

The Law of God, Part 4: Forsaking All Others

Exodus 20:1 ESV (Pg. 35) 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, or that is in the water under the earth. **5** You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, **6** but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments. **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.”

I. In 1986, the church I grew up in went through a nasty split. I was traumatized as my parents made a decision that our family would be among the half of the people that left the church. This meant that I would be saying goodbye to my youth group and all of my closest friends. It was a tough time for a 15 year old guy.

A. After a few weeks, we finally landed at a different church to try out. It was very difficult for me to “merge into the traffic” of a new social circle, but slowly I started showing up at some of the youth group meetings and functions.

1. When I found out that the youth were going to be having an all night “Lock-in” on Halloween night of that year, I decided to show up; but once there, I definitely felt like I was on the outer fringes of already formed friendships.

2. There were athletes in the group, but I was no athlete. There were musicians there, but I was no musician. There was even a “car guy”, who liked to race his souped-up VW Bug on the main drag, but I was too young to have a car, and didn’t know the first thing about hot rod mechanics. So by about 11pm, I was regretting that I had showed up, and wondered if I could sneak out!

B. But wandering around our cavernous fellowship hall, I noticed a cute blonde, laying on the floor, reading a music magazine with one of my favorite singers on the cover. I asked, “Do you like her music?” She said, “Yes!” And we talked for a couple of hours about all of the different singers and bands we both liked.

1. Needless to say, as a healthy 15 year old boy, it didn’t take long for me to find more things about her to be interested in than her musical choices!

2. I kept her in my sights all that night. I noticed how wherever she was, the people around her were laughing; she seemed to make everyone happy! She also carried a definite air of respect; completely different from the other girls in that youth group, many of whom were silly, immature, and shallow.

C. Our family stuck at the church, and about a year later I surrendered my life to Jesus. The blonde and I became fast friends. I never missed anything that the youth group did - they became my social circle. But she was one of my closest friends without a doubt. She was always friendly, always helping someone out, whether it was a pregnant teenager in real trouble, or just picking up 27 kids in her ’83 Buick to bring them to church or youth group, including me!

1. A couple of times I had the crazy idea to declare my undying love to her, which she always rebuffed with a smile, and the cruel, standby teenage girl “kiss of death”: she told me that she “just wanted to be friends”!

2. I watched her date (and undate) a handful of guys in the youth group. But something was strange; no matter what her romantic status, she really was my friend! She didn't put me off or brush me off.
- D. Over the years, I abandoned the idea of a future with the blonde, but my respect for her grew, as did our friendship. She eventually found a long-term boyfriend that everyone in our church, myself included, was convinced was "the one".
1. Then it happened. She announced one day that she had broken up with this boy and just wanted what God had for her. The breakup had not been easy. The boy became co-dependent and awkwardly needy.
 2. But something else happened. The boy was out of the picture. Many of her friends had gotten married or were getting married. Guess who was fortunate enough to become her main social connection?
 3. All the time together deepened our friendship further, and we grew in our respect for each other. We were amazed that we shared some many of the same goals for our lives; and Jesus was always at the center of our plans.
- E. For about a year or so, there was nothing intentionally romantic. I say **intentionally**, because our hearts were definitely becoming intertwined. It didn't take long before friendship began to deepen; a romantic turn was soon taken.
1. To make a long story short, on December 26th, 1992 I asked the blonde, whose name was Ginger Payne, to be my bride. Spoiler alert: she said yes.
 2. On August 14th of 1993, six years, nine months and two weeks after our first Halloween lock-in meeting, Ginger Payne completed my joy when she took my name as her own and became Mrs. Ginger Sharp.
- II. We have been studying the 10 commandments. I was struck this week how the first three commandments are better understood when we examine them in the light of the union between a husband and a wife, as I've enjoyed for almost 26 years.
- A. In the 1st Commandment, God requires exclusivity of worship. He will not allow himself to be worshiped in tandem with other gods. This is the whole point of marriage - **exclusivity**. When Ginger and I made our vows, we used the phrase, "forsaking all others". Henceforth, I am hers alone, and she is mine alone.
- B. In the 2nd Commandment, God forbids his people from looking in any other place for what he alone is to be for them (Savior, Defender, Provider, etc.).
1. Likewise, Ginger is forbidden by our marriage vow to look for in any other person what I alone am to be for her emotionally, provisionally, or sexually.
 2. Do you remember what God's reasoning is for forbidding his people from worshipping idols? "**I the Lord your God am a jealous God**" God is determined to fiercely defend the exclusivity of his relationship to his people.
- C. Now we come to the 3rd commandment: "**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.**" What is God saying when he forbids us to take his name in vain?
1. When I was a kid and I heard this commandment preached or taught, the core of the teaching was always the same. I was led to believe that God was saying, "No cussin'!" It was the "watch your mouth" commandment.
 2. As a child, I became proficient in the use of many words that my parents frowned upon, ones that were vulgar, crude, or disgusting; but to "take the name of the Lord in vain" was a whole different brand of evil in our house.

