
The 3rd Law of Life - part 1 of 2

"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" (Ex. 20:7).

We need not spend much time over the common idea of the violation of this commandment, that which is most obvious, and generally recognized. There are probably very few of those who read this who are guilty of what is ordinarily known as profane swearing. This is considered vulgar, and not in good taste, even by those who are not Christians. **Most people think that they keep this commandment, even though they may realize that they are guilty in respect to some of the others.** So the majority of what are called respectable people might conclude that they have no special need of this commandment. But it is here, in the midst of God's law, and is one of the commandments that stand fast forever, and therefore it concerns every soul.

God Hears the Thought

The Word of God is "a discerner of the thought and intents of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). When we get that fact before us, there is probably not one of us that will not have to plead guilty to violating this commandment, both in spirit and in letter. **We have already found that sin is not merely the thing done, but that within which impels the deed.** The Lord looks not on the outward appearance, but on the heart, and on the thoughts and intents. "O Lord, You have searched me and known me, . . . You understand my thought afar off" (Ps. 139:1, 2). The faintest thought sounds as distinctly in the ears of God as the loudest speech. There is encouragement for us in this truth, if we know the Lord. He understands the unspoken longing just as well as the most fervent prayer is not a thing to be dreaded, but a **glorious comfort, to know that God understands the innermost thought of the soul.**

The Essence of Profanity

People who swear usually do so when they are irritated; thus they give vent to their passion. How many of us who do not use profane language have likewise been angry and irritated? We may not use the name of the Lord, but we have in us that which manifested itself in those who are accustomed to swearing. Now the outward manifestation is largely a matter of circumstance, training, and education. If we have been brought up in society where swearing is considered vulgar, and so have never fallen into the habit, or if we refrain from the use of profane words because the use of them might result in the loss of reputation, then our not swearing when we become angry is no virtue. **Our angry feelings have every element of evil in them that there is in others who add the expression of profane words.** There is a thing that has

been by someone called “wood swearing,” as when an angry person gives vent to his feelings by stamping on the floor, striking the table, kicking a chair, or slamming the door. While this is not technically a violation of the commandment, it is such in reality, as all will be able to see when they consider the breadth of this precept.

Substitute Words and Phrases Used to Swear

These are many words and expressions that are substituted for the actual name of deity, which are not more than one degree removed, if they are at all, from gross profanity. If you should, in reading this paper, come across the expression, “My goodness gracious!” or should hear a minister use it in his sermon, would you not be shocked? You would think it very much out of place, and that such a thing was unbecoming a preacher or teacher. But why should we say at home, or in private use words that would be out of place anywhere in the world? They are simply a substitute for the words which another man uses who has been brought up differently.

The Lord has proclaimed His name: “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth” (Ex. 34:6). These qualities are attributes of God, so that to use the words, mercy, gracious, goodness, and the like, as mere expletives, is literally to take the name of the Lord in vain. Whether there is any difference in the degree between the sin of using these words, and taking the ordinarily recognized titles of deity, God alone can tell; but there certainly is none in kind, and whether a person uses one or the other is largely a matter of habit. “For every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment” (Matt. 12:36). “But let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No.’ For whatever is more than these is from the evil one” (Matt. 5:37).

Thoughtless Habits

“But I say these things without thinking;” one says. Then think! God has given us minds, in order that we may think, and not do anything thoughtlessly. We should have a reason for everything we do, and for our habits. Though an act or word may come involuntarily, we should have a reason for the formation of the habit. Our habits must be formed by the Word and Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit, having created us new creatures, must dwell within us, speaking through us. When this is the case, there will be no fear that we shall take the name of the Lord in vain. We all have need to pray, “Set a guard, O Lord, over my mouth; keep watch over the door of my lips” (Ps. 141:3).

Anybody can keep himself from the gross form of swearing, the obvious violation of the commandment, even though he have not the fear of God before his eyes. Almost every swearer knows that this is true, if he will but consider a moment, for all except those who are utterly abandoned abstain in certain society from the utterance of their common oaths. A young man once apologized to the writer for swearing at some provoking circumstance, saying that he could not help it. But he readily agreed that he could help it, when reminded that he would not have used the expression if ladies had been present. But, as we have seen, abstaining from what is considered as ordinary vulgar swearing, does not meet the requirement of this commandment.

Only the Spirit of God can enable us fully to keep the law, because the law is spiritual. The Spirit, however is abundantly able to keep us from every form of sin. So let nobody say of this or any other commandment, "I can't keep it!" God has given us the power, for He has given us Himself. He made men to be kings, and though we have been slaves, He has through the Spirit proclaimed our emancipation, and forever delivered us from the necessity of saying, "I can't." **"I can't" means bondage.** "Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. 3:17) and the Spirit is given to all. If we walk in the Spirit, we shall keep the commandments, and be at liberty.

