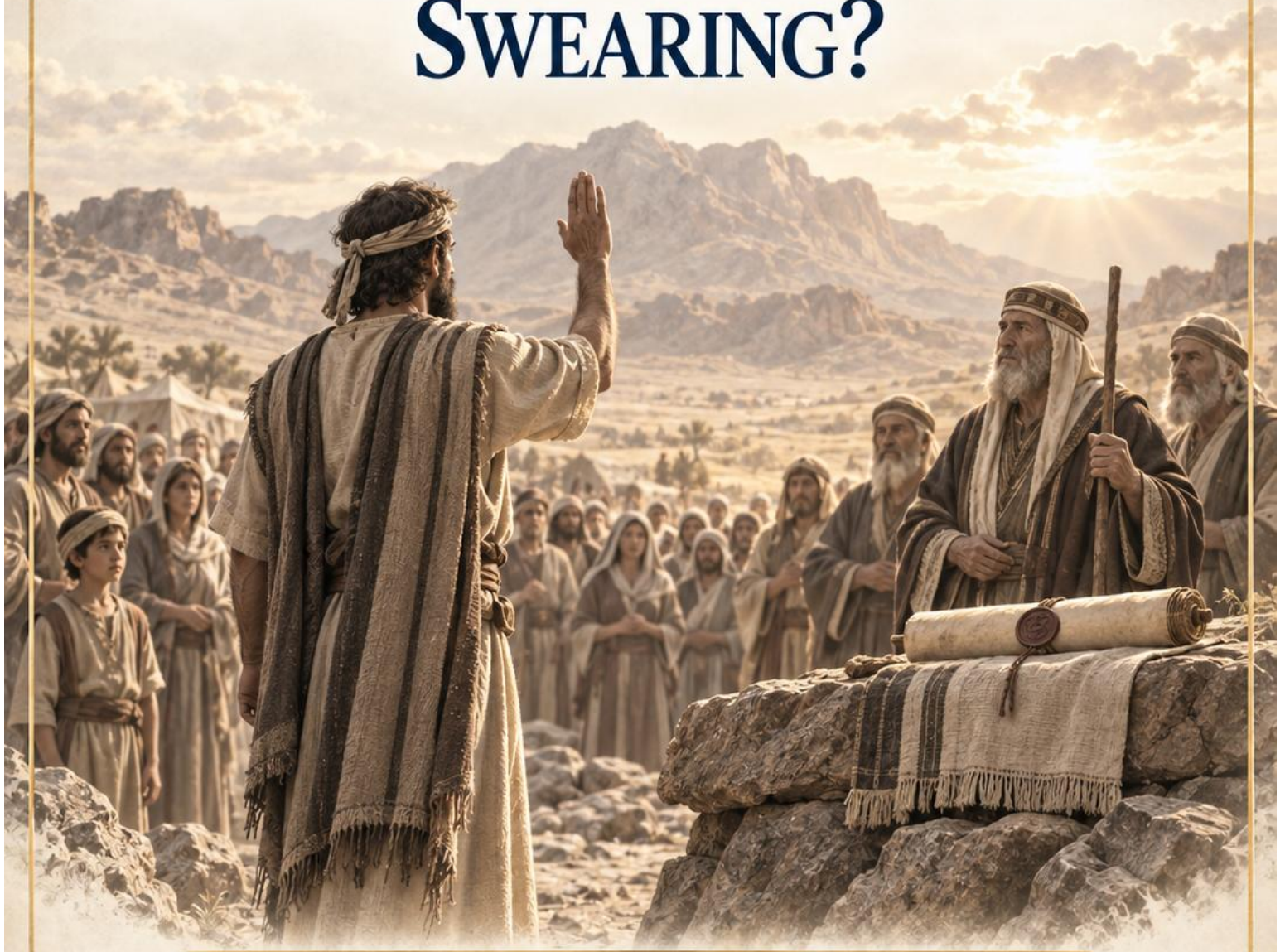


REASON TOGETHER CHURCH

THE TEN WORDS WE THOUGHT WE KNEW

A TEN-PART SERIES | PART THREE OF TEN

DOES TAKING GOD'S NAME IN VAIN ACTUALLY MEAN SWEARING?



DR. THOMAS W. HAWKSLEY

HEARING SINAI THROUGH ANCIENT EARS

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HEARING SINAI THROUGH ANCIENT EARS

SERMON TRANSCRIPT

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Reason Together Church

Aloha, friends.

Welcome to Reason Together Church.

Whether you are seated in this room or joining us from somewhere far beyond it, we are grateful that you are here.

This is a church where questions are not treated as threats.

Bring your questions.

Open your Bible.

Let us Reason Together the Word of God.

If today is your first time with us, you are an honored guest.

We will not ask you to stand, speak or give.

If you would like to stay connected, our guest card asks for only your first name and email address.

The Keiki Kids Center is available for our children, and parents are always welcome to keep their children with them.

After the service, the Reason Together Cafe will be open.

Join us for coffee and conversation.

The coffee is free.

The questions are welcome.

And COFFEE still reminds us that Christ Offers Forgiveness For Everyone Everywhere.

Today we come to the third study in The Ten Words We Thought We Knew.

The first Word asked where our ultimate allegiance rests.

The second asked whether we have reduced the living God to an image we can manage.

The third now turns our attention from what we worship and how we picture God to what we do with His name.

Many of us first learned this commandment through a swear jar.

Say a forbidden word.

Put a quarter in the jar.

Say God's name in a careless way.

Perhaps the fine became fifty cents.

That lesson was trying to teach reverence, and reverence is good.

Casual speech about God is not harmless.

Profanity can dishonor Him.

But imagine a different scene.

A witness walks into a courtroom.

He raises his hand.

He calls God as the witness of his truthfulness.

Then he deliberately lies.

