

LORD'S DAY 36

99. Q. What is required in the third commandment?
- A. We are not to blaspheme or to abuse the Name of God by cursing,¹ perjury,² or unnecessary oaths,³ nor to share in such horrible sins by being silent bystanders.⁴ Rather, we must use the holy Name of God only with fear and reverence,⁵ so that we may rightly confess Him,⁶ call upon Him,⁷ and praise Him in all our words and works.⁸

- Leviticus 24:10-17** Now the son of an Israelite woman, whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the children of Israel; and this Israelite woman's son and a man of Israel fought each other in the camp. ¹¹ And the Israelite woman's son blasphemed the name of the Lord and cursed; and so they brought him to Moses. (His mother's name was Shelomith the daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan.) ¹² Then they put him in custody, that the mind of the LORD might be shown to them. ¹³ And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ¹⁴ "Take outside the camp him who has cursed; then let all who heard him lay their hands on his head, and let all the congregation stone him. ¹⁵ "Then you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. ¹⁶ 'And whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name of the Lord, he shall be put to death. ¹⁷ 'Whoever kills any man shall surely be put to death.
 - Leviticus 19:12** And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.
 - Matthew 5:37** But let your "Yes" be "Yes," and your "No," "No." For whatever is more than these is from the evil one.
James 5:12 But above all, my brethren, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or with any other oath. But let your "Yes," be "Yes," and your "No," "No," lest you fall into judgment.
 - Leviticus 5:1** If a person sins in hearing the utterance of an oath, and is a witness, whether he has seen or known of the matter; if he does not tell it, he bears guilt.
Proverbs 29:24 Whoever is a partner with a thief hates his own life; He swears to tell the truth, but reveals nothing.
 - Psalms 99:1-5** The LORD reigns; let the peoples tremble! He dwells between the cherubim; let the earth be moved! ² The LORD is great in Zion, and He is high above all the peoples. ³ Let them praise Your great and awesome name; He is holy. ⁴ The King's strength also loves justice; You have established equity; You have executed justice and righteousness in Jacob. ⁵ Exalt the LORD our God, And worship at His footstool; He is holy.
- Isaiah 45:23** I have sworn by Myself; the word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that to Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath.
- Jeremiah 4:2** And you shall swear, 'The LORD lives,' in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness; the nations shall bless themselves in Him, and in Him they shall glory."
- Matthew 10:32-33** Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. ³³ But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.
Romans 10:9-10 that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.
 - Psalms 50:14-15** Offer to God thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High. ¹⁵ Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me."
1 Timothy 2:8 I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting;
 - Romans 2:24** For "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you," as it is written.
Colossians 3:17 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.
1 Timothy 6:1 Let as many bondservants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and His doctrine may not be blasphemed.

100. Q. Is the blaspheming of God's Name by swearing and cursing such a grievous sin that God is angry also with those who do not prevent and forbid it as much as they can?

A. Certainly,¹ for no sin is greater or provokes God's wrath more than the blaspheming of His Name. That is why He commanded it to be punished with death.²

1. **Leviticus 5:1** If a person sins in hearing the utterance of an oath, and is a witness, whether he has seen or known of the matter; if he does not tell it, he bears guilt.

2. **Leviticus 24:16** And whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name of the Lord, he shall be put to death.



Why does God do the things that He does? What motivates God to action? One thing, and one thing alone - **the glory of His Name!**

When God created the world, He did so in order that man might glorify His Name for creation's majesty and beauty. And so man does. "*O LORD our LORD how excellent is Your Name in all the earth*" (Psalm 8:1). "*The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows His handiwork*" (Psalm 19:1).

Why did God elect some fallen men to salvation? "*That He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus*" (Ephesians 2:7). Why did God reprobate others and leave them in their sin and condemnation? In order "*to show His wrath and to make His power known*" (cf. Romans 9:22-23).

Why does God forgive us our iniquity? "*For Your name's sake, O LORD, pardon my iniquity, for it is great*" (Psalm 25:11).

Why does God grant us the guidance of the Holy Spirit? "*For Your name's sake, lead me and guide me*" (cf. Psalm 31:3).

God's dealings with His people are all motivated by the glory of His Name (cf. Exodus 9:16, 1 Samuel 12:22, Psalm 106:8, Isaiah 48:11, Ezekiel 36:22). Because God

does everything for the glory of His Name, He commands that we must do everything with the same goal in mind. Our greatest goal in life must be to glorify God.

