

Then God Said... The Third Commandment

I am not a prude, nor am I someone who has lived a totally sheltered life. Yet I am still unsettled, even shocked, these days when I hear what is allowed to be said on television and what people say in public. The use of foul language and swearing is common place.

The language that most troubles me is “wrongful use” of God’s name. From people of faith to people who are atheists, using God’s name in vain and using it to curse others is often heard.

Why do people make this wrongful use of God’s name? For some, it has become something they hear so often that they copy it. They may be trying to fit in or not even think about it. For others, it seems they have a limited vocabulary and lack any creativity. For still others, they may be trying to offend or shock.

The Third Commandment is, “*You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God.*” (*Exodus 20:7*) This tells us, positively, that God’s name deserves respect and reverence. It tells us, negatively, that God’s name should not be used to affirm wrong, and it should not be used carelessly.

I find it interesting that “God” is used so often negatively, while the name of no other so called god is used in this way. People don’t swear using the name of Buddha or Mohammed or Hindu gods. Swearing by God’s name, or some other ancient deity’s name, originated early on as a way to back up one’s claim. Jesus says simply, “*Let your word be ‘Yes, Yes’ or ‘No, No’; anything more than this comes from the evil one.*” (*Matthew 5:37*)

Some say swearing meets neurological and linguistic and emotional needs. I wonder. Do we really need it? Not according to God.

Some people say that swearing is the least of our problems and not to worry about it. “Worry about the real sins,” they say. I would assert that this is a real sin, however, and an offense against God. Further, it affects us and this world in a negative way.

What if we used our language not to disrespect God, and not to call on his name for naught? What if we used our language, instead, for good, for positivity, to build up? And then, what if we reserved our language about God for praise and sharing?