

## THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

Text: Exodus 20:7

By Pastor YAU

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### INTRODUCTION:

1) The giving of a name in Chinese culture: There are several aspects of a name in Chinese culture. Besides the family or last name that comes from family lineage, the given name, or first name in America, is chosen with lots of deliberation and consideration, such as the meaning of the characters or words chosen that will carry the good will and hope of those who hold the authority in the family to give names, usually one of the eldest in the family. Then the sounds of words must be pleasing and easy to pronounce. Then there must not include words that were used by parents or grandparents in their names, to show them respect. When a name is chosen and given, that is forever how the newborn will be identified, for the rest of his or her life. Any change is prohibited and will be deemed as an act of rebellion and disrespect.

2) The giving of a name in Western culture: Many of us are confused by the process of giving names in the British royal family. Although I have read some articles on the tradition of giving names in the British royal family, there are meanings, historical importance and other aspects few of us may never fully understand. Western culture sees names more about the tradition of the family and the intimate relationship between generations. That's why we see people name their son the same name as his father or grandfather and call him Junior or the Second or the Third. Our son Franklin gave the name of his mother Sophia as his daughter Evelyn's middle name, while Cecil gave my name Kenny as the middle name of his first born son Asa. Traditionally, names were chosen by simplicity, good meaning and easy pronunciation. That's why it happens many people have the same name in a class at school or at work or in a church.

THE MEANINGS OF NAMES: Why do we have names and what

do they mean? Here are a few common aspects of names:

1) Names represent identity: Maybe this is the most important reason why we have names. We have names so each of us will be separately identified. It is important to distinguished one person from another when we interact with them. Just imagine what kind of chaos might arise if you have several kids in your family and none of them has a name you can identify. How about in a class of 25 students without names for each one? So, names are necessary for identification purposes. With the combination of family name and given name, usually we are able to identify a particular person, with few exceptions.

2) Names represent character: Most people name their children with hopes of good will. With the help of dictionary and website, we can easily find the exact meaning of names to give to our children. When parents try to find names for their children, they do so with the hope and wishes of character traits and accomplishments they want to see in their children. When God gave the name Jesus to the firstborn baby of Mary, He intended Jesus to be the deliverer of humans from their sins. (Mt. 1:21) God had a purpose in changing the name Abram, the exalted father, to Abraham, father of a multitude or many nations. (Gen 17:5) God also changed Jacob, heel holder, to Israel, God prevails. (Gen 32:28) Jesus changed Simon, heard, to Peter, stone. (Matt 16:18) When believers of Jesus were called Christians in Antioch, they were recognized as followers of Christ. (Acts 11:26)

3) Names represent reputation: On June 13, Hillary Clinton relaunched her bid for the White House with a new approach to the politically recognized name "Clinton." Two days later, on June 15, Jeb Bush also used his family name to kick off his presidential campaign. Both names, Clinton and Bush, carry the reputation of political power. In that same week, a financial scam was reported on the news that thousands of investors, mostly from China and Hong Kong, had lost US\$1.2B to a wealth management company named AGI Premiere Swiss Trust AG. Some international criminals used the

good name of Switzerland to entice ignorant but greedy investors by misrepresenting the good name of Switzerland in financial business. From early days of history, many people have worked hard to create a good name and fight hard to protect it. To most people, both in the East and the West, the reputation of a name is very important to the dignity of that person and the family.

4) Names represent authority: Throughout history, the names of kings and emperors or powerful people carried supreme authority over their subjects. Decrees issued in the name of a king must be obeyed and followed. In today's society, names of authority are still recognized and respected with honor, even in merchandizing. That is why brand names of consumer items like cars, watches, clothing, purses and many other items represent quality and prestige. When we see a name, be it in commercial, politics or another area of life, we recognize whether that name carries authority.

HERE is the Fifth Commandment: “Thou shall not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.” (Exodus 20:7, KJV)

### THREE PARTS OF THIS COMMANDMENT:

1) Knowing the name of the Lord: The word “Lord” is from a Hebrew word YHWH, pronounced “Yahweh,” “Jehovah” in English. Jewish people dare not to speak the name “God,” so YHWH was translated “the Lord.” No one gave God his name, as we all are given names. When Moses asked God for his name, God told him: “I am” or “I am who I am,” which means “I am self-existent and everlasting.” (Ex 3:13-14) The name of God is different from all our names for identity. God named himself on the basis of his divine nature, power, dignity and superior character. In fact, YHWH isn't a name, but a concept to understand who God is. Not one deity that men created has the same divine nature as our God. So, mixing the names of other gods with our God, thinking that they are all the

same, is wrong and blasphemous.

2) Respect the name of the Lord: According to the Encyclopaedic Dictionary, “in vain” means: unsubstantial, empty, of no effect, no purpose or value. It also means casual and unavailing, unimportant and of no virtue. God forbids anyone to call or use his name in such a contemptuous manner. In fact, God cares a lot more how we address him than his name, and a lot more about our attitude when we use his name. Any time anyone uses the name of God, or the Lord, he needs to speak it with utmost reverence and respect for who God is. If we must show respect by calling a judge “Your Honor,” how much more do we need to show respect and reverence to God when we call on his name?

