

Glorify God's Name; 3rd Commandment Exodus 20:7 Leviticus 24:10-23

In the movie, the Mission, Jesuit missionaries came to South America and began to share the gospel with native peoples in Brazil. These missionaries, in their love for Jesus, created farming communities in which the Indians and the white people worked together and shared in the fruits of their labor. In their working together the missionaries discovered that the native peoples of Brazil loved classical music, they loved to sing. And so they formed choirs and orchestras together and the missionaries trained these people how to make and to play their own violins and other instruments. The effect of their mission was amazing. They created such a wonderful community that some people said this mission was like paradise.

The problem of this early mission was that it became a commercial competitor with other plantations. And these other plantations were remarkably different. Whereas the missionaries and the Indians worked as partners together for the common good of the community, in the other plantations the whites were cruel bosses and the Indians were slaves and the bottom line was profit and power. The royal courts of Europe owned these slave run plantations, and these Jesuit missions were seen as unnecessary thorns in the flesh. So the royal courts, the people in power in Europe began to oppose the Jesuits and to complain to the pope that these missionaries were interfering in the political and economic affairs of South America. The pope listened to their lobbying and saw that removing the Jesuits from South America would please these powerful princes and these greedy plantation owners in Europe. The pope realized too that ridding the region of Jesuits would also increase his political power and his popularity.

So the pope, the representative of Jesus on earth, sent a cardinal to South America to close these Jesuit missions down, and to send the missionaries home. The Cardinal who was sent said. "I was like a surgeon sent to cut off a diseased limb to save a life." But when he came to Brazil and saw the Jesuit missions he was amazed at what he found. "I had no idea what an inexpressibly beautiful and healthy limb I was sent to cut off." Nevertheless he ordered the missions closed, and the Jesuits returned to Europe.

Shortly after the missionaries left the white colonists massacred the Indian population. One plantation owner said to the cardinal: Your eminence, this is the way of the world.

"No", replied the cardinal. We have made the world this way and I have helped to make it so."

In the name of God popes and people do terrible things. In the name of God Christians destroyed the culture and the dignity of the Aboriginal peoples living in North and South America. In the name of God the church burned at the stake handicapped women as witches. In the name of God people have gone to war and justified the slaughtering of the enemy. In the name of God people have heckled and gossiped and abused others so that the only option for them was suicide. In the name of God people even today promote systems of hatred and cruelty for the weak and the helpless. All in the name of God.

And God is angry and pained. "I will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses my name," says the Lord. That, my friends is what the third commandment is about: You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.

As you can tell from the example this misusing of God's name means more than mouthing swear words although that is included too. God's name is more than just a word. God's name is God's reputation. From the bible we understand that God places his name in the midst of the people who worship God. Where there is an altar, where there is a temple, where there is a body of Christ there the name of God lives. God's name is planted among the people when the priest blesses the people and pronounce the holy name over them, and they live in that blessing. God's name stands for God's reputation. God's character, God's life lives among the people who honor and worship him. God's name stands for God's purpose and God's activity in the world. God's name is God's holiness, his majesty, God's glory, God's spirit. God's name stands for the presence of God. God's name is God's revelation of himself. The name of God is God's trademark, God's logo, the sign of God's presence and God's authority. And from the New Testament we realize that Jesus is the embodiment, the personification of the name of God. At the name of Jesus, at person of Jesus every knee shall bow, because the name, the life of God, the reputation of God lived in him.

To understand the nature of this commandment we read Lev 24. In that passage we meet a man born from an Egyptian father and an Israelite mother. He lived among the Israelites. He lived among the people who had that name of God in their midst. He was a person who reaped the benefits and the blessings of God's salvation even though the rest of his fellow Egyptians were drowned and killed. But as he lived in their community, he fought with an Israelite. It seemed that the Egyptian desire to subdue, enslave, and degrade the people of God still lived in his heart. Knowing the teaching of the New Testament I see that this fight was no ordinary fight. It was a fight that represents his conscious fighting against what God was doing. As matter of fact in the fight this Egyptian slanders the name of God. He misuses the name, he misuses the purpose of the salvation of God. He uses the name of God to fight against the work of God. He uses the name of God to fight the people of God.

This is the sin against the third commandment. This is misusing God's name. Fighting against God's people and God's kingdom. The question is how bad is this sin. What can we compare it to? What is just?

