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3rd Commandment



Ten Commandments - Steve Gregg

Steve Gregg discusses the relevance of the third commandment, which instructs to hold the name of God sacred. Gregg explains how speaking scornfully about someone using God's name is a form of blasphemy and goes against the commandment. He emphasizes the importance of treating God's name with reverence and notes that blasphemies are among the things that come from a wicked heart. Gregg encourages Christians to show respect for God and his name in their worship.

Transcript

Would you turn with me to Exodus chapter 20. It is here that we find the Ten Commandments. And we talked last week about the Ten Commandments in general, how that they are part of the law of Moses.

Not that Moses formulated it. It was certainly of divine origin. God gave Moses the law.

And Moses gave it to the people from God. And the law of Moses as a body of rules takes up a major part of the Old Testament because it governed almost every aspect of life for those in Old Testament times who were obliged to keep it. In the New Testament, however, the Bible says that the law, Jesus said actually, the law and the prophets were up until John the Baptist.

But since then, he said, the kingdom of God has been preached and every man presseth into it. Meaning that the law had its power, had its force up until and up through the time of John the Baptist. However, with the ministry of Jesus, a new law was being ushered in, a new authority.

Jesus now has more authority than Moses. In fact, over those who are under Jesus, Moses has no authority nor his law. But that does not mean that the laws that Moses gave have no value to us because, for one thing, Jesus repeated some of them.

And he is our Lord. He has all authority. Whatever he said is binding on us.

And whatever Jesus repeated of the law of Moses is binding on us, not because it's of the

law of Moses, but because it's the law of the Lord, Jesus. And other law, besides that which Jesus repeated, has value to us because it foreshadows and portrays and types the character of Christ. Now, we decided, I decided sometime a couple of weeks ago that I would, on these Friday nights, pursue a series of teachings on the Ten Commandments.

I believe that the Ten Commandments have relevance to us, though as I explained last week, I don't believe that we are under them in the same sense that the Jews were. Because the law, and the Ten Commandments were definitely part of the law, is not any longer the means by which we obtain righteousness. We are declared righteous by faith, by grace through faith, the Scripture says, and therefore it's not of works lest any man should boast.

But since Jesus repeated most of the Ten Commandments, nine of them, not necessarily verbatim, but his teachings touched on at least nine of them, they have relevance to us because we are supposed to do all things whatsoever he commanded us. And as we look at the Ten Commandments, we see that they make a neat package. There are ten, four of which have to do with our relationship to God directly.

The first one is that we should have no other gods. The second one is that no idols should be made or bowed down to. The third one is that his name should be kept sacred.

The fourth, that a day should be kept holy unto him. Those things have to do with our relationship directly with God, whereas the other six have to do with our relationship with our fellow men. The first has to do with our relationship to our parents.

Honor your father and your mother. And then others that are mentioned have to do with not stealing, not killing, not committing adultery, not coveting, and not bearing false witness against our neighbor. All of these have to do with the way we relate with our fellow man.

And that is no doubt why when Jesus was asked to give an example of the greatest law, he said, I can't limit it to one, I'm afraid, there are two. He said, the great commandment, the first and great commandment is, Hear, O Israel, the Lord our Lord is one God, and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy strength, with all thy soul, with all thy heart, with all thy mind, and so forth. And then he said, and there's another one like it, and that is, that thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

He said, on these two hang all the law and all the prophets. And we can see how that is so, that if you love God with all your heart, then those first four commandments will not create any difficulty. You will do those things by nature, because you will not wish to do that which offends the one you love.

If you love your brother as yourself, you also will not want to trespass upon his rights. You will want to give him the honor that's due. You won't want to lie about him.

You won't want to steal or kill him. And so we can see then that the law of love, love for God and love for our brother, encompasses the whole of the law of the ten commandments at least. And Jesus said, actually all the law and all the prophets can be summarized with those two.

Now, today I would like to talk about the third commandment. We talked last week about the first two, and the third commandment has to do with holding the name of God as sacred. It's found in Exodus chapter 20 and verse 7. It says, thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.

Now, usually when we think of this commandment, there's a rather narrow idea that we have of what it means to take the name of the Lord in vain. We usually think of the irreverent logger or construction worker or truck driver, the gruff macho type who uses the name of Jesus as a curse word. And that kind of usage of the name of God is generally what we think that this is talking about.

And certainly that is included in what this is talking about. But we might feel ourselves somewhat righteous if we thought that's all that it involved, because maybe we don't use the name of God in such ways. Therefore, we might think this commandment is not violated in our lives.

When the rich young ruler came running to Jesus and said, What good thing must I do to have eternal life? Jesus said, Keep the commandments. The man said, Which ones? Jesus named some of them. Mostly were taken from this list of Ten Commandments, though there was one that was added besides.

And the man said, I've kept all of these from my youth up. And it seems likely that that was not true. There are many people who say, My religion is the Ten Commandments, and I don't break the Ten Commandments, so I know I'm going to go to heaven.

Of course, people like that are not Christians, because a Christian is one who does not rely on his own keeping of the law. But it's interesting how many people think that they keep the Ten Commandments. It's interesting how many Christians have such a narrow view of what it means to keep these commandments that they think that they have not violated some of them.

I believe that we have violated every one of the Ten Commandments, each of us, if we understood it in the spirit of what it means. You see, Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, You've heard that it's been said to them of old time, Thou shalt not commit adultery, but I say unto you, If any man looks upon a woman to lust after her, he's already committed adultery with her in his heart. He said, You've heard that it's been said to them of old time, Thou shalt not kill, and whosoever kills shall be in danger of the judgment.

