

Exodus 20:7 – The third commandment

God's law is like a mirror. It shows us what we are truly like. People will tell you about their own goodness (Proverbs 20:6); but God's law shows us the truth. The first command told us that the true God must be our God, without rivals. The second told us that our worship and beliefs about him must come from his word alone. Now the third tells us how we are to worship him.

1. The name of God

Names have meanings. In the Bible, a name represents a whole person. It shows us some truth about that person. Moses was “drawn out” of the water. Peter was a “rock”. Jesus means “Saviour”. This commandment is really telling us to respect as holy *everything* that is connected with God (e.g. his name, his church, his commands, his Bible, his day). His name, Jehovah, reveals him as the eternal, glorious one who depends upon nobody. His name is unlike any other; he is completely holy. This is the God we have to deal with. Everything about him is awesome and demands our total respect.

2. What it means to use God's name lightly or “in vain”

To use God's name “in vain” means to use it in a common way. It means to treat it as ordinary. In a king's palace, you must behave very well and treat everything with complete respect. This means that everything connected with God must be treated by us as holy. A Christian profession is a very serious thing. Church membership must be taken seriously. God's day must be treated as holy (4th commandment). In worship and in prayer, we must come with respect and worship, not just speaking to God as a person like us.

3. The special reasons to avoid this sin

He is the LORD – great and holy. He deserves this honour; when we treat him as holy, we are acting according to truth. He is also our God; he has made us, he has kept us and provided for us, and if we love Jesus then he has saved us. What could be worse than treating such a being as common? God says he will not hold anyone guiltless who does this. Men may think that Christianity can be treated lightly, but God will take notice of what we do and punish us for it.

4. Why we need a Saviour

There are no limits on this command. Even our thoughts must be completely pure and reverent. Truly, we need a new heart to obey this command. How often we are angry if someone insults us – but we think or feel little or nothing if someone insults God! The good news is that Jesus can give us a new command. Jesus was guiltless. But God treated him as guilty of all the sins of all his people. God's holy anger was poured out on Jesus at the cross. Jesus was punished so that we can go free. If we turn away from our wrong ways and trust in Jesus' death and resurrection, then he will forgive us and make us new.