



The Name Above Every Name

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Exodus 20:7

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⁷ “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.

(Pastor Prays)

One of my favorite authors is a man named Ron Chernow. I've read several of his books, and one of the great books he has written is about George Washington. If you get interested in George Washington, the first president, the name of that book is *A Life* by Ron Chernow. It's a great book. It's a long book. And he writes about this remarkable man, his noble traits, his selfless leadership. In fact, the book goes into maybe too much detail. I don't want to be an expert on George Washington. I just want to know some. But in about almost every area of his life, he was a soldier under the crown and then, of course, a general in the Continental Army. He was a farmer. He was a husband to Martha Custis. She was a widow with two children when he married her. He talks about George Washington and his relationship with his mother, which was unusual. Even when George Washington became the most admired man in America, she was never, ever proud of him. In fact, she would still insult him. It's a strange dynamic between him and his mother. She was probably senile. That's my diagnosis. I don't know. There is a whole lot to read about Washington, but what I found most intriguing about this man was the description of his Christian faith. According to Chernow, who is not a Christian, he says that George Washington was a man of deep conviction. He was a man of impeccable morals. He was

a consistent churchman, but his faith was expressed in hushed tones. Even when he would talk about God, he would use euphemisms to talk about the Lord. When you read his writings and some of his speeches, you never actually hear him say the name Jesus Christ. George Washington felt as if saying the name made him too familiar. Instead, Washington, when he talked about God, he would talk about providence. He would talk about the Almighty's hand. He would talk about the work of heaven.

Over the years, some people have seen this and said that it is evidence of the fact that Washington really wasn't a Christian. But if you know his context, in the Anglican high church tradition of the day, he was a man who displayed a deep reverence for a holy God that orders the moments and the events of our lives. That George Washington had a profound respect for the name of God. Now, I'm not suggesting that we go as far as George Washington. I'm not suggesting that we never say the name Jesus. But I am suggesting, as we go back to Mount Sinai, where God's people stand at the base of this mountain, we consider and think, in the eyes of a Jewish man or woman, what did the Hebrews think about a name? The Hebrew mind understood that the name that a person had might be expressing his character. That a name carried weight. That a name had meaning, it had significance. In the Bible, oftentimes a name will symbolize a person.

You don't have to go very far in the pages of the Bible, and when you get to Genesis chapter 4, you meet Cain and his brother Abel. Abel, whose name means breath and wind, because he was here today, and gone tomorrow. In fact, he never spoke a word. When you go and look at Jacob and Esau. Jacob's name meant trickster because he was such a devious man until he wrestled with God, and then his name was changed to Israel, the one who feared God. Or take the name Joshua, which means Yahweh saves, and Joshua would lead his people into salvation, he would become the forerunner, pointing to Jesus, who saves his people from their sins through the life, death, and resurrection. The name means something. And the concept holds true when we go into Exodus chapter 20. When we approach the name of God, here we are at the third commandment. Let me just recite them with you. The first commandment had to do with who we are worshiping. You shall have no other gods before me. The second commandment has to do with how you worship. You shall not make any graven images. The third commandment says, and it's interesting that it's God speaking and he speaks in the third

person, 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. What does this command teach us? I would like to put this before you, the command teaches us to live like you love God's name.

Live Like You Love God's Name

If you have been redeemed by Christ, and you put your faith in Jesus and you call yourself a Christian, then it is now incumbent on you to live your life like you love God's name. Let me tell you how I'm going to try to get at it. It's a short verse, but the way I want to try to get at this commandment is to say it in several ways so that we might somehow get an understanding. So I'm going to say it maybe two or three ways negatively, and then maybe four or five or six ways positively. I left Connie in Mississippi, so I'm by myself, so here we are, I have nine points. So, maybe one of those we can rightly apply and get to the heart of what this commandment is. Here's the first point, number one.

Do not treat his name lightly

That's what it means. The word, when you read verse 7, not to take the name in vain, to take it in vain means to take it lightly, to put no weight on it, to not have any regard for it. I think, on its face value, the very first way we can understand this has to do with profanity. If you're from the north, you would say cursing. If you're from the south, it would be cussing. It's the unholy grail of bad words, to use God and then finish that out with profanity. That is the most explicit display of taking the Lord's name in vain. Or maybe you don't have a profane mouth, maybe you just say, OMG, oh my God. To use that in exasperation, to use that in surprise, or maybe yours is even softened down like an Andy Griffith, to doggone it, or gosh darn. What we're doing is substituting, because at the very root of that is, okay, I know it's wrong to say GD, what I'll do is soften it up, but in fact, it's the heart, you see. Using the Lord's name to express anger or to express surprise, it not only breaks the third commandment, it also is just bad manners. And you can control that, which I think also leads to other foul language, which maybe is another sermon, but it's enough to say any of those sorts of euphemisms, just be careful how you speak. It matters how you speak. Out of your mouth come blessing and cursing. It shouldn't be like that, James says.

