

The Third Commandment HONOUR THE LORD'S NAME

“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.” Exodus 20:7

“...a tree is known by its fruit. Brood of vipers! How can you, being evil, speak good things? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good things, and an evil man out of the evil treasure brings forth evil things. But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give an account of it in the Day of Judgment. For by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned.” Matthew 12:33-37

Words are very important. *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” John 1:1*

The first petition of the Lord's Prayer is: *“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your Name.”* Matthew 6:9

God's people in the Old Testament understood what it meant to show reverence to God by honouring His Name. The scribes who copied the Scriptures by hand had many complex rules that enabled them to copy the Scriptures very carefully and accurately. They had word counts and letter counts at the end of each page to ensure that they had not added or left out anything that they were responsible to copy. Whenever a scribe came to one of the secondary Names of God such as Elohim, or El-Shaddai, they stopped and put down their pens. They took up new pens and carefully wrote that Name. However, when they came to the principle Name that God had used to reveal Himself in the Burning Bush to Moses, *Jehovah* or *Yahweh*, for which they used the four letters *JHWH*, they were to rise from their seats, go and wash themselves, and clothe themselves with new, clean garments, dedicated for this purpose. Then they were to pray and confess their sins, take up a new pen, and fresh ink, in order to write those four letters *JHWH* – for *Yahweh*.

We do not do that today. However, in our mission, it has always been one of our principles to ensure that every word referring to the Lord is capitalised, including Him or His when referring to the Lord, Saviour, Gospel, Bible, or His Word.

It is disturbing how today so many ministries, even some Bible societies, are decapitalising references to the Lord and His Word. It is even more disturbing when we notice that many of those same publications and writers will capitalise the government and the state!

The Bible teaches that *“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.”* (Psalm 111:10). Evidently many people will lack wisdom. What was once illegal and unthinkable is now broadcast on television, on the radio, in films, printed in news media and magazines. We are being literally bombarded by profanity.

“...the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His Name in vain.” Exodus 20:7

I was shocked when I was called up for my military service at how many would brazenly take the Lord's Name in vain. However, I noticed that many would feel awkward when having done so in

the presence of a Christian. They would turn and apologise to us. It does hurt and offend a Christian to hear God's Name taken in vain. However, as I often had to remind these individuals: *"It's not to me that you need to apologise. It is Almighty God, our Creator, and your Eternal Judge, that you will have to stand before and give an account for every idle word ever spoken."*

I was so distressed over this abuse of God's Name, particularly by non-commissioned officers, that I requested to see the Officer Commanding. As I was marched into the Commandant's office he asked me: *"Well, rifleman, what is on your mind?"*

"Sir," I asked, *"Is it against the law to blaspheme the Name of the Lord our God?"*

"Yes, son," he answered, *"Why do you ask? Is the Lord's Name being blasphemed in this unit?"*

"Yes sir. I'm sorry to have to report to you that many corporals and sergeants are blaspheming the Lord's Name daily."

The Commandant's face darkened. *"I'm sorry to hear that, son. I will deal with this."* He dismissed me.

Sure enough, at the very next Battalion Parade on Friday, the Commandant addressed the unit: *"The Lord Jesus Christ is the Commander-in-Chief of this army. He is the One who determines whether we live or die. Victory or defeat is in His hands. Your lives are in His hands. Any man that takes the Name of the Lord our God in vain is a traitor and he will be treated as such. I will not tolerate blasphemy in this unit!"*

Indeed, he did not. Some NCOs were charged for taking the Lord's Name in vain and some lost their rank.

We also saw the Lord deal with blasphemers in the ranks. On one occasion a new convert rebuked a notorious blasphemer for taking the Lord's Name in vain: *"The Lord will judge you!"* he warned.

The blasphemer cursed again, picked up his coke tin and was stung on his tongue by a bee that he had not noticed sitting on the tin. As his tongue swelled up, the rest of the platoon couldn't help but burst into laughter. This foul-mouthed blasphemer was not able to speak a word for days.

