



MT. ROSE REFORMED
ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

The Name Above Every Name

Reverend Scott Johnson | November 2, 2025 | Exodus 20:7

Old Testament Reading

The Old Testament reading is Exodus chapter 20, verse seven, Exodus 20, verse seven. 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.

New Testament Reading

Let's turn to the New Testament for our New Testament reading from Philippians chapter two, verses one through 11. Philippians two, one through 11.

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant. Being born in the likeness of men and being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore, God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is

Lord, to the glory of God the Father. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

Go ahead and turn back to Exodus chapter 20, verse seven. This is our sermon text for this morning. And again, this is the third commandment as we are working our way through the 10 commandments. Everybody in the world has a favorite word. It's a word that always catches your attention, a word that is music to your ears, a word that is truly precious to you. And I know what your favorite word is. Your favorite word is your name. And your name, of course, is more than a mere word. It's more than a simple label that we use to distinguish you from other people, but it stands for what kind of person you are. Your character, your identity is wrapped up in your name. And so that your name becomes invested with everything that makes up who you are as a person. Your name carries that with it whenever it is sounded.

And it's the same with God. God has a name as well. And His name is not just a word, a mere word that we use to refer to God, but it is a symbol that stands for the nature, the character of God. Everything about God, everything that is true about Him, His transcendent glory, His holiness, His grace, His love, this is all wrapped up in His name. As one person said, God himself is present in his name. We sang from Psalm eight earlier and David in that Psalm in verse one, he says, "Oh Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth?" He could have said, "How majestic are you in all the earth?" But he says the same thing when he says, "How majestic is your name in all the earth? You have set your glory above the heavens." And it's because the name of God is invested with and carries with it all that is true about God, His holiness, His majesty, His greatness. Because that is true, God has given us the third commandment.

The Third Commandment

Again, verse seven, Exodus 20, "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. For the Lord will not hold them guiltless who takes His name in vain." Whatever we do with God's name, whether we curse it or bless it, we are doing to God himself. And

our attitude toward the name of God, whether we reverence it or whether we use it flippantly or carelessly, that shows us what is our attitude towards God himself. Now, one distinctive feature of the third commandment, and if you are reading very carefully, you may have noticed this, but unlike the first two commandments, the Lord, he refers to himself in the third commandment in the third person. He doesn't say, "You shall not take my name in vain." Obviously that is true, but the commandment says, "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain." And God gave us the commandment in this way so that our attention would be focused on the name of God. So rather than just saying my name, he tells us, he reminds us what is his name and his name is the Lord. That is his name. We could say that is God's proper name, at least in our English Bibles, it is the Lord. That was the name that he revealed to Moses back in Exodus chapter 3 at the burning bush. We looked at that several weeks ago, but let me read a couple verses from chapter 3.

This is when Moses is hearing from God at the burning bush. Verses 14 and 15, God said to Moses, "I am who I am." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, I am, has sent me to you." God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, the Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob has sent me to you. This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations."

God's Name

And so what is God's name? It is the Lord, the Lord. In our English Bibles, the Lord stands for the actual name of God. And we went over this several weeks ago, but I think it would be helpful to go over this again. When you are reading your English Bibles, when you are reading the Old Testament in your English Bibles, you'll notice that the word Lord is given to us in two different ways. One way that we read the word Lord, or the way that it's printed, is with a capital L and then a small o, small r, small d. And when you see that, that is just a generic name that means master or overseer or something like that. But then you also see in the Old Testament the word Lord with all capital letters, capital L, capital O, capital R, and capital D. And that word, that Lord, is the

English rendering of the Hebrew word that is the very name of God, the name of God that he gave to Moses at the burning bush. Now, nobody today knows exactly how In Hebrew, God's name was pronounced. We have a guess, and our best guess is that it's pronounced something like Yahweh. In Hebrew, there are four consonants that make up the name of God. Sometimes it's called the tetragrammaton because it's made up of four different letters. Our best guess is that we pronounce it Yahweh, or that's how it would be pronounced in Hebrew. And by the way, when we sing our hymns and we see the word Jehovah, without going into all the details, essentially that's a kind of a misspelling or a misunderstanding of how to pronounce God's name. It's not Jehovah, but it's closer to Yahweh. And the name itself means I am, I am. And God's name, because it is I am, it refers to the truth that unlike everything in creation, unlike us, unlike everything that God has made, God's existence does not depend on anything outside of himself. He is eternally self-existence. God always was, he always will be. We are dependent upon God for our existence, but not God. He is self-existing. He is I am. And so in English then, Yahweh is Lord, capital L-O-R-D. And so whenever you say Lord, you are saying the name of God.

