

L.E.A.D. – YES OR NO

The Third Commandment Revealed

Integrity in the things we say, the promises or oaths we make, and the actions that we display to others is such a fundamental part of our witness, so central a focus in the life of one of God's people, that it is directly linked to the third commandment: "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." Many take Exodus 20:7 to mean not uttering God's name frivolously, which we must also take care not to do, but there is much more to this commandment than meets the eye.

The Hebrew word used for 'take' in the commandment is נָשָׂא, 'nasa' (Strong's H5375), which means 'to lift,' 'regard,' 'respect,' 'carry,' and so on. The word for vain is שָׁוְיָ, 'sav' (H7723), literally meaning 'empty,' 'falsehood,' 'lie,' 'vanity,' 'useless,' 'ruin' and directly linked to the word שָׁחַ, 'sho' (H7722), which means 'ravage,' 'destroy,' 'desolate,' 'wasted.' Even in English, the idea of 'taking something in vain' suggests making it common or false, which should never be done with God's holy name. Still, with the added depths of the Hebrew definitions, we can see how serious 'carrying God's Name falsely' is.



In Hebrew thought, someone's name represented their character and who they were, just as old English names would mean a person's role in the community, such as Carpenter, Smith, or Fisher. Hebrew names take this idea further, sometimes even being prophetic in nature. For example, the names of Betsalel and Aholiab, the two men made responsible by God for the construction of the Tabernacle,

are directly related to their work: Betsalel (H1212) means 'in the shadow, (i.e., protection) of God (calling to mind the image of the pillar of smoke above the Tabernacle) and Aholiab (H171) means 'Father's tent.' From this, we can draw the understanding that a name in Hebrew culture is far more than just a label. As such, they carry God's name with anything less than respect, honor, and integrity, which tarnish God's very character in the eyes of others.

If we attach the name of God to our lives, the things we say and do, and what we promise to others, then we have declared to the world that we are an example, representing the Most High. So then, if we live as a bad example to others, what does that say to them about our God? When the statutes related to how we treat our neighbor are declared in Leviticus 19, verse 12 states: “And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.” This directly links the third and ninth commandments (Exodus 20:7,16), relating the idea of falsely carrying God’s name and swearing oaths to others in His name are two sides of the same coin. This is why it is considered so important that the example we demonstrate to the world truly represents God’s goodness, love, and glory, and to do otherwise is a serious matter. Promises and oaths are so important to God that the Scriptures tell us repeatedly that it is a sin to break a guarantee that you made to someone, most especially when it was made before God: Leviticus 5:4-6, Numbers 30:2, Deuteronomy 23:21-23, Psalm 56:12-13, Proverbs 20:25 and 25:13-14 & 18-20, Ecclesiastes 5:2-6 and Matthew 5:33-37 all express how significant a matter this is to YHWH.

With all of this in mind, let’s review Exodus 20:7 again. It could read: *“You should not make God’s name void or common by making an oath in His name and not keep it. For the LORD will hold him accountable for making His name worthless.”* If we wanted to take this further in a more ‘amplified’ version, it could read: *“You should not make a promise or an oath and attach God’s name to it unless you plan to keep it. Nor should you put His name out there by claiming you follow Him, but in reality, you represent yourself and your selfish motives by not following through with what you promised Him and others. Doing so will make His name worthless and no different than anyone else’s. Therefore, it is better that you don’t make a single promise to God or your neighbor rather than break your word.”* We have to constantly ask ourselves whether or not we are keeping our word with others and whether or not we are maintaining our word to God. This is not something we can neglect in favor of or prioritize other aspects of our walk.

Keeping ourselves consistently faithful and true to our word can be challenging as flawed human beings. Still, there is a straightforward way we help ourselves avoid stumbling in our integrity: giving constant and precise praise and worship to our heavenly Father. By staying in almost-permanent praise and worship, we fully concentrate on Him with no distractions from the world; our minds, will, and emotions are diminished to make way for Him. It is so simple and challenging for many of us to keep up. Still, with discipline, obedience, and a mindful focus on God’s hand, voice, and will in our lives, we will represent our Father in a way that genuinely venerates him before others. We will not simply carry His name but, more importantly, elevate it with the glory it deserves and show others how great God truly is.

If we do stumble and break our word to someone, however, there are ways we can go about restoring and rectifying the situation without too much damage to our reputation. Talking honestly and openly with that person about the problems we are facing or will face in keeping that promise or oath will go a long way to helping you peacefully resolve the matter between you. If this doesn’t go the way we hope, then may it simply be a lesson about taking care of the words that come from our mouths, seeing as they show the world what is in our hearts (Luke 6:43-45). Don’t forget that life and death are in the power of the tongue (Proverbs 18:21), so what comes from it must be measured, controlled, and based on honesty, truth, and love.

As people of the One True God, we must understand that how we live represents Him to others and ensure that the picture we paint of our Father displays his goodness and glory. Our faithlessness doesn't make God faithless, He remains True regardless of what we do (2 Timothy 2:13), but we cannot show that Truth to others if we demonstrate a false character. Too many are lost or trapped in darkness because of the awful representation of God to the world by those who have used God's name for their ends. Because of that damage, we must strive harder to show that the truth of the matter is entirely different. We must be instrumental in offering people an accurate picture of God and His ways. To do this, we must carry His nature in our very essence, our thoughts, emotions, our will, and ultimately their manifestations through our actions and words. Our nature backs our assertion, and when we give someone our word when we put our 'signature' to an agreement, that is an affirmation, a 'sign' of our nature. As emissaries of Messiah, the perfect representative of God to humanity, the sign of our nature should always be that of the nature of Messiah, the sign of the cross, an indication that we have crucified our flesh along with our old selves and that we now live according to a higher will, with higher standards. This will must be shown plainly to not live for its ends but those of the Kingdom of God and the needs of others. This is what it means to represent YHWH through our way of life properly.

We follow a great and merciful God, but One whose very nature is truth, THE Truth, and we must show that *clearly* if others are to discard the lies of a world that seeks to damn them and come into the loving embrace of the truth that will set them free. Staying faithful to God's Word and remaining true to ours is a matter of life and death for us, especially those we carry God's name to, so make sure you are showing them who our Father REALLY is.

Shalom,

Jim Staley