Which scene is closer to the danger Israel first heard at Sinai?

The child who speaks carelessly and owes a quarter?

Or the adult who places God's name over a falsehood so that the falsehood will sound true?

The answer does not make careless speech acceptable.

It does make the commandment much larger than a list of prohibited syllables.

The most serious misuse of God's name may sound religious.

It may come from someone who is not trying to insult God at all.

It may come from someone trying to borrow God's authority.

Let us pray.

Our Heavenly Father, Your name is holy because You are holy.

You have made Yourself known in mercy, truth and faithfulness.

Forgive us for every careless word and every calculated misuse of what belongs to You.

Give us the courage to examine not only the language on our lips but the claims we make in Your name.

Teach us to speak truth without manipulation.

Teach us to represent You without pretense.

Make our lives trustworthy so that those who hear Your name from us are drawn toward Your character rather than driven away by our hypocrisy.

Guard this study from novelty for novelty's sake.

Let the text correct us.

Let Your Spirit humble us.

Let Jesus Christ be honored among us.

We ask all of this in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

Our first Scripture reading is Exodus chapter 20, verse 7.

The King James Version says:

"Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain;
for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain."

Now listen to Leviticus chapter 19, verse 12:

"And ye shall not swear by my name falsely,
neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God:
I am the LORD."

Before we reason through those words, let us pause for our giving statement.

We do not pass an offering plate at Reason Together Church.

Our guests are never expected to give.

If another congregation is your church home, please support the work God has entrusted to that church.

Those who call Reason Together Church their church home may give as the Lord leads through the giving box in the back.

Giving should be willing, cheerful and free from pressure.

No minister should say, "God told me that you must give this amount," in order to make resistance feel like rebellion against God.

No one should place the divine name upon a fundraising goal simply to make a human appeal harder to question.

God may lead His people to generosity.

Scripture plainly calls us to generosity.

But His name must never become a lever for religious pressure.

And that brings us directly into the heart of today's commandment.

The question is not only whether we pronounce God's name with sufficient care.

The question is whether we attach God's name to what is empty, false or deceptive.

The Hebrew wording helps us hear that.

The verb translated "take" is nasa.

It can mean to lift, take, carry or bear.

The word translated "name" is shem.

In Scripture, a name is more than a sound used to identify someone.

It can represent identity, reputation, character and authority.

The word translated "vain" is shav.

It can describe emptiness, worthlessness, falsehood or deception.

So the commandment warns against lifting up or carrying the name of the Lord into what is false and empty.

We should be careful here.

Hebrew word studies can illuminate a text, but they should not be used to perform a magic trick.

The verse does not suddenly mean something unrelated to every faithful translation Christians have read.

The wording can naturally describe taking God's name upon one's lips in a false oath.

Leviticus 19:12 makes that connection explicit:

"Ye shall not swear by my name falsely."

That legal and social setting is one of our firmest conclusions.

The broader idea of bearing God's reputation through the life of His covenant people is also biblical.

We will see that from other passages.

But it is best understood as a wider scriptural application, not as the only possible translation of the Hebrew verb.

That distinction matters because we want Scripture to guide our conclusion.

We do not need to exaggerate a word in order to deepen a commandment.

Now try to hear this as an Israelite living in an ancient world.

Written contracts were not available for every exchange.

Public reputation mattered.

Witness testimony mattered.

An oath could settle a dispute when ordinary evidence had reached its limit.

To swear by the Lord's name was to call upon the God of Israel as witness and judge.

It was a declaration that God knew the truth and would hold the speaker accountable.

The name was not decoration added to a sentence.

The name brought the speaker's claim beneath divine judgment.

That is why a false oath did more than deceive another human being.

It recruited God's reputation in the service of a lie.

It said, in effect, "The God of truth stands behind what I am saying," when the speaker knew that He did not.

The lie stole credibility from God's name.

The speaker wanted the authority without the truthfulness.

The speaker wanted the benefit of being believed without the burden of being honest.

This also helps explain the warning at the end of the commandment:

"The LORD will not hold him guiltless."

Human courts may fail to uncover a false oath.

Neighbors may believe it.

Religious people may admire it.

But the One whose name was invoked is not deceived.

God hears when His name is used to conceal what He knows to be false.

This was not unique to Israel's concern.

Across the ancient Near East, oaths invoked divine witnesses and curses.

People understood that a god's name was connected to authority and judgment.

But Israel's commandment carried a distinctive seriousness because the Lord was not one local deity among many.

He was the God who had brought them out of Egypt.

He had revealed His covenant name.

He had attached His own character to faithfulness and truth.

To misuse that name was to contradict the very God the name identified.

The commandment therefore reaches far beyond crude language.

It enters courtrooms, contracts, pulpits, family conversations and private promises.

It confronts every moment when someone says, "God knows," while hoping that the person listening will not discover the truth.

It confronts the casual promise, "I swear to God," when the speaker has no intention of keeping his word.

It confronts the religious claim, "The Lord told me," when what really happened was, "I strongly want this."

It confronts the preacher who says, "God promised," where Scripture made no such promise.

It confronts the person who puts a Bible verse on a personal demand so disagreement will appear ungodly.

The most serious misuse of God's name may sound religious.

Jesus confronted the same impulse in Matthew chapter 23.

Some religious teachers had developed elaborate distinctions among oaths.

Swear by the temple, they said, and perhaps the oath was not binding.

Swear by the gold of the temple, and then it counted.

Swear by the altar, and perhaps there was room to escape.

Swear by the gift upon the altar, and then the promise became serious.

Listen to the moral strategy beneath the religious detail.

It was an attempt to sound solemn while preserving a loophole.

The words created an impression of truthfulness.

The system retained an avenue for dishonesty.

Jesus exposed it.

He said that the temple belonged to the God who dwelt there.

