

The Third Commandment

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BIG SANDY, Texas—We as believers are thankful that we are saved by grace. In fact, we should reflect our appreciation by giving much thought and attention into recognizing God's expectations for us.

We can reflect back to the time in the Old Testament when the children of Israel were brought out of the land of Egypt—the house of bondage (Exodus 20:1-2)—and remember that God gave them instructions about how to live (verses 3-17).

Let's spend some time considering the third commandment.

Exodus 20:7—"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."

Violating by words

God places great value in His name. And He places great value in how people use His name.

In the book of Leviticus, God gave some instructions to Moses about His name.

He said that people should not misuse His name by making promises they do not intend to keep (Leviticus 19:12).

In the book of Deuteronomy, God mentioned the importance of vows.

He said that people should accomplish the words that they promise with their mouths (Deuteronomy 23:21-23).

In the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:33), Jesus referred to both those sections of Old Testament scripture. Then He magnified the lesson.

He instructed members of His audience to avoid swearing. Then He elaborated to them that they avoid swearing by heaven (verse 34), by the earth (verse 35), by Jerusalem (also verse 35) and by one's head (verse 36).

The same message was repeated by the apostle James in James 5:12.

God expects believers to avoid using His name lightly. Yet I believe that there is a greater violation of the Third Commandment than merely using wrong words.

Violating by actions

Consider this. How does God feel about people who claim His name but misrepresent Him by their actions?

Titus 1:16—"They profess to know God, but in works they deny Him, being abominable, disobedient, and disqualified for every good work."

1 John 2:4—"He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

God has consistently revealed that He loves people. Yet God has also consistently maintained that He will honor His name—even when His people do not.

Ezekiel 36:21-23—"But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations wherever they went. Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "I do not do this for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name's sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went. And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I am the LORD," says the Lord GOD, "when I am hallowed in you before their eyes." ' "

Worshipping in vain

Some people think that it is impossible to worship God in vain. They pontificate that God accepts any effort and form of worship.

While it is true that our Heavenly Father is extremely merciful, He has the authority to set the standards. He has the prerogative to accept acts of worship and to identify acts of worship as vain.

Notice when Christ quoted Isaiah 29:13 to the scribes and Pharisees. Notice why He considered them to be worshipping Him in vain.

Matthew 15:7-9—"Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: 'These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.' "