3) Violators will be punished: God was very serious in the giving of the Ten Commandments. He expected all his people to obey his commands, and spelled out clear consequences of punishment to those who disobey his commands. Although there aren't any details on his punishment, God has the right and the power as he sees fit to punish those who show contempt for him. Anyone who shows contempt for a judge will certainly be punished, so why can't we be more serious in showing God the honor and respect he certainly deserves in all our dealings with him? Too often people believe that God is only love but forget that God is also holy and righteous. His love to us should encourage us to respect him and honor him in all that we do.

DON'T TAKE GOD'S NAME IN VAIN. Here are some examples.

1) Don't use God's name lightly: In today's world, many people, Christians included, use the name of God very lightly. People use “Oh my God!” as an exclamation of surprise, both good and bad. Some use “Jeez” (“Jesus is an equivalent) to show disagreement about things that are questionable. Christians should respect God and honor his name. We can't use his name so casually, with little or no respect.

2) Don't use God's name in doing wrong: You might think that no one would do that, but it happened. In Lev. 18:21, God forbade the Israelites from doing just that: “Do not give any of your children to be sacrificed to Molech (name of an idol among the Canaanites), for you must not profane the name of your God.” God set rules to forbid Israelites from doing wrong in giving their children as sacrifice to idols in his name, thinking that is what God wanted them to do. “To profane” is to make it irrelevant, to show contempt or to bring shame to the holy nature of God. Even today, some people still wrongly use the name of God to justify their wrongdoing, either to legitimize their wrong or to mislead others to accept or follow their ways. This happens often in cult sect practices and with false teachers who spread false doctrines.

3) Don't use God's name for personal gain: About 20 years ago on one Friday night, I was called by a church member to answer the door at the church where we were having our discipleship activities. A man in his 30s told me I needed to give him money so he can stay in a motel close to our church. When I asked him why I needed to do that, he told me God told him to ask me to do that. I told him I would wait for God to tell me that. You may think this is not a norm in everyday life. You are wrong. There are people who will use the name of God to benefit themselves in money, convenience, reputation or taking advantage of others, for their own personal gain. The Bible had many of these false prophets and false teachers in the New Testament time. Some TV preachers and cult leaders have used this method to scam unaware followers.

4) Don't use God's name to support your claim: Some people have used God's name to support their claims, hoping by doing so that people will believe their claims. In the early 1960s, Nikita Khrushchev, Prime Minister of the old USSR, when asked how he could prove that there isn't a God, in frustration of his inability to find some authoritative figure to make his point, he shouted: “God knows I don't believe there is God.” God should not be used to

justify or prove your claim, be it true or false. Jesus forbade people from swearing in the name of God in Matt 5:34: “But I tell you: Do not swear at all; either by heaven, for it is God's throne, or by the earth, for it is his footstool.” Using God, his name or his dignity to support human claims is forbidden.

USE GOD'S NAME THE RIGHT WAY: God didn't forbid the use of his name, just forbade using it in unworthy manner. Here are some worthy ways:

1) Use God's name to guard our life: The Bible does encourage us to use the name of the Lord in ways that exalt his glory. In Colossians 3:17, “Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” In 2 Tim. 2:19b, “Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.” God loves us to claim his name with our life as a good testimony to the world. It is a good thing to bring credit to God's name with our righteous life.

2) Use God's name in gospel ministry: When Peter proclaimed the salvation message to the Jewish faithful at Pentecost, he said, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:12) We proclaim the gospel message found in the name of Jesus Christ.

3) Use God's name in our prayers: Jesus wanted us to pray in his name: “Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive and your joy will be complete.” (John 16:24) There is power in the name of Jesus and he loves to hear us pray to the Father in his name, if at all possible closing your prayers in the name of Jesus Christ.

4) Use God's name in our praises: Praising the name of God is found all over the Bible, particularly in the Psalms, as in 8:9, “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.” We tend to forget to praise God's name in our prayers, but ask everything for our needs and wants. In all of our prayers, we need to bring praises to the name

of the Lord God for who he is and what he has done for us.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN TO US? It means we need to . . .

1) Treat the name of God with reverence: Since April 8, 1974, when I was ordained at a Baptist church in Singapore, the title Reverend was added in front of my name. Some may like to think that is a title of honor, but I take it as an extra responsibility. I always ponder, how should I live my life and do my job to be worthy of being called the Reverend? Sometimes I don't feel I deserve the honor that title comes with. But to God, it is a different story.

God deserve every bit of reverence, honor, dignity and glory and everything else anyone could imagine. We are on familiar terms with God and recognize him as a loving Father, which he is. But we shouldn't forget that this is the God who created all things in this universe and beyond. He is the one who is in control of all things everywhere. His holiness and justice are parts of his divine nature. When Paul was presenting the gospel in Athens, he said this about God, "The God who created the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples made by hands. And he is not served by human hands as if he needs anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else." (Acts 17:24-25) The praise song, "Our God is an awesome God" should remind us to treat God the right way.

2) Live our lives worthy of His name: A story like this was told: A hardened criminal was brought to King Alexander, the Great. He was accused of committing many unspeakable and heinous crimes. When asked his name, he replied: "My name is Alexander." King Alexander was greatly disturbed by this and told him this: "You need either to change your name or change your behavior!" He can't bear the same name as the king and do all those ugly things. Paul encouraged all Christians to live a life that is worthy of God's call: "As a prisoner of the Lord, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received." (Ephesians 4:1) Let us strive to do that.