But I say that he that hateth his brother without cause shall be in danger of the judgment. What Jesus is pointing out is that the law is not something which God only requires to be kept outwardly, but it has to be kept from the heart. And when we realize that though we may not curse God with our mouths, though we may not commit physical acts of adultery or stealing or murder, yet many times our attitudes have been in violation of the great spiritual principles that these embody.

Now there are three ways in which the Lord's name can be taken in vain. And I think you'll find that probably if you're like the rest of us, you've at one time or another been guilty of all three of these ways. And the reason I select three is because the Scripture gives us three.

At three different places in the Scripture, we find examples of different ways in which the name of the Lord is taken in vain. And they are very different from each other. By the way, the violation of this command is called blasphemy.

And if blasphemy is a word that doesn't have very clear definition in your mind, I hope by searching the Scriptures together with you tonight, that you will have a clear idea of what the Bible speaks of as blasphemy. Again, blasphemy often is, we consider that a man is a blasphemer if he claims to be God, or if he curses God or does something like that. But the New Testament uses the word blasphemy and encompasses many things besides that, of which we need to be aware.

All right, of the three things which constitute taking the name of the Lord in vain in Scripture, the first of them definitely has to do with failure to render due reverence to the name of God. That is, to not reverence His name. And when we speak of His name, we need to understand that in Scripture a name signifies the whole person, or who the person is.

To not reverence His name means we don't reverence Him. After all, if you've ever been in love, probably a few of you have been at one time or another, the very name of the person that you love probably warmed your heart because it called to mind everything that that person was and meant to you. For those who you admire and whom you love, the name alone is sweet to your ears.

But if you can speak scornfully concerning someone and using their name, it's evident that the way you treat their name is the way you think of them, because a name just speaks of the person themselves. The name is just a handle that we put on a person so that we can know how to identify them in talking about them. And to take the name of the Lord in vain can mean simply that we don't reverence God as He deserves to be revered.

And the way we speak of Him may even bring that out. Let me give you a couple of scriptures on this. The first is found in Psalm 139, verse 20.

It says, For they speak against thee wickedly. This is speaking to God. They speak against thee wickedly, and thine enemies take thy name in vain.

Now, what he's saying here is that those who hate God take His name in vain by speaking of Him wickedly. That is, they don't reverence Him. It is against Him that they speak, not just against His name, but against Him.

And the use of His name or the reverence or lack thereof that is given to the name of God signifies a corresponding reverence or lack thereof toward God Himself. In Leviticus chapter 10, in verse 10, we are told that there are some things that are holy and which have to remain holy, and that a person with discernment or a spiritual person must know how to tell the difference between that which is holy and that which is unholy. It's in Leviticus 10.10 that it says, And that ye may put difference between holy and unholy, between unclean and clean.

That means that God desires for His people, in this case it was the priests, to be able to know the difference between things that were holy and things that were unholy. Unholy doesn't mean necessarily nasty or evil. Unholy simply means that they are not in the category of holy things.

Holy things means things that are separate. Things that are set apart for special reverence or for special use. In the Old Testament, the temple was holy, the tabernacle was holy, the altar was holy.

All these things were set apart for reverence and for divine use. The instruments and the furniture in the tabernacle had paraphernalia, spoons and censers and dishes and things like that that were used for it. Cups for drinking out of.

All these things were holy vessels unto the Lord. They were to be used for nothing except the worship of God. Now we have a story in the book of Daniel, how the Babylonians broke into the temple before they burned it down and they took out all the holy vessels of the temple.

And sometime later, one of the Babylonian kings, Belshazzar, took the holy vessels which had been taken from the temple in Jerusalem and began to drink from them and toast his gods, that is, the false gods that he, the Babylonian king, worshipped. And he did not put the reverence on those holy things that they deserved and he used them for common or profane purposes and a judgment struck that very night. In fact, he saw a finger, the finger of God, writing on the wall.

And the writing said, your kingdom has been weighed in the balances and found wanting and will be torn from you today. And that night the man was put to death by the invading Persian armies and his kingdom was overthrown. Now, no doubt this would have happened anyway, but the straw that broke the camel's back and brought the

judgment upon this king was the fact that he failed to give proper reverence to the holy things that were taken from the temple in Jerusalem.

The Bible says in 1 Corinthians chapter 11 that in the Corinthian church judgment had fallen on many in the church. It's in 1 Corinthians chapter 11 that Paul says, for this cause many are sick among you and some have even died. Now, what kind of thing could a church do that would cause God to bring death and sickness upon the members of the church? Well, we're told that when they came to the Lord's table, when they were eating and taking communion together, there was abuse of the Lord's table.

In those days they took communion as a feast and people would help themselves to the food and some were pushing their way to the front and taking all the food. Others who came along later would have nothing to eat and Paul said that some are going away drunken from having too much and some are going away hungry from the feast and that there's abuse of one another in the Lord's supper and he says that they are eating and drinking unworthily in verse 29 of 1 Corinthians 11. It says, for he that eateth and drinketh unworthily eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord.

That is, the body of Christ, the church, is made up of us and as you abuse your brother, you are abusing Christ. You're not discerning that you're abusing a holy thing. The saints are called holy saints.

The word saints means holy ones. Christians are saints, therefore we're holy. When we abuse a brother or a sister, we are abusing that which is holy.

