

### WHAT'S IN A NAME? (part 3)

We have looked at the names and the titles that we are given and those we give ourselves. We have seen that as Christians, we come in the name of the 'name above all names'. We are ambassadors for Christ, and we speak with His authority the Good News of His Kingdom. We should therefore do as He does and say what He says. To not do so may bring His name into disrepute. This brings me to this week's topic. Let's take a look at what God says about the use of His name;

**"You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God..." (Ex. 20:7a)**

Taking the Lord's name in vain (KJV) is the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment given to Moses. (This is sometimes called Blasphemy) So what is the misuse or taking of God's name in vain? To the Hebrew nation, this commandment was to do with oaths and cursing. To the keeper's of the law, they were forbidden to make flippant oaths, using God's name as witness to the oath. They were also restricted in the way they pronounced blessings and curses in the name of the Lord.

The Israelites were so strict in their observance of this law, that God's name was eventually almost banned from use. The Teacher's of the Law were so fearful of breaking this commandment that they would almost never even utter the holy name of God. So much so, that the actual pronunciation of the revealed name of God is unknown to us today. (We render it as Jehovah, but an in depth study will reveal that this is most unlikely.)

So what does this commandment say to those of us in Christ? Well, one thing that is always sure to cause debate is when we bring up the relevance of the law to the Christian. The argument is as old as the 1<sup>st</sup> century church and I certainly do not set myself up as an expert on this matter and nor do we have space here for an in depth study. However, let us let the Scriptures, and in particular Jesus Himself, clarify the situation.

Firstly, it is important to state from the beginning that we are saved "by grace...through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is a gift of God." **(Eph 2:8)** The Law of Moses was only a shadow of things to come. It had its purpose for a time as a way to God, but it was in essence unable to save mankind, as sinful man could never really save himself by keeping the commandments given him. However, it was advantageous to the Israelites as a tool for declaring their faith, making them different to the tribes about them and they served as a spiritual protective cloak against the effect of sin. (ie, keep the commandments, you protect yourself from the adverse affects that not keeping them will bring!)

So we are not saved by keeping commands, we are saved by faith in Jesus' sacrifice for us. But this great revelation has caused many in the church to disregard the Law altogether. However, Jesus actually showed great respect for the law. He came to fulfil the law, and said that not until heaven and earth pass away, will a single letter or stroke of a pen be removed from it. He went on to say that anyone who breaks the law and teaches others to do so will be called the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. **(see Matt 5:17-19)**

Note Jesus says that the law will remain until the end of time. That tells me that the law still has relevance to the Christian! You should also note that those that break it (or teach others to do so) will be the least in the Kingdom of Heaven. Not cast into hellfire, but *least* in the Kingdom. Saved by grace (absolutely!) but the crowns and position given to us once we enter His kingdom are subject to what we have done with the message and life His death won for us.

Like the Israelites, keeping God's commandments will set us apart from the world and protect us from the results of sin. For example, being sexually pure will protect you from sexually transmitted disease, unwanted pregnancy, and difficulties in your marriage, whether future or current. It will also protect you from allowing the devil to gain a foothold in your life (see Eph 4:27). If you are full of light, then the prince of darkness cannot enter. But keep hidden sin and the enemy gains access to those dark areas, then can work on you from a place of strength.

If you are still not convinced, when we read on in Matthew 5, Jesus tells His followers that not only is murder the taking of life, but for His disciples, so is anger at each other. Adultery is not just sexual impurity, but looking lustfully at a person. Why? Because of Jesus' death and resurrection He paved the way for the Holy Spirit to dwell within us and write God's law in our hearts. Unlike the Israelites, we have the Holy Spirit in us and when we learn to hear His voice, we are convicted of sin *before* we act. He empowers us to keep God's commands, rather than being compelled by written law and the rituals of priests. Therefore, we are gifted to follow God's commands, so the expectation is actually higher under grace, not less.

So, to finish up this week's study, let's look again at the 3<sup>rd</sup> commandment, not misusing His name. Using the same yardstick Jesus used when He spoke about what the commandments meant to His followers, then the misuse of his name moves from being just a command relating to oaths, blessings and curses and extends to an even broader meaning. I put it to you that we as Christians, who come as ambassadors in His name, take that name in vain when we declare that we are Christians, but do not do as He asks.

He told His followers that “If you hold to my teaching, you are my disciples.” (John 8:31) “If you love me, you will obey what I command” (John 14:15) “If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love.” (John 15:10) During this discourse, Jesus regularly makes mention of the Holy Spirit’s role as counsellor, in reminding us of His words, leading us into all truth and as a testimony of Christ. So we are not left alone to fulfil God’s commandments, He Himself empowers us to live upright lives and therefore bear witness of His saving power. But we are expected to yield to the work of the Holy Spirit and let him ring in the changes. And as Christ’s commands, (though not a yoke we cannot bear thanks to the Holy Spirit), are actually at a higher level than strict observance of the law, then every believer should take care as to what he does with the grace given him.

As a music team, we are very visible representatives of Christ. We should be aware that taking on the name Christian, being ambassadors for Christ, also brings with it great responsibility. That just as an ambassador that came in the name of a king in biblical times was expected to represent his king truthfully and with honour, so too we should come to the world, doing the works of Him who sent us, lest we ‘misuse His name’. When we blatantly sin, when we do that which is not consistent with the representation of the one perfect God, it is then that we misuse His name, taking it in vain. Does this mean we will always get it right? Certainly not! But should this thought lead us to repentance when we do sin and greater desire to represent Jesus in a more favourable way. You bet! To not do so *is* blasphemy! Let us not misuse the name we bear. The precious name of Jesus!

**Study 3 – questions**

1. Read **Exodus 20:1-17**. Why do you think God gave the 10 commandments?

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2. What does Eph 2 (saved by grace) mean to you? Using Scripture or your own words, what is grace?

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3. Read **Matthew 5:17-22, 27-28**. How can we hope to fulfil Jesus’ commands? How can we reconcile His words with those of Paul in Eph 2:8?

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4. Read **John 8:31-32** and compare this to **14:15-17a**. What ‘truth’ does obedience in discipleship bring? What does this truth set us free from?

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5. Read **1Corinthians 3:10-15**. What do you think this Scripture is saying about the value of our service in the Kingdom of God, especially if we are in error?

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6. Compare this with Jesus’ words in **Matthew 5:19** (least in the Kingdom). What do these Scriptures say about Christians who don’t do the right thing, but believe?

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7. What does it mean to ‘give the devil a foothold’ (Eph 4:27)? What causes this?

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8. How have you looked at ‘taking the Lord’s name in vain’ in the past? What do you think about the extension of this commandment to include unrepentant acts of sin by those that bear his name? (*Christ-ian*)

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9. Jesus is the name above all names. What other names is He known by?

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10. What has God revealed to you through this study?