All Sin is Blasphemy

This commandment forbids all unnecessary use of the Lord's name, even in prayer. It shuts off "vain repetitions," and "can't" phrases, which people get in the habit of using without any thought of their meaning. It teaches us that we should use the name of the Lord only with a definite purpose, and with a clear understanding of why we use it. That which one causes another to do, is counted as though he did it himself. Paul, addressing the Jews which were "instructed out of the law," and made their boast in the law, yet who through breaking it dishonored God, said, "For *the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you,*" as it is written" (Romans 2:17-24).

In like manner, after King David's adultery and murder, the prophet Nathan said to him: "By this deed you have given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme" (2 Sam. 12:14). No man's sin can end with himself. It is impossible for a man to sin, even in secret, without influencing somebody also against the Lord. So here again we see the exceeding breadth of the commandment, and how impossible it is to violate this third commandment without breaking the whole law. And, on the other hand, we see how every sin is a violation of the third commandment. So when we read: "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain," we way know that it is equivalent

to, "You shall do no evil." Remember this when we come to speak of the still broader meaning of the commandment.

The Apostle James, speaking of those who dishonor their Maker by reproaching the poor, says: "Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?" (James 2:6, 7). The church stands in the same relation to the Lord that the wife does to the husband. **Christ is the Head of each individual Christian. The professor of Christianity takes His name, and should be absolutely one with Him, so that Christ's life is the only life seen.** Now if God is not given the supreme place in the life, and the individual's sinful self is exhibited under the name of Christ, it is plainly seen that the Lord is dishonored. Neighbors look at the professor, and say that there is no power in Christianity. They blaspheme the name of God, saying that He is not able to keep those who trust in Him. Thus people who have never taken an oath in their lives are guilty of breaking the third commandment. Many professed Christians are unconsciously taking the name of the Lord in vain.

A Gracious Promise

This thought naturally brings us to a wider and more glorious phase of the commandment than is usually comprehended. The third commandment is ordinarily regarded simply as a stern decree, as though God said, "Don't you dare use My name lightly, or else I will punish you." Men have robbed the commandment of all the love, all the joy, all the light, and peace, and comfort that it contains. It is even so with **the whole law, which by many professed Christians is looked upon as a table of stern decrees, the justice of which they acknowledge, but which they regard as irksome.**

The blessing of Moses shows that the law was given in love, and that it is an expression of the love of God. "The Lord came from Sinai, . . . From His right hand came a fiery law for them. Yes, He loves the people" (Deut. 33:2, 3). When received as it is given to us, in the hand of a Mediator, it conveys to us nothing of harshness, but everything pure, tender, gentle, sweet, and easy, and that tends to lift up, strengthen, and bless. It is a blessed promise, that if we hear, we shall be preserved from taking the name of the Lord in vain.

Every commandment of God is a promise. God has pledged Himself that every believer will be kept from taking His name in vain,—that is, every believer will keep the whole law, doing nothing that can in any way dishonor God. "The Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain." This is a negative statement, the

positive form of which would be, The Lord will hold him guiltless who does not take His name in vain. Is not that grand? **The person who keeps the third commandment is counted guiltless before God. "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin" (Rom. 4:8); and He does not impute sin to the man who does not take His name in vain.**

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The 3rd Law of Life - part 2 of 2

"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" (Ex. 20:7).

Taking the Name

Think a moment of the word "take." It means to lift up, to bear, not simply to utter. **We are to take the name of God, else there would be no force in the commandment not to take it in vain.** But the blessedness of the commandment lies in the assurance that when we take it, it will not be in vain. It will accomplish something for us. It will make and keep us guiltless, for "the name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe" (Prov. 18:10).

An illustration of this is given in the third and fourth chapters of Acts. In the third chapter we have the record of the healing of the lame man at the gate of the temple. He never had walked, but when Peter said to him, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6), "he leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them — walking, leaping, and praising God" (v. 8). When the multitude gathered round in amazement, Peter said: "The God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified His Servant Jesus, . . . whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all" (vv. 13-16).

Then the next day, when the Apostles were brought before the Jewish Council, Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said unto them, "If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. . . . Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:9-12). **This miracle gives us a vivid illustration of what it is to take the name of the Lord not in vain.**

Salvation in the Name

There is salvation in that name. "You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). His name is what He Himself is. Note the words used by Peter: "by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole." That is to say, that **to stand in the name of Jesus is to stand in Jesus. The name is the person. God is the Saviour, and His name is in Christ.**

Reality, Not Magic

The name of the Lord is not to be taken as a charm; it is not magic, but reality. When Paul was at Ephesus, wonderful miracles were wrought by him in the name of the Lord Jesus. "Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists took it upon themselves to call the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "We exorcise you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches." Also there were seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, who did so. And the evil spirit answered and said, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" Then the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, overpowered them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded. This became known both to all Jews and Greeks dwelling in Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified" (Acts 19:13–17).