The altar belonged to God.

Heaven was God's throne.

No arrangement of sacred nouns could hide a dishonest heart from the Lord.

Earlier, in Matthew chapter 5, Jesus said:

"Let your communication be, Yea, yea;

Nay, nay."

In other words, become the kind of person whose ordinary yes can be trusted.

Do not build one vocabulary for statements you mean and another for statements from which you hope to escape.

Truth should not require theatrical reinforcement.

Our problem is not solved merely by deleting the phrase "I swear."

The deeper question is whether our speech is dependable.

This does not mean that every solemn promise is automatically sinful.

Scripture records lawful vows, covenant commitments and serious testimony.

Paul sometimes called God as witness to the truthfulness of his concern.

A marriage vow is not an attempt to escape honesty.

It is a public promise that places ordinary faithfulness under solemn obligation.

A witness in court may be asked to affirm that testimony will be true.

The concern is not that truth is ever spoken with seriousness.

The concern is that sacred seriousness becomes a costume for a lie.

James chapter 5 repeats the teaching of Jesus:

"But let your yea be yea;

and your nay, nay;

lest ye fall into condemnation."

James is forming a community in which words do not need layers of spiritual decoration before they become reliable.

Imagine two neighbors making an agreement.

One says, "Yes, I will do it."

The other asks, "But do you promise?"

The first says, "I promise."

The other asks, "But do you swear before God?"

Each added layer reveals that ordinary speech has lost its value.

Jesus calls His people back to integrity at the first word.

Your yes should already contain the truth.

Your no should not conceal a future reversal.

That kind of speech is a quiet form of worship.

It says that the God who hears public oaths also hears ordinary sentences.

It says that truth matters in a kitchen as much as in a courtroom.

It says that we live before God even when no religious phrase is spoken.

There is a special warning here for those who teach, counsel or lead.

People often come to spiritual leaders at vulnerable moments.

They may be grieving, frightened or uncertain.

They may be eager for someone to tell them exactly what God is doing.

In that moment, confident language can feel powerful.

But pastoral authority must never outrun biblical authority.

Sometimes the faithful answer is, "Scripture clearly says this."

Sometimes the faithful answer is, "Here is the wisdom I would offer."

Sometimes the faithful answer is, "I do not know."

Those sentences carry different levels of certainty, and love tells the listener which one we mean.

Saying "I do not know" does not make a pastor weak.

It keeps a human voice from impersonating the voice of God.

We should be clearest where Scripture is clearest.

We should be humbler where our conclusion depends upon judgment.

We should never use the Lord's name to cover the distance between the two.

Some people never use profanity and still use holy language to deceive.

Some never speak God's name casually and still attach His name to rumors, exaggerations or private ambitions.

A polished religious vocabulary can conceal a heart that is using God.

That is why this commandment deserves more than a swear jar.

Consider one of the most powerful phrases in religious conversation:

"God told me."

There are times in Scripture when God unmistakably spoke.

The prophets could say, "Thus saith the LORD," because the Lord had commissioned them to deliver His word.

Scripture is God's authoritative revelation.

We should not weaken that truth.

Christians also rightly speak about the Spirit's leading.

We pray.

We seek wisdom.

We sense conviction.

We recognize providential circumstances.

We may sincerely believe that God is directing us toward a decision.

But sincerity does not make every impression infallible.

A mature believer can say, "I believe the Lord may be leading me in this direction."

That language does not deny faith.

It practices humility.

It leaves room for Scripture, wisdom and the counsel of other believers to test our conclusion.

Manipulative certainty sounds different.

It says, "God told me, so you may not question me."

It turns a personal impression into a divine command for someone else.

It closes the Bible, ends the conversation and places disagreement on trial before God.

That is spiritually dangerous.

A person may be honestly mistaken about guidance without deliberately taking God's name in vain.

We should not accuse every imperfect discernment of intentional deception.

We all see through a glass darkly.

But when divine authority is used to silence questions, secure compliance or protect personal power, the third commandment is very near.

The name of God is not a shield for our ego.

The Holy Spirit is not the author of manipulation.

There is another kind of misuse that appears in Acts chapter 19.

Certain traveling exorcists saw the power associated with the preaching of Jesus.

They attempted to use His name as a technique.

They said:

"We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth."

Among them were seven sons of Sceva.

They knew the wording.

They had observed the results.

They assumed the name could function like a spiritual formula.

But they did not belong to Jesus.

The evil spirit answered:

"Jesus I know,

and Paul I know;

but who are ye?"

The attempt ended in humiliation and injury.

Acts says that fear fell on the people and "the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified."

The contrast is striking.

The sons of Sceva tried to use the name.

The people learned to magnify the name.

Those are not the same posture.

Faith is not learning the right religious phrase to activate divine power.

Prayer is not an incantation.

The words "in Jesus' name" are not magic syllables added to make God obey us.

To pray in His name is to approach the Father through Christ's authority, in dependence upon Christ and in a manner consistent with Christ's character.

We do end our prayers explicitly in the name of Jesus.

We do so because our access to the Father is through Him.

But if the phrase becomes an attempt to stamp Christ's approval upon selfishness, the sound remains while the meaning disappears.

The name is not a tool in our hand.

We are servants under His authority.

Now the Bible broadens our vision from speech to representation.

Ezekiel chapter 36 addresses Israel among the nations.

God says in verse 20:

"And when they entered unto the heathen, whither they went,

they profaned my holy name,

when they said to them,

These are the people of the LORD,

and are gone forth out of his land."

Israel carried an identity before the nations.

They were known as the Lord's people.

Their sin, judgment and disgrace caused surrounding peoples to speak wrongly about the Lord.

So God declared:

"I had pity for mine holy name."

Then He said:

"I will sanctify my great name,

which was profaned among the heathen."

