

Posting Guards . . . Seasoning Words

Exodus 20:7

Introduction

We have been studying the Ten Commandments in Exodus, chapter 20. We are only on the third command and God is already addressing the way we talk – and rightly so.

If you have been studying with us, you know that the first command had to do with the fact that God is preeminent. And if God is preeminent, then the second thing that would follow is that we worship Him alone. Those are the first two commandments.

If God is prominent, and He is preeminent in our lives, and He is the only God that we worship, then the third command makes perfect, logical sense. The command is that we will address Him correctly; we will use words that would honor Him. If God is indeed, preeminent and prominent and the God we worship, then that will affect our speech; that will affect the way we talk. That is the third command that we are going to look at today.

Why is this so high on God's list? Why would His name be so important in scripture?

I think it is because when you speak the name God, or Jesus, or Christ, or whatever name for Him you may use, you bring the thought, even though it is for a split second, of all the character and quality behind the name. That is what the name represents.

You could go to other countries and find that Jesus is a very common name. However, in the context of the believer, the world will stand accountable for the way they use that name because of all that is behind it when we refer to Him as Jesus or Christ or Lord.

In Hebrew times, names were very important, as you may know. The Hebrews would usually name their children after a quality or a characteristic that they would hope their child would grow up to be like. They did not name them, like so many today, something that goes well with their last name, or something such that the initials would look good on luggage, or something that makes a little jingle. They would give a name that had something in it that had deep resonance and a quality of character that would hopefully, be something the child would live up to.

I read that the Puritans used to follow this idea. They would name, for example, their daughters names like Charity, which is a very beautiful name that is still common today, and Kindness, and Hope, and Faith. I even read of one Puritan who named his daughter Silence. I thought, "Man, did he have a rude awakening about two o' clock in the morning! She didn't live up to that!"

These names were something they hoped their children would live up to and, to get back to Hebrew thought, they were incredibly significant. God's names are even more significant. When you use His name, be careful that you do not use it in vain, as the third command prohibits.

Does it really matter to God how we use His name? In Leviticus, chapter 24, verses 10 through 16, there is the story of two men who were in a fist fight. One of the guys, evidently the one who was losing, blasphemes and curses. That is all it says. It does not give us the expletives, it just says he blasphemes and curses.

They were so serious back then that they took the man to the elders. They said, “What are we going to do? This man cursed; he took God’s name in vain.”

God’s answer was, “Stone him.”

Now fortunately, in this dispensation of grace, that is not the immediate practice. However, turn to Ephesians, chapter 5, and you will find that this command has just as serious an import today as it did then. Although there is not immediate death, notice what we are told verses 4 and 5.

and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person . . . who is an idolater . . .

In this context, who is Paul talking about? Someone with that kind of mouth. He says, in the last phrase of verse 5, that this person has no,

. . . inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

An individual who is constantly using the name of God in vain, as we will learn in our study today, is a person who is indicating that God is not prominent; that God is not worshiped. As a result, God’s name is used in vain, indicating this person is not of God.

So, it was very serious then and it is serious now. In fact, when we use the name of God, we need to be prepared to worship.

Three Ways We Take the Lord’s Name in Vain

I think today, there are three ways that people use God’s name in vain.

Profanity

1. The first way is commonly thought of when we think of using God’s name in vain, and that is, profanity. This is using His name in the wrong context.

Three types of people who use profanity

Now there are three types or classes of people who take God’s name in vain by using profanity. Let me give them to you.

The uninformed

- The first, I think, is the uninformed.

This is the individual who is oblivious to what God has revealed about His name. This may be a young person who has yet to understand the gravity of what they may be repeating.

The reason I know that is because I can still vividly remember an elementary school experience in my own life. When I was in the third grade, I believe, I overheard some older boys saying some words. As I heard them and watched them, I thought the way they were acting was kind of tough and that their talk must be big guy talk. At the time, I had a crush on a girl, the only one I ever had, other than my wife, of course, and I thought, “Boy, it would be impressive if I talked to her that way.”

I remember talking to her and using the words that I had heard the older guys saying. She, however, was not so uninformed. In fact, by the time she finished turning me in, you would have thought they were going to call in the National Guard. I was in very serious trouble. My only defense was, “I didn’t know! I didn’t know what it meant.”