You Shall Not Take the Name of the Lord Your God in Vain

So what exactly does the third commandment mean when God says, "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain?" Well, one thing that it doesn't mean is that we can never speak or use the name of God. As you probably know, there are some Jewish people who out of fear of breaking this commandment will simply not ever say the name of God or even write out the name of God. They might refer to God's name as simply the name, but they will not speak his name or say his name. And the reason they do that is because they don't want to even come close to breaking the third commandment. Now, when you compare that extreme caution with the name of God to how his name is so carelessly and thoughtlessly and profanely used by so many people in our world today, there seems to be something to that approach. Let's treat the name of God reverently. Let's not even say his name. However, there is no biblical prohibition against writing out or saying God's name. Taking the Bible as an example, we would say

that God wants us to speak his name. He wants us to use his name. In the scriptures, we hear people in the Old Testament, the saints, using the name of God, saying the name of God all over the place. His name is throughout the Psalms. The Psalms were sung by the people of Israel in their worship of the Lord. They spoke his name, they sang his name in thanksgiving and praise and so on. And so following that, we have to say that God wants us to speak his name. He wants us to use his name. Of course, in a way that honors him. And so the third commandment does not prohibit the use of God's name, but it prohibits the misuse of God's name. In Hebrew, the commandment literally says something like this. "You shall not lift up or take up the name of the Lord your God for nothingness." The word in vain is a word that means nothingness, vanity.

And of course, God is the opposite of nothingness. God is infinite in glory, in majesty, in greatness. The Hebrew word for glory is weightiness or heaviness. And that of course is the opposite of nothingness or vanity. And so to use God's name in any way that is not consistent with his gravity, his glory, his majesty, is to equate the name of God with vanity or nothingness, it is to say that God is nothing or nothingness. And of course that is to take his name in vain. Our shorter catechism puts it this way. "What is forbidden in the third commandment?"

"The third commandment forbiddeth all profaning and abusing of anything whereby God maketh himself known." Now in the original setting in which this commandment was given to the people of Israel in the ancient Near East, there were basically three different ways in which the people of Israel or other peoples may have taken the name of the Lord in vain. And we'll briefly survey those three ways, and then we'll see how in our modern context, in our day and age, we can basically take the name of God in vain in those same three ways.

Sorcery

So first of all, God's name could be misused in sorcery. So a sorcerer was someone who would take the name of God in vain when he would use it as part of his repertoire of divine names that he would recite in order to carry out some purpose or agenda that

he had as a sorcerer. And so he would speak some kind of a magical incantation involving the names of gods or the name of the true God in order to heal sickness or to defeat an enemy or to foretell the future. But you can see the problem with that. The sorcerer was not using the name of God in order to praise God, to worship Him, to honor Him, but he was using the name of God as a kind of formula in order to control or to harness the power of God to accomplish his own purposes.

We see a very good example of that sorcery in the New Testament in Acts chapter 19 when the seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva, they attempted to use the name of Jesus in order to cast out evil spirits from a man who was demon possessed. And so they were not really honoring the name of Jesus. They did not believe in Jesus. They weren't using the name of the son of God in order to worship and to praise him, but they were trying to harness the power of the name of Jesus in order to exercise dominion over these evil spirits so that they could cast them out of this person, and they were using the name of God, in this case, the name of Jesus, in vain. And of course, as you know the story, they found out the hard way that that was a very bad idea. The evil spirit and the man in whom they were trying to cast out, the evil spirit, attacked the sons of Sceva. They fled out of the house naked and wounded.

But that was an example of sorcery, a misuse of God's name. The Old Testament says that this kind of misuse of God's name in sorcery is an abomination, an abomination.

False Prophecy

Secondly, God's name could be misused in false prophecy. When you read the Old Testament, you read the prophets over and over again, the prophets will preface what they say from the Lord by saying, "Thus says the Lord," "Thus sayeth the Lord." The problem was that the false prophets, when they said anything, they said the same thing at the beginning, "Thus says the Lord." And when they did, that is the false prophets, they were taking God's name in vain because they were attaching to the name of God, words that God did not speak. And so they would attach God's name to what was a lie, what was false. And of course that was condemned by the Lord.

Deuteronomy 18:22, "When a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the Lord has not spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him." So any kind of false prophecy in the name of God was taking his name in vain.