We are using it profanely or not counting it holy. We need to be able to put the difference between that which is holy and that which isn't holy. One thing that's holy is the name of God and it surprises me sometimes how frequently Christians can lightly use the word God or Jesus Christ or even other words.

I've heard of a restaurant, a Christian restaurant that has Yahweh sandwiches and things like that. For me, I don't want to go near that place to tell you the truth. It reminds me of a story that's told of the apostle John.

It's in the history of the church. It's not in the Bible. In the days of John, there was a great heretic named Serentis who was a leader of Gnosticism.

John went with some of his disciples into one of the public baths there in Ephesus where he lived out his final years. It was told him that Serentis was in there. He didn't see him, but he heard that he was.

He warned his disciples, quick, get far from this place before lightning strikes because Serentis is here. There's times when I've been in churches or Christian establishments where I've felt similarly. Quick, let's get out of here before lightning strikes.

Thank you. I had a friend who was wanting to give out awards, lightning rod awards, to certain Christian organizations. I won't say he wasn't self-righteous.

He probably deserved one himself. But there were several things going on in some churches that he thought he'd like to award them with the official lightning rod award because he thought they were profaning the name of God. Well, that does go on, I'm afraid, among Christians as well as non-Christians.

People who joke around, jokes that have Jesus in them. But more than that, even just talking about God irreverently, even when it's a positive kind of talking. Some people talk about God as the man upstairs.

Or people speak of Jesus in such coarsely familiar terms. Now, it's true that Jesus said that we were his friends, but that doesn't mean we're just chums. Jesus said, you are my friends if you do all things whatsoever I command you.

Obviously, the kind of friendship we have is one of obedience to his lordship, one of reverence toward him. And that we reverence him even though he is our friend. Or because he is our friend, because we want the best for him.

We want to give him what is his due. We reverence his name and that is certainly what is due. I'd like to show you a few more scriptures.

Before I look at some specific ones, I'd like to remind you that Jesus repeated the emphasis on this very point when he said that... Thank you. When he said that when we pray we should pray, our father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. The very first petition that Jesus taught his disciples to pray was that God's name would be hallowed.

That means sanctified or venerated or revered among the people of the earth. That should be the highest and first desire of every Christian. That God's name would be venerated by all men whom he has created and from whom he desires and deserves to receive worship.

That men take God lightly is to fail to give him the reverence that's due. Many times people think that because they are not gross sinners that they're really not too bad off even though they don't believe in God or don't follow God. Or because they believe in God but don't fully follow him, they feel like they're better off than those who don't believe in God.

But I don't suppose anything to be more insulting to God than to be taken casually or to be taken lightly. If God is who the Bible says he is, then none can take him lightly. He is, if the Bible is correct and we believe that it is, our creator to whom we owe our existence.

When Daniel rebuked Belshazzar, he says, You have praised all the gods of the sun and the moon and the stars, but you have failed to praise the God in whose hand your breath is. God holds our breath in his hands. Every breath you take is given as a special gift from him.

He doesn't owe you the next one. He deserves our reverence. He is a God who has shown us his ways and shown us his wrath.

Many of the stories in the Old Testament demonstrate the wrath of God against those who violate his commandments. It's evident he does not want to be taken lightly. If it is true that we have the privilege of knowing our creator, this is the greatest privilege a person can have.

And for a person not to take it, not to take advantage of that privilege, is to take God too lightly. Jesus told a parable about a king, and this is in Matthew 22, I think. He said, The kingdom of God is like a king who would make a marriage for his son.

So he made the feast and he invited his guests, but the guests made light of it. And they said, Well, I've just gotten married, I can't come to a feast right now. Or, I've just bought some yokes of oxen, I'm afraid I can't come right now to this feast.

Now, this feast was the call of God to the people of the earth to come and worship him and be his people. To come and follow Jesus. And the people made light of it.

It wouldn't have been good, but it possibly would have been less insulting if they would have rebelled and said, No way, we're setting up our own kingdom here. But they didn't do that. They didn't openly rebel.

They didn't submit either. In fact, they didn't take the king's word as anything to even pay much attention to. They just made light of it.

And this made the king very angry, according to the parable, and he went and destroyed their city. But the Bible says here, God will not hold him guiltless that takes his name in vain. And part of taking the name of the Lord in vain is to not treat God and his name with the reverence that it's due.

Our primary petition as Christians is, Hallowed be thy name. That is, it should be the burning desire of our hearts to see God's name treated with reverence and with holiness. And Mark was sharing about how sometimes young Christians get carried away with a lot of fooling around and joking around.

And he mentioned sometimes a little too much. I don't believe that it's wrong to joke around, but it is true that sometimes young Christians especially, and sadly, some older Christians get a little too carried away and do not give the reverence, don't live in the fear of God, the fear and reverence of God that the Bible says we're to live in. Jesus

indicated in his teaching that lack of reverence for God, which is blasphemy, basically, to use the name of God irreverently, is something that proceeds out of a wicked heart.

It's not something that someone does accidentally. It comes out of a wicked heart. Would you turn to Matthew 15? And while you're turning there, I'd like to remind you, most people are familiar with the fact that Jesus said, there's only one sin of which men cannot be forgiven.

And that is what he called blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. Now, he doesn't specifically tell us what blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is, but the indication is that the Pharisees had been guilty of it on the occasion when he mentioned it. And they had attributed his working to the workings of the devil, that is, giving the devil the credit for what God was doing.

And that may be what blasphemy of the Holy Spirit is, but whatever is intended by that term, one thing's clear, blasphemy is a violation of the third commandment. And Jesus said that's the only sin of which a person cannot be forgiven, neither in this life nor in the age to come. It stands above all sins as being unforgivable, whatever it is.