So we see that it is not some utterance of the name that is of value, but the recognition of the being and character of the Lord.

His Name is His Character

His name is His character, His personality, and cannot be separated from Himself. Names of men and things with us are mere matters of convenience and fancy; they mean nothing. And this is doubtless one reason why people do not better understand the force of "that glorious and fearful name, the Lord your God." **To take the name of God in reality is to take the life and experience the power of it.** "And those who know Your name will put their trust in You; for You, Lord, have not forsaken those who seek You" (Ps. 9:10). God has never failed any person; **we may go to Him in the name that is above every name, asking for His own sake to take away our sins, and to cleanse us, and we shall never be disappointed. What a blessed promise! "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain."** The Lord says to the one who trusts Him, "Because he has set his love upon Me, therefore I will deliver him; I will set him on high, because he has known My name. He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him, and show him My salvation" (Ps. 91:14–16).

Baptized into the Name

The disciples of Jesus are baptized "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matt. 28:19). To be baptized in the name of the Lord is to be swallowed up in His life, so that one can say, "it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal. 2:20).

Since the life is the life of Christ, it is perfectly proper for the person to bear the name of Christ, just as the wife bears the name of her husband. We are joined by death to Christ in a bond "that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing" (Rom. 8:38, 39), can break. His name is our salvation. We are baptized into it, and it is the strong tower, into which we run and are safe. So again we rejoice in the assurance given in the third commandment, "You shall not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain."

Praying in the Name

We are exhorted, "Whatsoever ye do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him." Gal. 3:17. So we are to pray in His name, and the assurance is, "If ye shall ask anything in My name, I will do it." There are many unconscious forgers at the bank of heaven. How many there are who in their prayers use the expressions, "in Jesus' name," and, "for Jesus' sake," without a thought of what they mean. Thus they take the name in vain. They come with the name of the Lord without the Lord Himself.

When we truly bear the name of Jesus, we are sunk out of sight, for it is He who lives, and not we, and it is He in us asking that He may be delivered from the power of sin in our flesh. He is dwelling in our flesh, in order that He may cleanse us from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit. "In the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with vehement cries and tears to Him who was able to save Him from death", He was heard. (Heb. 5:7). He was saved from death, in that He was saved from sin. He "suffered in the flesh" (1 Peter 4:1), "being tempted" (Heb. 2:18), but He suffered not for Himself. The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all, and it was the infirmities of our sinful flesh that oppressed His soul, He is still pleading in sinful flesh, presenting His life in our behalf, and longing to be relieved from the burden of sin with which we make Him serve.

How can a guilty sinner, already convicted of law-breaking, appear before the Lord, in the presence of that law that sends forth thunder and lightning, and a storm of

indignation upon the wicked? He dare not; but he need not, for it is not he, but Christ. **Knowing and confessing that Christ is come in the flesh, the sinner comes with boldness to the throne of grace, for he comes in the name—in the person—of Jesus.** If he truly believes in the name of Jesus, it is Christ using his tongue to utter the petition; and when he knows this, he can always make his requests with thanksgiving, no matter with how strong crying and tears his supplications be made; for Christ in the days of His flesh obtained deliverance from those very temptations to sin.

So when I use that name, I must claim all that the name comprehends. Christ never offered a petition in vain. He said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me" (John 11:41–42). Whatever we ask in His name indeed, will be granted. **God will clear and hold guiltless every soul who takes that name for all that it means.** Such an one will not take it in vain.

Stamped with the Name

"And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, 'This is the way you shall bless the children of Israel. Say to them: "The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace." "So they shall put My name on the children of Israel, and I will bless them" (Num. 6:22–27). The name of the Lord is mercy and grace and peace. This name put upon the soul, keeps it. The Lord says of the one who believes Him, and thus has the victory that has overcome the world, "I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, . . . And I will write on him My new name" (Rev. 3:12). So the trusting soul will be as safe as the New Jerusalem, and as God Himself. He says, "Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who meditate on His name" (Mal. 3:16).

Those who trust in the name have the name written upon them, and that shows to whom they belong. This is a pledge of safety, for the Lord will keep His own. His name upon us shows that we are His property, and He will defend us with His life against all adversaries. The devil knows the name of the Lord, and trembles at its power. He knows that God has put a hedge about every soul who trusts in His name. Though Satan goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, we are safe so long as we abide in the name of the Lord; and that name abides forever. "Those who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be moved, but abides forever" (Ps. 125:1).

What a glorious promise, then, is the commandment that we shall never take the name of the Lord our God in vain!

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