



THE GOD WHOSE NAME IS HOLY

UNDERSTANDING AND APPLYING THE THIRD COMMANDMENT IN DAILY LIFE

This study explores the meaning of the third commandment (Exodus 20:7) according to Scriptures and to available sources; and the principles on how every Christians can apply this commandment in daily life.

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Introduction:

In the Mountain of Sinai, God descended upon the mountain and spoke to Moses. Then he gave the two tablets of stone where the ten commandments are inscribed for His nation Israel to establish their relationship with God, and for them to live in accordance with the will of God – the God of their ancestors. This tablet of commandments will serve as their guide.

The third commandment which is the focus of our discussion is found in **Exodus 20:7**, it says, *“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.”* (ESV¹). This verse which is the third commandment is often quoted but usually misunderstood. In the Jewish point of view, they revere the name of God for it represents God’s nature and attributes, the totality of His being, and especially His glory. Using the name of God in vain was a serious offense against His holiness and covenant relationship with His people.

Today, Christians still understand this command as not to use the name of God in cursing, but its full meaning and the more deep and practical application are still unclear to some. Many believers still don’t understand what it truly means to take the name of God in vain, especially in today’s world where God’s name is often treated without reverence, misused in oaths, or to misused about somethings that doesn’t reflect His character according to Scripture and to misrepresent God as Him but doesn’t reflect is biblical attributes. This issue touches on worship, integrity, and witness not just in speech.

This study explores the meaning of the third commandment (Exodus 20:7) according to Scriptures and to available sources; and the principles on how every Christians can apply this commandment in daily life. This seeks to deepen the understanding of God’s holiness and the reverence that God want for His people.

¹ English Standard Version

The Name of the LORD

Yahweh

God reveals His name to Moses when He called him in the wilderness at the mountain of Horeb in the appearance of the burning bush. God commanded Moses to free his nation Israel from slavery in Egypt, 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?”* (Exodus 3:13), Then God reveals His name to him, “I AM WHO I AM.” – the Hebrew verb **הָיָה** (*hyh*, “to be”) in a first-person imperfect form (**הָיִהְיֶה**, *ehyeh*) and is separated by the relative pronoun **אֲשֶׁר** (*asher*, “which/who”), which mean *“I will Be who I will be”*², this means that He is the one who is and who will be. His existence doesn’t depend on anyone or anything else, He is simply “IS”. But it will be kind of strange for Moses to say to Israel *“‘I will be’ has sent me to you”*. Only God can say *“I will be”* - **הָיִהְיֶה**, *ehyeh*³. Therefore, God said in His next sentence in Exodus 3:15 *“So you must say to the Israelites, ‘Yahweh, the God of your ancestors, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. This is my name forever, and this is my remembrance from generation to generation.’ (LEB⁴)”*. God reveals His name to Moses as **YHWH** (**יְהוָה**, *yhwh*) the personal name of the God of Israel, the supreme being the creator of heaven and earth – The God of all creation.

² W.K. Bechtold III, *“I Am Who I Am,”* in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

³ BibleProject, The Lord's Name (Exodus 20:7), YouTube video, 6:37, December 9, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eLrGM26pmM0>.

⁴ Lexham English Bible

LORD (in all capital letters)

Over the centuries, Israelites wanted to honor the sacred divine name of God, as they fear to put His name in ‘*vain*’ they stop saying his name **Yahweh**. Instead, they started saying the Hebrew word for ‘Lord’ which is ‘Adonai’ – the meaning of all capital letters ‘LORD’⁵. Many writers adopted this practice and instead of writing down Yahweh, they wrote down all capital letter “LORD” as it indicates that this is the name of God Yahweh. That is why we have in different translation in in the word Lord in Exodus 20:7, like the ESV which translated the word Yahweh as **LORD**, compared to the LEB which translates the real meaning of behind the word **LORD** as **YAHWEH**. This the comparison Exodus 20:7 in the two translations,

English Standard Version	Lexham English Bible
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. ⁶	⁷ “You shall not misuse the name of Yahweh your God, because Yahweh will not leave unpunished <i>anyone</i> who misuses his name. ⁷

We just don’t have to be confused with the word ‘Lord’ in the bible in small letters ‘ord’, in Hebrew is ‘*adon*’ which means lord or master. This word refers to people like kings, master of a servant or even shepherd over his sheep and sometimes it refers to God as our master and to our Lord and God Jesus Christ⁸.

⁵ BibleProject, The Lord's Name (Exodus 20:7), YouTube video, 6:37, December 9, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eLrGM26pmM0>.

⁶ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Ex 20:7.

⁷ W. Hall Harris III et al., eds., *The Lexham English Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012), Ex 20:7.

⁸ BibleProject, The Lord's Name (Exodus 20:7), YouTube video, 6:37, December 9, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eLrGM26pmM0>.

