

Third Commandment: Honor God's Name

Let us turn to our Bibles to Hosea, chapter 4. Hosea, chapter 4, verse 6. I mentioned we would drill down into this verse. Before I drill even further into it, which I will, I want to cover what it touches upon more generally, which is the third commandment.

Let us listen attentively to the word of God. Hosea, chapter 4, verse 6. My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I will reject you from being priests for me. Because you have forgotten the law of our God, I will also forget your children.

Let us pray. With this terrifying, God, message, and warning, to your people of old, may we examine our lives and our hearts, that we be not like them.

That we would take with proper seriousness and honor, God, the things that you have your name upon, such as your Bible and your word. And to therefore, God, have, as we know, the responsibility to learn it and not to live in culpable ignorance, God Almighty, as we see, unfortunately, too many people in our day. And to that end, God, may your spirit be with us and guide us to have a better understanding of the third commandment.

How to honor your name and how that's related to this verse. Gracious God, we pray these things for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

We live in an age of defilement of God's name. In gross, consistent violations of who he is and his honor of the third commandment. And I don't mean unbelievers.

That's to be expected, unfortunately. Although it wasn't, I understand, in older generations, you see older movies. Apparently, the Ten Commandments was on last night.

Saw a little bit of it. My wife was surprised, it's done at 10:30? It's a long movie. Back then in the 50s, I know they had rules in Hollywood.

Now they don't seem to have any rules. It's just, anything goes. And of course, God's name and blaspheming it is up there on the tops, even on TV now, as we know.

I'm talking about Christians, in Christian circles, people who proclaim the name of our Lord and Savior, just like Hosea. Remember, again and again and again, as we've gone through the Minor Prophets. What's his audience? Christians, that is, Old Testament saints who believe in the Messiah to come.

Members of the household of God, acting like pagans. Movies with Jesus depicted in them, left and right. Action figures of Christ.

I saw that like six or seven years ago. I was just like, what? Flippant use of God's Bible and Gospel truths. We'll talk a little more about that a little bit later, a few verses in.

When you have the power team, you probably don't remember this. I had a group called the Power, I didn't have them personally, but here in Colorado, as I was growing up, not far from here, over there in Nevada. In the evening, I can remember to this day, I must have been 12 or 13, in the 80s.

They had these muscle-bound guys, they were just massive dudes, coming up to replace the preaching. And my daughter's just like, huh? This is all she's ever known, right. The kids growing up on the Covenant, are like: "what? Replace the preaching?" and what they did instead was, we're going to talk about the power of God. And we're going to show you and demonstrate to you the power and the almightiness of our Lord and Savior.SS

And they would bend bars and rip yellow pages. Do you even know what a yellow page is, Renee? Big, thick books. It's a footprint.

Entertainment. Entertainment has its place. Not with God.

Not with His Word. Not with His truth. So they were taking God's name, in vain, by trivializing it.

It's just another entertainment. So don't think taking God's name in vain means cursing all the time. It's a violation of the third commandment.

We're going to see what that looks like here. Since God's Word, of course, is immediately related to God's name and honor. His name is on this, in a way it's not on other things in this world.

Clearly, because He gave it to us, it's special. We can already see how the third commandment relates to this passage in Hosea. It is related by Israel's omission of honoring God's name and Word by staying purposefully ignorant of it.

In particular, of course, of worship. The first four commandments. But not exclusively, because in this immediate context, we read that they're swearing and lying and killing and stealing and committing adultery.

And presumably making excuses for it and not wanting to learn any more about God's law lest they be found more guilty in their own conscience. They like to stay ignorant. And that's an omission of the third commandment, which is to honor God's name and anything He puts His name on, like His law and His Word.

So let's look more carefully here at the third commandment. Before I get to the third commandment, here in the first point, what is forbidden in the third commandment, the second point, of course, is what is commanded, which is the pattern we have in the Shorter Catechism, right? The Westminster Shorter Catechism. But before we get to that, I want to remind us again of some of the principles and rules of God's law, of how to apply it and understand His law.