This is not merely a dictionary expansion of Exodus 20:7.

It is a canonical application.

The whole Bible shows that God's people can profane His name not only by what they say but by the way they represent Him.

Second Samuel chapter 12 gives another sobering example.

After David's grievous sin, Nathan told him:

"By this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme."

David's failure did not make God unholy.

But it gave God's enemies an occasion to mock the God David claimed to serve.

That should cause every Christian to pause.

We bear the name of Christ.

The word Christian identifies us publicly with Him.

When we are cruel while speaking of His love, we place a false picture beside His name.

When we deceive while defending biblical truth, we contradict the God of truth.

When we excuse abuse to protect a ministry's reputation, we actually profane the reputation we claim to defend.

When we promise integrity in public and practice exploitation in private, observers do not always separate our conduct from the Christ whose name we display.

The church does not sanctify God's name by hiding sin.

The church sanctifies God's name by telling the truth, protecting the vulnerable, practicing repentance and trusting that Christ needs no deception to defend Him.

This is personal too.

What does your family learn about God from the way you use His name?

Do your children hear prayer in the morning and contempt in the afternoon?

Do your coworkers know you as the person with a Bible on the desk but also as the person whose promises cannot be trusted?

Do your social media posts defend God with words that do not resemble the character of Christ?

Do you use "God's will" to avoid apologizing for a decision that wounded someone?

Do you quote Scripture to win an argument you have not taken time to understand?

These questions are not meant to create despair.

They are meant to restore weight to a name we have sometimes made too light.

Proverbs chapter 30 contains a prayer that joins conduct and God's name.

The writer asks for neither poverty nor riches.

He asks to be fed with food convenient for him.

Then he explains the danger on both sides:

"Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the LORD?

or lest I be poor, and steal,

and take the name of my God in vain."

His concern is that his life might place God's name beside denial or theft.

He does not trust himself merely because he knows the correct vocabulary.

He asks God to shape his circumstances and character so that he will not dishonor the Lord.

That is a wise prayer.

Now we should return to the familiar question.

Does taking God's name in vain actually mean swearing?

If by swearing we mean making an oath, especially a false oath, then yes.

That stands very near the commandment's original legal and social force.

If by swearing we mean profanity, the answer requires care.

Crude and contemptuous speech can certainly dishonor God.

Scripture commands wholesome speech.

Jesus warns that our words reveal our hearts.

Ephesians tells believers to put away corrupt communication.

We should not use a richer understanding of Exodus 20 as permission for irreverence.

But the commandment cannot be reduced to whether a person blurts out God's name after stubbing a toe.

A person can avoid that expression for a lifetime while repeatedly using God's authority to support what is false.

What about phrases such as "Oh my God" or softened substitutes that are designed to sound almost the same?

Christians will draw some practical boundaries differently.

The wise question is not, "How close can I get to a forbidden sound?"

The wise question is, "Does my speech treat God as holy?"

If God's name has become a verbal filler with no thought of God, reverence has been diminished.

If we replace the letters but preserve the contempt, we have not transformed the heart.

The goal is not anxious word policing.

The goal is truthful, grateful and worshipful speech.

We want the name of God to awaken love and awe rather than become background noise.

The commandment has a positive direction.

Jesus taught His disciples to pray:

"Our Father which art in heaven,

Hallowed be thy name."

Hallowed means treated as holy.

The third commandment says, "Do not carry God's name into emptiness."

The Lord's Prayer teaches us to carry His name into worship.

Do not attach it to falsehood.

Speak it truthfully.

Do not exploit it for power.

Submit to its authority.

Do not make it empty through hypocrisy.

Let your life display that His character is weighty, beautiful and trustworthy.

We hallow God's name when our yes is honest.

We hallow God's name when we admit, "I was wrong."

We hallow God's name when a leader refuses to claim divine certainty that God has not given.

We hallow God's name when a business agreement is kept even when breaking it would be profitable.

We hallow God's name when repentance is more important than reputation management.

We hallow God's name when worship continues after the song has ended and becomes integrity on Monday morning.

But none of us has done this perfectly.

We have spoken carelessly.

We have exaggerated.

We have made promises and failed to keep them.

We have sometimes used a verse as a weapon.

We have represented God poorly.

We have allowed people to associate the name of Christ with attitudes that did not come from Christ.

If the third commandment ends only in self-examination, every honest person must leave guilty.

The Lord will not hold the guilty guiltless.

That sentence is meant to be felt.

God does not treat falsehood as a small matter.

So where can guilty people go?

We go to the One who perfectly revealed the Father's name.

Jesus prayed in John chapter 17:

"I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world."

Jesus did not merely pronounce the Father's name correctly.

He displayed the Father's character faithfully.

He could say:

"He that hath seen me hath seen the Father."

There was no gap between His claim and His character.

No false oath passed His lips.

No private corruption contradicted His public teaching.

No selfish ambition hid beneath His use of divine authority.

He spoke what the Father gave Him to speak.

He did what pleased the Father.

He sanctified the Father's name in perfect obedience.

Then the only perfectly faithful Son was condemned through false testimony.

Men misused legal language to convict the Truth Himself.

They mocked His identity.

They placed a title above His cross.

Yet Jesus willingly bore our sin.

The guiltless One stood in the place of the guilty.

He died.

He was buried.

And on the third day He rose again.

Acts chapter 4 says:

"Neither is there salvation in any other:

for there is none other name under heaven given among men,

whereby we must be saved."

The name we could never carry perfectly is the name by which we are saved.

Salvation is not earned by cleaning up our vocabulary.

It is received by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

He forgives the liar.

He forgives the hypocrite.

He forgives the religious manipulator who truly repents.

He forgives the careless speaker.

He gives a new heart, and from that new heart He begins to form new speech and a new life.

