
VIDEO LECTURE MODULE: TEN COMMANDMENTS

LECTURE 10: THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

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The John Knox Institute
of Higher Education

Entrusting our Reformed Inheritance to the Church Worldwide

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Module

TEN COMMANDMENTS

18 LECTURES

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Lecture 10

THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

Often God speaks in His Word about that He does things for His holy Name sake. That means He exalts the glory of His character or Being by His own doings or works. None has as much right to exalt His own Name as God. After all, there is none Who can even be remotely compared to Him. Naturally God is protective of His Name or glory. To associate His Name with something or someone that is evil is very offensive. We would feel the same about our own names. But honoring His Name isn't only pleasing to Him. It also will prove to be a source of blessings for us and those we live with.

TRANSCRIPT LECTURE 10

Welcome, dear friends. As we gather here today, we will study something that is precious to God. That's His holy name. And so, the title is simply, *Honor My Name*. That's God's commandment, in the ten, of the third one, "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain. For the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain" (Exodus 20:7). So, before we consider the details of the third commandment, let's take a third principle that applies to the law of God. And the principle is that the law of God is far more than presents itself at its face value. Officially, [that means] that the commandments of God are spiritual.

There's a depth to [them] that we need to understand if we want to really comprehend the fullness of the commandments of God. Simply, that means that there is far more covered in one commandment than in the few words that you find in the ten. For example, let's take an example of the sixth commandment, "thou shalt not kill." Now, taking it [by] the letter, most of us, hopefully, are not murderers that we have murdered anyone and thereby broken the sixth commandment. Yet, Jesus's teaching on the Sermon of the Mount makes very clear that there is more to the sixth commandment than just the letter: murder. Yeah, we break the sixth commandment, as you will see in a future lecture, much easier or much more [than we think], for example, when we crush someone's spirit, belittle him or her, or use name-calling to injure or wound a person's being. So, each commandment goes much wider and much deeper than the literal reading. Recall the second commandment we just looked at. God does not only forbid us making stone images but also mental pictures.

Each commandment, therefore, includes our understanding, our will, our affections, our intentions, our imaginations. And, that all lies deeper in our heart, our words, our gestures, and finally also our actions. Everything we do or say or intend or are motivated to do, needs to be love-shaped and love-driven at every layer of our human existence. That's what Paul meant when he writes in Romans 7 that the law is spiritual. That's also this depth of the law that Jesus has in mind when He teaches us in Matthew 5 that except our righteousness go deeper than or exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, we shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Now, this depth to each commandment, of course, shouldn't come as a surprise to us. It makes perfect sense in the knowledge that the law is the reflection of God's being, a transcript of His great glory, and that what we have in the 10 Commandments is the shortest exposition of this so great law of the Almighty and of His infinite glory. So, that's then the third principle, that the law is spiritual, much broader than at its face value.

Well, let's now then take up the third commandment. Am I wrong to say that you are jealous, as I am, about my [(your)] name, about me [(yourself)] as a person? Who of us likes the feeling when our name is mentioned in a negative or derogatory way or slandered? We feel offended. We feel pained. We feel humiliated or dishonored when someone does that to our name. Why? Because that name belongs to us. It's me. It's us. It's our identity, even though our name is actually only a word to distinguish me from another human being.

That's at least how most of our names are given us. But, how much more this is true for God. His name is not just given for distinction of other gods than [Himself]. His name is [a] revelation. His name is the very identity of our God and Creator, and therefore, when God reveals Himself in His names, He tells us Who He is. We are to treat that name of God with great respect.

So, in the third commandment God reveals that loving God above all with all your heart and mind and strength is that we use His name with the utmost care, with respect and reverence. So, I propose that we consider the details of the third commandment by looking at four questions. First, why is it so important to use God's name honorably? Second, what is meant with using God's name in vain? And then, thirdly, how do you do that? And fourthly, how do we use the name honorably? So, the positive side of the commandment.

