

The 3rd Commandment: Reverence

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[0 : 00] So what's in a name that which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet? Famous lines from Romeo and Juliet. Juliet ponders whether names really do have significance.

And although it's true that a rose called by any other name would smell as sweet, it has been given that name. And the name itself, a rose, conjures up so many ideas, images, and interconnections. Names are important. Chat to any one of the new parents in church, and they'll all have reasons why they gave their babies the names that they did. Names are significant.

Your identity is bound up with your name in a legal sense on the one hand, but perhaps more importantly on the other in a descriptive sense. A name conjures up a whole history and a life. Everything we know about one another is tied in a sense to our names. Without a name, who would we be? What's in a name?

[1 : 12] Everything. And if that's true for us, well, it's even more so for God. Whilst we are named by our parents, God has existed forever, and so he names himself.

His name is the perfect revelation of who he is. That's why the third commandment exists. You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

And yet, we live in a culture where the names God, Christ, and Jesus are more commonly used as exclamations of shock than as the name of God himself.

So, let's sort of think together about the significance of this commandment, the reasons it exists, and the ways in which Christians in Scotland today should honor it.

There's three points which I want to focus on. God's name is holy, number one. Number two, God's name is abused. And number three, God's name is given to the church, which has a few sub points.

[2 : 17] So, number one, God's name is holy. When we said the Lord's Prayer earlier together, we began by praying, Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

In other words, may your name be holy and glorified, for it is holy and glorious. Why do we pray this? Well, we pray it because the holiness of God's name is significant.

Holiness is a godly separateness. And God's name is distinctively like no other name. The giving of the Ten Commandments comes in Exodus 20, the halfway point of the Exodus story.

There are two moments, before and after this, where God reveals something important about his name to Moses and his people, showing how distinctive it is. The first we've already read is when God appeared to Moses on a mountain in a bush that was on fire, but not burning up.

God here was sending Moses to lead his people out of slavery in Egypt. And Moses wanted to know who God was. I'll read some of these verses again.

[3 : 26] Moses said to God, suppose I go to the Israelites, and I say to them, the God of your fathers has sent me to you. And they ask me, what is his name? Then what shall I tell them?

And God said to Moses, I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites. God also said to Moses, say to the Israelites, the Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob has sent me to you.

This is my name forever. The name you shall call me from generation to generation. When you're reading the Old Testament and you see the word Lord in capital letters, as we do here, that translates God's name, Yahweh.

And his name, Yahweh, means I am who I am. The name I am, it captures God's eternity, his essentialness to everything.

That sense that he is the foundation to all creation. He is the self-existing self, self-sustaining one. No one else can describe themselves with the words, I am, but God can.

[4 : 42] That's the first moment. The second moment comes in Exodus chapter 34. This is after Israel have sinned terribly by crafting a golden calf to worship. God forgives them and he gives Moses another revelation of his name at this point.

This is what Exodus 34 says. Then the Lord, Yahweh, came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord, Yahweh.

And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, the Lord, the Lord, Yahweh, Yahweh, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished. He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation. So here, God is revealing the meaning of his name even further.

His name encapsulates his justice and it encapsulates his compassion and his love and his forgiveness and his faithfulness. His name reveals who he is.

[5 : 55] Unless the Bible story develops, God's name is unpacked in the way he acts in history.

And the biggest development of this comes 1400 years after the Exodus, when a baby was born in Bethlehem, the day when God came to earth as a man, God with us.

So Joseph was told by the angel, Mary will give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins. We mentioned baby names earlier.

Mary didn't get to name her firstborn because God the Father already had a name for God the Son. Jesus, the one who will save God's people from their sins.

Because Jesus came as a man to die the death that we deserve for sin, Paul writes this in his letter to the Philippians. Therefore, God exalted Jesus to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

And every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Jesus Christ is the Lord.

[7 : 15] He has the name above every other name, the name of God. And one day, everyone will realize it. Realize the name they've been saying in mocking jest for years is the name of God himself.

Because this authority has been given to Jesus in the wake of his victory on the cross, Jesus told his disciples before he ascended into heaven, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

The threefold name of God, Father, Son, and Spirit. That's the name that Christians are called by and baptized into. And it reflects the fullest revelation of God's name.

He is three persons, one God. And so the Bible story reveals and unpacks bit by bit the name of God and its implications.

God's name is holy and it's powerful and it's wonderful. It reveals who God is and teaches us about his character and his work in human history, particularly when Jesus arrives on the scene.

[8 : 33] And if this is the nature of God's name, then the biggest implication is this, that it deserves reverence and respect. These are not unfamiliar concepts to us.

When meeting a royal, for example, you would be expected to meet them in an attitude of deference and respect. It's just what you do because of who they are. When it comes to God's name, because of who he is, his name is to be used with reverence and with respect.

Some people can be overcautious and fearful about using God's name. The Jews became like this. And that's part of the reason that our Old Testaments say, Lord, rather than Yahweh.

It's a bit of a hangover from that attitude. But God has revealed his name so that his people can know him. God, Yahweh, Jesus.