If you are in this room, watching online or reading these words later, you can call upon Him now.

Romans chapter 10 says:

"For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

Do not merely use His name.

Trust the Person whose name it is.

Turn from sin.

Believe that Jesus died for you and rose again.

Receive Him as Savior and Lord.

If that is the desire of your heart, you may pray with me.

The prayer does not save you by its wording.

Jesus saves everyone who truly comes to Him in faith.

Let us pray.

Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner.

I have failed in my words, my actions and my heart.

I believe that You died on the cross for my sins.

I believe that You were buried and rose again.

I turn from my sin and place my trust in You.

Forgive me.

Save me.

Be my Savior and my Lord.

Teach me to honor Your name with my lips and with my life.

I receive Your gift of eternal life.

I ask this in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

Let us pray together as a church family.

Our Heavenly Father, hallowed be Thy name.

Thank You for making Your character known through Your Word and through Your Son.

Forgive us for every time we have treated what is holy as though it were light.

Forgive careless speech.

Forgive false promises.

Forgive religious language used to gain power over another person.

Forgive the ways our conduct has given others a distorted picture of You.

Make us people whose yes can be trusted.

Give our leaders humility in speaking about Your guidance.

Give every believer courage to test claims by Scripture.

Protect those who have been wounded by someone who used Your name to manipulate them.

Restore in us a reverence that is warm rather than fearful, honest rather than performative and centered upon Jesus Christ.

May Your name be magnified in this church, in our homes and in our ordinary work.

We pray in the name of Jesus.

Amen.

Before we leave, let us make this practical.

This week, listen for the moment when God's name is about to become a shortcut.

Perhaps you are about to strengthen a story by saying, "God knows," when the plain truth should be enough.

Perhaps you are about to settle an argument by saying, "The Lord told me," when you should say, "This is what I currently believe, and I am willing to test it."

Perhaps you are about to quote a promise that Scripture never made.

Perhaps the needed response is an apology because your conduct has misrepresented the Christ you confess.

Stop in that moment.

Tell the truth without decoration.

Choose humility over borrowed authority.

Then do something positive with the name of God.

Thank Him aloud.

Speak truthfully about His character.

Pray for someone in the name of Jesus without attempting to control the outcome.

Keep one promise because you belong to the God who keeps His promises.

If you prayed to receive Christ today, please tell us.

You can speak with me after the service or use the guest card to let us know.

We would be honored to pray with you and help you take your next steps.

If this message raised a difficult question or reopened a wound caused by spiritual manipulation, you do not have to carry that alone.

I will be available after the service.

Our prayer team will be available too.

The Reason Together Cafe is open, and there is a place for you at the conversation.

Next time, the fourth Word will move us from God's name to God's time.

We will ask why most Christians treat the Sabbath commandment differently from the other nine.

Is the Sabbath a creation gift, a covenant sign, a binding weekly command for Christians or something fulfilled in Christ?

The question has divided sincere believers, and we will not solve it with a slogan.

We will return to the text and listen carefully.

Until then, may the name of the Lord be more than a word upon our lips.

May His truth shape our speech.

May His character shape our conduct.

May His grace lead us quickly to repentance.

And may Jesus Christ be clearly seen in the people who bear His name.

Aloha Nui Loa.

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PASTOR'S COMMENTARY

Does Taking God's Name in Vain Actually Mean Swearing?

Hearing Sinai Through Ancient Ears

Exodus 20:7

Dr. Thomas W. Hawksley

Pastor & Teacher

www.ReasonTogether.Church

*Bring your questions. Open your Bible.
Let's Reason Together the Word of God.*

Introduction

Many Christians first encountered the third commandment through a short list of expressions they were forbidden to say. The lesson was intended to teach reverence, and reverence matters. Yet Exodus 20:7 entered a world of solemn promises, legal testimony and public appeals to divine witness. A person could take God's name with perfect pronunciation and still take it in vain by placing it over a lie.

Part One asked whom Israel may worship. Part Two asked whether worshipers may give the living God a form they can manage. Part Three asks whether human beings may borrow God's revealed name, reputation and authority for what He has not said or approved. The movement is from allegiance, to image, to name.

This Commentary expands the sermon without reproducing the internal Vault. It will examine the Hebrew wording, the false-oath setting, Jesus' teaching about truthful speech, responsible language concerning guidance, the use of Jesus' name in prayer, public Christian representation and the Gospel answer for people whose words and lives have failed.

Controlling answer: The command does include swearing when swearing means invoking God in an oath, especially a false oath. It does not mean only profanity. It forbids carrying God's name into what is empty, deceptive or untrue. The canon extends that moral center to religious manipulation, magical use of sacred language and conduct that publicly misrepresents the God whose name His people bear.

1. Read the Command in Its Covenant Setting

The Name Belongs to the Deliverer

The third commandment does not introduce an unknown deity. Exodus 20 begins, 'I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.' The name belongs to the One who rescued Israel and entered covenant with them. It carries the memory of His acts and the truth of His character.

The command says, 'Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain.' The phrase 'thy God' makes the violation personal and covenantal. Israel must not call upon the Deliverer's authority while acting against the truth He embodies.

The Warning Is Part of the Word

The final clause says, 'for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.' A false speaker may deceive a neighbor or persuade a court. God is not deceived. His name cannot be used as concealment from the very Judge being invoked.

This warning should be allowed to carry weight. It should not be converted into superstition, as though one accidental sound triggers automatic condemnation. The issue is guilt before the God who hears, knows and judges truthfully.

2. Nasa, Shem and Shav

Three Hebrew words help the reader hear the range of the command. They illuminate the text, but they must not become a magic trick through which a novel English sentence replaces every faithful translation.