So first, why is it so important to use the name of God honorably? It is because it reflects that you and I recognize Who God is, the first commandment, and what He is like, the second commandment. It is important to grasp [that] the third commandment doesn't stand in isolation [among] all ten, but that the third commandment is an outflow of the first and the second commandment. When I don't recognize Who God is, the first, [and] when I don't reflect God in my worship, the second, it will be revealed [in] how I speak about God or to God, and that's the third. Let me illustrate it.

Let's consider that I see God as some limited being, an indulgent lover, someone without any moral dimension, turning His blind eye to everything that's done wrong, or if I consider Him as an impersonal being, some force, some power, neutral, impersonal, or the opposite spectrum, I stand in awe of Him, and I consider Him like Jeremiah exclaimed, 'Who is like unto thee, Oh LORD. There is none like unto thee; thou art great. Great is thy name' (Jeremiah 10:6). And he extols God in his thinking. Now, how will that reflect that different understanding, different appreciation, different faith in God? How will that influence me in how I speak about Him, how I reference His name? You know, if God is nothing [more] than some kind of a harmless grandfather or some scarecrow in a veggie patch, why [be] concerned about His name? But if, on the other hand, I consider God to be the exalted, the holy, the almighty, the infinite Creator of the heavens and of the earth before Whose presence even sinless angels feel the need to cover themselves, this would be reflected in how I use His name. And, dishonoring the name of the Lord God has far-reaching consequences.

God added in the third commandment that those who would use His name in vain, He will not hold them guiltless. He will punish the dishonor done to His name, and that will already be experienced in this life and also hereafter. So, let's think about that. What kind of punishments will be experienced when we carelessly and consciously misuse His name? Is God only out there to protect His glorious name, or is God also thinking beyond [that to] what's going to happen to you and me when I use His name in vain? Indeed, He's thinking of that as well.

Let's think about what happens to your relationship with your father, mother, spouse, friend, when you speak [dishonorably], when you use his/her name in a dishonorable manner. What happens to the relationship? The relationship degenerates; [there comes] distance, perhaps even more. Behavior becomes bad. Now, if that happens between human and human, it also happens between God and us. And, when I dishonor the name of God in my words and deed, I vex, I offend, I grieve the Lord God. And what happens? He is going to stand back. He is going to withhold Himself. He is going to withdraw. No greater judgment can we experience in this life than when God steps away from us and withholds Himself from us.

If you read through Romans 1, you'll see that written out there, the culture of Paul's days. God gave them up. He lets them go to an increasingly wicked lifestyle, which totally destroyed itself. You see, God is concerned about what happens to us when we do not hold His name in honor. Profaning God's name is followed with a trail

of other sins in the wake. It turns our hearts [to be] calloused about and against God. It leads to a despising of His authority. It erodes the force of the solemn oaths that we swear in courts or promises we make to each other. It turns every prayer [into] an act of mockery and corrupts the entire family around us. As Jeremiah 23:10 says, "Because of swearing the whole land mourneth." So, if we sum it up, dishonoring God's name is the nurse of sin. It's the foster parent of unthankfulness, rebellion, and ungodliness. That's what God is after when He states in the third, 'Don't use my name in vain.'

So then, let's then secondly consider, what is meant exactly with using God's name in vain? The Hebrew word *vain* means frivolous, inconsiderate, irreverent. So, God commands that we express our love to Him in words that reflect that we hold Him very sacred, that we esteem Him, that He is dear to us and glorious in our eyes. So, those of us who sprinkle God's name all over in our daily conversations are not doing justice to the name of God. When we insincerely and superficially and thoughtlessly refer to God, we are breeding contempt, as familiarity can breed contempt. We would generate a casual and a careless and a commonplace attitude to the God Who is a holy being. And I agree with him who said that those who display this casual attitude towards God in the use of His name in a casual way tell us far more than any of the creeds that they adhere to. Now, we know metal by the tinkling sound when we touch it, and we know man by the way they talk about God.