But many Christians, probably most Christians, at some time or another have wondered if they've committed that sin. Because it isn't real clear to some people what it is. I've had many Christians come and say, I'm afraid I've committed the unforgivable sin.

I must have blasphemed the Holy Spirit. And then you ask them what they did and they tell, and usually it's not so that they've done it, but it's interesting how people wonder about that. But the Bible says that blasphemies come from a wicked heart.

I can show you that in Matthew 15, 19. Jesus said, for out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man.

Now, he mentions blasphemies as being among the things that come from a wicked heart. It should be comforting to some that it's not likely that you'll accidentally commit the unforgivable sin if you really have a heart that's right toward God. Sometimes people think, I wonder if I accidentally said the wrong words and now I can't be forgiven.

God is not going to condemn someone unforgivably to hell because they accidentally uttered the wrong syllables out of their mouth when their heart was really right toward God. The only way a person could become guilty of blasphemy of the Holy Spirit would be if their heart was wicked against God. But one thing we need to see is that if we are blaspheming God or failing to give His name the reverence that is due, then it speaks of the condition of our heart and there may be a need in us to have an improved condition in our hearts.

Look at Psalm 111, that is Psalm 111 and verse 9. Psalm 111 and verse 9. It says, He sent redemption unto His people. He hath commanded His covenant forever. Holy and

reverend is His name.

The word reverend means to be revered, to be held in reverence. Holy and reverend is His name. The name of God is to be revered.

And when spoken at all, it must be spoken with reverent tones. And from a reverent heart. A heart that necessarily sees itself as under His Lordship and rightfully so.

That it acknowledges His rightful dominion. Now, the Jews were quite sensitive about this issue of blasphemy, as you might know. They were so concerned that they might accidentally take the name of God in vain Many Jews adopted a practice of avoiding altogether writing or speaking the name of God.

Many modern Jews do the same. It's the practice among some Jews, instead of writing the name of God, they will write G and then they'll put a dash and then a D to signify the name God. But they won't write it out in all its letters for fear that they might be using it in vain.

They want to show such reverence to it. In biblical times and even to this day, some Jews would not use the name of God verbally. Instead, if they intended to speak of God, they would substitute the word heaven so that they might not use the name of God for fear that it might be irreverent for them to do so.

And so, they would say, heaven bless you, rather than God bless you. The prodigal son, returning to his father in Luke chapter 15, said, Father, I've sinned against heaven and in thy sight. What he meant was he sinned against God and in his father's sight.

But he said against heaven because that observes the Jewish scruple against using the name of God. The sad thing is that though they had this scruple, nonetheless, when God came in the flesh among them, they didn't reverence him. In fact, they accused him of being a blasphemer.

In John chapter 10, Jesus said, I and the Father are one. And the Jews, hearing that, took up stones to stone him. This is John 10, and verse 30 and following says, I and my father are one, said Jesus.

Then the Jews took up stones again to stone him. Jesus answered them, many good works have I showed thee from my father. For which of those works do you stone me? The Jews answered him, saying, for a good work we stone thee not, but for blasphemy.

And because that thou being a man, makest thyself God. Now, in their opinion, he was not showing proper reverence to God, because they figured no man could claim to be God. Because that's dragging God's identity down to human level.

That's not giving him the revered position. But in this unique condition, they were

mistaken, because this man really was God. But constantly he was accused of being a blasphemer, because he claimed to be God.

And they constantly sought to stone him, because the Bible said that a blasphemer should be stoned. In Leviticus chapter 24, there's a case given. Leviticus 24, verses 11 through 16, where a man was fighting with another man, and he got so angry that he cursed and used the name of the Lord in vain.

And people who overheard him brought him to Moses and said, what should be done with this man? And we heard him curse and blaspheme the name of God. And Moses said, well, wait right here, and I'll go ask God about it. So Moses went in before the Lord and said, what should be done? God said, stone him to death.

And it's evident that God doesn't take it lightly when people don't reverence his name. The Ten Commandments say, God shall not count him guiltless who takes the name of the Lord in vain. We should not be legalistic like the Jews in being so fearful of using the name in vain meaning that we never speak the name of Jesus or never speak the name of God.

Certainly the disciples did not express that fear. They spoke the name of God and of Jesus frequently. But we should certainly have the same care they did against blaspheming and speaking his name or using his name or thinking even with less reverence toward him than is due his name.

In Psalm 89 and verse 7, it says, God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him. Reverence for the name of God, reverence for the person of God. That is something that is sadly missing from much Christian worship.

A reverence doesn't mean terror and it doesn't mean craven fear and it doesn't mean paranoia that God's going to strike out at us if we have any joy at all. It's just the opposite. We know that God wants us to enjoy him and to enjoy holy things and wholesome things that he has provided for us.

But it does mean that we set him apart. He is holy. He's not just my pal Jesus.

He's not just the man upstairs. He is the holy God whose name must always be counted as reverend to those who name themselves by his name. He's greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him.

In Hebrews chapter 12, we see again a New Testament stress on the need for reverence among Christians. In Hebrews 12, 28, it says, Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. Now it's interesting, some people's concept of grace is that since we're under grace, we don't have to be careful about things like that. We can live a

loose life.

We can be casual toward God because his grace has just made us clean and, you know, grace covers it all. And grace can cover every sin, of course. But the grace of God in the New Testament is not depicted as something that makes us free to violate the commands of God.