The Ten Commandments, again, are a summary of God's law. And a summary of that summary, as we saw in Sunday School class, is to love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,

soul, mind, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself. Cheating and other sins, as one example of how to understand God's law, are not explicit in the Ten Commandments.

There is no, thou shalt not cheat. Because cheating is what? Stealing and lying in the same breath. It's a combination of sins.

And we know it's a sin, even though it's not one of the ten explicitly, by a black letter, as we say. But it's a combination. And so we have this understanding that there's a number of other laws implied with singular or a combination of other commandments here, of the Ten Commandments, that are also forbidden.

All commandments also include, of course, the Outward Act, as well as the Inward Act. God isn't just forbidding murder with the hands, but also murder in the heart. And it's always been that way, because He's a God of what? The heart, of the Spirit.

That's Christ's point in John 4, where He says you're supposed to worship Him as Spirit and Truth, because He is a Spirit. He wants your body, but He wants your spirit. He wants your soul.

He wants your soul to be obedient to Him. And of course, Christ hammers the Pharisees about that. You murder your brother in your heart, that too is a violation of God's holy will.

The Pharisees argued over and over again, implicitly, if not explicitly, the externals only counted. And Jesus called them what? Whitened sepulchers, or whitened tombs, that look beautiful on the outside, external, and by their actions, look at me, I'm giving a tithe, I'm helping the poor, look how holy I am, but inward what? Full of dead men's bones. It's a terrible indictment.

So honoring God's name, in other words, the Third Commandment, is not just the lips, it's also our heart. That's implied, that's necessary in this commandment. All commandments include related matters to that commandment, such as the means and methods and the like, to obey or to avoid sin.

Hanging out with people who curse the Lord's name in vain all the time, or watching or hearing it all the time, or reading it all the time, is not a very healthy way to maintain the Third Commandment, now is it? That is not a means, or method, in which it helps you honor God's name, honor His creation, and honor things that He wants you to take seriously. It's the wrong way to fulfill the Third Commandment. The right way would be to be around whatsoever is good, and righteous, and holy, and just, good neighbors, good friends.

Lastly, each commandment implies a negation. Now, of course, I think it was nine out of ten of the commandments are in a negative form, thou shalt not, thou shalt not, thou shalt not, but that also implies thou shalt. You shall not murder implies you should preserve life.

You should not lie implies you should tell the truth, obviously. This is all the evidence, again, the Ten Commandments are but a summary, because God wants us to have a bite-sized way of memorizing these things, and then, with our common sense and God's wisdom bestowed upon us, we have the understanding of how to apply and unpack the law of God. So, not

taking the name of the Lord God in vain, the Lord God in vain, implies you should honor, therefore, His name.

What is Forbidden in the Third Commandment?

So, the question, then, is before us, that is, the Catechism question, 55, the Westminster Shorter Catechism, is what is forbidden in the Third Commandment? The Third Commandment forbids all profaning or abusing of anything whereby God makes Himself known. The Third Commandment forbids all profaning or abusing of anything whereby God makes Himself known. We read, 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.

That is the explicit lettering and words of the Third Commandment, the proof text used here, of course. What does it mean by vain? Vain means empty, useless, false, unreal, or worthless. In short, taking God's name in vain refers to the abuse, misuse, blasphemy, cursing, or manipulation of the Lord's name, instead of the proper and careful use of it in wherever He puts His name on something, His ownership, in other words.

To honor what someone owns, their possessions, their car, their house, or things dear to them, like their kids and their spouse, and if you misuse and abuse them, make fun of them, and poke them, and break them, you're also what? We know this. We don't say it this way in America. You're dishonoring them.

And they take it personally, don't they? And they ought to. That's, what do you think you're doing? That's mine. That's someone precious to me.

