

CHAPTER THREE

God Abuse

You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name ~Exodus 20:7.

INTRODUCTION

Proverbs 28:9 states, “He that turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination” (KJV). Now, I am sure that we do not want our prayers to be considered an abomination by God. And since His Word is truth, we need to give *heed* to this aspect of His Word.

We read in Romans 8:3,4 that the reason Jesus condemned sin in the flesh was so that “... the **Righteousness of the Law** might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the Spirit.” ~Emphasis added.

The Law is to have a very prominent place in our lives; First, as our “schoolmaster to bring us to Christ”, and Second, that its *righteousness* might be *fulfilled* in us by the power of the Holy Spirit. It stands to reason, therefore, that we *must* become familiar with the Law in order *for* the Law to do its work; either in convicting us of our sin, or, as James states, as the mirror that measures our behavior.

In the last Chapter, we dealt with God's Law concerning idolatry both in the making of idols and in worship or service to them. This Chapter deals with the Third Commandment, "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that takes His name in vain."

This Law has both outward and inward ramifications.

I. CONSIDERING OUR CONVERSATION

The outward is obvious to us; it has to do with our speech. We understand that we are not to curse using God's name; at least, that is what we have always believed. The Hebrew word for “vain” means “deceit, deception, malice, falsity, vanity, or emptiness.” It comes from an unused root meaning to rush over. Hence, in our understanding, and, also according to Webster, “vain” means: “Having no real value or significance; worthless, empty, idle, hollow...”,

Psalm 139:19-20, If only you would slay the wicked, O God! Away from me, you bloodthirsty men! ²⁰They speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries misuse your name.

In the above Scripture, the Psalmist is calling those individuals who take God's name in vain “bloodthirsty men”, putting them in the same category as ruthless individuals who have no thought for human life. It is easy for us to relate to the above Scripture. We have all been in situations where God's name has been taken in vain, but rarely have we exhibited the same revulsion as the psalmist. Ray Comfort recounts an experience:

I was once sitting in a restaurant counter near two young ladies who were talking.

After about five minutes, I leaned across and offered one of the girls a booklet. She noticed that it was a Christian booklet and said that she was a Christian. I turned to her friend and said, 'You're not, though, are you?' She replied, 'Why do you say that?' I gently answered, 'Because in the past five minutes you've blasphemed God's name four times.' She put her hand to her mouth and said, 'God...I have!' To which I said, 'Five!'¹

It is hard for us to believe that God's people—the Jews, or we as Christians today—would invoke His name with that kind of disregard. Israel took this command so seriously that they rendered God's name throughout Scripture in such a manner as to make it impossible to pronounce! Even with those precautions, they managed to *take His name in vain*. How did they do this? How do we do this?

We are talking about more than *curses* with God's name. We become guilty of taking His name in vain when we use it lightly in an oath,

Leviticus 19:12, Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the LORD.

Jeremiah 34:15-18 Recently you repented and did what is right in my sight: Each of you proclaimed freedom to his countrymen. You even made a covenant before me in the house that bears my Name. ¹⁶ But now you have turned around and profaned my name; each of you has taken back the male and female slaves you had set free to go where they wished. You have forced them to become your slaves again. ... ¹⁸ The men who have violated my covenant and have not fulfilled the terms of the covenant they made before me, I will treat like the calf they cut in two and then walked between its pieces.

What happened here? Israel went back on their word. Remember, for the Christian, the Word instructs us: “Let your communication be yea, yea; Nay, nay...” (Matthew 5:37). The Christian is to be as the Psalmist stated, “... He that swears to his own hurt and changes not.” (Psalm 15:4). What is meant here is that we are to be so conscientious where our “word” is concerned that we will keep our word, even if it ends up costing us. Our priority is to keep our word, not to try to escape because of the cost. The Word of God is explicit about counting the cost (Luke 14:28-33). True, the Scripture referred to is speaking of becoming a disciple of Jesus, but the application holds for our words also thinking before we speak.