The grace of God, in fact, leads us to keep his commands. Here it says, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, we need to have grace and by that grace we will serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. Even the receiving of his grace, if we've rightly received it, will bring forth reverence and godly fear and acceptable service in our lives.

So the New Testament teaches us, of course, to show reverence to the name of God. And while Jesus was accused of being a blasphemer by the Jews, yet he was vindicated by the resurrection from the dead so that Peter later said of him in Acts chapter 4, in verse 12, Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved, than the name of Jesus. That's what Peter said.

And Paul said, as you probably know, in Philippians 2, 10 and 11, He said that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus is Lord. How glibly we use the name of Jesus. How seldom the very name of Jesus drives us to our knees to bow in reverence to him.

Yet the scripture says that's the norm. At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow. But frequently we use Jesus as a familiar word that is... And you know, an interesting thing, in the New Testament, in the epistles, we constantly have references to the Lord by name.

The apostles use it, the name. But he's usually called the Lord Jesus Christ or Christ Jesus or Jesus Christ. Usually his title is Christ and sometimes even so far as saying the Lord Jesus Christ are the most common expressions.

Almost never in the epistles do we find the word Jesus by itself. Which doesn't mean that it's wrong to use it, but it's an interesting phenomenon. That Jesus is a very familiar way to address him or speak of him.

But in the epistles, the apostles in writing of him tended to affix more of his titles to him to preserve the reverence of that name. That they wouldn't just use it as a common name. Because the name Jesus was a common name in Jewish society.

There were many people named Jesus. Even some others in the Bible besides the Lord Jesus. But when the apostles spoke of him, they didn't want to use his name as just a common name.

And so the most frequent thing is to find him referred to as the Lord Jesus Christ. And just that affixing the proper titles to him puts his name in its proper reverent setting. And at the name of the Lord Jesus, every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus is Lord.

Do you feel compelled to bow when you hear his name? If not, then maybe, and if I don't, then maybe we don't reverence his name. We fail to give the proper reverence to his name. This is part, this is one part of what blasphemy is.

It's not just a matter of speaking the wrong words. It could be speaking the right words with the wrong spirit. Because blasphemy was not just using the name of other gods.

It was using the name of the true God, but using it wrongly. And so one of the three things in the New Testament that are said to be blasphemy is this. And I think that probably Christians, maybe not as much as non-Christians, but just to a greater degree, still fail to give proper reverence to Jesus.

There are things that we do in dealing with other Christians that we would never do if we knew Jesus to be present. And yet he said where two or more are gathered in my name, I'm there in the midst. And yet many times a group of Christians can be together and they'll be joking around irreverently and all.

And you wouldn't expect they'd do that if they could see Jesus there. I'll bet the disciples were pretty awestruck by Jesus most of the time. Once, as Jesus and his disciples were traveling, some of the disciples were far enough from Jesus that they thought he couldn't hear.

And they started discussing among themselves who would be the greatest among them. Something they would have never done in his presence. But it was something they were arguing about.

And later on, when they came into the house, Jesus said to them, what were you talking about back there? And the Bible says they were silent. They didn't dare to tell him what they'd been talking about back there. Of course, he knew and he told them that he knew.

But the point is that they would not have spoken the way they did if they had known that he was listening. And many times I think Christians would not speak the way they do if they were conscious of the presence of Jesus. And yet he's present here.

Not only knowing whether we're using his name verbally with the correct reverence, but whether we in our hearts reverence him. Whether our hearts are bowed before him every time his name is uttered. A second way, and perhaps more directly the way that this commandment was intended to be understood about not taking the name of the Lord in vain, has to do with not swearing falsely by his name.

This is something we can't initially relate to very well because we don't swear oaths anymore, as they did in those days. But there is an application to us. In the biblical times, if a person wanted to guarantee that he was speaking the truth about something that he intended to do, or about something that he affirmed was true and which he knew to be true, he would sometimes swear with an oath.

And that was supposed to give more certitude and more verity to what he said. He might say, I swear by God. He might say, I swear by the temple.

Jesus said that the Pharisees were hypocrites in Matthew 23 because he said, they said if a man swears by the altar, it's not binding. But if he swears by the sacrifice on the altar, it's binding. He said, if a man swore by the temple, it wasn't binding.

But if he swore by the gold in the temple, it wasn't binding. And the Pharisees had all kinds of rules about, if you swore by this, it's binding. If you swore by that, it's not binding.

And Jesus pointed out that's hypocritical and he basically told his disciples not to swear oaths at all. He said, let your yea be yea and your nay nay. Just tell the truth the first time and don't be tempted to go on into swearing oaths.

Now, why is that? What does swearing an oath have to do with anything? It says in Hebrews chapter 6 and verse 16 that it's the practice of men to swear by something greater than themselves. Hebrews 6.16 says, for men verily swear by the greater, which means that if a person swore an oath, he'd select something that was greater than himself to swear by. And the reason for that is that by swearing in the name of something or another or of a person, they were invoking the virtue, committing the character and endangering the good name of that person.

Those are three things that I got from a book which talked about what swearing an oath was. It said if a person swore an oath, they were doing these three things. They were invoking the virtue of the person or the thing.

They were committing the character of it, which means that if they're saying that if this doesn't happen, if I don't do this thing, then may the character of this person that I'm swearing by be blotted or besmirched. And they were endangering the good name of the person that they were swearing by. Now, we don't relate to that.

We're not Orientals. The Jews were Middle Easterners and we in the West think differently, but we have to understand what it referred to. It had to do with calling upon God, swearing by God as a witness to the truthfulness of what was being said.

