

Today we are looking at the Second Commandment, which, of course, we should all know by heart: "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God." Or as I'm sure some of you remember it: "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain." Exodus 20, verse 7 goes on to say: "For the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain." So what is meant by God's name, then? What does it mean to misuse it or to take it in vain? Why does the Lord judge us so harshly for misusing it? And how then should we use his name? Those are all questions that we need to consider that will help us to look at this commandment.

So first of all, what is meant by God's name? Names to us are usually just names, right? I have my name. You have your name. And that's all that it is. If I was called by some other name, I might still be who I am. Yeah, it might have some family significance. It might be something special. But a name is just a name. That's how we tend to look at them. Is that what we mean by God's name? Is God's name just what we happen to call him, so that we could call him by some other name and still be talking about the same God?

Not at all, actually, because God's name is so much more than this. God's name is everything that he is, and it is everything that he does. It's like if we were to say about someone "they have a good name," we mean they have a good reputation. They have a reputation for doing lots of good things. God's name is the same way. God's name is everything which is connected to him. Take, for example, Romans chapter 10, where Paul says this: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." So calling on his name means that we call on him as our Savior. God's name includes our salvation. If it was just his name by which we just happened to call him, then calling on that name would have no power. We couldn't be saved by it. But because God's name includes what he does for us in saving us through his Son, that's how we are saved. God's name includes our salvation. Or take Psalm 124, which says this: "Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth." So God's name includes him helping us. It includes his power, his ability, his willingness to save us. Because when we call on his name in the midst of all of our troubles, he will deliver us, just as he has promised to do. Or one more example from 1 Kings chapter 8, where Solomon says: "Now it was in the heart of David my father to build a house for the name of the Lord, the God of Israel." So God is wherever his name is. That's why Solomon built a temple to his name, because when God's name was there, God would be there as well. That's why we start our worship services, especially on Sunday morning, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, because God is wherever his name is just as he has promised to be. So we can see, then, Christians from the Scriptures that God's name is everything about him. God's name includes who he is and what he does.

So how do we misuse his name, then? How do we take the name of the Lord our God in vain? We misuse his name when we use it in an evil way or in a way which leads to evil. So in our reading from Leviticus, for example, the man who blasphemed the name used God's name in an evil way. He was fighting, he was angry, and he used the name to curse the person he was fighting with. But because he had used God's name in that way, he had turned it into something evil. And that's why God judged him like he did, because he had turned God's name into something it was not supposed to be. And to say that God is evil is blasphemy. It's like another example in Mark chapter 3. The Jews say that Jesus has a demon. They say that he casts out demons by the prince of demons. They're saying that he had the power to do what he did only because of demons. And Jesus condemns this as blasphemy. That's why he says, Mark chapter 3: "Whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit never has forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal

sin,' for they were saying, 'He has an unclean spirit.'" So if we call God's work evil, that's clearly misusing his name. And the same is true the other way around. If we say something evil is something which God is doing, that is also taking his name in vain.

But we can misuse God's name in other ways, too, Christians, like if we were to take a false oath. If I were to swear in God's name that I'm going to do something and then I don't do it, I've misused his name, because in that case I lied, and I made God part of my lie too. That's not good to do. Or if I swear in God's name that I'm going to do something evil--it doesn't matter if I do it or not--but if I swear in his name that I'm going to do that evil thing, that is also misusing his name. Because God's name is not something to be tossed around like it was nothing, or to be used in a way flippantly, however we want to use it. This is why James says in chapter 5: "Above all, my brothers, do not swear either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your 'yes' be yes and your 'no' be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation." It's better to never swear at all than to use God's name falsely.

Another example of misusing God's name would be using it in a magical or a superstitious kind of way. Thinking that just by saying God's name, I can make something happen. There's a great example of this in Acts chapter 19, where it says this: "Then some of the itinerant Jewish exorcists undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying: 'I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.'" These exorcists didn't actually believe in Jesus, but they wanted to use his name anyway. Because they figured: "If I just say the name 'Jesus,' then I can get what I want. I will get power over these demons and be able to do things that I couldn't before." That's using God's name in a magical kind of way. But we can also do this if we think that just saying "in Jesus' name" is going to force God to do anything. Like I'm going to twist his arm and make him do my will as long as I use his name. That's also misusing it. Or if I think that whatever I do, as long as I do it in God's name, it's good, it's acceptable, even if it's clearly evil. That's also misusing the name of God.

But one more example of this is actually probably the worst one of all, and that is lying or teaching falsely in the name of God. If I say that God says something which he did not say, that is misusing his name. Or if I say that God did not say something which he clearly did, that is also misusing his name. Or if I say that something is good which God says is evil, or if I say that something is evil which God says is good, or if I say that something is evil which God says is at least neutral, all of these things are misusing God's name. In fact, it's the worst abuse of God's name because it leads other people into evil as well. Jeremiah, for example, in chapter 23 says this: "Behold, I am against the prophets, declares the Lord, who use their tongues and declare, 'declares the Lord.'" These false prophets who say that there is no danger for those who hate God, that they don't need to repent, that's taking God's name in vain. These false prophets who say that what God says is hateful or evil, that's taking God's name in vain. Or these false prophets who say we don't have to listen to the Bible in this or that thing, especially because it's unpopular, that's taking the name of the Lord in vain. That's a terrible thing to do, because teachers who do this will suffer a severe judgment, as James tells us. And it will be better on the day of judgment to have never believed in God at all than to teach falsely in his name. That's how serious it is.

But why does God care so much? Why does he hate his name being abused? Why does he seem to punish us so harshly for breaking this commandment? Because God is good, Christians. And

God is good and righteous and holy in everything that he does. And when I misuse his name, when I use his name in a way that is evil, then I'm saying that he is evil. I'm lying about God. That's why it's so serious. And God is not going to stand around and do nothing while his name is being used in this way. Ezekiel 36, for example, says: "Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God, It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came." God will not let his name be turned into a lie. We must not misuse the name of the Lord our God.

So how then should we use it? We should use his name in a way which is good or in ways which lead to good. For example, we use his name rightly when we call on him for salvation. Acts chapter 22 says: "And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on his name." When we confess our sins, Christians, and call on the name of Jesus, we will be saved, as he has promised. We also use God's name rightly when we call on him in prayer. Jesus in John 16 says: "In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you." Whenever we pray to God, asking the Father for anything in the name of Jesus by faith, he will give it to us, just as he has promised to do. And we also use God's name rightly when we give thanks to him for all that he has done. Colossians 3 says: "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." We glorify God and give thanks for all that he has done and do what is right in his sight, and in that way we use his name rightly. All of these things and more are what God commands us to do in the Second Commandment.

So then Christians, let us call on his name. Let us confess our sins in his name. And then we will find life and forgiveness in that mighty name of Jesus. Because as Acts chapter 4 says: "There is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." His name is glorious, Christians! Let us use that name today by giving praise to him and calling on him to be saved.

Let us pray. O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! Hear us when we call on your name this day, for you have promised to hear us through Jesus Christ, our Lord; in whose name we pray. Amen.