We also become guilty of taking His name in vain when our speech is the same as that of the world. A story is told of a minister who was making a wooden trellis to support a climbing vine. As he was pounding away, he noticed that a little boy was watching him. The youngster didn't say a word, so the preacher kept on working thinking the lad would leave. But he didn't. Pleased at the thought that his work was being admired, the pastor finally said, “Well, son, trying to pick up some pointers on gardening?” “No,” the boy replied, “I'm just waiting to hear what a preacher says when he hits his thumb with a hammer.” The life we live as Christians is to be as dramatic as light is to darkness! The world, like that little boy, is waiting to see how we act and react to the “pressures” of life.

¹ Comfort, Ray; Ibid; Pg.121.

We have, for the most part, been very fortunate in this country in that we have not been called upon to make the type of choice typified below:

The year was A.D. 155, and the persecution against Christians swept across the Roman Empire and came to the city of Smyrna. The proconsul of Smyrna, swept up in this persecution, put out an order that the Bishop of Smyrna, Polycarp, was to be found, arrested, and brought to the public arena for execution. They found Polycarp and brought him before thousands of spectators screaming for blood. But the proconsul had compassion on this man who was almost a hundred years old. He signaled the crowd to silence. To Polycarp he said, "Curse the Christ and live."

The crowd waited for the old man to answer. In an amazingly strong voice, he said, "Eighty and six years have I served him, and he has done me no wrong. How dare I blaspheme the name of my king and Lord!" With that Polycarp became a martyr.²

Where do we think we will get the grace to be able to withstand persecution for His sake if we are not true to Him in our speech? Jesus talked about being faithful in little things first (Luke 16:10).

During the Korean War, a group of believers were in a little chapel when communist soldiers barged in with machine guns. One of the soldiers said, "All right everybody, get up!" So, they got off their knees. He said, "Line up against the wall!" They did what the soldier said to do. Then that soldier ripped the picture of Christ off the wall and threw it down on the floor. He said, "All right, one by one, I want you to come by here, spit on this picture, and curse His name."

The first three in line were men of the church, they did what the soldier said to do. They spit on the picture and they cursed the name of Christ. The fourth one in line was a high school girl. She came up before the picture and she dropped to her knees. She wiped the spittle off with her skirt, and she said, "Go ahead and kill me. I cannot curse His name."

The soldier said, "Get up!" They blindfolded that girl and the three men and marched them out behind the chapel. The people inside heard three shots. The soldiers came back in with the girl, alive.

The soldier said, "Anyone who gives up what they believe that easily is not fit to be a communist." And they marched out.³

While we may not be called to make those life or death choices, we are, however, called to live lives that are holy and without blame so that those in the world may *know* that there is no difference between our creed and our conduct, our behavior and our belief!

² Anderson, Leith; "Can Jesus Trust Us?" Preaching Today, Tape No. 126.; Bible Illustrator for Windows, Copyright © 1990-1998 by Parson's Technology, Inc.

³ Blue, Ron; Moody Founder's Week, 1985; Ibid.

The *outward* ramifications of this Law are readily understood, but the *inward* are a bit more difficult to grasp, not because it is hard to understand; but, because we have established certain patterns of behavior or thinking. If those patterns are not adhered to, we feel that we have gone wrong. We are also guilty of taking His name in vain when we speak one thing and live another, therefore, becoming a contradiction.

II. CONSIDERING OUR CONDUCT

A golfer had a terrible day on the links. On the last hole he actually went into a tantrum, cursing and swearing, and beating the ground with his club. Finally recovering himself, he looked woefully at the caddy and muttered: "I guess I'll have to give it up."