And it was considered that an oath ended all controversy. It says that also in Hebrews chapter 6. An oath ends all dispute. As soon as a person swore an oath, it was considered, OK, well, he really means it.

And Jesus, of course, told his disciples not to use oaths. But in Leviticus chapter 19, it's clear that in those days it was permitted of the Jews to swear oaths in the name of God. There was no law in the Old Testament that said they couldn't swear in the name of God.

And many people did in order to guarantee how right they were talking. And in Leviticus 19, 12, it says, Now, when it says, you shall not swear by my name falsely, it means that if you swear by my name, you better do what you said you're going to do. If you say, I swear by God that I'm going to do this thing, then you'd better make sure you do it.

Because if you don't, you're swearing falsely by his name and you're besmirching his character. You're endangering his good name. You're invoking his virtue.

You'd better take that seriously. And he indicated that if you don't do that, that you are profaning the name of your God. Now, that's obviously related to taking the name of the Lord in vain.

You profane his name. The word profane in the Hebrew has a variety of meanings. It means to defile or to pollute or to stain or to wound or to prostitute.

A person who used the name of God in an oath and didn't really mean to keep his oath was prostituting the name of God. He was using it for his own advantage, for his own gain or his own profit. But he wasn't counting it a holy thing.

He wasn't realizing that by committing the virtue of God and endangering the good name of God, that in breaking his oath, it was God who was being stained and the name of God was being blotted. And I believe that though we don't swear oaths today, we do have the name of Jesus upon us. People know us to be Christians.

And if they know us to be Christians, then they need to know that if we speak something, that we'll keep our word. And I believe when Jesus said, just let your yea be yea and your nay, nay. For all other than this comes from the wicked one.

I believe what he was saying, partly, is you should be honest enough that you can just say yes. And because the name of Jesus is on you, you don't need to swear by his name. His name is already on you.

And you better treat your yes as though you'd sworn an oath. If you tell someone you're going to do something, you'd better do it. If you say that you're not going to do something, you'd better not do it.

Because basically, the Lord's name is upon you. Now, I think the reason Jesus said not to swear oaths also is because we can't guarantee the future. We don't know if we're even going to live till tomorrow.

If I say, I swear that I'll pay you next Tuesday for a hamburger today, I can't be sure I'm

going to be alive Tuesday. And if I swear by God and then I don't show up Tuesday because I got hit by a truck on the way, then I've endangered his good name. So, it's very important.

In fact, James tells us in James chapter 4, Go to now ye that say today or tomorrow we shall go into such a city and continue there a year and buy and sell and gain. He says, for ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor which appeareth for a little time and then vanisheth away.

For that ye ought to say, if the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that. And I believe that that probably should be our attitude and maybe even sometimes we should go so far as to state it so that people know that that's what we intend. That we say, yes, I will be there.

That it needs to be understood, if the Lord wills. If I live, if the Lord wills, I may survive long enough to do this thing. At least I'm letting you know that it's my intention to do it.

My yes, I'm as good as my word. But it's up to God to really make it possible for me to carry out my word. Because if we assuredly guarantee things that we have no power to guarantee or to bring about, then we may end up being guilty of taking the name of the Lord in vain, swearing falsely by His name and profaning or staining and wounding His name.

Now, the third way in which the name of the Lord can be taken in vain, I think, is the way that really is much more practical than these other two and have more to do with you and me. And that is when you go to... At this point, the cassette tape was stopped and turned over to record on the second side. N-A-S-A.

It's the Hebrew word. I'm sorry, I disagree. It's the Hebrew word that's translated take.

You should not take the name of the Lord in vain. Nasa has a variety of meanings also. It means to accept or to take or to marry or to wear.

And in a sense, the Jews were marrying God's name because they were entering into a contract with Him, a covenant with Him, just like a man and wife enter into covenant. And in fact, the covenant between God and His people was such that was compared to a marriage, sometimes in the prophets. In Jeremiah chapter 3, God spoke to the Jews of how they had... how they'd married Him, but how they played the harlot and worshipped other gods.

They hadn't kept their marriage vows to Him. They actually were entering into a marriage relationship with God. And He was saying, OK, you're taking, you're accepting My name as a wife accepts the name of her husband.

When a woman gets married, she takes the last name of her husband. That's the

practice. She accepts His name as her name from then on.

But from then on, whatever she does, because she has His name, endangers His good name. If they have a joint check account, because they both have the same name, she can go out and abuse the checking account in His name because she shares His name. His name is upon her.

So it was with God in Israel. His name was upon Israel. And when He said, you shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, I believe that one of the meanings was this, that if you are called by the name of God, that is, you're known to be one of God's people, then you need to correctly represent His character.

In your behavior. That if you take His name, but you don't live like someone who really represents Him, then you are taking His name falsely or in vain. And you will not be held guiltless for doing so, He said.

I'd like to show you some examples in Scripture where that's exactly the meaning of the expression, take the name of the Lord in vain. One is in Proverbs chapter 30, verses 8 and 9. Proverbs 30, verses 8 and 9. A man named Agger is writing this chapter. You can get his name out of the first verse.

But he says in verse 8, remove far from me vanity and lies. Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with food sufficient for me.

Lest I be full and deny thee and say, who is the Lord? Or lest I be poor and steal and take the name of my God in vain. Now, he said, I don't want to be rich. I don't want to be poor.