False Oaths

Thirdly, God's name could be misused by taking a false oath. Often in the Old Testament, a person would confirm an oath that he made or a vow that he made or he would certify the truthfulness of his words by using God's name to back him up. He would say something like, "As the Lord lives, I will do so and so," or "May God do so to me and more also if I do not do so and so." And by saying that, the person was using God's name. He was appealing to the character of God, the nature of God, the integrity of God, to back up his vow or his promise or to certify the validity of his words. But if that person then failed to fulfill his oath, or if he spoke words that he knew were untrue while invoking God's name, he was taking God's name in vain. And the Bible condemns that as well, Leviticus 19:12. "You shall not swear by my name falsely and so profane the name of your God. I am the Lord."

The Lord Jesus Christ

So those are the ways in which people in the old covenant in the context in which this commandment was given could take the name of God in vain. And in a minute, we'll see that we can do essentially the same thing. It just looks a little different today. But before we see that, it's important for us to see, it's crucial for us to see that in addition to the Lord, which is the name of God that he gave to Moses, now with the coming of his son, God has given himself, he has revealed to us a new name for himself. And of course, that new name of God is Jesus Christ. Again, The word in our Old Testament that is God's name is Lord, capital L, capital O, capital R, capital D.

And Lord is the English rendering of the Hebrew Yahweh. Now before the coming of Christ, sometime BC, I forget exactly what year, the Jewish people, they translated their

scriptures from Hebrew into the Greek language. And whenever they came across the word Yahweh in the Hebrew scriptures, they would translate that into Greek with the Greek word kurios, kurios. And then later, after the coming of Christ, when the New Testament was written, and of course it was written in Greek, the authors of the New Testament used that very same word to refer to Jesus, kurios. And what that means is, is that for the New Testament authors, That is the New Testament authors who each one were inspired by the Holy Spirit of God. For them, Jesus, the man Jesus was one in the same as the Lord of the Old Testament. And so Jesus is Kurios. He is Lord.

He is Yahweh. He is the incarnation of almighty God whose name is the Lord. He is the one who spoke to Moses from the burning bush and revealed his name and said, "I am who I am." And so everything that was revealed about God in the Old Testament, everything that is true about God that is given to us in the Old Testament is also true for Jesus. And that's what it means to confess that Jesus is Lord. It's not just to say, I believe that Jesus was an extraordinary man whom God had given extraordinary authority, that he is Lord in some sense like that. But to say that Jesus is Lord, to confess that he is Lord is to say that Jesus is one and the same as the God who revealed himself in the scriptures as Yahweh, as the Lord, the creator, of heaven and earth, the sovereign God over all things.

Earlier, we heard from Philippians, and let me read some of those verses again. Philippians 2, nine through 11, speaking of Jesus. "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father." The remarkable thing about that passage, and this is a well-known passage to us from Philippians. But the remarkable thing about that passage is that Paul is quoting words that God himself spoke in the Old Testament about himself.

In Isaiah 45:23, God himself says this, "By myself, I have sworn from my mouth has gone out in righteousness, a word that shall not return to me, every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance."

And so what the Apostle Paul does in Philippians is he substitutes Jesus, the name of Jesus, for God, for God himself. And so to bow the knee at the name of Jesus, to confess that Jesus is Lord is to bow the knee to God and to swear allegiance to God. And so everything that the third commandment says about the name of God, the Lord, applies equally to the name of Jesus Christ.

How We Take the Lord's Name in Vain Today

And so with that in mind, let's go back to those three ways that God's name was taken in vain in the Old Testament and see how they apply to us today.

Sorcery Today

So the first way was sorcery. Sorcery was the first way that God's name was taken in vain. Again, the sorcerer tried to use God's name as a means to harness or control the power of God in order to accomplish his own agenda. And today, in a similar way, anytime somebody uses the name of God as a sort of holy seal of approval, or uses the name of God in order to endorse or promote his own agenda or desires that are not biblical, he is acting out of the same spirit of sorcery that was condemned in the Old Testament. You see this, for example, when somebody claims, with no biblical support, but somebody claims that His political agenda or her social agenda is God's will, or that this is what Jesus would want.

I remember several years ago, there was an ad campaign that was sponsored by a Christian environmentalist group. And the ad asked the question, "What would Jesus drive?" So instead of what would Jesus do, what would Jesus drive? And the obvious implication was that Jesus would not drive a big gas-guzzling SUV, but rather he would choose to drive a much more fuel-efficient car. And of course, on one level, it's just absurd to claim that Jesus would favor a certain kind of car to drive, but it's more serious than that. It's actually blasphemous to attach the holy name of Christ to advance a political or social cause that the Bible says absolutely nothing about is taking God's name in vain. This came to my mind as well as we were watching the World Series and

you see fans in the stadium praying that their team will win. Let's not make God a fan of your favorite baseball team and pray that he'll give the victory to your team. That's essentially taking God's name in vain. It's a kind of sorcery.