So, when this is written down, Moses gave it first to the scribes, and then it's copied over the years by Jewish scribes who love the word of God. When they would get to God's name, Y-H-W-H, they would write the consonants in the paragraph, and then over in the margin, they would put the vowels. So when you got to Yahweh, you don't say Yahweh, you come over here and say Adonai. Now, I'm not saying we resort to that. What I am saying is be careful, it matters because the problem is from the heart, the mouth speaks from the heart. Do you have trouble with your language? Do you have trouble when you're losing your temper or something happens and it's not just foul language, but you actually use God's name or you express it like Jesus Christ and you say that in a way that is not worship, but surprise?

I had a football coach at Wofford College who was a Baptist. He knew I wanted to be a Baptist preacher, so there was some sort of weird connection we would have. And we'd talk about church, but sometimes when we're doing line drills out on the field, and there weren't any women around, he would cuss a blue streak, call me all kinds of names, use the Lord's name in vain, up one side, and down the other. But if there happened to be a female trainer standing there, he was able to control his mouth. The problem is not that you can't control, you can control. It's when you decide and ask God saying, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing to you. I think that's the first, the very surface level of what this commandment means. Do not treat his name lightly. Let's go down a little further. What is the second way?

Do not treat his name flippantly

Do not treat his name flippantly, casually. This is how we think about God, how we approach God. I think that would be primarily with superficial worship, a sort of trite way of understanding, a chirpy way, a chippy way of understanding God. I heard a well-known preacher, maybe a year or two ago, I only saw a clip, I didn't see the sermon because I don't think I would make it through the sermon. But I heard him over and over and over again, talking about Jesus, saying he was a sneaky Jesus. Sneaky Jesus. What a trite way to think about the crucified, resurrected, reigning Jesus. When I think about Jesus Christ being crucified, Jesus Christ dead in the grave, Jesus Christ raised from the dead, Jesus Christ ascended into heaven, Jesus Christ interceding on my behalf, and one day, when Jesus will come, he will not sneak back.

Or I think about the flippant way sometimes we think of God when it has to do with dating relationships. And I'm all for dating relationships and a short courtship. Look, if you're dating someone and you're both believers, I probably believe in arranged marriages. I don't know if it's right or not, but here's what I think. If you love Jesus and you can stand to look at the guy, marry him. I mean, if he's going to church and he likes your mother and everything's fine and he's got a job, yes, marry him. I don't know why I just went off on that. But what I'm saying is that what bothers me is a young Christian man who will pursue a young woman that's not a believer or vice versa and still want to maintain that it's honoring to the Lord.

Or if you can live your life and not actually confess your sin to God and see your need for the cross. Or pride. I'll tell you what is one of the biggest dangers for Christians, is a sense of pride, of not thinking that you need grace. Or just living with an awareness of God. Or worse, this duplicitous living. What I mean, when I say duplicitous is, it feels like you are a committed Christian when you are here at church but when you are other places, that facade slips. You live like the rest of the world. I think it's a matter of lordship. How much do we understand and appreciate the lordship of Christ in our lives? And how far down into your heart does it seep?

One of our doctrines that is dear is the perseverance of the saints. We believe in once saved, always saved. But we would also say, if saved, it shows. Or the sufficiency of God to work. These are all ways we don't consider the depth and the power of God. Or if you're one of those people who say you don't care what people think about you. Well, don't tell anybody you go to Hickory Grove if you're going to live in such a way that you feel like that, because the truth of the matter is that you carry not only your last name, you carry the name of Christ. As A Christian, it matters. Okay, that is two things so far. They're negative. Do not take his name lightly. Do not treat his name flippantly. Here's a third one, number three.

Do not use his name manipulatively

This may be the one I hate the most because it's so subversive. And it's often hard to spot because it feels, especially if you're raised in the church and you know the language of Zion, you're able to speak it. Look, I got called on the carpet by someone the other day. They sent me a text asking me to do something, and I said to them, let me pray about it. And they knew that was an absolute no, is what that meant. It shows up. When I say to not use his name

manipulatively, what I mean is, it shows up in phrases like, I feel led to do something or God told me to do something. Or mostly, here's a better camouflage, God spoke to my heart.