Term	Basic range	Contribution	Limit
nasa	Lift, take, carry, bear or raise.	Describes bringing or lifting the divine name into an utterance or act.	Does not prove that bear is the one exclusive translation.
shem	Name, reputation, identity, renown or authority.	Shows that misuse touches the Person and character represented by the name.	Theological breadth must remain tied to the verse and its context.
shav	Emptiness, vanity, worthlessness, falsehood or deception.	Places hollow and false use near the center of the command.	No one English gloss exhausts every occurrence.

The wording can naturally describe taking the LORD's name upon one's lips in a false oath. The larger Biblical theme of bearing God's reputation through the conduct of His people is also true. The first is the strongest immediate reading. The second is a canonical application. Careful interpretation need not choose between a narrow dictionary and an uncontrolled metaphor.

3. The False Oath Stands Near the Center

Leviticus Makes the Connection Explicit

Leviticus 19:12 says, 'And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD.' False swearing and profaning the name appear in the same sentence. The surrounding commands concern stealing, lying, defrauding and oppressing a neighbor. The misuse of God's name is never merely private etiquette. It can become a weapon against another person.

Calling God as Witness

An oath placed a statement beneath divine witness and judgment. The speaker was saying that God knew the truth and would judge falsehood. In a setting where written evidence was not available for every transaction, reputation and testimony carried enormous weight. Invoking the LORD could settle a dispute when ordinary proof reached its limit.

A false oath therefore recruited God's reputation in the service of a lie. It said, in effect, 'The God of truth stands behind my claim,' while the speaker knew He did not. The name supplied borrowed credibility. The lie sought the authority without the truthfulness.

4. Oaths in the Ancient World

Divine Witness and Sanction

Ancient Near Eastern treaties, legal proceedings and agreements often called divine witnesses and named consequences for violation. The exact forms varied, but the social logic was recognizable: a deity was asked to observe what human beings might not be able to verify and to enforce what human courts might fail to reach.

Israel shared an understandable cultural form while confessing a distinctive God. The LORD was not one local power among many. He was the Creator and covenant Deliverer who revealed Himself as

merciful, gracious, longsuffering, abundant in goodness and truth and unwilling to clear persistent guilt. His name could not honestly guarantee deception.

The Horizontal Victim

Discussions of God's name can become so vertical that the injured neighbor disappears. A false oath might deprive someone of property, conceal abuse, distort judgment or escape a promise. Leviticus keeps worship and neighbor-love together. The speaker profanes God's name by using it to make harm believable.

5. The Ninth Commandment Is Related but Distinct

The third commandment and the prohibition of false witness are not duplicates. The ninth Word protects a neighbor from false testimony. The third protects the divine name from false invocation. They overlap when a witness places God's name over a lie, but each command retains its own focus.

This distinction matters for the series. The third Word cannot absorb every form of lying, and the ninth Word should not be emptied before the series reaches it. The present study addresses falsehood precisely where sacred authority is invoked, implied or carried.

6. Jesus Exposed Religious Loopholes

Temple, Gold, Altar and Gift

Matthew 23 describes a system in which some oaths counted more than others. Swearing by the temple could be treated as less binding than swearing by its gold. Swearing by the altar could be treated as less binding than swearing by the gift upon it. The distinctions sounded religious, but they preserved escape routes.

Jesus exposed the fiction. The temple, gold, altar, gift, heaven and earth all stand beneath God. No rearrangement of sacred nouns creates a place where dishonesty escapes His hearing. Religious precision can become an instrument of deception when it makes one promise appear binding and another disposable.

Yea, Yea; Nay, Nay

In Matthew 5 Jesus says, 'Let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay.' James 5 repeats, 'let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay.' The goal is not to discover a safer oath formula. It is to become a person whose ordinary word does not need theatrical reinforcement.

Truthfulness is a quiet form of worship. It recognizes that God hears a conversation in the kitchen as surely as testimony in a courtroom. A Christian's first yes should already be dependable. A no should not conceal an intended reversal.

7. Are All Solemn Promises Forbidden?

Sincere Christians have answered this question differently. Anabaptist and Quaker traditions have often understood Jesus to forbid oath-taking and have practiced truthful affirmation instead. Their concern is serious: if ordinary speech is fully truthful, no sacred formula should create a higher grade of honesty.

Other Christian traditions distinguish the evasive and manipulative oaths Jesus condemned from lawful testimony, marriage vows and solemn commitments. They note that Scripture records Paul saying, 'God is my witness,' and making other solemn appeals to the truthfulness of his ministry. Hebrews recognizes the social function of an oath as confirmation.

The third commandment settles what both traditions must reject. No solemn form can sanctify a lie. No Christian may use a sacred promise as a costume for dishonesty. Where conscience leads believers to different practices, each should tell the truth without loopholes and without contempt for the other's attempt to obey Christ.

8. "God Told Me" and Borrowed Authority

Different Levels of Certainty

People often come to pastors, teachers and counselors while grieving, afraid or uncertain. A confident spiritual answer can feel comforting and powerful. Yet pastoral authority must never outrun Biblical authority. Love tells the listener how much certainty a statement actually carries.

Statement	Meaning	Pastoral responsibility
Scripture clearly says...	A claim of Biblical teaching.	Quote, interpret in context and remain accountable to the whole canon.
I believe this passage teaches...	A strong but interpreted conclusion.	Give reasons and acknowledge serious alternatives where they exist.
Here is the wisdom I would offer...	Counsel rather than revelation.	Serve the listener without making disagreement rebellion against God.
I believe the Lord may be leading me...	A personal discernment claim.	Test it through Scripture, prayer, wisdom, counsel and providence.
I do not know.	An honest boundary of knowledge.	Remain present without inventing certainty.

Sincerity Is Not Infallibility

Christians rightly pray for guidance, recognize conviction and give thanks for providence. Sincerity does not make every impression infallible. A believer may be honestly mistaken without deliberately taking God's name in vain. Humility leaves room for testing and correction.