Perhaps on a more personal level, When we pray and ask God for some particular blessing or provision, we must always say, as Jesus himself said when he prayed to his father, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thy will be done." Because if we don't say that, or at least we don't have that submission and attitude in our hearts, when we pray to the Lord, we can so easily want to use the name of Jesus to try to get what we want from God even if it's not the will of God to give us that. And we can come very close to using the name of Jesus as a kind of incantation, like a sorcerer would use the name of God. And so these are modern forms of sorcery by which we can take God's name in vain.

False Prophecy Today

The second way that God's name was taken in vain was by false prophecy. The false prophet said, "Thus says the Lord," when the Lord had not said so. And that spirit of false prophecy is what lies behind every so-called Christian teaching that clearly contradicts what God has revealed to us in the scriptures. And so, for example, whenever you hear somebody declare that God wouldn't condemn anybody to eternal damnation, or that Jesus will save all good people regardless of their faith or religion or lack of faith, or that God wants us to be healthy and wealthy, that is attaching a false teaching to God and using His name to endorse it, and that is taking God's name in vain. And so any teaching in the name of Christ that is contrary to scripture, any teaching that denies the truth of the gospel, that is a form of false prophecy that is breaking the third commandment.

Now there are false teachers who do this very wrongly, very sinfully, but there are also genuine believers in Christ who genuinely seek to honor him, and yet they can stumble in a very similar way. A well-meaning Christian can say something like, "God told me to do this," or "God wants me to do this," or "God revealed to me that this or that will

happen." And that too, even though the person may be sincere, that too is a form of false prophecy.

When my sister was suffering from cancer many years ago, my aunt told me that her son, who was very young at the time, so he was concerned for my sister. But nevertheless, my aunt told me that her son said something like, "Mom, God has told me that Meredith is going to live." Well, my sister didn't live, and so whatever it was that made him think that God had told him that, it wasn't God, and it was a kind of false prophecy. And that kind of thinking is not just irresponsible because it may confuse or hurt other people, but it's really dishonoring God. It's pretending to speak for God when he hasn't spoken. It's taking the name of God in vain.

False Oaths Today

The third way that the ancient Israelites could break the third commandment was by making a false oath in the name of God. And as Christians, we all make promises or vows in the name of God from time to time. For example, when you publicly professed your faith in Christ, you promised that you would be a faithful disciple of Jesus. You made a vow before God and in God's name. Or when you presented your children for baptism, when you became a member of the church, when you got married, you made certain promises in the name of God, with God as your witness that you would fulfill your word. And if we make such vows insincerely with reservations, or if we break our vows, we have taken God's name in vain.

Using God's Name in an Irreverent Way

Another way that we can take God's name in vain that is similar to making a false vow is by using the name of God or Jesus in a thoughtless, careless, irreverent way. And this is the first thing that comes to mind when we read the third commandment, the way in which God's name is used as a swear word, to express happiness or anger or surprise or outrage. And so you hear this all the time.

People say, "Oh my God," "OMG." Or they'll say, "Jesus Christ," in a way to show their surprise or anger. Or they'll say, "For God's Sake," or "For Christ's Sake," and so on. The list goes on and on. You know what I'm talking about. And if we were to just go by the number of times people use the word or the name of God or Jesus in their everyday conversations, we might think that we lived among the most pious and most spiritually minded people that ever walked the face of the earth. But of course, it's a very sad commentary on the spiritual condition of our society, that the holy name of God, the holy name of Christ is used in such a thoughtless, careless, flippant, disrespectful way by so many people day after day in their everyday conversation. And here I believe the warning attached to this commandment takes on a special significance because a person in this life can easily get away and people get away all the time with taking God's name in vain. If you break the sixth commandment, you probably won't get away with it. If you commit murder, you probably will go to prison. If you break the third commandment, nobody cares. You won't get arrested. You won't get charged with any kind of criminal violation. It's no big deal. But it is a big deal. God sees it as a very serious offense. And though we may not experience any kind of punishment from men, God hears and he will judge. And that's why it says, "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." And so you may get away with taking God's name in vain in this world, but God hears and he will judge those who use his name in a way that dishonors him.