These are names to be used, but used reverently. When God's name is used irreverently, well, that's what we call blasphemy.

[9 : 40] Perhaps an archaic-sounding idea in our day and age, but actually a deeply important one for understanding how we're supposed to relate to God and relate to and use his name.

And this leads us into our second point, the fact that sadly, in this world, God's name is abused.

Today, when people speak of blasphemy, what possibly comes to mind quickest is the controversial blasphemy laws held by some Muslim states.

They treat blasphemy against their false god as a very serious offense. Perhaps Christians in Britain are slightly numb to blasphemy because it happens all around us. The true God's name is misused and abused in everyday speech all the time. In the songs we hear on the radio or on Spotify, in the TV that we watch, and in the conversations that we hear and are part of all throughout the day.

And yet, the third commandment compels Christians to take it seriously. God says, you shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

[10:58] God is not some abstract concept who could bear any name. He is the living God and so his name is sacred. He's revealed his name to us in kindness and in grace.

And so, of course, he would be offended if his name, the most beautiful name in all existence, was trampled on, mocked, and abused.

In Israel, God's law developed further what it looked like to blaspheme. Let's take one law. One law said, do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God.

I am the Lord. So, there's one way in which his name can be misused, swearing falsely on it. Here's another and this second one's perhaps a little bit more controversial.

Anyone who curses their God will be held responsible. Anyone who uses the name of the Lord blasphemously is to be put to death. Isn't that shocking?

[12:00] Actually, maybe a better question is, why do we find that shocking? Now, I should say that this law was for God's people who God had redeemed and who God had revealed himself to.

It was not primarily for the nations and so, it speaks here to how important it is for God's people to relate to God and to his name rightly. If we find that shocking, it's probably because we don't hold God's name in the same esteem which he holds it.

Now, I've been challenged working on this talk because I think this is an area where our culture is really negatively impact our view, the church's view, of God's name. When we see a law like this, it really shows us that using God's name flippantly as an exclamation or as a joke is actually really serious.

It's similarly serious as making false promises in God's name or to God, whether casually saying we swear to God or promising that we will do X for God if he does Y for us and then not following through.

Folks often talk about a scary experience as one where their heart is in their mouth. In many ways, our heart is always in our mouth. How we use our words often reveals our hearts.

[13:25] How we use God's name. Well, that reveals how much we revere it. And blasphemy, it's not just a word thing. It can also occur in our actions.

Consider this law. Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molech, who was the Moabite god, for you must not profane the name of your god. I am the Lord.

Now, I hope it's not surprising that child sacrifice to false gods is a bad thing. That hopefully is fairly self-explanatory. What maybe is more surprising is that this is a way of breaking the third commandment.

And indeed, that's the commandment that is in view in that law. The first, second, and sixth are still broken by doing that. But it's the third that that law focuses on, which is quite interesting. Here's another, which shows that the third commandment has a bearing on all the actions of God's people. If you do not carefully follow all the words of the law which are written in this book, and do not revere this glorious and awesome name, the Lord, Yahweh your God, the Lord will send fearful plagues on you and your descendants, harsh and prolonged disasters, and severe and lingering illnesses.

[14:38] Now, those plagues mentioned, they were a particular judgment for Israel at the time when they failed to follow this law. But the main thing I want us to notice is that following God's law and revering God's name are linked here.

Reverence for God's law involves, or reverence for God's name rather, involves following God's law. This is very sobering because this means that every time God's people sin, we break the third commandment.

Our sin denigrates and slanders the name of the one who saved and bought us. When the world misuses God's name, it is a terrible offense. For example, Ezekiel speaks of God revealing his holiness to the nations who have misused his name.

And revelation in its typical symbolic imagery, well, it pictures the world as a blasphemous beast. Listen to this description. The beast had ten horns and seven heads with ten crowns on its horns and on each head a blasphemous name.

The beast was given a mouth to utter proud words and blasphemies. It opened its mouth to blaspheme God and to slander his name and his dwelling place and those who live in heaven. [15:55] So blasphemy is to be, in a sense, expected from a world that doesn't know God. It's instinctive. This doesn't justify it by any means, but it explains its prevalence.

What's worse, though, is when Christians abuse the name of God? It was so that God's Old Testament people didn't abuse his name, that God was prepared to punish them so harshly. This is why God has saved his people from slavery in Egypt and established them. He gave them a hope, a home, and an identity. To then trample on his name in response is actually then pretty sickening, isn't it?

And those who are Christians are God's New Testament people. Jesus has saved us from slavery to sin. He died on a cross and took the punishment of hell so that we could live.

So how could we even think of trampling on his name after he has done that for us? And yet, Paul says in his letter to Titus that there are those who claim to know God but by their actions deny him. [17:12] They are detestable, disobedient, and unfit for doing anything good. And Jesus himself offered this rather stark warning. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Many will say to me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?

Then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers. Now, this side of Christ's return, as we know, we will never be without sin.