"Give up golf?" asked the caddy. "No, not golf," he said sorrowfully, "the ministry."⁴

The world has a very skewed value system. People Magazine issued a lengthy questionnaire on Jan. 13, 1986, aimed at defining just what, in the 80's, Americans regard as sinful. One thousand responses were selected at random for analysis. The list that was comprised places the sins of the survey in rank from "guilty to the max" to "blameless." First on the list was murder; swearing ranked 45 out of 51.⁵ Dr. Billy Graham had an interesting encounter while traveling on a plane next to a salesman. Billy Graham asked him, "Are you paid anything for all the swearing you do?" "No," was the startled reply, "I do it for nothing." "Nothing?" cried the famous preacher. "You work cheap! You throw aside your character as a gentleman, inflict pain on your friends, break the Lord's Commandments, and endanger your own soul – and all for nothing! You certainly work cheap — TOO CHEAP!"⁶

We may not be *guilty* of swearing like the salesman mentioned above, but I fear that we profane His holy name in much the same manner that Israel did.

Ezekiel 36:20, And wherever they went among the nations they profaned my holy name, for it was said of them, 'These are the LORD's people, and yet they had to leave his land.'

Ezekiel 44:23, And they shall teach my people *the difference* between the holy and profane and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean.

One of the responsibilities of the Old Testament priests was instructing God's people in the difference between holy and profane. They were not to mix the two. We're well aware of the meaning for Holy, to be set apart for God. But what about profane? At first thought we would think it would mean profanity. Yet, that's not it. Profane in biblical times meant common. Everyday stuff. So, the contrast is between what is set apart for God and what is considered everyday usage. E.g. there were the holy vessels of the Tabernacle, used only in worship to God and there were vessels used every day for cooking and eating. The two were never to be

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

interchangeable. Another difference was between Sabbath or Holy days and regular work days. Ezekiel was the Prophet during the Babylonian captivity. He was raised up to answer the shouted and grumbled question of “Why did this happen to us”. The whole of Chapter 22 lists transgression after transgression. But the biggest reason, and the reason for the 70 years duration of their captivity was because they gave up honoring His Sabbaths.

Ezekiel 22:8 You have despised My holy things and profaned My Sabbaths.

After Judah had been taken into captivity by the Babylonians, the Jewish people were very quick to let their captors know that Jehovah was their God and they were His people. However, they failed to explain *why* they were in a foreign land. They gave the impression that their behavior was acceptable. So, in spite of their physical precautions, they became guilty of breaking this Commandment. In other words, they were “talking the talk but not walking the walk.”

One of the most sobering charges brought against the Christians at Rome by Paul is found in Romans 2:23-24. “You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? ²⁴ As it is written: ‘God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.’” (NIV). How many of us have blasphemed His name because our words, spontaneous, inappropriate or otherwise, have not measured our walk. We may even profane His name in our praying! Calvin Miller:

I am disturbed when I hear believers say "Lord" thoughtlessly. Many Christians are guilty of making Christ only a figurehead while continuing to run their lives just as they did before. It may be possible to fake the lordship of Christ now, but in the days when Paul wrote the letter to Romans, "Lord" was not a word used flippantly by the church.⁷

How many times have you found yourself praying and several moments later caught yourself wondering what you had said? Or perhaps you have prayed without result. Yet Scripture states plainly that, *anything* we ask in Jesus' name will be given to us (John 14:13, 14). Christians, by and large, have used the name “Jesus” as a formula-ending of their prayers. They have not considered what they are doing. Jesus never intended for His name to be an addendum to our prayers. He never intended for us to use His name in such a free fashion. His name was not, and is not, a formula that, when invoked, grasps the attention of the Father; and, presto, we are in His presence being granted our petitions. May I suggest to you that such a high-handed use of the Name that is above every Name, the Name that is precious to our ears, is, in reality, using that matchless name in *vain*? You see, when we invoke the Name of Jesus, we are saying to the Father, “Jesus would make this same petition of you”; “I am coming with His authority behind me!” That is why the Apostle John clarified the relationship between asking and receiving when He stated in 1 John 5:14,15:

This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us. ¹⁵ And if we know that he hears us – whatever we ask – we know that we have what we asked of him.