Another foul-mouthed pagan in our unit was warned by one of our Bible study fellowship that *"God will judge the stiff-necked!"* Shortly after this, this lance corporal injured his neck so severely in an obstacle course that he had to wear a neck brace for several weeks thereafter. Wherever he went other pagans were laughing at him, pointing and repeating those words that God had judged the *"stiff-necked!"*

In the Book of Acts we read how God struck Ananias and Sapphira dead for lying to the Holy Spirit and dishonouring God's Name. ***"So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things."*** Acts 5:1-11

When plans were made to bring the blasphemous *Last Temptation of Christ* to South Africa, our mission mobilised nationwide protest against this film. We were later informed by the Publications Control Board that literally mail sacks of protest letters were received. South Africa was one of the few countries in the world that had the integrity to outlaw this blasphemous film.

However, after F.W. De Klerk's infamous *"Red Friday"* when he announced the government's intention to *"liberalise"* the abortion laws and publications control, along with unbanning the ANC,

releasing terrorists from jail, etc, the University of Witwatersrand organised for an “*academic*” screening of *The Last Temptation of Christ*. Not that they made any mention of this when they invited me to come and debate “*censorship*” on the university campus. However, contacts of ours had informed us that the Publications Control Board had granted a temporary provisional exemption for Wits to screen *The Last Temptation of Christ* in an academic environment, on condition that they had a public debate first on the merits and demerits of the film - including a minister who would oppose the film. So when the invitation came, we knew the circumstances.

I immediately phoned Rev. Kjell Olsen of Christians for Truth who mobilised members of CFT from KwaZulu/Natal and from the Transvaal to support me in the debate. I flew up to Johannesburg and, with many CFT and ACA members in the audience supporting my position, articulated the case against blasphemy and pornography, and particularly against the “*Last Temptation of Christ*” in honour of the Lord’s Name.

Opposing me was a so-called “*dominee*” who was at that time running the SATV programme *Kruis en Kroniek*. His position was incredible. The only thing that should be censored is censorship itself! All censorship censors the image of God! As God has made the world in His image, anything that censors that image is blasphemy! Just in case I’d misunderstood his position he reiterated that all forms of pornography and profanity should be allowed as free speech, but that the only thing that should be outlawed was censorship. While blasphemy shouldn’t be illegal, censorship should!

“Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes ...” Isaiah 5:20-21

“Woe to you, scribes and pharisees, hypocrites!...therefore you will receive greater condemnation.” Matthew 23:14

After the debate, which evidently these blasphemers were only enduring because of the legal requirement to do so, they sneeringly announced that they would now screen the film.

Rev. Fano Sibisi of Christians for Truth came up in front of the stage and announced to everyone in the auditorium that that was not acceptable, and as Christians we intended to stand for honour of the Lord’s Name by blocking the screen and refusing to move. The smirks and sneers of our hosts quickly disappeared and a look of panic came over their faces. They threatened to mobilise “*the angry youth of Soweto*” against us! We looked on with amusement as a group of toyi-toying youngsters danced into the theatre in an aggressive manner shouting and singing threats against us. However, as they saw the determined Afrikaners and Zulus, standing resolute shoulder to shoulder, they fled.

There was more confusion, and then our hosts came back and threatened to call the police to have us removed by force. “*Go ahead*”, Rev. Sibisi challenged them. We sang Hymns of Faith, and prayed, and every pagan fled the auditorium.

The police didn’t rush to get there. It was after midnight when they came and politely asked us if we would be kind enough to leave. The officer in charge told us that he fully agreed with our position and that’s why they had ensured that they arrived after midnight. The exemption for Wits University to screen the *Last Temptation* expired at midnight!

The police joined us in prayer as we gathered outside on the steps of the auditorium.