I knew from then on. I could never use that excuse again. It only worked once.

That is the case, I think, with people who are uninformed. This may be younger people who do not know that God’s name is sacred and is to be sanctified.

This is probably the smallest of the three classifications that we are going to talk about. The reason it is the smallest, I think, is that they go after God’s name, or Jesus’, or Christ’s because written in their heart is rebellion and they are seeking the highest form that they can, in effect, shake their fist at.

If you are uninformed, then after this sermon, you will not be. Therefore, you cannot use this excuse.

The uncontrolled

- The second is the uncontrolled individual.

I think in that moment of pain, or fury, or disappointment – when you smash your finger with the hammer; when you are cut off in traffic; when you are cut out of a promotion by someone – and those words come out of your mouth, you are uncontrolled. I am not only talking about unbelievers, but about believers who are not controlled. This reveals itself in situations such as these.

I believe, in fact, that is what David had in mind, in Psalm 141, verse 3, when he said,

Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips.

He is literally saying, “Post a sentinel at the door of my lips.”

This has a lot of meaning to me because when I was growing up, my brothers and I used to play little league baseball on the Navy base in Norfolk, Virginia. To get to the field, we had to drive our car past a small gatehouse where a military man stood. He would watch all of the cars coming through and if you did not have a bumper sticker indicating you were part of the military, you would be stopped. He would lean down and ask what you were doing. We would say, “We’re going to play baseball.”

He would say, “Go on through.”

On the other side of the gatehouse, another military guard would carefully watch everyone as they came out. If you were part of the military, you had to have a pass or he would not let you out.

It is interesting that David is, in effect, saying, “Post a sentinel over my mouth. Don’t let anything past it – in or out – that is not pleasing to You. Watch it carefully because there may be something that comes out that hurts the credibility or the security of this base and my character. Post a guard. I don’t want to be uncontrolled.”

In another Psalm, in fact, David will talk about setting a watch over his lips. It is interesting that this is written when his son Absalom is in rebellion. It is one of the most difficult times in David’s life and it is at that time that David says, “God, guard my mouth because even in this terrible situation, I don’t want to slip; I don’t want to say anything that would bring dishonor to Your name.”

So, there are the uncontrolled.

I am convinced, since we could all fit into this category, of one statement that I read. It is this, “If we are in the habit of using God’s name the right way, we will be less likely to use it the wrong way.”

It is in developing the habit of referring to God and Jesus and Christ in the right context that will protect us, as we mature in Christ, from using His name in the wrong context. By doing this, that is the last thing that would come out of our mouths during uncontrollable moments.

The unsaved

- There is a third type of person who will use profanity; who will use God’s name in the wrong context, and that is, the unsaved.

I think this is the person who uses God’s name profanely to boast of his independence.

J. Vernon McGee, a commentator who is now in heaven, said he believed if you could tape record everyone’s conversation for a week and then play it back, you would have enough evidence to determine whether or not they were a believer.

I think that is a biblical thought because in Colossians, chapter 4, verse 6, we are told that one of the marks of a believer that sets him apart is his vocabulary. It says,

Let your speech always be . . . seasoned with salt . . .

Salt was used as a way of preserving things to keep them from going bad. Some of you probably salted meat on a farm.

Someone has calculated that we get involved in thirty conversations a day. That is about thirty thousand words. Every year, we write a hundred books; each about two hundred pages in length. That means we are authors; we are rapidly filling a library with our words.

When we come into contact with Jesus Christ, we then, as believers, change perspective. The thing that sets us apart from unbelievers is the way that we use words – especially the way we use His name.

I cringe when someone says they know Jesus Christ and then I hear them use God’s name in vain. In fact, to me, that is a red flag. Why? Because Paul says this distinguishes us from the unbeliever.

It is interesting, if you have studied the life of the apostle Peter, you may remember when he was by the campfire warming his hands. He was about to deny Jesus Christ and a servant girl recognized him and said, “Hey, you are part of them. You’re Galilean.”

He said, “No, I’m not.”