Give Honor, Glory, Reverence and Praise to the Name of God

And so we can break the third commandment in very similar ways, such as sorcery, false prophecy, a false oath, and so on. Now one of the principles in interpreting and understanding the Ten Commandments is that when a commandment like this one, the Third Commandment, when it forbids something, by implication it commands the opposite. And so there is a positive commandment in this commandment, as well as a commandment against something. And so if the third commandment forbids us from taking the name of the Lord in vain, what does it command? Well, it commands the opposite. And that is that in all that we do, in everything that we do, we give honor and

glory and reverence and praise to the name of God and the name of Christ. Colossians 3:17 says, "And whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." In other words, since we as believers in Christ profess the name of Christ, all that we do must be worthy of that great name. And that is true, first of all, in our worship. It is in our worship that this commandment has particular relevance to us because in our worship, we say the name of God, we confess the name of Christ, we use God's name to praise and to worship him. Psalm 100 verse four says, "Enter his gates with thanksgiving and his courts with praise. Give thanks to him, bless his name."

The only way that we can truly bless the name of God and to honor God by using His name is when we come into His presence and worship when our hearts are filled with thanksgiving and praise. If not, you are speaking God's name in worship, but you are not really giving God the glory that is due to His name. And we've all experienced this. We're in church, we're singing a hymn to God, we're supposed to be praising Him, and we're mouthing the words of the hymn. Maybe we even know it by heart. But in the meantime, in your mind, you're drifting off to a conversation that you had yesterday, or you're struggling in your heart with bitterness or anger against somebody for some reason. All the while, you are using the name of God to praise Him and also taking the name of God in vain. You are not really giving God the glory that he deserves when you use his name in that way in worship.

Honoring His Name

And going beyond worship, the third commandment deals not only with what we do here on Sundays, but the third commandment deals with the entirety of our lives. All that we say and think and do as believers in Jesus Christ, We do in the name of Christ and therefore we either glorify him by honoring his name or we take it in vain. Phil Riken said, "The very name of Christ is associated with everything we do. Our reputation is a reflection of his reputation. So we should always make it our name or our aim to honor his name." Paul said of the unbelieving Jews in Romans chapter two, 2:24, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you." May that never be said of

us, that the name of God is blasphemed because of our sin, because of our hypocrisy. May it never be said of us that the name of God is held in dishonor or disrespect by unbelievers who do not know him because of our sin and our failures. And so, I hope that as we have been unpacking this commandment that what you've been able to see by the grace of God is that the third commandment has so much more to say than to simply say, "Don't use God's name as a curse word." Or "Don't say, 'Oh my God,' when you're surprised."

Because when we think about it, we break this commandment every day because we fail to give him due honor as we bear the name of Christ. We don't worship him as we should. We fall far short of giving God the glory, the honor, the praise that is due to his name. And this is one of the reasons why we're going through these 10 commandments to see how the law of God applies to all that we do, all that we think, our words, the intentions of our heart. It's comprehensive, it's thorough, it's spiritual.

Believe in the Name of Jesus for Your Salvation

But when it comes to the name of God, the good news is that God's name has everything to do with salvation. God's name has everything to do with the hope of salvation for us sinners who do take his name in vain, who fail to keep this commandment. The name of God again is Jesus. And Jesus is the Greek form of Yeshua or Joshua. And what it means is Yahweh saves or Yahweh is salvation. Literally the name of God is salvation. The name of salvation. God has revealed himself to us in his son, Jesus Christ. He has made himself known to us in the savior. And in the preaching of the gospel, he makes his name known in the world so that sinners like you and me for those just like us, you and me who have broken this commandment, who have broken all the commandments, that there may be salvation and hope and redemption in his great and glorious name. He has given us the name of Jesus that by faith in his name, we might be saved, we might be forgiven. Acts 4:12, "There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." You could put it this way.

When it's all said and done, the greatest honor that you can give to the name of God, the best way for you to magnify, to honor, to bless the name of God is to believe, to believe in the name of Jesus Christ for your salvation. To hope in His name, to trust in His name, to believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, that He died for you, for your sin, that He was raised for you, for your salvation. This is how we begin to keep the third commandment, by coming to the Son of God by faith, confessing His name, acknowledging that He is our Savior, that He is Lord. And it is by this same faith in Jesus Christ that God gives us the grace to keep or to grow in keeping this commandment. And the promise that Jesus makes to you and me is this, that if you confess, if you confess the name of Jesus before men in this world on the day of judgment, Jesus will confess your name before the Father in heaven. He will confess you and your name as one for whom he died that you may enter into eternal glory.

Let's pray.