

Question: I am amazed and deeply offended by the frivolous and meaningless way I hear people everyday using the expression “Oh my God” (OMG). Are they ignorant of this misuse of God’s name or do they just not care anymore? What would Jesus say about this?

The expression “Oh my God” has become one of the most frequently used bywords in our world today. I even heard of a child’s bedspread that had the letters OMG plastered all over it. I suspect many people have picked up this expression simply because it is what they have heard and read so often. However, the third of the Ten Commandments states: “You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain” (Exodus 20:7 NAS). Others have translated this command as, “You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God” (NIV). The Old Testament Hebrew word translated “vain” includes treating God’s name as worthless by using it in unnecessarily idle, empty or meaningless ways as well as using it for the purposes of deceit and fraud.

Instead of using God’s name in empty and meaningless ways, Jesus taught his disciples that God’s name is to be “hallowed,” a word that means to be highly honored as holy (Matthew 6:9). The writer of Psalms cried out: “Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness” (Psalm 29:2; cf. Philippians 2:9-11). God warned Israel, “Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the LORD” (Leviticus 19:12). Ancient Jewish scribes cleaned their pens and used fresh ink when writing God’s name because it is holy. In a similar way, we need to reverence God and avoid words or behaviors that disrespect the holiness of God.

Often, people who lack genuine faith in Jesus do not understand why Christians are concerned about this kind of reference to God. Any objection to OMG may seem trivial to them. Unfortunately, even some who claim to worship God have been influenced more by the society around them than by a consciousness of God’s holiness. They, too, have fallen into careless misuse of God’s name. But the wise man said, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Proverbs 9:10). By the aid of spiritual wisdom and by meditation on the holiness and fear of God, we can be kept from misuse of God’s

name. It will also help to remember that someday “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. Since, then, we know what it is to fear the Lord, we try to persuade men” (2 Corinthians 5:10-11). Concerning the Day of Judgment, Jesus said: “But I tell you that everyone will have to give account on the day of judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matthew 12:36-37).

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