Jesus

The Name of God in Jesus' name. In the narrative of John's Gospel, He has so much record of Jesus claims as God and his many words of "I am". One of the accounts that Jesus claims to be God according to John is in the chapter 8 verse 58 of the gospel of John where Jesus said, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."* (ESV), While he was speaking to the Jews and the Pharisees. In this passage, Jesus is claiming to be God. First, when He said, "before Abraham was", Abraham's life had a starting point because he lived within time. He was born and had a beginning. But Jesus is different. His life didn't have a beginning or an end. He exists from eternity past to eternity future. That's why He used the phrase ἐγώ εἰμι, which means "I am," a way of showing that His existence is eternal and not limited by time⁹; Second, is the way He use the word "I am". Jesus' use of ἐγώ εἰμι (egō eimi) in the absolute sense ("I am") draws on Exodus 3:14 and other Old Testament passages where the phrase clearly refers to God. In using the expression, Jesus seems to be explicitly identifying Himself as Yahweh, declaring His eternality, self-existence, and changelessness, and claiming to bear Yahweh's presence on Earth. Jesus employs this absolute sense of ἐγώ εἰμι (egō eimi) in the Gospels, particularly in the Gospel of John¹⁰; Finally, Jesus is claiming to be God and the Jews understood what He is declaring in front of them in John 8:58, this explains why the Jews *'picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple'* (John 8:59, ESV). They understood that Jesus is identifying himself as Yahweh the God of Israel. They picked up stone, for Death by stoning was the prescribed punishment for blasphemy (Lev 24:16)¹¹.

⁹ Marvin Richardson Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1887), 181.

¹⁰ Jeffrey E. Miller, "I Am Sayings," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

¹¹ John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), Jn 8:59.

Holy Spirit

Therefore, using the name of Jesus in vain applies the third commandment which is in Exodus 20:7, the same level of seriousness when the name of Yahweh is put into senselessness. The same as the third person of the Trinity - The Holy Spirit is God, as Jesus and the Father is God. The Holy Spirit is evident as God in Matthew 28:19, for it is spoken by Jesus in the same level of authority and power as the Son (Jesus) and the Father. As he said, *“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the **Holy Spirit**” (ESV)*. One of the most convincing statement about the Holy Spirit as God is can be seen in the Book of Acts chapter 5 verses 1 to 11, where in verse 3, when the Apostle Peter said to Ananias, *“Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the **Holy Spirit** and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land?” (ESV)*; and to his wife, *“How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord?” (Acts 5:9, ESV)*, concluded that Ananias *“have not lied to man but to God” (Acts 5:4, ESV)*. Peter reveals that the Holy Spirit is God. Lying to the Holy Spirit is lying to God.¹²

Is there any other god than Yahweh? Of course there is none. Therefore, the title **God** only belongs to God himself the owner, the maker of everything, the one whom is to revere and is to be honor and the only worthy of worship. Any title in the scripture that describes any of the persons of the trinity is part of God's name. All the title that refers to His attribute and character must but be use with reverence to Him alone, and using those in *vain, the **LORD** will not hold him guiltless*.

¹² Got Questions Ministries, "Is the Holy Spirit God?" GotQuestions.org, accessed July 16, 2025, <https://www.gotquestions.org/is-the-Holy-Spirit-God.html>.

What does it mean to take the name of God in vain?

“You shall not misuse the name of Yahweh your God” (LEB) prohibits hypocritical, insincere, or senseless use of God’s name. The Hebrew phrase combines the verb *nasa* (“to take up”) and the noun *shawe* (“falsehood” or “vanity, uselessness”). God takes personal offense to any affiliation or association with Him that belittle His character or reputation¹³. People take the name of God in vain when it is misused, used without reverence, and when they speak about God that does not reflect the truth about God.

Common Ways People Misuse or Dishonor the name of God

Disrespecting the name of God

“Whoever blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him.” (Lev 24:16, ESV). Blasphemy is an act or expression that slanders or disrespects God or sacred things, whether verbally or through some profane action.

Swearing by The Name of God

Matt 5:33-37, The reference of what Jesus’ said in this verse – *“Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, ‘You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.’”* Is from Lev 19:12, and this law in Leviticus is also from the idea in Exo 20:7, to not put the name of God in vain. profane Refers to treating something as though it were not holy. In this context, failing to keep

¹³ John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), Ex 20:7.

oaths made in God's name is a way of profaning His name¹⁴. That is why Jesus said in Matt 5:33-37, do not take oath and use holy things as a witness, instead practice honesty without the use of oath.

Spoke Falsely on behalf of God

Deut 18:20, *"the prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that same prophet shall die."* Preaching behind the pulpit is speaking to God's people on behalf of God, a preacher teaches what the Scripture had said and what it means. Failing to do so is to misrepresent God on behalf of His people.