That's close to me. That's what we're talking about here in the Third Commandment, brothers and sisters, except it's God Almighty, and He puts His name on you, and His church, and His holy ordinances, and He wants us to take it seriously. If we told an inappropriate joke about our spouse, parents, kids, we'd be offended, and we ought to be.

It's all the more so with God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. This is what the Third Commandment's about. Putting His name, or negatively, being vain about it, using it emptily, unwisely, foolishly, as though it were nothing.

Vain means a light nothingness of sorts. It's whatever. It's just kind of entertainment, right? It's kind of a fun thing.

Chewing a little bit of bubble gum, and it's gone in 30 seconds, right? No, a thousand times no. We're talking about God, and the things close to God that He tells us to take seriously. Profaning God's name.

We have two verbs they have here, because the shorter catechism is just that shorter, so it's very succinct, and He uses the word for profaning or abusing of anything whereby God makes Himself known, where He's put His name on, and where He has been known as well. Leviticus 19.12 is one of the passages here. Leviticus 19.12, He shall not swear by my name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of the Lord your God.

I am the Lord. That is, I am the covenant-keeping God. To profane here means to desecrate, pollute, defile, or to make common.

God is not just a run-of-the-mill God, deity out there. He is not to be spoken and dealt with the things related to Him specifically, like His doctrine and His church and His people and the Gospel, let alone His own person, in just an everyday mundane fashion. The passages used here, we speak of breaking God's covenant, Psalm 89, the misuse of the Sabbath, Exodus 31, that is, it's God's holy day, it's God's day that He put His name on, whereby He is made known, and we should not, therefore, just be flippant and just break it whenever we feel like it.

Swearing falsely falls under this as well. We're breaking our word. Matthew 5, 33.

Here we are with the Pharisees again. Again, you have heard that it was said of those of old, you shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord. But I say to you, do not swear at all, neither by heaven, for it is God's throne, nor by the earth, for it is His footstool, nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.

Now, what is Jesus speaking of here? This is the proof text used by the Puritans about swearing by His throne, by the earth, by His footstool, nor by Jerusalem. The Pharisees had a little game. It's the game we had as kids.

I don't know if the newer generation does this anymore. You take your finger like this and you say, I swear, I promise, I won't do it. And when you have your finger crossed, it means you can lie, it's okay, you got away with it.

The Pharisees were doing a similar thing by saying, I give my word according to the gold in the temple. And that was their way of saying, I don't have to give my word. It just sounds holy and good, right? There's that external, whitened sepulcher, a way of holiness and sanctification, and yet full of dead men's bones and lying and manipulations.

That was the game they played. And that is what? Vainly using the Lord's name in, here, contrary to the third commandment. It's not a joke.

There's a wrong way of jokes, of course, in this regard. It's not cursing, the way we think of using, or using God's name in vain, but it is using His name in a light manner. In this case, lying.

You should not attach His name to any kind of sin. There's more here, profaning or abusing anything of God's. Question 113 gives a little more detail here in the larger catechism.

What are the sins forbidden in the third commandment? I'm not going to read the whole paragraph. The sins forbidden in the third commandment are the not using of God's name as is required, misinterpreting, misapplying, or in any way perverting the word, maintaining false doctrine, and backsliding are some of the ways in which the third commandment is violated by Christians today. Isaiah 5.12 we read, And the harp, and the vial, and the timbrel, and the pipe, and the wine are in the feast.

But they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operations of His hand. So they come to the feasts, the Old Testament festivals there. They have their enjoyment, but God isn't at the point of their festivals.

It's not it. It's just a fun time to get together. A social activity.

The church had become a social club in that regard. And that is what? Using God's name in vain. Let's expand our understanding of that phrase.

Because of course He put His name upon His festivals of the Old Testament and the Lord's Supper in the New Testament and His baptism in the New Testament. These are good things given by God. The pipe, the wine, the harp, and the like are today's computers, cars, clothes, money, and prosperity.

But if we don't regard the Lord and thank Him for these things, we are celebrating a violation of the third commandment. Isaiah 4.6 relates to this description here. Misinterpreting, misapplying, or in any way perverting the word of God.