Or people say, I have a peace about it. Be careful if you have a peace. I mean, when Jonah was running from the Lord when God called him to do something, he went the other way, he was outside of God's will. He went and found the boat, and everything was perfect, and they took him out on the ocean. He goes to sleep. He had a peace, you see.

I want to be careful how I say this, because what I mean is that oftentimes I have actually heard with my own ears a man who has committed adultery and is trying to get away from his wife and had an affair because he wasn't happy in his marriage and he said to me, the Lord wants me to be happy. That is manipulating because if you play the God card, there's not a better card to put on top. I can't beat it.

Let me just put that aside for a moment. I do believe, actually, that God leads, that God shows, that God speaks, and that God gives peace. We pray that God would give us the peace that surpasses understanding. We ask for that. God gives that. But if he does that, he does it according to his word. He does it to the glory of his name. He does it for the betterment of the church. Be careful, do not take the Lord's name lightly. Do not use it flippantly. And don't use God talk to manipulate. So those are three things to not do. I think they help us see the dark side of this commandment. Now let's turn it over. What about the things we should do? What is the up side? How do we live it out? What are some things we can do? So I'll just give you a few of these, number four.

Celebrate his name joyfully

One of the things I like about this church, and there are lots of things I like about it, but one of the things I like about this church is when we have baptisms, you spontaneously, and rightly celebrate. You think that is a good picture. We are glad. It is a welcoming when a person is baptized, not only into the Christian faith, but baptized into this congregation. There is a congregation of people that applaud and say, welcome. How did the psalmist say it? The psalmist says, magnify the Lord with me. Come, let us exalt his name together. Then we are to rejoice, the joy of the Lord becomes your strength. That is honoring to God. I mean, it's good

for us to find some deep core of joy. We're going to need it. Why do we need it? Because life turns unexpectedly in terrible directions and we're going to need strength. And the Bible says that it is the joy of the Lord that is your strength. That there is a deep well in you because of that. Look, it's good to go to the cross and think about what God has done for you at the cross of Jesus and rejoice that you are saved. If you've got nothing else in the world to be happy about, I want you to go and stand in your mind's eye and look to the cross of Jesus. Thank God you are not going to hell. That the very worst day you have on the planet earth is all the hell you have to ever have. There's a lot for you to rejoice about, so we rejoice. We celebrate his name joyfully. That his name is above every name, we celebrate his name joyfully. Let me give you a fifth one, number five.

Use his name prayerfully

You ought to use his name prayerfully. Remember what Jesus says about our prayers. Jesus said, in John 14, whatever you ask in my name, this I will do. Why? Not because you're being manipulative, not because it's a magic spell. Why? I will do it because the Father will be glorified in the Son. If you ask anything in my name, Jesus said, I will do it. So, what do we believe about prayer? There are a couple of things. One thing I just want to mention, when we prayed, I don't want to be too legalistic about this, but it helps us, if you think of yourself as a Christian, you think of yourself as a Trinitarian Christian. We have God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Think of it in salvation. God the Father has planned your salvation. God the Son accomplished your salvation, through his life, death, and resurrection and God the Spirit applies salvation when you believe. When we pray, this is how we pray. We pray to God the Father. We pray through God the Son, on his merits, on his righteousness, not our own. Our righteousness is filthy rags. We claim the righteousness of Christ to God the Father, through God the Son, and we pray by God the Spirit. When we say our prayers, in Jesus' name, here's what we're saying. That we want our prayer to be sifted through the will of Jesus. We want our prayer to be sifted through the character of Jesus. We want our prayer to be sifted through the righteousness of Jesus. So we pray in Jesus' name.

David Mathis is a writer for a website called Desiring God. I would recommend that to you. If you're ever looking for a website to help you with Christian thought or Bible study or just sermons, the name of it is, Desiring God. He's written several books that we have here at