Claiming to be a Christian but Continually Disobeying Christ's Commandments

In the early Church era, the believers are called Christians because of their faith and dedication to the gospel of Jesus proclaiming that he is the Christ¹⁵ – The Messiah, The Savior. The title Christian was embedded to the early believers, because the world know that they are the disciples of Jesus, that is something that people have forgotten in these days. People claimed they are Christians because they attend church, they say they read the bible, they know John 3:16, these people are the people whom Jesus rebuked in His time on earth. The legalistic kind of religion, living more in practices and tradition, but neglecting the reason why they do what they are doing. That is the sad reality that faced by many churches today. My point on saying these things is, because of our legalistic culture in the Philippines, we forgot that, whenever we claim that we are Christians because of our legalistic religion and forget to live according to the will of God, people mocked God for they can't see Christ in us. When people mock us for being Christian but not in our testimony, people mock Christ. Therefore, we put the title of Jesus Christ in vain by claiming we are Christian according to religion but not in relationship to Christ. If we are living in this world as ambassador of God, and not living as citizen of heaven, we are putting the

¹⁴ John D. Barry et al., Faithlife Study Bible (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), Le 19:12.

¹⁵ English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Acts 11:19–26.

name of Christ into shame. It's tragic story, if people will talk about us and shaming Christ because of us. If we are living like this, we are living in shame before God.

Live Without Shame Before God

Paul commanded Timothy, *“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15, ESV)*. As people who believed in Christ as Lord, God and Savior. Consider yourself as a person who is not ashamed living according to the word of truth, preaching the word in truth, and presenting yourself to God without shame.

Live in Reverence to God Because of the Gospel of Christ

Remember these my brothers and sisters, as we live in this world, we are supposed to live according to the purpose of our creator. The greatest reason for us to live in reverence of God in the name of Jesus Christ is to always remember – God created us according to His purpose. Despite of our sin and for not acknowledging God as who He is, as what He revealed to us in His creation and in our hearts – despite of all the serious offences humanity has done to God, Jesus our Lord came down to earth lived a righteous life, lived in full obedience to God, even being hanged on the cross to die. Jesus our Lord died on the cross for His obedience to the Father, to pay the penalty of the sin of those who will believe in Him, and as How Jesus Christ died on the cross and resurrected on the third day, all of us who believe may die on our sin, and live a new resurrected life as we hoped for the promise of our Lord, God, and Savior Jesus Christ that we will live eternally in His presence and will have victory over sin and death.

Live Continually for Christ as Lord

In whatever you do, always remember what Paul said to the Church in Collosae, *“whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” (Col 3:17)*. Whatever you do in this world do your best to do everything in the name of our Lord

Jesus. We live as if we do it for our Master. Paul always uses the word '*Lord*' to Jesus to present Him as Master to us, and to always see ourselves as how Paul sees himself in front of Christ¹⁶ - **servant**. Jesus Christ is the Lord of our life, for we are saved through Him and He bought us with such a precious price – His blood. Therefore, He is worthy to be honored as our master in everything we do. Whether we eat or drink.

Live in Everything You Do for The Glory of God

We do it for the glory of God. In the smallest practice of what we do in our daily lives, we do it to honor God, even as we eat or drink (1 Cor 10:31, ESV). For the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever¹⁷. When we appreciate even the small things that God has done for us, we glorify God. The appreciation and thanksgiving to God before we eat our meal, and before we drink our juice, will set our joy for even the small things that God gave to us. And as we live on it daily, many people will notice the difference of a grateful believer of Christ to this world. This curiosity that will build to people as we live faithfully before God, honoring God as Lord and glorifying Him in front of them will not just bring glory to God but will also be a springboard to speak out the Gospel to people. Imagine this while you are just being faithful to God honoring His holy name in in doing good works because of your worship and reverence to God, you are also living as an instrument of hope to other people, leading them to put their hope also to God.

Conclusion

God's name is holy, it deserves to be worship, adore, praise, revered and glorified in everything we say that'll display of His personal character. Everything that we do as a representative of God matters to Him, for we are carrying His name before us. Therefore, let this world gave you the title Christian as

¹⁶ Romans 1:1

¹⁷ The Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647), Q. 1, "What is the chief end of man?"

you live your faith, honoring God as you live your life to the fullest in satisfaction of what God has done to you. Brothers and sisters, we honor His holy name when we satisfy our selves with His glory. The more we satisfy ourselves to Him as we live our faith in our community, work or school; the more we brought curiosity to the people who witnesses the outpouring of our love to the one who saves us, and the more we build a greater opportunity to share the Gospel to people. May the great reason for our hope be the words that this world hears from us not be the reason to despise God because of us, so they may also glorify God, whose name is holy.