Now, to guard us against such a direction, [we have] not only the third commandment, but think [also] about the Lord's Prayer, as Jesus instructs His disciples in the first petition, "Thy name be hallowed." But even in the address of the prayer, "Our Father, which art in heaven," feel the reverence, the exaltedness that we always have to keep in mind: even when we speak to our Father, He is still in heaven. And, "hallowed be thy name" is [saying], 'teach us so to live that we may do and say everything that will glorify and exalt Thy name.'

So, take a moment to reflect. None of us [would like] it when everybody around us would casually use our name like a stop word in a sentence or like an exclamation to emphasize a point you've made or when you get hurt, an expression of displeasure. We would not like that. Or if you are a parent or a teacher or any other authority figure, and those you lead refer to your name with disrespect as if you're nobody, as if you're nonexistent or [unimportant].

Now, let's therefore consider this commandment and look at how we use the name of God or even shortened forms of the name of God. Are we using it honorably? So, then how do we use His name in vain? There are mainly three ways you do that. First, by referring to or speaking dishonorably about God or even to God. Secondly, by appealing to God in a dishonorable connection. And thirdly, failing to bear His name with honor. Now, let me review those briefly.

First then, we take His name in vain when we refer to Him dishonorably. Now, the most common way is using His name like *God* or *Jesus*, or His attributes like *my goodness*, or His titles, *Oh, my Lord*, in a way that is meaningless, is empty. It has nothing to do with worship. It is just mentioned as a daily part of our speech that doesn't have anything to do with really acknowledging or honoring or worshiping Him. Now, some people are very much in the custom of saying, "Well, God bless you" or "Praise the Lord" or "Amen" without really having a sense of the seriousness and intention but using it as a phrase. So, please let's remember that, that that's not the way that our name is used or we want others to use our name. Let's also not do that to the name of God.

Now, taking His name in vain can also be done in worship time. Addressing God in prayer is a solemn thing. We're speaking to Him before Whom the angels cover themselves with a reverent attention to His glory. If I preach or I teach on His behalf, I better be conscious on Whose behalf I speak. And if I pray to Him, I better be conscious to Whom do I speak. So, flippant, casualness in speech or posture not only shows great ignorance, but it also shows disrespect of Who God is. So, let's keep in mind the thoughtless and the meaningless use of His name in our prayers and in our praises, in which we just repeat His name as a customary phrase or fill up vacancy of thought and we just use His name, or in which we fail to express our reverence and our esteem for God in the way that we pray to Him.

So, thirdly, consider that using God's name or referring to God's being in a casual or a trivial way often becomes the mother of more disrespect and blatant sins. It is often said that flippancy is the cousin to profanity. When I lose the respect, I will forget about other boundaries. And the one sin then leads to the next. Obviously, we take the name of God in vain when we curse. Mentioning God's name when I become angry or hurt myself or get a fright or want to make a strong point all fit in the category of cursing. And sadly, that is so common in our society that we hardly hear this anymore. We need to remind each other that also a sinful silence, when God's

name is taken in vain, is transgressing the third commandment. So, let us remain on guard not too quickly to excuse ourselves as if we didn't hear. For really, that reflects that we love our own name more than the name of our God and Creator.

So, we can take the name of God in vain in the area of swearing false oaths and vows. Now that's what I meant with using the name of God in a dishonorable connection. God doesn't forbid us to make oaths in the Bible. In [a] court setting, truth may be confirmed with a solemn appeal to God's knowledge. We see examples of that. Paul appealed to God in various contexts. So in swearing an oath, we honor God's being as having the power to judge between us and the other and to punish us if we are speaking a falsehood. So when in our court of law we are asked, "Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing else but truth?" and if I answer, "Yes, so help me God," that's a valid use of God's name, unless I am, obviously, dishonest or deceitful.

Scripture also records very proper examples of vows that we make in the name of the Lord. Think about Abram's servant how he vowed to Abram regarding the wife for Abraham's son, Isaac. So, a vow is completely proper as we enter into the marriage state. Those are vows we make to God and appeal to Him and to His knowledge in the sincerity of our heart, but we discredit and we dishonor the name of God when we appeal to His knowledge and power, and swear an oath or make a vow, while we are deceitful in our hearts. In civil courts, we call that perjury, and that is a serious sin and a serious dishonor of the name of God.