I just want to be middle class, because he said, if I'm poor, I might be tempted to steal. And if I steal, then I'm in effect taking the name of my God in vain. Now, in what sense is that true? How is it that if he would steal, he was taking the name of his God in vain? Because he was a Jew.

Because the name of God was known to be associated with the Jews. And God does not approve of stealing. Therefore, if a man would steal, and he was known to be one of God's people, and God's name was upon him, he had taken the Lord's name, but he was taking it falsely.

He was not representing God correctly. He was doing that which God did not approve. I have a friend who's usually here on Friday nights, but is not here tonight.

A young Christian, very young and very unstable in the Lord, but I believe has a future in the Lord. But that person is not here tonight, because there are Christians, not Christians who come here, I don't think, but Christians in the church that he attends, who have greatly stumbled him. Because he came looking for Jesus.

And he came to the church because he knew a man in the church who really did resemble Jesus. And he was very impressed and drawn to the Lord by this man's example. And when he came to the church, he assumed all the people there, because they were Christians and had the name of Christ on them, that they would be as godly and as Christ-like as this man was.

But as he was there for a period of time, and got to know people better, he learned that some of them were double-dealing. And some of them were gossips, and some of them had animosity and hatred and hostility toward each other. Now, you and I know that those kind of things aren't supposed to stumble us.

And if this man were a stronger Christian, then he might have gotten through that. But what happened was, the testimony of these Christians, whom he expected so much from, because they had the name of Christ on them, actually drove him from fellowship. He no longer attends church anywhere.

I think he'll be coming here again, because I talked to him recently. But he basically came to a point where he said, I'm not sure I even am a Christian anymore. Because he was looking for Jesus, and he looked in the people who were supposed to represent Jesus, but many of them, at least in a sense, were taking the name in vain.

They were said to be Christians, but they didn't represent Christ in the way they behaved. They didn't portray him to this young seeker, and caused the name of Christ to be reproached because of it. It says in Romans chapter 2, a very convicting statement.

It's spoken about the Jews, but it applies also to many Christians, of course, because as the Jews once had the name of God on them, so do the Christians now carry the name of Christ on us. And because his name is upon us, it is incumbent upon us to behave as he behaved. And when we don't, we are in a sense taking his name in vain.

In chapter 2 of Romans, and verse 24, Paul is quoting from Deuteronomy, a verse that was stated to the Jews. And to them it was said, for the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you. Now, this is a scripture, as I said, quoted from Deuteronomy chapter 10, verse 17.

But he says, the name of God, I'm sorry, it's not from Deuteronomy, it's from Isaiah 52.5. He said, the name of God is blasphemed because of the Jews. Now, I'm not saying this to put down the Jews. In fact, what I'm saying is that though none of us are Jews, none of us can be too careful about writing this scripture off easily because it may be that the name of God is blasphemed because of us sometimes.

Now, why would it be blasphemed because of them? Because it was known that God associated himself with them. It was known that they were his people, but they did not behave like people of God. They constantly were going into idols.

They had adultery. They had injustice in their court system. They had oppression of the poor.

They had many things that did not represent the heart of God. And they were supposed to be the image of God to the world around. But instead of drawing people to Christ, instead they caused the name of God to be blasphemed because they were such bad examples of what the people of God should be.

Now, we need to ask ourselves, are we making a serious effort, or have we even known that it was important to make a serious effort, to represent Christ in all of our dealings? Who knows how many times in this town the name of Christ has been blasphemed among the heathen because of the actions of the Christians? There are some times in history, of course, where the name of God has been blasphemed because of it. One of the great reproaches in church history, of course, was the Crusades, where one of the leaders of the so-called Christian church determined that it was the duty of the church to go and liberate Palestine from the Muslims that were there. So they sent armies down there, and many bloody battles were fought, many Crusades were fought, and they were fought in the name of God, in the name of Christ.

And atrocities were done in the name of people who called themselves Christians. And I don't know to what degree that darkened the name of Jesus among the Muslims, who should have been evangelized by Christians, but were instead being killed by Christians. But I know that ever since then, the name of God has been blasphemed among the heathen because of those things.

You can today meet people on the street who, when you try to tell them about Christianity, they say, what about the Crusades? Of course, that's a dodge, and it's not a valid argument to avoid Christ, but the fact is, Christians have done many things which give heathen people convenient excuses to blaspheme the name of God, because Christians have not acted like Christians. I'd like to show you two more scriptures about this, and that'll really be it. But in 1 Timothy chapter 6, Paul is giving instruction to the servants in the church, that is, those who are slaves.

In the Roman society, there were many slaves, and many of them were converted to Christ and were in the church. So there were Christians who were slaves. Not slaves to the church, but slaves to masters, whether Christian or non-Christian masters.

And it says, let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed. Now, what it's saying is that servants, whose status in life it was to be submitted to their masters, should do so, they should submit to their masters, and give honor to their masters, as was considered to be appropriate for slaves to do for their masters, though many heathen slaves would no doubt curse their masters behind their backs, and seek to do as little work as they could get away with. Many Christians do the same thing with their

employers.

They speak evil of their employers, they grumble, they do as little work as they can get away with on the job, take as long coffee breaks as they can get away with. And their employers see that, and others see that, and they say, oh, so that's what Christianity is. Cheating your employer.

Not being thankful that you even have a job. Especially if unemployed people see that. People who wish they had jobs, and they see that you're not thankful.

You know, the way you live, and the way you react to people and to life, can cause the name of God to be blasphemed. That is, can cause people to reject God and fail to give him the reverence that's due, his name. It's possible to take the name of the Lord in vain, though you never speak his name in an irreverent manner.