Clearly and surely being ignorant of what He commands in His word is a way of perverting and undermining and misusing God's Bible. Or even specifically maintaining false doctrines. You get lots of false doctrines if you're ignorant about true doctrine.

If you're willfully ignorant, if you want to maintain your lack of knowledge of God's truth and just wander from church to church, happy because you meet nice, loving people, that's good. The pastor seems very nice, that's good. But you're not interested in ever learning and growing.

That's what happened here in Isaiah 4.6, where people were destroyed for a lack of knowledge. That is not only a violation of the first commandment, you're supposed to have a knowledge of God, it's about Him and Him only as the chief end of man, and therefore you must learn about Him and know of Him. But also the third commandment, which is where He puts His name upon it, which is not only in general revelation, the creation declares that God exists, but specifically and especially His Bible.

No one else has it. It's a special honor that He put His name on whereby He is known even more clearly than general revelation in many regards. They rejected knowledge but embraced lies, and thus they have false worship, false gods, which is also a violation of the third commandment.

More examples. What is technically called scatological language, cursing is the word we would use today, common curse words. In Ephesians 5.11 and 12, Paul writes, And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them for it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret.

And they make jokes about it now on TV and the movies and the radio and everything else. Marriage is honorable among all and the bed undefiled, but fornicators and adulterers God will judge. Hebrews 13.4. Again, this is something God has given and men have abused.

If God has given it and men have abused it, that's a violation of the third commandment. We teach our children to wash their language and the like, and that's good. We ought to maintain these things.

Complaining can also fall into this. If complaining is in the sense of being dissatisfied angrily towards God and the like in his providence, instead of accepting where you are and doing what you can by his will, as he revealed to you, to change it if it's a problem with respect to maintaining your family's integrity, employment and the like. But if you just wander around just always complaining, never happy and satisfied where God has put you, you need to be careful.

Flippant, irreverent proclamation of God's truth is another violation, another big one again. In Christian circles I gave the example at the beginning here of the power team, of Jesus Christ's action figure, of comic book Bibles. It's still there.

The last time we went yesterday to get some more Bolton's at Mordell's, the Christian bookstore. I was there maybe six months ago as well. I remember looking around.

I found it again, the Christian cartoon Bible. Not only do you have the gross violations of pictures of Jesus, it just turns the holy word of God into a cartoon. Kids know what cartoons are about, right? It's playtime.

That's what cartoons are about. A number of you may remember, how long ago was it? I don't remember. It's in my notes.

But I went over Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death* in Sunday school class, right? And he explained how the form of something can change the content of something. That there's a reason for advertisement forms that they use t-shirts and TVs and coffee mugs and short, simple sayings to get your attention. And if we take those and aren't careful with them, you end up reducing God's truth to a trivial advertisement.

And that's what that comic book does. The form clearly of pictures and comic book form pictures, comic-y style, kids know what that is. It's something you don't take seriously.

You don't learn lessons from reading G.I. Joe when I was a kid in the 80s. It's just fun time. It's colorful.

It gets people's attention. The Bible should not be that way at all. It's a serious matter of the soul.

Commercialization of the Christian message in the sense of not being careful with what we use and proclaim God's truth and the like. Again, I'm not saying having anything on a coffee mug like a Bible verse is necessarily wrong. But often what we run across is people use this as a way of evangelizing as opposed to this is just my personal mug.

I have a home to remind me it's my favorite Bible verse. Okay, that's fine. Or a poster.

But they don't. At least not in my experience. Maybe you have.

They typically make it as the message. This is the way to really get people, wake them up. No, often in my experience again, bumper sticker theology is just that.

It's very short. It doesn't communicate very little. It can be even confusing because it's so vague.

It's so short. The Bible has a lot to say. It may take some time to explain it to people.

So, we need to be careful. Stylizing the Star Wars, for example. Largo front.