Manipulative certainty is different. 'God told me, so you may not question me' turns a private impression into a divine command for another person. It closes the Bible and ends the conversation. When God's authority is used to secure money, compliance, silence or personal power, the third commandment is very near.

9. Fundraising, Leadership and Spiritual Pressure

Religious fundraising can invoke Biblical generosity while still misusing God's name. Scripture calls believers to give willingly and cheerfully. A leader crosses a dangerous line when he claims that God dictated a specific amount for another person or suggests that questioning a ministry goal is disobedience to God.

The same issue appears in relationships and organizations. 'God told me you must marry me,' 'God told me you must stay silent' or 'God promised our plan cannot fail' places divine authority where the

speaker has not demonstrated divine revelation. The person receiving the claim should be free to open Scripture, ask questions, seek independent counsel and refuse coercion.

A person harmed by spiritual manipulation is not dishonoring God by testing the claim. Acts 17 praises hearers who searched the Scriptures, and First John commands believers to test the spirits.

Accountability protects the name from human misuse.

10. The Name of Jesus Is Not a Formula

The Sons of Sceva

Acts 19 records traveling exorcists who attempted to use the name of Jesus as a technique: 'We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth.' They had observed power associated with apostolic ministry, learned the wording and assumed the name could be detached from the Person.

The evil spirit answered, 'Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?' The attempt ended in humiliation. The narrative then says that 'the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.' The contrast is exact. The sons tried to use the name. The people learned to magnify it.

Prayer in His Name

Christians rightly pray in Jesus' name because access to the Father is through Him. Yet the closing phrase is not an incantation that makes God obey. To pray in His name is to depend upon His mediation and authority and to ask in a way consistent with His character and will.

The phrase can remain while its meaning disappears. A selfish request does not become Christlike because a sacred ending is attached. Faith does not seize the name as a tool in our hand. Faith places us under the authority of the One whose name we confess.

11. Bearing the Name Through Conduct

Ezekiel 36 and the Nations

Ezekiel says Israel profaned God's holy name among the nations. Observers saw the LORD's people judged and scattered and drew conclusions about the God they claimed to serve. God promised to sanctify His great name, cleanse His people and give them a new heart and spirit.

This does not prove that 'bear the name' is the only translation of Exodus 20:7. It does establish a wider Biblical truth. Covenant people represent God publicly. Their behavior cannot change His character, but it can place a false picture beside His name in the minds of observers.

David Gave Occasion to Blaspheme

After David's grievous sin, Nathan said, 'by this deed thou hast given great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme.' David's private conduct carried public theological consequence because he was known as the LORD's anointed king.

A church therefore does not protect God's reputation by hiding abuse or silencing truthful witnesses. Concealment adds another falsehood to the original evil. The faithful response is to protect the vulnerable, tell the truth, practice discipline, pursue justice and repent openly where the failure was public. Christ needs no lie to defend Him.

The Prayer of Proverbs 30

The writer asks for neither poverty nor riches, lest he deny God in abundance or steal in poverty and 'take the name of my God in vain.' His concern reaches vocabulary, conduct and confession together. He asks God to shape his circumstances because he does not trust religious knowledge alone to preserve faithfulness.

12. What About Profanity?

A richer understanding of Exodus 20:7 is not permission for irreverence. Crude, contemptuous and corrupt speech is addressed throughout Scripture. Jesus says words reveal the heart. Ephesians commands believers to reject corrupt communication and speak what gives grace. Colossians names blasphemy and filthy communication among the practices to put away.

Christians may draw some boundaries differently concerning expressions such as 'Oh my God' and softened substitutes. If God's name has become a verbal filler with no thought of God, reverence has grown thin. If the letters change but contempt remains, the heart has not been renewed.

The wise question is not, 'How close can I get to a forbidden sound?' It is, 'Does my speech treat God as holy, tell the truth and give grace to the hearer?' The goal is not anxious word policing. It is truthful, grateful and worshipful speech.

13. Hallowed Be Thy Name

Jesus taught His disciples to pray, 'Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name.' The negative command says not to carry the name into emptiness. The prayer teaches believers to carry it into worship and obedience.

- We hallow God's name when our yes is honest and our no does not conceal a loophole.
- We hallow His name when a leader refuses to claim certainty God has not given.
- We hallow His name when an apology matters more than protecting our appearance.
- We hallow His name when a business agreement is kept after breaking it becomes profitable.
- We hallow His name when a church protects the vulnerable and tells the truth about sin.
- We hallow His name when prayer depends upon Jesus instead of using His name as a formula.
- We hallow His name when worship continues after the song and becomes integrity on Monday morning.

14. Jesus Perfectly Manifested the Name

No Gap Between Claim and Character

In John 17 Jesus prayed, 'I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world.' He did not merely pronounce the Father's name. He displayed the Father's character faithfully. He could say, 'he that hath seen me hath seen the Father.'

No false oath passed His lips. No private corruption contradicted His public teaching. No selfish ambition hid beneath a claim of divine authority. He spoke what the Father gave Him and did what pleased the Father. He hallowed the Father's name in perfect obedience.

The Guiltless One for the Guilty

Jesus was condemned through false testimony. Men misused legal and religious speech to convict the Truth Himself. Yet He willingly bore the sin of guilty people. He died, was buried and rose again.

Acts 4:12 says, 'there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.' Romans 10:13 promises, 'whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.' The name we have failed to honor is the name upon which we may call for salvation.

Salvation is not earned by cleaning up vocabulary. Jesus forgives the liar, the hypocrite, the careless speaker and the religious manipulator who truly repents. He gives a new heart, then forms new speech and faithful conduct from that heart.