D. My siblings and I were absolutely forbidden to exclaim, “Oh my God!” or “Oh my Lord!”. We were never to use the name of Jesus Christ as exclamation either. The ultimate offense was to combine the word “God” (as the title of the Almighty), and the word “damn” (a word used to curse someone or something). This was always, under all circumstances, taboo in the Sharp household.

1. I remember one evening when I was about 10 years old, I came out of my room and fired off a blue streak at my brother and sister, and included in that streak was the combination of the two words that must not be uttered!

2. I had thought my parents were gone for the evening, but I’ll never forget the look of shock on their faces as they exited their bedroom to see who had uttered the blasphemies. Needless to say, I don’t remember much after that.

E. The prohibition on this kind of irreverent use of the Name of God is definitely included in the meaning of the 3rd Commandment. **Leviticus 24:16 ESV** *Whoever blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him. The sojourner as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death.*

1. But it includes so many other misuses of the Holy Name of the Lord; for example, we are not to use the Name of the Lord flippantly in the oaths we take (“by God” or “I swear to God”). This can apply to deceptive oaths taken in God’s name, or invoking God’s name to sanction an act in which one is being dishonest¹.

2. But it also includes such offenses as using God’s name in occultism or magic, or to use it irreverently in humor, or disrespectfully in the case of casual curses and careless exclamations².

F. In all these things, “Yahweh is warning Israel against using his name as if it were disconnected from his person, presence, and power”³.

1. The point is that God is Holy, and therefore his Name should be regarded as such; it is not to be used for the punchline of a joke, an exclamation of frustration, or to add credibility to our rashly taken vows and oaths.

2. John Piper says this about what “taking the Lord’s Name in vain” means. **“It’s dealing with God and speaking of God in a way that empties him of his significance...you take his name in vain because he is empty to you. Your mind doesn’t feel the weight and fullness of his glory.”**⁴

III. But there is another side to this discussion and understanding of what it means to “take” the Lord’s name in vain. The word “take” is actually a bit of a mistranslation. A more accurate word might be “carry”; as in “You shall not carry the Name of the Lord your God in vain”⁵. The idea is that as the people of God, we have been given the Name of the Lord, and with it, a sort of stewardship responsibility.

A. This is not unlike when a bride takes her husband’s name (like how Ginger Payne became Ginger Sharp). That act is not insignificant. It means something. **Genesis 2:24 ESV** *Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.*

1. In taking her husband’s name, the wife is declaring that she is no longer primarily associated with her parent’s house, but rather with her husband.

2. When you and I became believers, and especially when we were baptized, we were making a similar declaration that we were no longer associated with the

world of sin into which we were born, but with the Kingdom of light, and of God into which we were reborn.

B. So now, if we are believers in Jesus, we carry the Name. We are marked by it. It denotes to whom we belong, to who we give our allegiance, whom we love and are committed to serve. And we are told not to carry this Name in vain.

1. The Oxford Dictionary defines “vain” as producing no result; and something that is useless⁶. Something that is vain is futile, worthless, pointless.

2. The Name we carry was never meant to be a vanity. Jesus said it should have an affect on the world. **Matthew 5:14 ESV** “You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. **15** Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. **16** In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

C. Imagine a woman who takes her husband’s name but refuses to live with him; who slanders him, and dishonors him by taking other men into her bed. She may have taken his name, but she has taken it uselessly. It means nothing. As offensive as the thought is, that scenario describes the Christianity of many.

1. We do many things that give us the appearance of carrying the Name; we go to church a couple of times a month and post inspirational quotes on Instagram. But our hearts are a hive of unfaithfulness and disloyalty to God.

2. This hypocrisy is intolerable to God, the one who loved us and gave himself for us. So much so that he attaches a clause to this commandment that isn’t found attached with any of the other nine commandments. **Exodus 20:7b ESV** “...the Lord **will not hold him guiltless** who takes his name in vain.”