May the force be with you and make some kind of a connection to Jesus and the Holy Spirit being a force. Do you really want to associate the Holy Spirit with this pagan idea or this scientific whatever movie entertainment idea of the force? Of course you don't. But people want to do this.

And I understand the zeal. They want to get people's attention into the front door of the church. But you don't do it by trivializing God's truth.

People associate things with this. You've got to be careful in this regard. That's what reminded me why I never watched the Ten Commandments and had my daughter not watch it as a kid.

I'm not saying necessarily a sin, but I don't want her getting the wrong idea. The Bible doesn't give you two hours worth of Moses' life before he gets out of Egypt. That's what they did in the movie.

We're in the world of that kind. They made up all kinds of stuff there. All kinds of stuff.

Not in the word of God. Just to fill space. And kids are very impressionable.

And they're going to wake up remembering this stuff. They watch it every year and make a habit of it, for example. It may be a great acting.

I don't remember. Charlton Heston. It must be great.

But they're going to remember all these other gaps that aren't there. Made up things. We don't want God's word mixed with other things, even unintentionally, if we can avoid it.

That's my point. And so one way to ask this question, because it's not always an easy answer. I'm not trying to give you the say that there's always an easy answer about this.

But do these methods show the weightiness of God's truth, or are they without weight and significance? I think I put in this regard a lot of religious jokes. We've got to be very careful about that. Now there's reasons annexed, we forget about this, to the third commandment.

What are the reasons annexed to the third commandment? Question 56 of the Shorter Catechism. The reason annexed to the third commandment is that however the breakers of the commandment may escape punishment from men, yet the Lord our God will not suffer them to escape His righteous judgment. And we certainly see that here in verse 6, the latter part.

Because you have forgotten the law of your God, Hosea warns them, I will also forget your children. How terrifying is that? I don't want my children to be forgotten by God, or my grandchildren. And the Lord warns His people, you maintain this path of ignorance, this is exactly what's going to happen.

And that's a segue into my next sermon about the ignorance that we have today. We have to fight this ignorance in our own lives, and the lives of those we love around us. Ignorance of His Word.

It is easy to focus on the second table, bemoaning the high divorce rates, and the like, and lying ministers, and the scandals. But ask yourself, what if the first table of the law, what of it? How much of the troubles in the Church of America is because we blaspheme God's name, we live in ignorance, we violate the third commandment, and God says, I'm going to forget you, and I'm going to forget your children. Which clearly is a curse and a judgment.

What is commanded in the third commandment? This is the positive side of it. Question 54. What is required in the third commandment? The third commandment requires the holy and reverent use of God's names, titles, and attributes, ordinances, words, and works.

Malachi 1:6. A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I be a father, where is mine honor? And if I be a master, where is my fear? Saith the Lord of hosts unto you, O priest that despise my name. So here it's more negative, the implication being the positive, that you ought to honor me, you ought to fear me.

That's the other half of the commandment. Thou shalt not take my name in vain, but rather what? Take it with honor, and take it with dignity, like we would do to our forefathers, and those that died in the war. That's probably a more relevant example for conservatives today who aren't Christian.

They take seriously our history, they honor our men who went to war, and they won't take any kind of jokes against that. Good. All the more with God, God Almighty.

And not to play around with what he has told us, and has given us in his word, in his ordinances. And you say, when have we despised your name? And continue here in Malachi 1, I think it's 1-7 now. And they reply to God, when have we despised your name? There's that specific verb there, despised your name.

You offer defiled food on my altar, but say, in what way have we defiled you? By saying, the table of the Lord is contemptible. And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and the sick, is it not evil? They gave the worst of their sacrifices, of the animals, of the cattle, of the sheep, on the altar. And they're like, why is that a big deal? God's saying, you're not honoring my name.

You are what? You have despised my name. Not the name, qua name, that is, they're using God's name, mimicking jokes of it, but where he put his name attached to, which is the sacrifices of the Old Testament in particular, those sacraments. This is, in other words, a proof text that explains why that, we use that phrase here, the name of God, and what it's attached to.