15. A Pastoral Answer for Different Listeners

For the Person Troubled by Careless Speech

Do not excuse irreverence, but do not imagine that one verbal failure places you beyond grace. Confess honestly, receive Christ's forgiveness and ask what the habit reveals about the heart. Replace empty speech with thanksgiving and speech that gives grace.

For the Person Who Says "God Told Me"

Ask whether you are reporting Scripture, offering wisdom or describing a personal impression. Use wording proportionate to the evidence. Invite testing. If the claim gives you control over another person's conscience, slow down and submit it to independent examination.

For the Person Harmed by Religious Manipulation

The misuse belonged to the person who borrowed God's authority. Testing that claim was not rebellion against God. Seek safe and trustworthy counsel. Return to the character of God revealed in Scripture and in Jesus rather than allowing the offender's conduct to define Him.

For the Christian Leader

Be clearest where Scripture is clearest and humbler where judgment is required. Say 'I do not know' when you do not know. Correct public overstatement publicly. Protect people before protecting institutional appearance. The name of Christ is magnified by truth and repentance, not invulnerability.

For the Person Ready to Trust Christ

Religious vocabulary cannot save. Jesus saves. He lived without sin, died for our sins, was buried and rose again. Turn from sin and place your faith in Him as Savior and Lord. Call upon His name because you trust the Person, not because a formula has power by itself.

You may pray: Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner. I have failed in my words, actions and heart. I believe that You died for my sins, were buried and rose again. I turn from my sin and place my trust in You. Forgive me, save me and teach me to honor Your name with my lips and life. I receive Your gift of eternal life. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

Pastoral Summary

1. The divine name belongs to the covenant Deliverer and represents His revealed character and authority.
2. The warning that the LORD will not hold the offender guiltless makes false invocation a matter of divine judgment.
3. Nasa can mean lift, take, carry or bear; shem can represent identity and reputation; shav includes emptiness and falsehood.
4. Leviticus 19:12 explicitly joins false swearing with profaning God's name.
5. A false oath calls the God of truth as witness to a lie and can harm a neighbor through borrowed credibility.
6. The third and ninth commandments overlap but remain distinct.
7. Jesus and James reject oath loopholes and call for dependable ordinary speech.
8. Christians differ about all oath-taking but agree that no sacred form can sanctify falsehood.
9. Personal guidance should be spoken with conviction proportionate to the certainty actually available.
10. Divine language becomes abusive when it silences examination or secures money, compliance, secrecy or control.
11. Acts 19 contrasts using Jesus' name as a technique with magnifying His name through reverence.
12. Ezekiel 36 and 2 Samuel 12 show that the conduct of God's people affects how observers speak of Him.
13. Profanity and irreverent speech matter, but they do not exhaust Exodus 20:7.
14. The positive command is to hallow God's name through truth, humility, repentance and faithful representation.
15. Jesus manifested the Father's name perfectly and is the only name under heaven by which sinners may be saved.

Name and Claim Discernment Worksheet

1. Write the exact statement or promise being examined.
2. Identify whether God's name is spoken directly, implied through Scripture or attached through a claim of guidance.
3. State what Scripture clearly says before describing what you infer or desire.
4. Classify the claim: Biblical teaching, interpretation, pastoral wisdom, personal guidance or uncertainty.
5. Ask whether the statement remains truthful if every religious intensifier is removed.
6. Ask who receives authority and who loses permission to question.
7. Test the claim through Scripture, prayer, wise counsel, facts and providence.
8. Look for an oath loophole or a spiritual formula that promises control.
9. Examine the fruit: truth, humility, freedom, repentance and love or fear, secrecy, pressure and self-protection.
10. If the claim was false, determine the needed correction, apology, restitution and protection.
11. Replace borrowed certainty with plain language that states what you actually know.
12. Ask how this moment can hallow God's name and make Christ's character clearer.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. What did swearing commonly mean in the legal and social world of the commandment?
2. How does Leviticus 19:12 clarify Exodus 20:7?
3. What do nasa, shem and shav contribute without deciding the verse by dictionary alone?
4. Why does a false oath harm both God's name and a human neighbor?
5. How are the third and ninth commandments related and distinct?
6. What loophole was Jesus exposing in Matthew 23?

7. What does it mean for an ordinary yes or no to be dependable?
8. Why have sincere Christians differed about courtroom oaths and solemn vows?
9. How should a pastor distinguish Biblical authority, interpretation, wisdom and uncertainty?
10. When does the phrase God told me become manipulative?
11. What does Acts 19 teach about using and magnifying Jesus' name?
12. How can the phrase in Jesus' name remain while its meaning disappears?
13. How did Israel profane God's name among the nations in Ezekiel 36?
14. Why does concealment fail to protect a church or ministry from dishonoring God?
15. What should guide Christian conscience concerning casual expressions and substitutes?
16. What would it look like to hallow God's name at home or work this week?
17. How did Jesus manifest the Father's name perfectly?
18. Why is salvation described as calling upon the name of the Lord?

Prayer

Our Heavenly Father, hallowed be Thy name. You are holy, truthful, merciful and faithful. Forgive us for every time we have treated Your name lightly or attached Your authority to what You did not say.

Forgive our false promises, exaggerations and manipulative certainty. Forgive the ways our conduct has distorted another person's view of You. Give us courage to correct what was false and make restitution where our words caused harm.

Make our yes dependable and our no honest. Give pastors and teachers humility. Protect people who have been wounded by spiritual pressure and help them distinguish Your character from the person who misrepresented You.

Teach us to pray in Jesus' name with trust and submission rather than treating holy words as a formula. Let our speech give grace, our repentance tell the truth and our ordinary work display that You keep Your promises.

Thank You for Jesus Christ, who manifested Your name perfectly, bore the guilt of sinners, died and rose again. May His name be magnified in Reason Together Church, in our homes and among every person who watches our lives. In His name we pray. Amen.

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