

Exodus 20: 7 – The Ten Commandments, part 3: “You shall not take the Lord’s name in vain.”¹



Main point: If you wear God’s name, wear it well, in a way that accurately reflects God’s character.

Open with a short prayer, inviting God to teach us.

Background: Moses and the people of Israel have just escaped from hundreds of years of slavery in Egypt. *How did they escape? What miracle did God do to get them out and over the Red Sea?*

God parted the Red Sea! And when the Egyptians tried to follow to get the Hebrews back, the seas flowed back in and the Egyptians were destroyed. Amazing show of God’s power and provision for his people.

- The first commandment: “Thou shalt have no other God before me.” God says: You’re my number one, because I saved you from slavery and made you my special people. Therefore, make ME number one for you.
- The second commandment: Don’t make an image of me. Don’t try to create me in YOUR image, to do what YOU want. Trust me and follow me as I am.

Study: Exodus 20: 7

“You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.”

1. *So: What is the third commandment?*
 - a. “You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain.”
 - b. *I wonder what that means? How would you rephrase it?*
 - i. Don’t misuse the name of God.
 - ii. Don’t swear/use curse words. (That’s what most people think this commandment means.)
2. *Why is cussing (cursing) and swearing unpleasant?*
 - a. Ugly, hurtful language; harms civility, kindness
3. *Let’s go a little deeper into this, because maybe this commandment is about more than just ugly words. Think about when you talk about your kids, or your parents, or your spouse. How do you talk about them when they’re not around? How do you talk about them when they ARE around?*
 - a. Lovingly, respectfully, truthfully
 - b. Not mean, not gossipy, not hurtfully
4. *What does doing something “in vain” mean? For example, “I tried to fix my car, but it was all in vain” or “I wanted to swim across the English Channel, but it was a vain effort because I’m out of shape.”*
 - a. There’s no meaning to it; useless, dumb, not real; didn’t work at all.
5. *So why would God not want his name used in vain? What does God’s name represent?*
 - a. We’re in a relationship with God. God’s name has purpose and meaning as real as a person! God’s name represents His very being; his love, compassion, power, judgment.
 - b. Don’t use God’s name casually or frivolously; You wouldn’t use your spouse’s or child’s name uselessly, would you?

¹ Some material gratefully borrowed from Fellowship Monrovia: <https://madeforfellowship.com/>

6. *But perhaps there's even more to this commandment. When you call something by its name, what does it do in your mind? For example: If you call something an orange, what do you picture? What taste do you expect if you eat it? If you call something an apple, what does that make you think about? What do you expect it will taste like? [If possible, hold up an orange and an apple in turn; encourage people to describe what each is like.]*
 - a. The name of something creates expectation and understanding of what that thing IS: how it acts, what its characteristics are. An orange is not an apple. An apple is not an orange.
7. *When you got married, did you "take" a different name, such as your husband's last name? What does it mean to you when you take, or carry, a family name, whether the name you grew up with or another family name by marriage? What sorts of things does your family name represent?*
 - a. Culture, history, religion, traditions, attitudes, morals, expectations
8. *So: If we call ourselves followers of God, whose name do we carry?*
 - a. God's! We are adopted into God's family.
9. *So what should it LOOK LIKE, for us to "take," to carry God's name? When you carry someone's name, what's the responsibility with that?*
 - a. An expectation of reflecting the reality, the truth of that name, like an orange or an apple.
 - b. Act like the person whose name you carry! In this case, act the way God's name represents about God.
10. *What does "name dropping" mean?*
 - a. Using someone's name to make yourself look impressive by association – but there's not really a depth of relationship there.
11. *Does this ever happen with God's name? Do people use God's name, call themselves Christian or followers of God, but their lives reflect otherwise? Lives that don't reflect the reality of God's character that we see in scripture?*
 - a. Unfortunately, yes... all throughout history, harm and scandalous things done "in the name of God."
 - b. If we're tossing around God's name, it's like name dropping without the relationship; using his name without reflecting the reality of God's glory, morals, love, compassion, and peace.
12. *In this commandment, "do not take the name of the Lord in vain," God says: "wear my name well."*
 - a. Don't use / wear my name in vain: uselessly, falsely.
 - b. Don't be fruit that tastes bad or wrong or unexpected when someone bites into it.
 - c. Wear God's name in a way that reflects the truth of God and brings glory to God.
13. *Where do we struggle to wear God's name well, to reflect godliness?*
 - a. Forgiveness
 - b. Speaking gently and truthfully
 - c. Being patient
 - d. Loving everyone

Summary of The Ten Commandments: A love letter! A call to *love*, not a burden of law. A beautiful invitation to relationship with God and each other.

- Ask for any prayer requests for today.
- Close in prayer, naming people and needs listed.
- End with a song, e.g., first verse of Amazing Grace

The Ten Commandments

Exodus 20: 1-17: And God spoke all these words, saying,

² “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

³ “You shall have no other gods before me.

⁴ “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath ...

⁷ “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain

⁸ “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor, and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your male servant, or your female servant, or your livestock, or the sojourner who is within your gates....

¹² “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

¹³ “You shall not murder.

¹⁴ “You shall not commit adultery.

¹⁵ “You shall not steal.

¹⁶ “You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.

¹⁷ “You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male servant, or his female servant, or his ox, or his donkey, or anything that is your neighbor’s.”