D. God reserves the right to define our relationship to him. We may be quick to excuse our spiritual apathy, devotional laziness, and rampant hypocrisy, but God is not. We have carried the Name in vain and will be held accountable.

1. Why is this so? Firstly, because the Name we have been given is the most exalted Name of all. **Philippians 2:9 ESV** Therefore God has highly exalted him (Christ) and bestowed on him the name that is above every name.

a) It is a major crime against the holiness of God to take such a Name to yourself and have it result in no discernible difference between yourself and those who are perishing in the world without the Name.

b) Much like some wayward, adulterous wife, it demonstrates that we want all the benefits of being associated with the Lord of All, but have no use for the intimacy and love, expressed in obedience, that should given to the one who has rescued us from futility and eternal death.

2. Secondly, the Lord will not hold the one guiltless who dares to take the Name in vain because it is in that Name alone that a man or woman can be saved.

Acts 4:12 ESV “And there is salvation in **no one else**, for there is **no other name** under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

E. If you want the salvation of God, you **must** take the name. God is looking to the church as a bride, not some meaningless fling. Ephesians says that Jesus will “present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish”⁷. In order to do so, he himself

has made her holy, “having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word”⁸. We are adorned in his righteousness, which we didn’t deserve.

1. To carry the name in vain on one hand means to carry it in self-righteousness or religious perfectionism. This portrays that even though Christ is the one who did the work to make you holy, you have no confidence in the finality of his work and feel the need to add to what only grace can secure for you.
2. On the other hand, carrying the Name in vain means living in disobedience and unrepentance, blatantly disregarding his holy requirements
 - a) This means thinking yourself exempt from living a life pleasing to the Lord because of a prayer you once prayed, or a ceremony you once observed, like baptism, first communion, or a catechism class.
 - b) This displays that though Christ has paid such a high cost for your salvation and sanctification, you can be on cruise control, trusting only in some version of cheap grace that results in no transformation of your life.

F. Jesus said that he alone was the Way, the Truth, and the Life; and he added that no one has access to the Father except through him⁹. This is the ultimate meaning of “the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.”

1. Many claim to have taken the Name, to carry it - But Jesus said that **Matthew 7:16a ESV** “You will recognize them by their fruits”.
2. Does your life or mine display the single-hearted devotion of a Bride who has gladly taken the name of her beloved? Or are we exposed by our other loves as frauds? Know this: to claim to carry the Name, and yet to do so in a meaningless way, devoid of evidence is the express lane to destruction... “**the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.**”

IV. So today, if that describes you, why not come to the Lord? Stop playing games, and take his Name, gladly living your life as the “beloved of the Lord”.

A. Some of you who are truly devoted to God, may realize that you have **areas** of your life where you have carried the Name of the Lord in vain. Simply repent of those areas today and return joyfully to the arms of the Lover of your soul.

B. Some of you may have realized that your previous profession of belonging to God has largely been a sham and you need to give yourself fully, without all of your prior reservations and hypocrisies, to the Lord Jesus this morning.

C. Others of you may never have entrusted yourself to the love of God as found in the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. It is at the cross that we see the love of God most clearly. **Romans 5:8 ESV** God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

1. Today is a great day to give yourself fully to Christ, trusting him entirely, and taking his name, not in vain but so that you can be made brand new.
2. You will never regret that decision. Life will still be challenging, but it will be lived in the context of a God who moved heaven and hell to not only make you new, but to make you his! What more could you ask for?

D. No matter which category you are in, the communion table is a great place to address our vanities. Like I said last week, it is a place to remember just who Jesus really is, or who he should be in our lives.

1. It is a great place to repent and “renew our vows” as we feast on his broken body and shed blood in the bread and the cup.

2. So don't just come to do one more religious ceremony. That would be the very definition of taking the Lord's name (and his suffering) in vain! Instead, come to remember and reclaim what you once had, or to claim what you need from the storehouses of God's boundless grace.

V.1 Corinthians 11:23 ESV For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, **24** and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." **25** In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." **26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

¹ The ESV Study Bible, Large Print Edition; Note on Exodus 20:7; Pg 197 © 2008 Crossway, Wheaton, Illinois

² ibid

³ ibid

⁴ <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/how-do-you-define-the-sin-of-taking-the-lords-name-in-vain>

⁵ Dennis Prager; <https://youtu.be/lcAP4Be9LZQ>; 10:51-15:27

⁶ <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/vain>

⁷ Ephesians 5:27

⁸ Ephesians 5:26

⁹ John 14:6