Later, someone else pressed him and then, another pressed him. Finally, what did Peter do? He cursed; he swore; he called down curses. Isn’t it interesting that after that, no one else accused him of being part of the band that followed Jesus Christ? That did it. Street talk took care of any further accusation. He was off the hook.

Isn't that an incredible implication? It is the way that we talk that tells the world that we are following Jesus Christ. That is one of the highest indicators of whether or not we are part of His band.

So, the uninformed, the uncontrolled, and the unsaved are, I believe, the classifications of people who profane God's name.

Profanity is usually what we think of when we think of ways people take God's name in vain. However, there are two other ways that I think camp a little closer to the church of Jesus Christ.

Hypocrisy

2. The second way people take the Lord's name in vain is hypocrisy. That is using His name for the wrong reason.

Mark, chapter 12, verse 40, talks about the Pharisees and the scribes,

who . . . for appearance's sake offer long prayers . . .

In other words, they are invoking the name of God to impress someone.

How often do we do something like that when we give, fast, or pray? Those three are things that are supposedly done in secret, as it were, yet there is something about them that we feel we must let people know when we are doing them. When we do, we literally take God's name in vain; we use it for the wrong reasons. We are using His name to bolster us; to be impressive.

I wonder how many come to church for appearance's sake? How many show up because this is the thing to do; this is the thing to be seen doing? That is hypocrisy; that is using God's name for the wrong reason, which, I believe, is taking His name in vain.

Matthew, chapter 7, verse 22, is an interesting passage that is telling of, in effect, the judgement. Jesus Christ is telling the religious leaders,

Many will say to Me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?"

Then, Jesus Christ, the Judge, will say,

. . . "I never knew you; depart from Me . . ."

That is an indication, men and women, that there are people today who use the name of Jesus Christ;

who cloak their ministries in the name of God, who have no part of God. That is hypocrisy at its most blatant form. And God will one day say, "Even though you used My name,"

. . . "I never knew you . . ."

I think we, as believers, need to be careful in the way we use God's name. Be careful, men and women, that you do not use His name at the drop of a hat just to defend your position. Be careful when you say, "I prayed about that." Be careful when you say, "God led me to do that," or "God told me to do this." Be very careful because you are invoking the name of God as your defense.

Remember the thought in Isaiah, chapter 55, verse 8, that,

“. . . My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways,” declares the Lord.

Be careful to bring into alignment with your ways the character and quality of God.

I will never forget an experience that I had while riding the bus to school in college. I went to Liberty for a year, before they had a campus, and we would ride an old school bus to a public school. One day, I was sitting on the bus beside a gal who had just gotten engaged. At that point in time, I was full of questions and I talked to her about it.

She said, "I'm just so excited that God led us to do this."

I asked, "How do you really know that this is the time and this is the guy?"

She said, "Well, you'll never believe it."

I thought, "Boy, she's going to see it written in the sky or something."

She continued, "My fiancé and I were at the mall. We went into a jewelry store and the ring that I liked fit."

Of course! Who would question that?! It must be God's will.

I remember thinking, "That poor girl. I hope it fits for forty or fifty years."

We need to be real careful when we talk about God, as if we know God wants us to do something. It is not that we cannot know or be certain in our hearts, but there are a lot of people who are using His name to defend their causes when their motives are wrong.

Insincerity

3. The third way people take the Lord's name in vain is insincerity. This is using His name with the wrong attitude.

Three ways to use God's name with insincerity

There are at least three ways of using God's name with insincerity.

Without reverence

- The first is using His name without reverence.

I think this occurs in expressions that are used. I am sure you understand the context of which I am speaking. This is the person who says things like, "God Almighty," or "Oh, Lord," or "Oh, God," or "God". It is using His name without a tone of reverence; it is pulling His name into something without a reverential attitude where it has no place.

God's name is reserved. He said, in effect, "Set apart My name before the nations." In other words, when you use it, make it special; make sure it is a special time or it is reverential. God's name is not a slang word, it is someone's name.

The Hebrews were so careful of His name that they only spoke it once a year. Even then, it was not just anyone who spoke it, it was the high priest. He would verbalize the name "Yahweh" once a year on the day of atonement.

