

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

This evening we continue our study on God’s Law, The Ten Commandments. Last week, the First Commandment instructed our hearts to have a perfect fear, love, and trust in God. You see, trust in God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit is the foundation for our life and every Commandment.

The First Commandment is all about our hearts – where we place our trust. This evening, we move to our mouths and tongues – the Second Commandment. So, how does your mouth show what’s in your heart? How does your tongue confess the trust of your heart?

God commands us: ***“You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain”*** (Exodus 20:7a). To this, Luther says in his Large Catechism: *“It means misusing the name when we call upon the Lord God – no matter how – in order to deceive or do wrong of any kind.”*

For several centuries before Christ’s Incarnation, as a way to not break this Commandment, Jews developed a prohibition against vocalizing the divine Name of God known as the “Tetragrammaton,” the Hebrew four letter name “YHWH.”

Even to this day, pious Jews continue avoiding the divine Name when reading the Hebrew Scriptures and instead vocalize “Adonai,” meaning “Lord,” as a substitute. The thought was that by not vocalizing the divine Name, there are fewer opportunities to misuse it. This practice has continued in English Bible translations where the word “Lord” replaces “YHWH.” Now, nothing in the Scriptures prohibits Christians from vocalizing the divine Name, but Christians have been influenced by this Jewish tradition. Is this what God means by *“You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain”*? Not exactly. You see, we are not to avoid His Name, but we are to speak His Name, just not in vain.

The Apostle Paul writes: ***“If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved”*** (Romans 10:9-10).

Did you see how the heart and tongue are tied together? What you trust in your heart comes out what you say with your mouth. And what you say with your mouth reveals what you trust in your heart. In fact, God takes this Commandment so seriously that He adds a threat to it: ***“For the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain”*** (Exodus 20:7).

So, when you curse, swear, use satanic arts, lie, or deceive by God’s Name, you are using God’s Name in an empty or frivolous way.

First, what does God mean by “Name”? Jesus commands His disciples to baptize ***“in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit”*** (Matthew 28:19). Is this what God means by “Name”? Well, the “Name” is not the titles “Father,” “Son,” and “Holy Spirit,” but the singular divine Name that these Three Persons of the one God share. Jesus revealed to us the mystery of YHWH to be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The oneness of the Persons is taught in their sharing of the same Name. The Apostle Paul understands that the crucified and risen Jesus possesses the divine Name because that is ***“the name that is above every name,”*** at which ***“every knee should bow”*** (Philippians 2:9-10).

So, the Name is YHWH, the One God in three Persons: the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. But how might we take the name of the Lord your God in vain?

We often use God’s Name to cover up our wrongdoing when we say: “God forgives me” not of repentance, but only to cover up our sin. How often do we cover up our sin? How often do we choose not to confess the sin, but try to gloss over it and forget about it?

How often do you dress yourself with God’s Name claiming to be right? “God said I could!” How often do we try to justify and lie by calling on God’s Name and using His Name as a cloak for our shame? I have heard many say: “I am doing the work of God” when they are promoting sin and vice.

In the same way, Christians are to avoid flippant use of any names or titles for God in interjections such as “O my God!” Or for those who text: “OMG.” Or using “Jesus Christ” as an interjection. Instead, we are to hallow God’s Name by confessing Jesus as Lord and worship Him.

Remember, ***“the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His Name in vain”*** (Exodus 20:7b). But the promise is greater than the threat. Not only does God tell us what not to do with His Name, but He also tells us what to do. And this is a wonderful, gracious, and merciful invitation. God gives you His Name for you to use.

You see, God wants you to call upon His Name in trouble. He says: ***“Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me”*** (Psalm 50:15). God says, “Here is My Name. I want you to have it and use it well. Call upon Me, because I want to deliver you and help you.”

You see, when you are in any trouble – *whether it is doubt, despair, or sickness* – God promises to deliver you. And when He delivers you, He does it for His honor and glory. So, we can say, “Lord God, protect me!” and “Help me, dear Lord Jesus!”

Now, sin is our true trouble. And when you call upon God for rescue from sin, He always delivers you from your trouble of sin. He doesn’t do this just because you called Him. He does this because of Jesus, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world. That’s why God the Father sent His only Son to the cross. Jesus bore and honored God’s Name for you. Jesus was cursed to remove the curse from you. Jesus Himself called upon His Father to deliver you from eternal trouble: ***“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”*** (Luke 23:34). Because of Jesus, we are forgiven.

Another way we keep God’s Name is by calling upon His Name in praise and thanksgiving. We keep His Name as we give thanksgiving to Him at meals and other prayers. We give praise and thanksgiving to His Name by simply responding to His life-giving Word by confessing with our tongues to others of the forgiveness and salvation we have in Jesus. Also, here in the Church’s liturgy, we praise the Lord through speaking the Gloria Patri to which we confess that it is YHWH who is praised in none other than the one God who has revealed Himself to be the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit as we say, “Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit.”

You see, in our liturgy, God graciously teaches us how to call upon Him. Here, God tenderly invites us to pray, praise, and give thanks.

God teaches us how to use His Name by honoring His Name and keeping His Name constantly on our lips. So, true honor to God and His Name is that we use our mouths to call upon Him for our needs and in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

**+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +**