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Exodus 20

*“Don’t Shame God’s Name”*

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The third Commandment teaches us how to treat the name of God. Names are important, especially in the times of the Bible. A person’s name reflected something about their character and reputation from birth. If something significant were to happen in their lifetime their given name was sometimes changed by God to reflect their new character. For example, in the Old Testament Jacob’s name was changed to Israel,<sup>1</sup> and in the New Testament Saul’s name was changed to Paul.<sup>2</sup> In addition to changing some names, God promises a new name to believers that will be written on a white stone.<sup>3</sup>

It is clear that God is into names. So when it comes to his own name it’s no wonder he commands: *“You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.”*<sup>4</sup> His name is to be revered. God’s name expresses his character and his reputation. Anytime you misuse the name of the Lord you malign, devalue, and dishonor the character and reputation of God. God wants us to treat his name with a holy reverence because his name is an expression of his character and reputation. God’s name is to be set apart<sup>5</sup> as a holy name.

The Lord first introduces his proper name in his conversation with Moses from the burning bush.<sup>6</sup> In his name, Yahweh, God declares himself as “the self-existent one

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<sup>1</sup> [Genesis 35:10](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Acts 13:9](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Revelation 2:7](#) God will individually give to believers a name that describes who they are in him.

<sup>4</sup> See [Exodus 20:7](#)

<sup>5</sup> In [Matthew 6](#) the Greek word *hagiazō*, which means “to consecrate or set apart as holy”, is used to describe how the name of God is to be revered.

<sup>6</sup> [Exodus 3:13-14](#)

who is self-determining and sovereign.” He needs nothing or no one. God reveals himself by more than 350 names and title throughout the Bible.<sup>7</sup>

Jesus also asserts his divinity by applying titles used of God to himself. In [John 8:56-58](#) he uses the same “I AM” name of Yahweh that God uses of himself in the burning bush with Moses. By naming himself in a variety of ways God graciously accommodates himself to our thinking. So many names are necessary in order to convey the vastness of his character and reputation. Because of the immeasurable greatness of who he is, he wants us to treat his name with reverence and respect.

The third commandment does not forbid the uttering of the name of God,<sup>8</sup> it forbids misusing, maligning, defaming, or devaluing his name. There are three typical ways in which this commandment is broken: blasphemy, perjury, and hypocrisy.

### Blasphemy

1. Blasphemy is the most obvious way that people break the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment.
  - a. Blasphemy is most often expressed through cursing and profanity. God often gets blamed for many things that are not his doing.
  - b. Blasphemy is also expressed through slang. A seemingly innocent saying can reduce the magnificence of the name of God to that of a common, casual expression such as “holy cow” or “good grief”.
  - c. The Mosaic Law condemned blasphemy as a capital offense.<sup>9</sup> It was also viewed as a capital offense in Colonial America.<sup>10</sup> The penalties in Colonial America ranged from six months imprisonment to being hanged.

### Perjury

2. Perjury is another way that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment is broken. This commandment is not a prohibition against taking oaths<sup>11</sup> or swearing to tell the truth.
  - a. When Jesus said that we should not swear by heaven or earth<sup>12</sup> he meant that an honest man doesn’t need to pad his word because an honest man’s word should be trustworthy by itself. An honest man does not have to invoke the name of God to bolster his creditability.

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<sup>7</sup> An example of some of those names are *Yahweh Yireh*, which means the Lord who Provides and is found in [Genesis 22:14](#). Another example is *El Shaddai*, which means God Almighty and is found in [Genesis 17:1](#).

<sup>8</sup> Many Jews today believe that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment is a prohibition against uttering the name of God.

<sup>9</sup> [Leviticus 24:15-16](#)

<sup>10</sup> *An Act against Atheism and Blasphemy* as enacted in 1697.

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:An\\_Act\\_against\\_Atheism\\_and\\_Blasphemy\\_-\\_Mass\\_Bay\\_Colony\\_1697.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:An_Act_against_Atheism_and_Blasphemy_-_Mass_Bay_Colony_1697.jpg)

<sup>11</sup> [Deuteronomy 6:13](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Matthew 5:34 - 37](#)

- b. Lying violates the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment. Breaking the covenant we make before God in marriage violates this Commandment. However, it is important to remember that God is gracious enough to forgive any and all of our sins.

### Hypocrisy

3. As a “Christian”, you carry the name of Christ. Whenever your behavior does not match your belief you are guilty of breaking the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment because you have maligned the name of God that you carry.
  - a. In [Romans 2:21-24](#) the author, Paul, exhorts Christians to live their lives in such a way as to bring honor to God.
  - b. Hypocrisy is one of the biggest faults of the Pharisees that Jesus pointed out.

When our lives bring reproach upon the name of the Lord and worship him with our lips but not our lives we break the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment. This Commandment should be a sobering warning against doing anything that would malign, misuse, dishonor, or disrespect the name of God, which is his character and reputation. Do not forget the way the Commandment ends, “. . . *for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.*”<sup>13</sup>

### Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [Exodus 20:7](#) to provide an overview for this study.
3. Discuss times when God has revealed himself to you by one of his covenant names.
  - a. For example, as your provider (Yahweh Yireh) or as your peace (Yahweh Shalom) or as your healer (Yahweh Rapha).
4. Spend time discussing some of the instances of people having their names changed in the Bible. Discuss the circumstances that surrounded their lives. What was the effect did this have on their lives? How were they different, before and after?
  - a. Abram to Abraham
  - b. Sarai to Sarah

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<sup>13</sup> [Exodus 20:7](#)

- c. Jacob to Israel
  - d. Simon to Peter
  - e. Saul to Paul
5. What effect has culture had on the concept of a names or significance value over time? How has this specifically influenced out Western view of the name of God?
    - a. Discuss the change that has occurred specifically in America over the past few hundred years. (See footnote #9)
    - b. Influence of Media, Music, and Televisions.
    - c. Can this be changed?
  6. How have instances of blasphemy affected members of the group personally? Perjury? Hypocrisy?
    - a. What has been the result of those occurrences?
    - b. How have they avoided repeating them in the future?
  7. What is another angle blasphemy can be understood from in light of Jesus remarks about blaspheming the Holy Spirit found in [Mark 3:28-29](#)?
  8. Recite the 10 Commandments together as a group.
    - i. You shall have no other gods before me
    - ii. You shall not make for yourself an idol
    - iii. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God
    - iv. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy
    - v. Honor your father and mother
    - vi. You shall not murder
    - vii. You shall not commit adultery
    - viii. You shall not steal
    - ix. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor
    - x. You shall not covet anything that belongs to your neighbor
  9. Close your time in prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to help each person: live in such a way as to bring honor to the name of God; to honor him with their lips and their lives; and to recognize things in their lives that might dishonor the name of God.

\* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).