In the Old Testament justice followed the law of retribution. The punishment was to equal the crime. An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and a life for a life. The question Israel asked was: what is equal to misusing the name of God? And the answer was death. Anyone who misuses the name of God must be put to death. That is just.

Does that make sense to you? Let me give you a couple of modern examples of misusing the name of God, and you decide if death is just. Get back for a moment to native peoples. Just 70 years ago, the law of Canada said that Indians had to go to Catholic boarding schools. At those Christian schools the Indians were told in the name of God that their language was demon talk. Whenever Indian children spoke their own native languages

they had their mouths wash with soap and they were beaten as punishment. Everything about them, their clothes, their family life, their art, their ideas, their worship these Christians said was evil. And as these Christians educated these Indian children they abused them in many different ways. And as a result these children learned to hate themselves, and today we live with the consequences of abuse and alcoholism. Whole tribes have been destroyed emotionally and spiritually. These schools had the name Christian on them, but they misused the name.

The Klu Klux Klan used the name of God in the same way. Quoting bible texts, and singing hymns, and raising crosses these people terrorized others who had a different skin color. They deeply scared these people, and today many of their grandchildren walk the unemployment lines of our cities, and take up space in our local prisons.

And then there are the bible quoting perpetrators who abuse their own children, and they damage them for life.

What do you think is just? What do you think should happen to people who use the name of God, who misquote the bible piously to bolster up their own opinions and their own greedy actions, and do exactly the opposite of what Jesus did on earth? The Old Testament says: The person who misuses the name of God must be put to death.

That is pretty severe isn't it? But then so is the offense. The sin of misusing the name of God robs people of life. It kills the life giving spirit of God in them, their ability to bear the image of God, it stops the kingdom and the love of God from coming. And so the law of retribution made Moses and the people of Israel take the Egyptian God slanderer outside the camp and they stoned him to death. Pretty awful isn't it, but then so was the crime. It was a crime against God himself.

In the New Testament Jesus discusses this third commandment again from the perspective of grace. Jesus says in Mark 3:28: I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of people, all slandering of God's name and misusing of God's name will be forgiven them.

When you use the Name of God to damn things and people, or when you use the name of Jesus to curse and to swear and impress. Or when you say nothing about it when you're friends or your coworkers workers insult god that way. When you pray out of habit and don't even know you have misused the name of God, don't even know you have prayed. When you have misquoted the bible because you are protecting your own position of power and strength. Even when you wash out the mouth of an innocent child in the name of Jesus your sin will be forgiven. You don't need to bear the death penalty. Jesus came for you. He was crucified under exactly that charge of misusing the name of God. He was innocent, and we are guilty, but he died in our place for our misuse of God's name. If we confess our sin, if we repent of this misuse of God's name we will be forgiven. You are forgiven.

But; says Jesus in Mark 3:29: but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit, will never be forgiven. Whoever misuses the name of God by opposing the work of the Holy Spirit

God will never consider this person guiltless, that person will be guilty of breaking the third commandment and the punishment will be death eternally.

What is this sin against the Holy Spirit? The sin against the Holy Spirit is the sin of saying that Jesus is possessed by an evil spirit. The sin against the Holy Spirit is the sin of opposing Jesus purposely. It is to do like the teachers of the law did. When they saw Jesus in action, when they saw the power of the Holy Spirit in Jesus and how the life giving love of God could heal the broken hearted and the weak and the poor, they said about Jesus that he was possessed by Beelzebub, the prince of demons. When we say that God is the Devil, or Jesus is a demon we are gravely breaking the third commandment.

When we consciously purposely oppose the work of Jesus, when we consciously bear false witness to his name. That is what breaking the third commandment is: bearing false witness about God and Jesus. When we purposely drag the name of Jesus in the mud and associate him with the demonic. When we consciously oppose the life giving spirit of God and stand in the way of the work of the spirit, in the way of the coming kingdom, God will not hold us guiltless.

The third commandment is given so that we will honor and glorify the name of God. This commandment is given to help us to hallow God's name and to desire the coming of God's kingdom. This third commandment is given so that we will use the name of God with reverence and awe. That we will confess him truthfully, that our witness about God will be accurate and inviting. This third commandment is given so we will pray to God in all sincerity and praise God in everything we do.

We as people of God, we as a community that bear the name of God and of Jesus, we are called to lift up the name of Jesus. We are called to carry that name and wear that name with integrity, so that others who see us in action, and will hear our praise will know what God is really like. We will be true image bearers, true representatives of God. So let us praise the name of Jesus.