You might speak very reverently of him, but because his name is upon you, your life, if not lived to his glory, can bring blasphemy against him from the heathen. So Paul says, let these Christian servants behave in this way, so that the name of God and his doctrine would be not blasphemed. Similar instruction is given to women in Titus chapter 2. In Titus chapter 2 it says that the older women should teach the younger women how to behave.

In verse 3 it says that they should teach them that they be in behavior as becometh holiness. Not false accusers, not given to much wine. Teachers of good things.

That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children. To be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed. He's saying essentially that if Christian women are not examples of what godly womanhood is supposed to be, if they're not chaste, that is if they're flirtatious, if they're not obedient to their husbands, if they're not discreet, if they're not keepers at home, if they let their children run wild while they go out seeking some career or something, and they're not teachers of good things, if they're not sober, if they don't love their husbands and their children, then likely is not the word of God is going to be blasphemed because of it.

Because people know that these are Christians. And they say, so that's what Christianity does to women. I'm glad my wife's not a Christian.

And it's a sad thing too, we were talking today in one of our classes, how that in Muslim countries, most Muslims, or most Arab countries, don't want American women to come and visit, because they consider that American women are too rebellious. The sad thing is that most people of other religions and other countries think that America is a Christian country, so that they imagine that these women are Christians. And they would compare Islam with Christianity and say, but they look at the difference in our women.

Our women are well behaved, they're obedient, they accept their role, whereas they see American women and they think, well, they're rebellious and loud and boisterous and unpleasant. I'm not saying American women are all that way, but I'm saying that that is the general feeling that most Arab nations have that I've gotten reports from travelers who've been over there. And it's a sad thing because the conduct of Christians, whether they're women, whether they're servants under the yoke, whether they're men or children, the point is that when Christians don't behave godly, it is a possibility that the name of God will be blasphemed.

And while you might think that you're not taking the name of the Lord in vain, or that you're not blaspheming, in a sense you are, and you're causing others to do so. Now, again, whenever we preach the law, the law has a tendency to condemn. And it's not my desire for us to be condemned, but to correct it.

You know, the law could condemn, but it could also instruct and correct. The reason it always condemned in the Old Testament times is that the people who received the law didn't have the Spirit. They didn't have the Holy Spirit to help them comply with it.

Therefore, the law could only show them what they were doing wrong and couldn't give them any power to change. We can look at the same law, and because we have the Holy Spirit who enables us to do what God wants us to do, we can let that law instruct us and say, OK, I can see now God is not pleased by this kind of behavior. But rather than being condemned, we can change.

And that's, of course, what the grace of God does for us. The grace of God enables us to change. The Holy Spirit within us enables us to change.

And the purpose of teaching the law is not to make everyone go out feeling heavy and say, Oh man, I'm really condemned. I really saw that. I really blew it.

I really blew it a lot. If you go out feeling that, then the message hasn't had a complete effect as it should. Because the idea here is that we are people who have God's Spirit given to us to effect change in our lives.

And hopefully we are of a mind that we just want to know what direction that change is supposed to go. We really just want to come to the Word of God and find out where we need change. And then we trust God to give us the power as we repent of our failures and as we repent of our former sins.

We trust Him to help us to make those changes with our determination to cooperate. And so I know that in speaking these things, it's been kind of a heaviness because we're talking about the law. But don't let the law be a heaviness to you.

Even godly people with good hearts in the Old Testament delighted in the law. In Psalm 119 it says, Oh how I love thy law. Thy law is my meditation all the day.

If your heart is obedient to God, the law is not a burden. It's not a condemning thing. It's just something that shows us.

Thy law is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path. So let's consider what the Scripture says about this particular commandment. It obviously is an important one.

Even if Jesus said it's the first thing we should pray for is for God's name to be revered. If it's the only sin that was unforgivable was something related to blasphemy, then we ought to consider that this law has special import and that we need to change in the areas where we might have violated it. And by the way, concerning blasphemy of the Holy Spirit, I'm quite convinced that blasphemy of the Holy Spirit has never been committed by anyone who's worried about it.

If you blaspheme the Holy Spirit in the way that Jesus said is unforgivable, then God wouldn't bother convicting you about it. If you were irredeemable, you wouldn't feel convicted. The fact that you might feel guilty for something you've done might make you feel that you committed the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit and that you can't be forgiven.

But the very fact that you're concerned about your spiritual life and concerned about the possibility that you couldn't be forgiven shows that you have not gone so far as to be unforgivable because the Holy Spirit is still dealing with you. And that's an important thing because many Christians need to hear that. That the Pharisees who were told that they had blasphemy of the Holy Spirit were people who knew that they were looking God in the face and they were saying, you are Beelzebug.

And people who could do that have hearts so hard that they don't care about their spiritual state. They certainly don't care about what Jesus thinks about them. But if you do care about those things, then you haven't committed that sin.

However, you can see, Jesus said, all manner of blasphemies will be forgiven me. All manner of sins and blasphemies shall be forgiven me except the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. It may be that though we haven't blasphemed the Holy Spirit, there has been some area in which we have actually overstepped by failing to give proper reverence to the name of God.

By not properly representing God, though people have known that His name is upon us. And so may the Lord help us to be conscious of those times so that we can avoid them in the future. Because He expects us to be growing, to be going on into obedience.

God desires for us to be a people desirous of good works and obedient to Him and a people under His praise whose lives glorify Him, not bring a reproach upon Him. And I trust that we can be people like that.