or didn't take place –

And to do it calling God to witness.

We used to have a practice in our courts
Of swearing in a witness
By having them place their hand on the Bible
And requiring them to take an oath:
“Do you solemnly swear to tell the truth,
The whole truth,
And nothing but the truth,
So help you God.”
If you took such an oath,
You had better tell the truth,
Otherwise, you’re calling God
To bear witness to a falsehood/lie,
And in so doing,
You’re lifting up His name to a falsehood,
And breaking this commandment.

This command also requires
That we be sincere in our vows.

We may never have been called
To testify in court,
But many of us have taken vows:
If you’re married, you’ve made a vow
To love and cherish your spouse

For your entire life.

If you've become a member of this church,

You've both sworn oaths and made vows:

You've called God to bear witness:

1. That you believe the Bible to be His Word, that shows us the only way of salvation.
2. That the Triune God is the only true God, and that Jesus is the Son of God who came into this world in our nature.
3. That you have repented of *all* your sins and are trusting in Jesus *alone* for your salvation.

You can't be a believer if you don't affirm these things.

You also made two vows:

1. That you will forsake this world, resist the devil, and put your sinful desires to death, that you may serve your Lord and live the life He calls you to live.
2. And that, as a part of this local body, you will faithfully worship and serve the Lord in this body, submitting to its leadership and listening to its correction if you should stray.

These things are merely a summary

Of what it means to be a Christian –

This is what it means to believe in Jesus,

And what it means to repent.

It's what all Christians believe and do.

When you take these oaths and make these vows

You're simply saying you intend

To take these things seriously.

The point is: If you have said these things,
This is what you need to do.

Loving the Lord means:

Devoting yourself to Him;

Living as He calls you to live;

And keeping your promises to Him.

How are you doing so far?

Each of us should carefully consider before the Lord

If we're loving Him as He calls us to,

And as we've promised we would.

2. But there's another way we can break this commandment –

One we're all too familiar with –

And that's when we use His name

In a way that dishonors Him –

When we lift up His name

And treat it as something less than worthless –

When we drag Him down

By using His name as a common swear word,

Or when we hear others use it in this way

And aren't offended by His being dishonored.

Think about this for a moment.

When you love someone,
You respect them
And want others to do the same.
It offends you when someone
Says something false about them,
Or makes them the brunt of a joke,
Or is critical of them.

Shouldn't your love for God
Make you feel the same way –
Even more so –
Because you love Him so much more?

Is that how you feel
When you hear God's name –
Or the name of His Son, Jesus Christ –
Used to curse at someone,
Or to express surprise at something?
Does it offend you?
Does it make you angry –
Not with a vindictive anger,
But with a righteous one?
Isn't this something
You shouldn't want to hear?

Are you taking steps not to hear
The name of the One who is most precious to you
Used in that way?

Love dictates that we stand up
For the honor and reputation
Of the One we love.

This applies to everything
The Lord uses to reveal Himself.

When people attack His Creation
By attributing it to evolution;
When they attack His Word
By claiming it's only a collection
Of myths and legends,
Or outdated social norms;
When they attack His justice
By calling Him vindictive and capricious;
When they attack His created order
By saying no one should have authority over another –
That all should be equal –
Or His moral commandments
By saying He's a killjoy and a prude;
We should be offended for His sake.

Do you love God?

Do you love His name?

Do you love His truth?

Do you love His works?

Do you love His ways?

This is what He calls you to do

In this commandment,

And if you know Him,

You know He's worthy to be treated

With the greatest love and respect.

B. Let's consider secondly, why we should keep our promises

And treat His name –

And everything by which He reveals Himself –

Reverently.

The first reason should always be because we love Him.

He's worthy to be loved.

We want to love Him.

What's He's done moves us to love Him.

His Spirit compels us to love Him.

But the second is always there as well: fear.

Solomon said, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov. 9:10).

Fear should always be a part of our Christian experience.

He adds something to this commandment

That should make us afraid:

“For the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain” (v. 7).

What does He mean?

He certainly means

That He will hold everyone accountable

Not only for what they do,

But also for what they say.

Jesus said, “But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the Day of Judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matt. 12:36-37).

How do our words justify or condemn us?

Jesus explained this in the verses that came before:

“You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart. The good man brings out of *his* good treasure what is good; and the evil man brings out of *his* evil treasure what is evil” (vv. 34-35).

Our language reflects what’s in our hearts –

It shows what we really are.

If we hate the Lord,

We won’t care if we lift up His name in vain –

But if we love Him,

We will care

And will speak reverently of Him.

The point is this:

The Lord will one day

Call into account those who dishonor Him.

The way they used His name

Will be one of the things

That will speak out against them

And prove that they didn't know or love Him.

But what about those of us who love Him?

Should we be afraid as well?

Yes; but not for the same reason.

We should fear at one level

That if we continually break our vows

Or use His name in a way that dishonors Him

That we prove not to be His in the end.

But we should also be afraid

Of what the Lord will do to us

Even if we do love Him,

But have fallen into this particular sin:

He won't destroy us –

He loves us too much to do this;

Jesus already died for us –

But He will discipline us.

If He doesn't spank us in some way,

We don't belong to Him.

But if we do belong to Him,

He will spank us –

The author to the Hebrews writes, “For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines,
and He scourges every son whom He receives” (12:6).

He goes on to say, “God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom
his father does not discipline?” (v. 7).

His spankings aren't always easy.

He may begin with a slap on the wrist,

But the deeper we go into sin,

The more intense His discipline will become.

God loves us so much

That He will do whatever has to be done

To break us away from our sin –

The sin that would have destroyed us.

You who are parents

Know that sometimes

You have to go to great lengths

To get your children to give up

The things that could ruin them.

You who aren't parents yet
Will one day learn this is what you have to do,
If you love your children.

God loves you –
If you belong to Him –
And He will do what is necessary
To keep you on the path –
And that's a very good thing.

There is, of course, an alternative:
Love and honor Him.
Devote yourself to Him.
Live as He calls you to live.
Speak the truth.
Don't confirm a lie.
Keep your promises.
Use His name reverently,
And you will see His face of blessing,
Rather than His fatherly hand of discipline.
May the Lord help us
To love Him in this way. Amen.