As with all the commandments, there is both the negative and the positive side. We are not to abuse God's Name. Just the opposite, we are to glorify His Name. Following the Catechism, let us deal first with the negative aspect of this commandment.

The commandment says that *we shall not take the Name of the LORD in vain*. Someone might say, "*What's in a name?*" Very much! Boys and girls will sometimes tease their friends by writing their friend's initials in a heart together with the initials of a girl or boy who was not very popular. That is sure to arouse anger! For a person is identified with his initials or by his name.

That is also true with the Name of God. God is identified with His Name. To abuse God's Name is to abuse God. To treat God's Name as though it was not sacred or special is the same thing as treating God as though He were not holy and greatly to be distinguished in honour.

What does it mean to use God's Name in vain? The word "*vain*" means "*to be empty, deceiving, worthless.*" What God

forbids, then, is that we ever use His Name as though it were an empty expression.

The Catechism speaks about **blasphemy**, which is using God's Name in an irreverent or contemptible manner, or to speak about God in a disparaging manner. The ungodly are often guilty of this sin, for they use God's Name as if it were an exclamation mark (!), in order to punctuate their speech. It is not uncommon to hear the ungodly say "O God!" when they are surprised or startled, and to say "Jesus Christ!" when they are angry. They are not using God's Name with fear and reverence.

We as Christians must never use God's Name in that manner. Neither should we use an expression which is very similar, such as "Gee whiz!" (which is a slight alteration of *Jesus*), or "Oh gad!" (which is derived from the expression, *Oh God!*) We should avoid using descriptions of God, such as Holy, as is used in such expressions as "Holy Smoke!" or "Holy cow!" or even "Hokey Pete!" In using such expressions, we come just shy of actually abusing God's Name. Using such expressions makes it appear as though we would like to say the real words behind it, but don't quite dare. Such phrases are not fitting for us as Christians.

Besides such blasphemy or abuse of God's Name, the Catechism mentions **cursing**. To curse is to invoke God to do evil to another. "Go to hell" or "God damn you" are examples of cursing, wherein we call upon God to condemn someone to hell. The LORD is displeased with such cursing, for it does not give glory to Him. God has revealed Himself as a God of mercy and grace. "For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved" (John 3:17). We are to reflect God's mercy and grace in all our dealings with our neighbour and to do good even to our enemies.

The Catechism also speaks about **perjury**. A man who has sworn an oath in court and then proceeds to lie, is guilty of perjury. Another means of abusing God's Name is by swearing unnecessary oaths. The Jews

of Christ's day were guilty of this. The Lord rebuked them for this (cf. Matthew 5:33ff.), telling them not to swear at all, but simply to let their *yes* be *yes* and their *no* be *no*. We will deal with this further in the next Lord's Day.

Besides the **conscious abuse** of God's Name (which we spoke of above) there can also be an **unconscious abuse** of God's Name. If we bow our heads to pray, but pray without really thinking, or pray without praying from the heart, then we have used God's Name in vain. We have heaped up empty phrases without real meaning and commitment. The same can happen when we pay little attention to the portion of Scripture that we are reading. In these ways we as Christians can become guilty of using the Lord's Name in vain.

The Catechism mentions yet another way that we can be guilty of sinning against this commandment. We can become guilty of taking God's Name in vain simply by being **silent bystanders**. If we hear someone use God's Name in vain, then we are duty bound to uphold God's honour. If a young man heard another speak ill of his father, he would surely make a suitable comment to uphold the honour and reputation of his father. He would not allow his father's name to be dragged through the mud. So it must be with the children of God. We too must uphold the Name of our God when others use His Name in vain. If we do not, then we become guilty of this sin.

There is still another way that God's Name can be blasphemed by us. That is when we **cause others to blaspheme** the Name of God because of what they hear us say or see us do. In His grace, God calls us by His Name. We are baptised into God's Name. We are called God's children. We are called Christians. We bear that Name everywhere we go and in everything we do. When we go to work, or to school, or out for some fun and recreation, we bear God's Name.

Now it is possible, and sad to say is often the case, that in our actions we as Christians cause God's Name to be blasphemed. In his letter to the Romans (2:24), Paul wrote to those who claimed to be God's people,

"The Name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you" (cf. Isaiah 52:5, Ezekiel 36:22).