But Jesus has paid for our sins so we can have assurance of salvation when we read a section like that. But, if we make a deliberate practice of continuing in sin and continue to break this commandment deliberately, and if we use God's name in a way that demeans it without seeking to reform and change our speech, it will serve as a record against us when Jesus does return.

And, it may be the proof that Jesus never knew you. Oh, this is heavy stuff. It's a, it's a solemn commandment because God's name is important.

[18:44] Much more important than I think we perhaps tend to realize. And the warnings accompanied with breaking this commandment may be shocking. But what I want to look at now is the blessings associated with God's name.

And I hope we'll see that actually the blessings associated with God's name actually outshine the stark warnings associated with it. So our last point is that God's name has been given to the church. We said earlier that God had revealed his name to us in grace. His name is not to be misused but it is also not to be avoided. God's name is to be used. We've got three sub points here.

God has given us his name for praise, for mission and as our new identity. And this is the positive application of this commandment because if misuse is prohibited well then correct use is encouraged, demanded even.

So let's look at the Psalms for example. The Psalms, the songbook of the Old Testament is filled to bursting with praise using the name that God has given to his people. Psalm 8 begins, this is what we read earlier, Lord, Yahweh, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.

[20:02] Psalm 29, ascribe to the Lord the glory due to his name. Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness.

and Psalm 103 which we just sang, it starts, praise the Lord my soul or my inmost being, praise his holy name.

Because we know God's name we can and we should use his name to praise him. Because we know Jesus, we should lift his name up with our voices in adoration and in love.

And there are good Christ-like reasons why we follow the government guidance throughout the pandemic, but I'm really glad that next week we can sing because it is such a wonderful thing to praise the name of Jesus.

It's one thing doing it in your heart, but it's even more beautiful to sing it out loudly from the depths of our lungs and worship him with our mouths and in song. It's a wonderful, beautiful thing to do and God has given us his name to do that.

[21 : 08] We were made to praise God's holy name and to use his name in worship. Although we mustn't forget that our worship is not in our speech alone.

There's a particular kind of worship that we do when we're gathered all together like this, but all of our life is to be worship. And so as Christians, as we bear Jesus' name in the world and we worship him in the way that we live, we want to be living in a way that reflects his name.

And as we do this, we use his name in mission. The mission of the church is to tell the world the good news about Jesus and to make disciples, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

God said to his Old Testament people, the Lord will establish you as his holy people as he promised on oath if you keep the commands of the Lord your God and walk in obedience to them. Then, all the peoples on earth will see that you are called by the name of the Lord and they will fear you.

So even back in the Old Testament, the way God's people live was to be in a way that was counter-cultural and reflects Christ. And the way we live should show that we are called by the name of God.

[22 : 30] God's called Peter and John, two of the earliest disciples, and Acts tells us they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.

But Peter and John replied, which is right in God's eyes to listen to you or to him. You be the judges. As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard. In other words, the name of Jesus has been given to God's people for sharing. People use Jesus' name all the time and in the worst ways. They have no idea that the name upon their lips is the name that brings salvation from sin and death. But if you're a Christian, you do. We have received life in Jesus' name. And now we should go and do likewise, sharing the true reality and the true power of Jesus' name to a city that has forgotten it. I don't know about you, but I feel challenged by this because it is hard. It's hard to speak in the name of one that so many dismiss and treat flippantly.

It's weird. It's awkward. And it's very countercultural. But it is the mission. It's the mission that God has given to us. And if you'll pardon the pun, it's not impossible because we go in the power of Jesus' name. And this powerful name of Jesus is our identity. I love Isaiah 43.

God says to his people, do not fear for I have redeemed you. I have summoned you by name. You are mine. God knows our names. He knows the name of his children, mine, yours, every believer throughout history. And Christians are, as Isaiah writes later in the chapter, everyone who is called by my name, everyone who is called by God's name. To be a Christian is to be called by the name of God.

And to bear his name as his children. We bear the name like we bear a family name. Once we were separated from God and we were not in his family. But Christ has redeemed us and has made his church his bride. And his bride takes and bears his name. Jesus says in Revelation, the one who's victorious, i.e. the one who keeps following him. I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. And this is the really key thing. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God. And I will also write on them my new name. It's a powerful and perhaps slightly strange image, but it conveys so much. Conveys this idea that God's people have been given the name of Jesus. We are his bride. John later sees in his vision. Then I looked and I saw before me was the lamb,

[26 : 09] Jesus, standing on Mount Zion and with him 144,000 who had his name and his father's name written on their foreheads. The number there is figurative. What John saw was a picture of our future. One day when Christ returns, all his people throughout history who have been called by his name are going to stand before him and enter into eternity with him. The bride who bears his name. And what a name it is.

The name that is above every name. If you haven't come to know Jesus by name, I can promise you that by the power of his name, your brokenness can be healed, your sins can be forgiven, and your life can be made completely new in the power of the name of Christ. His name really is the name above every name. His name brings salvation and it brings restoration and it brings hope. What a privilege it is, what a privilege it is to be Christ's perfect bride. Made spotless by the cross and called by the name of Jesus.

What's in a name? What's in God's name? Uncountable blessings and eternal life with Jesus. Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.