So despising God isn't just despising him directly in the sense of, I hate God, or ignorant of him, I don't care about him, I don't care about his ordinances, I don't care about his word, I don't care about his preaching, I don't care about his people. Things where his name is attached to. Malachi 1:6 and following.

Dishonoring God through dishonoring actions. They show this by their actions towards things that are his. How would you like to be honored? How would you like your parents to be honored? We already mentioned this.

Be spoken carefully. Not to be made light of. We even have days of celebration of our veterans, Veterans Day.

And we have that for God. It's the Lord's Day. Right? Although the Lord's Day is the fourth commandment, it's still related to the third commandment.

So this reminds us again how the ten commandments interrelate with one another, even though they're summaries. He put his name on the Sabbath day. So breaking the Sabbath is also breaking the third commandment.

It's despising. As they asked here, how are we despising your name? God's like, it's not just my name as such on your lips, but the things I've given you like the sacrifices or my holy day, the days of the feasts. So positively, the holy use of God's name, titles and attributes, speaking the truth about God to our neighbors, being careful to know his ways, speaking clearly of these ways and his titles of who he is and his attributes.

What is Commanded in the Third Commandment?

And as I read earlier, backsliding is a violation of the third commandment. The flip side of that is in the positive, here the third commandment requires a holy and reverent use of God's name, titles, attributes, word, and works, and the works are good works, holy works in your life. Backsliding is denying those good works, tearing them down, becoming and going towards bad works.

That's the flip side. We're supposed to live a life not blaspheming God's name because God's name is upon you. 1 Peter 2.12, Having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles that when they speak against you as evildoers, and they have done this for the last several years, they may by your good works which they observe, what? Glorify God in the day of visitation because they know God's name is on us.

Obedying God honors His name and therefore is a fulfillment of the third commandment because God wants more than our words but also our actions. The holy use of God's ordinances, words, and works, as I already gave an introduction here to works, that is our life, whether we're backsliding or we shouldn't be backsliding, but rather living a life in which the world sees our good works and rejoicing in Him. The care of creation, that's part of His works as well.

Honoring the Sabbath day, listening carefully to the sermon, praying sincerely, earnestly, like you really mean it, carefully living in this regard as well and using His word, speaking carefully about His truth and His doctrine. This is why the Reformed faith has taken so seriously the confessions and the like and we go over it. It took a lot of debate and going back and forth.

If you really want to go to sleep early tonight, go ahead and you can find the newest edition of Lightfoot's notes on the debates of the Westminster Assembly. That will put you to sleep real quick. Because they want to be very careful with God's word, handle it very carefully in terms of what the truth is and not just their own imaginations.

That's part of the third commandment as well. Brothers and sisters, there's a lot actually if you go there in the larger catechism on what it means to honor God's word and the things He puts His name upon, ordinances, His works, His titles, His name, attributes. We are called to honor Him by everything that we do and the best way to honor Him, brothers and sisters, is to keep our eyes on Jesus.

To live a life of repentance in His name, a life of faith and trust in Him is the greatest honoring of the commandments. For if we fail and sin and we will, we still have the promises and we turn around and repent it to self. It's a gift of God.

Because it's turning away from wickedness of dishonoring His name and wanting to honor His name. Let us honor and glorify God's name this week, brothers and sisters, standing boldly upon His promises through Christ Jesus that He will indeed work in and through us by the power of the Holy Spirit. Let us pray.

Father, Son, Holy Spirit, as we meditate upon the third commandment, not to take Your name in vain, not to take it in a trivial fashion and flip it in a light fashion, but with due weight and consideration, with proper honor and the like. God, help us in this goal in our life. By Your Spirit we pray not to give up, not to dismay, but to know that You are with us and that we can and have taken seriously the word of our Lord.

Help us in that regard as well to help one another to avoid violations of this commandment. Gracious God and Savior, that Your name be glorified in all that we do. We pray by the blood of Christ.