Now, we take the name of God in vain in blasphemy. That must be obvious. When I reproach or revile God or any of His attributes and say vile or unholy things about Him, that is a horrible sin of dishonor. Scripture records various examples of blasphemy of people against the God of Israel. Think about Pharaoh when he challenged the Lord, "Who is the Lord that I should obey his voice?" Now, it may not sound like blasphemy, but it is very much so. Or Rabshakeh when he says, "Who is the Lord that is able to deliver you out of my hand?" (Isaiah 36:20). That's a direct challenge against the God of heaven in a context that is blasphemous.

But there's one aspect of taking the name of God in vain that has nothing to do with your words. It is interesting that in the Hebrew language the word *take*, which we find [in] the third commandment in English at least, "thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain," but in the Hebrew this word is always used in the meaning of *to bear, to carry*, not just in the mouth but in a different way, that we carry the name of God. We were named by the name of God. The Israelites are often referred [to] that way: they bore the name of God. And the same of us is true as a New Testament believer. Though it was a nickname, today it is a description: Christian. We carry the name of Christ. We're marked with the name of the Triune God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Repeatedly in the Old Testament, God speaks about Israel as profaning His name when they are doing sinful things. Think of this one. Amos 2:7 refers to a horrible sin against the seventh commandment, and yet it is connected to the third. Listen to this. God rebukes the man and his father who are abusing the same maid sexually, and He adds, "to profane my name." Think of it as a person in the military who carries the name of his country, and he acts [dishonorably]. Even without words, this is an action. He takes the name of his country in dishonor. So, we as a Christian, when we reflect not the holiness and the glory of God in our life, we take the name of God in vain.

That leads us, then, to our last consideration. How do we use the name of God honorably? One of the best answers is found in the Heidelberg Catechism. And though I don't say it every lecture, I encourage you all to go take the Heidelberg Catechism or the Westminster Catechism and to read through those in connection with the commandments. Heidelberg Catechism Question 99 answers, about the third commandment, "that we use the holy name of God no otherwise than with fear and reverence, so that He may be rightly confessed and worshipped by us, and be glorified in all our words and works." Now, the brief version of those words is that in all you do and say, you may reflect the character of God as revealed in His name.

So, when we think about Jesus's expectation in Matthew 5:16, "Let your light so shine that the people may see your works and glorify [your Father]," that's the third commandment then. That reflects the glory of His name in how we live, in what we do. And so, they may see the glory of God the Father. Anyone who bears the name Christian, who as a son or daughter of the Father, acts or speaks in a Godlike manner is honoring the third commandment. When we are reviled, and we revile not back but meekly take it and turn the other cheek, when we genuinely pray for the persecutor, we bear out the name of God and honor Him.

So, exploring the details of these commandments, [they] are kind of like a spiritual x-ray, aren't they? They reveal many aspects of our life in which we fail to devotionally love the Lord our God. And why are we to look so deeply into the law and let the law look so deeply in us? Heidelberg Catechism Question 115 give us a very good answer, which I would like to read. Why look so deeply in the law? "So that all our lifetime we may more and more know our sinful nature, and thus become the more earnest in seeking forgiveness of sin and righteousness in Christ; and likewise, that we constantly endeavor and pray to God for the grace of the Holy Spirit, that we may become more and more conformable to the image of God, till we arrive at the perfection proposed to us in the life to come." Let's therefore pray that as we look at this exposition of every commandment that God's Holy Spirit will not only reveal what it paints but will convict our hearts and sanctify our lives.

And therefore, let's close together by thinking of the words of Jude, which are encouraging. The closing doxology in Jude's epistle [is] encouraging to those of us who feel the stress of how we fail even in this third commandment. Jude writes, "Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and forever. Amen." Thank you. May God bless these words.