

*A*polo*gia*: His Reputation Speaks for Itself—The Second Commandment

By Billy Newell

Introduction

When is the last time you heard God's name? Really, when was it? Most often, this question brings a response like, "Last night during the latest episode of Extreme Home Makeover. I heard it about thirty times when they moved the bus." You might have heard it when someone was in a fit of rage and blurted out, "God d@#\$ it." Or, you may be among the few who heard someone give thanks to God in a random realization of their gratitude. All of these scenarios, and many more, are directly related to the second commandment. What does it mean to say, "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord our God?"

Scripture Connect

The name of God comes to us in Exodus 3:13-14.

Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" 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.'" (ESV)

"I AM" suggests that God's name encompasses all that He is, and was, and is to come. The character of God is the essence of His name. God's reputation speaks for itself. We are talking about the God who creates, restores, heals, loves, and saves, but we are also talking about the God who is just, holy, righteous, and worthy to judge. Breaking the second commandment brings with it the righteous judgment of God as it is written in Exodus 20:7.

"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." (ESV)

God has revealed His name to us with His very character and He has also made it clear that He does not approve of those who intentionally or unintentionally taint His character, or His name. Knowing that God's name is His very character broadens our view of misusing His name. Not only does it command us to speak the name of God with fear and love, but it also commands us to speak of God with fear and love.

Scripture doesn't leave us in the dark when it comes to using the name of God correctly. Psalm 50:15 tells us to "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me." Jesus took these words to heart as He prayed to the Father in the Garden of Gethsemane. Psalm 118:1 puts it this way, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless His holy name!" The Apostle Paul frequently glorified God's name in his letters, as he did in Ephesians 5:10 by writing, "Giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Scripture makes it very clear that there is an appropriate context for the name of God.

Doctrinal Quotation

Many times we look at the commandments and focus on the things that they prohibit. Don't do this and don't do that. This is not a bad practice, but there is more to the commandments than sitting around trying not to do things. Martin Luther compelled many Christians to think about the positive commands that were bound to the commandments.

“Therefore, since we are forbidden here to use his holy name in support of falsehood and wickedness, it follows, conversely, that we are commanded to use it in the service of truth and of all that is good...” (Large Catechism, paragraph 64)

It is not enough to refrain from doing wrong by the second commandment. We ought to do everything we can to glorify God, keeping His name holy (set apart).

Application

As Christians, we bear the name of God all of the time. Our words should certainly be affected by the second commandment, but we also represent the name of God as we live out our lives. Practically speaking, our actions continue to speak louder than our words. Too often, I hear my youth continually use the name of God carelessly. I’ve noticed that they don’t always understand how important the name of God is, above every other name. When I realize that they need to understand the significance of using God’s name carelessly, I tell them a little story about a baseball game.

Imagine sitting at a baseball game. The fans are being fanatics, the players are being entertaining, and the peanut guy is being the servant to the fans. One young man decides that the players are not entertaining enough and begins to unleash his boredom onto the “servant of the fans.” He yells, “Peanut guy, over here” and then sinks down into his chair. The “servant of the fans” quickly rushes over to serve the fan who called out, but does not see who yelled his name. The young man ignored the “servant of the fans” and chuckled as he walked away disappointed. Each time the young man repeated his little trick, the “servant of the fans” quickly ran over to find that the fan who called him ignored him.

In the same way, the “Servant of all people” hears those who call on His name. The “Servant of all” loves His people and is quick to serve, but He often finds His people ignoring Him after they carelessly use His name. It is easy to see that the young man in the story above was mistreating the “servant of the fans,” yet it seems to be extremely difficult for God’s people to see that they are mistreating God.

Fortunately for us and our youth, the name of God also tells us that He is a merciful counselor, mighty to save. His name reveals the God who brought His people out of Egypt. His name reveals the God who is called the crucified one who died atoning for the sins of the world. His name reveals the God who is called the resurrected one who rises victorious over sin, death, and the devil. Can you see the significance of the name of God? So can your youth. They may just be waiting for you to share it with them.

May the name of God be forever on the lips of His children, as they give Him all honor and praise. May the character of God forever shine forth as His children live lives that bring Him glory. May the grace of God be forever poured out on His children as they look to the name of Christ for hope.