The president of South Africa at that time, F.W. De Klerk, had created much excitement when on being sworn into office, he had chosen to alter the traditional Oath of Office, swearing "*in the Name of the Tri-une god*" to uphold all the laws of this land. However, it soon appeared that he was taking the Lord's Name in vain. For, far from upholding the Constitution and all the laws of the land, F.W. De Klerk instructed the police not to enforce many of the laws of the land, including the Lord's Day ordinances, the suppression of Communism Act and the Internal Security Act.

Soon shops and cinemas were open on Sundays, violent revolutionaries were released from prison, and previously banned terrorist organisations, like the ANC and the South African Communist Party were freely organising public meetings throughout the country. Previously outlawed pornography was tolerated. And every week *Scope* magazine seem to push the boundaries even further. In one particular week, while the Publications Control Board banned 65 publications, the Appeal Board unbanned 62 of them!

The National Party which had always portrayed itself as a Christian Party, hired witchdoctors to design a new corporate image for the NP. The General Secretary of the National Party, Roelf Meyer, was photographed at a witchcraft ceremony in Soweto where witchdoctors, employed by the National Party, were "*dedicating*" the new NP offices in Soweto to the ancestral spirits! A goat was sacrificed, and blood and entrails were sprinkled over this General Secretary of the NP, who apparently was a church member. The fact that the once powerful National Party disappeared into oblivion shortly after this, again illustrated the point that "*...the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His Name in vain.*"

The Westminster Catechism teaches us that "*the chief end of man is to glorify God.*" If we profane His Name we are violating the very purpose of our existence. If some electronic item fails to work, where does it end up? On the trash heap. The Lord Jesus described eternal hell as *Gehenna*, the burning rubbish heap of Jerusalem. Just as the smoke continually ascended from the ongoing fire burning the rubbish of the city, the Lord described Eternal Judgement as God's rubbish heap. Those who do not glorify God will not enjoy Him forever, they will end up separated from Him forever on the burning rubbish heap of hell.

When the existence of the Life-Giver is held in contempt, then the lives of people are also held in contempt. If God is degraded, we, His creatures, become worthless.

Dr. Billy Graham was horrified when the Oval Office tapes of President Richard Nixon were released. The transcripts which were quoted from and printed in newspapers worldwide revealed that every second sentence included some blasphemy or profanity. Billy Graham who had known Richard Nixon for almost 30 years declared that he had never once heard any profane or blasphemous word come out of Nixon's mouth. This disproves a common excuse that many blasphemers claim: "*Oh, I'm sorry, I didn't even realise I was doing it.*" How then could a blasphemer like Richard Nixon be so discriminating as to never have blasphemed in public, and yet continually blasphemed in private? The Oval Office tapes revealed that he knew exactly what he was doing, when he was doing it, and who was around when he did it.

When the great architect Sir Christopher Wren was building St. Paul's Cathedral in London he ordered signs to be placed throughout the construction site declaring: "*Due to the heinous custom of labourers taking the Name of the Lord God in vain, each person is hereby placed on notice that it shall be sufficient cause for immediate dismissal if the Name of God is heard taken in vain in this place.*"

The Westminster Larger Catechism teaches that the Third Commandment requires "*That the Name of God, His titles, attributes, ordinances, Word, sacraments, prayer, oaths, vows, lots, His works,*

and whatsoever else there is whereby He makes Himself known, be holily and reverently used in thought, meditation, word and writing; by an holy profession, and answerable conversation, to the glory of God, and the good of ourselves, and of others.” (Question 112).

Under the Duties Required the *Westminster Larger Catechism* includes:

The duty to use God’s Name holily and reverently in thought and meditation (***“For those who fear the Lord and who meditate on His Name”*** Malachi 3:16

“How excellent is your Name in all the earth!” Psalm 8:9)

In Word (***“And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the Name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.”*** Colossians 3:17)

In writing (***“This will be written for the generations to come, that a people yet to be created may praise the Lord.”*** Psalm 102:18)

In holy profession and conversation (***“But sanctify the Lord God in your heart and be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear.”*** 1 Peter 3:15

“We will walk in the Name of the Lord our God for ever and ever.” Micah 4:5

“Only let your conduct be worthy of the Gospel of Christ...stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the Faith of the Gospel.” Philippians 1:27)