Hickory Grove. David Mathis says there are five reasons to pray in the name of Jesus. I'm going to give them to you quickly. What are they? Number one, he sympathizes with our weaknesses. He knows that we are tempted. He went through temptation, yet he didn't fall. And so he sympathizes with who we are as humans. As the God-man, he sympathizes with you. Number two, he is a sufferer; he knows human pain. We have three funerals this week. Some of them are genuinely tragic. He knows if you've lost someone, if you've lost a spouse, he knows. And standing there yesterday with Campbell and his family and his grandmother, there's an illogic that goes with it if you have a child die before you. There's an unusual pain that's hard to understand. And this reminds me that Jesus Christ suffered in ways that I never will suffer. As a sufferer, he knows human pain and is there beside us. We pray in the name of Jesus because he's a sufferer. Not only that, there's a third way. Matthew says, that as our sacrifice, Jesus paid all we owe. What I mean is that you can trust that Jesus Christ has paid all the debt that your sin has incurred. That if you are in Christ, Jesus Christ died on the cross for you. God raised Him from the dead. The wrath of God has turned away. If you're not in Christ, listen, this can be yours. You don't have to be under the judgment of God. The promise of the gospel is that if you will turn and trust Jesus did that for you, you can pray in Jesus' name and know that he paid everything you owe. There's a fourth reason we pray in Jesus' name. As our forerunner, he opened up heaven for us. He ascended into heaven and opened the door that was locked shut. He opened it for us. I don't like the language of someone saying that you believe in the man upstairs, except that it's theologically right. There is a man, a human, in a glorified human body who has gone before me and, as a man, is interceding with God the Father for me. As a forerunner, he opened up heaven's door. Let's go to number five, this is the fifth reason we pray in Jesus' name. As our priest, he brings us to God. When you feel far from God, you may even be far from God, he is your priest and he brings you there. You may be brokenhearted, maybe you are ashamed of your sins, they are shameful, he brings you there.

I want you to celebrate. Celebrate his name joyfully, and use his name prayerfully. Let me give you another one, number six.

Represent his name consistently

You need to represent his name consistently. I'll make this short. Second Corinthians 5:20 tells us, that we are ambassadors. An ambassador is somebody who originates from another country

and then goes to a foreign land and represents the country they're from. You've been adopted by Christ through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. You're no longer a slave to sin. You're a child of God. You have the family name. You're living out there as Christian. Be careful when you are out on the highway, and you have a sticker on your vehicle, and you fly off the handle at somebody, and go into some road rage. Or, I'm the president of Southern Baptist Convention and we'll be meeting in Orlando, Florida next year. 16,000 to 18,000 Southern Baptists will descend on one town, and all of the restaurants, they do not love to see us come for a couple of reasons. One is that we don't order any alcohol. Not much alcohol, I don't guess, but I don't order any alcohol. And so the bill doesn't go up. And two is, Baptists don't tip. If you're in a restaurant and people know you go to Hickory Grove, leave a good tip. It's not just Hickory Grove, it's the fact that you call yourself a Christian. We are seeking to represent his name out there consistently in your neighborhood. If you're a college student and people know you're a Christian, then it matters when they look to you because this is what they say of what Christianity is. We represent his name consistently. Let me give you a seventh one.

Reflect his name constantly

We need to reflect his name constantly in whatever situation we find ourselves. I'm going through the book of Colossians. I've been trying to memorize it. As I get older, it's harder and harder to remember. I don't know what's going on in my mind, but I'm having a hard time. So I'm working on it. I hope to have it done by December. Don't ask me to recite it to you yet. I don't have it. Maybe on Christmas Eve, I'll do it. But when you're reading Colossians, there are these household rules. Paul starts with wives. Wives are to submit to your husbands, this is fitting to the Lord. And then he goes to husbands. Husbands, love your wives, do not be harsh with them. And then he goes to the children. Children, obey your parents in everything, for this is pleasing to the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children lest they get discouraged. And then he goes to the slaves. And he says to the slaves, slaves, obey those who are your masters on earth in everything, not by way of eye service, as people pleasers, but with sincerity of heart. Then it goes to the masters. Masters treat the slaves justly and fairly, knowing you have a master in heaven. And then he sort of wraps it all up, to say, wherever you found yourself, I'm not telling you to find a better situation. I'm telling you that I've put you there so that you honor me in that situation. 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. Let me give you another one. We're going to honor his name, here's number eight.

Speak his name evangelistically

Evangelistically. So if we're not going to say Jesus Christ as a means of exasperation or profanity or in anger, how are we going to say it? When we talk about Jesus, we're going to talk about his perfect life. We need to talk about his death on the cross in the place of sinners. Talk about the resurrection, the resurrection of Christ. Talk about Jesus as Lord, his lordship overall. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:20, he says, ²⁰ *Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ*. What does that mean? If you're an ambassador for Christ, it is God making his appeal through us. And here's the appeal. *God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.* And that's honoring to the name of God. Let me close with one last point, number nine.

Hope in his name triumphantly

I want you to hope in his name triumphantly. Just remember you win. That in Christ you win. That in Christ, there's victory. You are not a slave to sin. You're not going to hell. You don't weep as those who have no hope. Isn't it good in Philippians chapter 2? You probably know it by heart. Paul said, 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 will 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. That's the name above every name. The name above every name that lived in your place, that died in your place on the cross, that was raised from the dead, that ascended into heaven, that intercedes on your behalf. And Advent says, one day he will return. This morning, I pray that you trust in the name of Jesus.

(Pastor prays)