Now, we bask in the light of grace that we can say God's name freely. I would never want to go back to the high priest saying His name only once a year. However, let us not become so trivial and trite with God's name that we use it for everything – when the car is stuck, the dinner is burned, or whatever. We do not say, "Oh, God," in those situations; His name is not for that.

I think it is interesting as well, that we use Jesus' name all too freely. A thought concerning this has struck me, while reading and preaching through the gospel of Mark and through Paul's epistles. Note this carefully. It is just a seed for thought that could be debated. It is a rare thing for someone, since the resurrection of Jesus Christ, to use just the name "Jesus". Have you noticed that? In the epistles, His name is always the Lord Jesus, or Jesus Christ, or the Lord Jesus Christ. I think there is a subtle implication in that. These men, after Jesus was resurrected, attached to His human name, His deity.

Let us be very careful. The Lord's name is not, "Hey, Jesus," it is Jesus Christ, or the Lord Jesus, or the Lord Jesus Christ.

Without reason

- There is a second way that we can use God's name insincerely, and that is, using His name without reason.

I think I have already illustrated this. When the supper is burned or whatever, you pull His name into a context where it has no business. There is just no reason to use His name like that.

Develop a habit. In fact, husbands and wives, kind of nudge each other and check each other when you say such things around the house, if you do. Say something else instead. Say your wife's name, "Oh, Cindy," or whatever. That will go far! And it will straighten you guys out. Do not say God's name.

With repetition

- The third way that we can use God's name with insincerity, and I think this is fairly important, is using His name with repetition.

It is interesting, in the pagan context, when they wanted to get the attention of their god, they would repeat his name over and over again.

Do you remember when the prophets of Baal were on the mountain and they repeatedly called out his name? Do you remember when the Ephesians repeatedly called out, "Great is Artemis or Diana. Great is Artemis or Diana."? They constantly said that, trying to invoke her attention; trying to get Baal's attention.

We do not get someone's attention by saying, "Hey, Joe, Joe, Joe, Joe, Joe . . ." or "Hey, Frank, Frank, Frank, Frank . . ." That would be silly.

Be careful. There is nothing pietistic about God's name; it is not a magic formula. I think it is used irreverently if it is used as some kind of formula; if it is used with the thought, "If I repeat it over and over again, *maybe* I'll get His attention."

God is not deaf, He heard you the first time. I think that is a very irreverent use of His name.

Using God's name without reverence, without reason, and with repetition are insincere ways that we take the Lord's name in vain.

Application – Three Things that Never Change

Now let me give you three things about God's name that never change, by way of application.

Reverencing His name is our highest purpose

1. Number one, reverencing His name is our highest purpose.

In Psalm, chapter 34, verse 3, David says,

O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together.

In fact, one of the corporate pursuits of this church is that we can magnify His name together. Come,

. . . let us exalt His name together.

Let us set this name apart; let us give it a special place; let us use it in a special way of worship. It is one of our pursuits as a body of believers.

Representing His name is our honored position

2. Secondly, representing His name is our honored position.

Let me read II Corinthians, chapter 5, verse 20, from the Amplified Bible. It says,

So we are Christ's ambassadors, . . .

(that is, we represent His name),

. . . God making His appeal as it were through us. We [as Christ's personal representatives] beg you for His sake to lay hold of the divine favor [now offered you] and be reconciled to God.

Isn't it interesting that we go in the name of Jesus Christ as His honored ambassadors.

Revealing His name is our heavy pursuit

3. Thirdly, revealing His name is our heavy pursuit.

We not only reverence His name and represent His name, we try to reveal it. In Matthew, chapter 28, verse 19, the great commission says,

Go . . . and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit

The third command, in Exodus, chapter 20, verse 7, when God says, "Do not take My name in vain," is much more than prohibition; much more than saying, "Don't do something." He is going far beyond that, I believe, in saying, "Set My name apart; reverence it; reveal it; represent it. Give My name something other than a commonplace position; give it a special place."

I believe, men and women, as believers, these are our highest purposes. Representing Him is our grandest position. Revealing Him to the world, as who He is – His character, His quality, His name – is our greatest responsibility.

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