Under the Sins Forbidden in the Third Commandment the *Westminster Larger Catechism* includes:

The sin of using God’s Name in an ignorant way;

The sin of using God’s Name in a vain, irreverent or profane way;

The sin of using God’s Name in a superstitious and presumptuous way (1 Samuel 4:3-5);

The sin of mentioning His titles, attributes or ordinances blasphemously (***“For they speak against You wickedly; Your enemies take Your Name in vain”*** Psalm 139:20

“But to the wicked God says: ‘What right have you to declare my statutes or take My covenant in your mouth, seeing you hate instruction and cast My words behind you?’” Psalm 50:16-17)

The sin of wicked cursing, vows and oaths (***“How shall I pardon you for this? Your children have forsaken Me and sworn by those that are not God’s.”*** Jeremiah 5:7)

The sin of misapplying God’s decrees and providences (Ecclesiastes 8:11; 9:3)

The sin of misinterpreting, misapplying, or in any way perverting, the Word of God (***“Because with lies you have made the hearts of the righteous sad...and you have strengthened the hands of the wicked, so that he does turn from his wicked way to save his life”*** Ezekiel 13:22;

“...untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do the rest of the Scriptures” 2 Peter 3:16; Matthew 22:24-30)

The sin of making profession of religion in hypocrisy, or for underhand ends (***“Having a form of godliness but denying its power...”*** 2 Timothy 3:5

“Woe to you, scribes and pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widow’s houses, and for a pretence make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation.” Matthew 23:14

“For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward...” Matthew 6:5)

Perhaps you may never consider breaking the Third Commandment directly, but do you sometimes pray prayers or sing Hymns using the Name of God in a thoughtless or mechanical way? When we fall into cold and indifferent worship, we are actually breaking the Third Commandment.

Through His Name we may approach God in worship, love and prayer. We dare not use such a great Name lightly. We do not pray or praise Him or sing to Him in such a way that His Name registers no meaning to our souls. In all our singing, praying and preaching we must be sincere, wholehearted and enthusiastic.

“Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: ‘these people draw near to me with their mouths, and honour Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men.’” Matthew 15:7-9

Meaningless worship is the inevitable result of a worldly spirit. In many church buildings people can be seen lounging in a lazy manner, peering around sizing up other people, whispering to one another, and making no apparent effort to focus heart and mind on worshipping the Lord. There are some who do not even attempt to try to sing the Hymns.

Many ministers encourage this halfhearted entertainment mentality by their over-casual dress and use of flippant, shallow language and inappropriate jokes. None of this helps encourage a sense of awe and reverence in worshipping the Lord in the beauty of holiness.

“So they come to you as people do, they sit before you as My people, and they hear your words, but they do not do them, for with their mouth they show much love, but their hearts pursue their own gain. Indeed you are to them as a very lovely song of one who has a pleasant voice and can play well on an instrument; for they hear your words, but they do not do them.” Ezekiel 33:31-32

Hypocrisy in worship is frequently the result of refusing to obey the Lord’s commands. ***“But why do you call Me Lord, Lord, and not do the things which I say?”*** Luke 6:46

To say the Name of the Lord with real meaning and sincerity must include wholehearted love and obedience. Those who spurn the Bible and the foundational doctrines of Christianity cannot possibly be serious when they use the Lord’s Name, for they have no respect for God’s authority. Such are laws unto themselves, picking and choosing what portions of God’s Word they will accept and mingling them with the philosophies and politics of men. ***“In vain do they worship Me...”***

The Third Commandment forbids all insincerity, thoughtlessness and shallowness in our worship. It condemns hypocrisy, rebellion and disobedience by those who claim to serve the Lord.

The positive virtues required by the Third Commandment are thoughtfulness, sincerity and wholehearted devotion to the attributes of our Lord and Saviour.

The chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

“Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” Matthew 12:34

“Our Father, which art in heaven, hallowed be Thy Name...”

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