That is praying in Jesus' name; being confident that He would ask the same thing we are

⁷ Miller, Calvin; The Taste of Joy. Christianity Today, Vol. 31, no. 15.; Ibid.

asking; being confident that what we are asking is His will. If we are unsure of His will, we should tell Him that. It's not like He doesn't already know. *We should cease using His name when we are unsure of having His authority.*

This Command has to do with our *Worship*.⁸ Matthew 15:9, “But *in vain* they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.” (KJV)
~Emphasis added.

When we add to God's Word, acting as though it **is** God's Word or giving our thoughts or our desires the same weight **as** God's Word, we become guilty of using His name in vain. 2 Timothy 2:19 says, “And, let everyone that names the name of Christ depart from iniquity” (KJV). When we refuse to deal with something that He has revealed as sin, when we state that we are His Child but refuse His authority, we become guilty, just as Israel was, of using His name in vain.

III. CONSIDERING THE CONSEQUENCES

This Law states, “... the LORD will not hold him guiltless ...”. This is not a light matter with God. Man may pass off this abuse as inconsequential, but God states that there will be repercussions for our disobedience. In the first Scripture used in this Chapter, Proverbs 28:9, we found that not giving heed to this Law hinders our prayers. But there is more involved than that. If we are not *guiltless*, then we are *guilty*.

“Magistrates who punish other offenses, may not think themselves concerned to take notice of this, because it does not immediately offer injury either to private property or the public peace. The sinner may perhaps hold himself guiltless. God will not hold him guiltless, and they will find it a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”⁹

Just how serious is God about this? Leviticus 24:16 says, "... anyone who blasphemes the name of the LORD must be put to death. The entire assembly must stone him. Whether an alien or native-born, when he blasphemes the Name, he must be put to death."

While capital punishment is no longer practiced for this type of sin, we can conclude that it is more horrendous in God's sight than murder is in ours! We are to be fearful in His presence, and using His name in vain shows our disdain for who He is and what He has done.

He is the *Mighty God!*
He is the *King of kings!*
He is the *Lord of lords!*
He is *El Shaddai!*
He is *Elohim!*
He is *Jehovah!*
He is *Righteousness!*
He is *Love!*
He is to be *Feared!*

⁸ The Matthew Henry Commentary; Pg. 94

⁹ Ibid.

He is to be *Adored!*
He is to be *Worshiped!*

But He is never, *never, never*, to be slighted, abused, or ignored! We, as His people, are to give to Him the honor due His Name.

Psalm 29:2 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.

Psalm 96:8 Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; bring an offering and come into his courts.

Psalm 105:3 Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.

Isaiah 59:19 From the west, men will fear the name of the LORD, and from the rising of the sun, they will revere his glory. For he will come like a pent-up flood that the breath of the LORD drives along.

We should **never** be found guilty of misusing His name. How do we stand before the Judge? Guilty? Guilty of *physical* abuse of His name? Guilty of *spiritual* abuse of His name? Without a doubt, every commandment that we look into will declare us guilty. Indeed, that is one of the purposes of the Law. What we do with the guilty verdict is the real question. We can try to ignore it, to our own peril; or we can admit that we *are guilty* and seek God's grace to live that Law in the power of His Spirit. To do less is taking His name in vain.



CONCLUSION: PRAYER FOR FORGIVENESS

“Father, in the model prayer, when Jesus taught His disciples *how* to pray, His first concern was for the holiness of your name. I have been guilty of profaning your holy name by the things I have said and by the inconsistencies in my life. My desire is that your name would be praised through my life and my lips. I pray with the Psalmist: “Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer.”¹⁰ My request is the same before you now, as was his: “Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips.”¹¹ Thank you for hearing my prayer and forgiving my sin, in Jesus’ name, Amen.”

A correct understanding of *Sabbath* is necessary to fully comply with the Fourth Commandment. In the next Chapter, we will come to understand how this Law impacts our use of the prescribed *day of rest* and also how it impacts the other six days.

¹⁰ Psalm 19:14

¹¹ Psalm 141:3