If we sell a car which we advertised to be in good condition when we knew that the car was ready for the scrap yard, then God's Name is blasphemed. For don't children reflect their parents who instruct them? If God's children are underhanded, what does this say about God?

If the children of a Christian school do something in the neighbourhood which the community disapproves, then they give others reason to blaspheme God's Name. If we go to work, and are lazy and waste time for which we are paid, then we give others reason to blaspheme God's Name. If we go out for some fun, and then get drunk, then we give others reason to blaspheme God's Name.

We bear God's Name everywhere we go, and we bear His Name in everything we do. Our actions should be such that our neighbour gives praise to God. We should do good so that God's Name is glorified through us!

Since it is so easy to abuse God's name, perhaps it would be better not to use God's name at all! That is what the Jews thought. To prevent abuse of God's Name, they refused to utter His Name, "*Yahweh*".⁷ But that is not what the Lord commands here. There is a saying, "*Use God's Name, but not in vain.*" We may and must use God's Name. That is the **positive demand** of this commandment.

The Catechism teaches us that we must use the Name of God with **fear and reverence**. The reference to fear does not mean that we should be afraid to *use* God's Name, but we should certainly be afraid to *abuse* it. We should remember the latter

part of this commandment which reads, "*for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His Name in vain.*"

Further, we are to use it with reverence. We are to use God's Name with a sense of awe, with a sense that we are dealing with something worthy of much honour and respect.

We are called to **confess** God's Name uprightly. We are to do this in Church, as we do each Sunday when the Creed is recited. But our confession must go beyond ourselves in Church. Christ said that we are to confess Him before all men, and woe to us if we do not! If we refuse to confess Christ before men, He will refuse to confess us before the Father (cf. Matthew 10:32f).

Notice also that the Catechism says that we are to confess His Name **uprightly**. There are many sects who confess their faith in God. But they do not confess God uprightly. Instead, they propagate their own ideas concerning God which are a lie. God has no pleasure in such unfaithful confessions.

This requirement of confessing God before men is coupled with praising God. Confession is directed towards men, while praise is directed to God. The Catechism mentions that this praise is to be given in the form of words and works. We are to praise God through our prayers and singing. (This shows us that our prayers should not only consist of petitions, but also of praise!) And we are to praise God in all the things that we do. If we love God and are truly thankful for what He does for us, we will walk in obedience to His commandments, and thereby glorify Him.

7. The Old Testament Scriptures were originally written without vowels. The Name "Yahweh" simply read "Y H W H". Whenever a Jew would come upon this Name, he would read the name "Adonay" instead, which means Lord. Later, when vowels were added to the Old Testament Scriptures to make it easier for future generations to read, the Jews did not put the actual vowels under YHWH. Since they were accustomed to reading "Adonay" instead of "Yahweh", they decided to insert the vowels of the name "Adonay" into the consonants of the Name "YHWH". This gave the new name "Ya-HoWaH". Since the sounds and letters of the Hebrew do not correspond exactly like our sounds and letters, this was written as JeHo-VaH. It is due to this practice of the Jews in the past that some churches today read God's Name as "Jehovah". We use the Name "Yah-weh", since we believe this is closest to the actual Hebrew Name of God.

In most Bible translations, the Name YHWH is rendered as LORD (all uppercase letters), whereas the other Name of God "Adonay" is rendered as Lord.

Questions

1. What motivates God to do the things that He does? What should be our motivation in doing the things we do?
2. What is in a name? What does this mean with respect to God's Name?
3. What does *vain* mean? What does it mean to use God's Name in vain?
4. What is blasphemy? Give two examples.
5. Besides using God's Name in vain, what else must we avoid? Why?
6. What is cursing? Why does cursing displease the Lord?
7. What is perjury? What other abuse of oaths must we avoid?
8. Besides conscious abuse of God's Name, what other type of abuse must we avoid? Give some examples of this.
9. What is a silent bystander? What must we do if we hear others blaspheme the Name of God?
10. Explain how we can cause others to blaspheme God's Name. How must we act?
11. Would it be better not to use God's Name at all rather than risk blaspheming His Name? Who thought this? Were they correct?
12. What is meant when we say that we must use God's Name with fear? Why?
13. What is meant when we say that we must use God's Name with reverence?
14. When and where do we confess God's Name? What warning did Christ give us in this matter?
15. Why does the Catechism say that we must confess God's Name uprightly?
16. What else must we do besides confess God's Name? How do we do this?