

INTRODUCTION

I invite you to open your Bibles today to Exodus, chapter 20, verse 7. Today we are continuing our study called "Ten Requirements for America's Survival." I'm convinced if America is going to return to the greatness we once knew, that caused us to be the most blessed nation on earth, we must return to the moral standard found in God's word, especially in the Ten Commandments.

There are all kinds of laws, even funny, strange laws, in our own nation. In fact, did you know, these are actual statutes on the books in different municipalities?

1. Pine Island, MN: A man must remove his hat whenever he meets a cow.
2. In Pocatello, ID: It's against the law to walk around looking peeved and dejected.
3. In Berea, OH: Every animal on the streets after dark must wear a taillight.
4. Michigan: Alligators may not be tied to fire hydrants.
5. Detroit, MI: It's against the law to fall asleep in a bathtub.
6. Natchez, MS: Elephants are not permitted to drink beer.
7. Owensboro, KY: If a woman wants to buy a hat, her husband must try it on first.

Some laws are better than others.

The Bible says God's law is absolutely perfect. We are looking at the Ten Commandments, at the Third Commandment.

Exodus 20:7. "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name."

Now, if there was ever a message America needs to hear, it's a message about cleaning up our national vocabulary, because it seems more and more people have become more and more profane and obscene in what they are saying, not only on the airwaves, but also in public life.

As many of you are aware, radio shock jock Howard Stern, was recently fined \$475,000 by the Federal Communications Commission for using obscene language on the air. Howard Stern has set out as a crusade against the FCC and others who says he is losing his First Amendment right. But, I'm seeing in America today, less and less patience with this profanity we are hearing in our nation. Perhaps it started with the Super Bowl with the Janet Jackson incident. Maybe there are more and more people who are willing to stand up and say, "I'm not going to stand for profanity and obscenity in America.

Many, many centuries ago, God said you need to be careful what you say and how you say it. This is a message about watching your mouth. Let's notice three things God is trying to say here.

I. GOD'S CHARACTER IS LINKED TO HIS NAME

First, we learn that God's character is linked to his name. I've been sharing with you that God's name in the Bible is Yahweh, which means "Creator," which means "One who rules over all."

Did you know in the Bible God's name was so absolutely holy and revered the Jews never even said his name out loud? You would never hear them say, "Yahweh." That's why we don't know how to pronounce it. Instead, they always substituted the name "Adonai," which is often translated "Lord." Six thousand times in the Bible, God says, "This is who I am. This is my name."

In the Old Testament time, there was a group of people whose job it was to meticulously reproduce the copies of the Old Testament law. There were called the Masoretes, and this was a complete profession for these men. They lived by very precise rules and laws. Every morning when they awoke, they underwent a Jewish *mikva*—a ritual cleansing—and they donned a white linen robe and picked up a new quill. Then they began to meticulously copy these Hebrew characters. Every book had been counted so the consonants were known, how many there should be, there could only be a certain number on each line and a certain number of lines on each page. If a Masorete made a mistake in copying, the sheet was thrown out and he would start all over again.

Whenever these Masoretes came to the holy name of God, YHWH, they paused and would pray and underwent the ritual cleansing again. Then, they would take a brand new quill, never before used, and write those four consonants in Hebrew, then that quill was destroyed so the only letters, the only word it ever wrote was the holy name of God. Then they resumed copying. Six thousand times, in the process of copying the Old Testament, they had to stop and go through that kind of process. That's how much they revered and honored the name of God.

Names don't mean that much to us—they are merely identifiers. We are known mostly by our Social Security number and our driver's license number, but in the Bible names held character. For instance, when Isaac's wife, Rebekah, gave birth to twins, because Esau was red and hairy, they gave him the name "Esau," which basically means hairy. And, because his twin, was holding on to the heel of his brother, they named him Ya'akov, which means "the grabber," we know him as Jacob. It seemed like all of his life, he was grabbing for everything he ever got. In the Old Testament, names carried character and so when we talk about the name of God, we are talking about the very character of God, so to misuse the name of God is to impugn His character.

II. PROFANITY INSULTS GOD'S CHARACTER

The second thing we see in this passage is that profanity insults God's character. Let me tell you what profanity is, and it's not only using curse words, by the way. Our English word, "profanity," comes from two Latin words, *pro fanus*, which literally means "out of the temple," meaning whenever we say something that is out of order or out of a godly setting. But it does include all kinds of misuse of the name of God. Let me just mention two kinds of wide-spread profanity in America today.

1. Vulgar speech

There's the profanity of what you might call vulgar speech. Multitudes of Americans constantly take the name of God and use it as a prayer, literally asking God to give damnation to certain people in certain situations. It is rampant in our society today.

There have been a lot of studies on profanity in America today. Jonathan Lasker wrote *Profanity in America*. He writes, "Not only is profanity a problem, most people in America see it as an advantage. Many people see cursing as a relative risk-free verbal tool, capable of getting the attention of others, emphasizing a particular point, expressing a strong opinion or emotion, intimidating others, making a joke or even relieving stress, frustration or outrage."

As bad as it's become today, was it that long ago that at the end of "Gone with the Wind" Rhett Butler said something that caused our entire nation to gasp with outrage, when he said, "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a..." (and you know what he said). There was a national outrage, but as Lasker says in his book, "We've come to a time today where writers for television and film often lace the dialogue of their characters with foul, scatological humor, gross obscenity and crass disrespect. Parents are mocked, authorities are denigrated; honor and faith are made the butts of cruel and vile and vicious jokes. Popular music has descended to even more astonishing depths. Brutally, pornographic lyrics are not at all uncommon in rap or rock music today. Graphic language, detailing the most horrifying cavortings of barbarism is widely heralded as honest, liberating and refreshing. Indeed, anyone daring to express qualms about this tidal wave of vulgar, lewd and tawdry preoccupation with adultery and fornication, to say nothing of rape, incest and mutilation, anyone who objects is likely to be mocked as a prude, a goody-goody and a moralistic fundamentalist."

I don't care what you call me, my friend, but I am outraged at how far our nation has sunk into the sewer of profanity. Some say, "I just can't control it." A couple of years ago, it was my privilege to be able to play in a pro-am golf tournament here in Tyler, when some professional golfers were invited in to play with three amateurs from the area. We made our introductions on the first tee but the pro in our group had no idea I was a pastor of a Baptist church. On the first hole, the second hole and the third hole, he laced the air with his profanity. Every time he said it, it really hit me the wrong way. I can remember on the third green one of the guys in our group went over and whispered to the pro gofer in our group that I was a Baptist preacher. To his credit, he came over to me and he said, "I understand you are a preacher. I apologize for what I've said. But you're just going to have to put up with it because I can't help it." I'm here to tell you, he never again that day said a profane word. Yes, you can control it.

Branch Rickey was the manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers. When the Dodgers owner interviewed him for the first time, the owner was using the name "Jesus Christ" in the wrong way and taking the name of God in vain, over and over again. Rickey said to him, "I've had it. I've heard you insult my friend one too many times and if you continue to insult my friend, I will not work for you." The owner said, "Who have I insulted?" Rickey said, "You have used the name, Jesus Christ, in every way except the right way. He is my best friend and I will not have you insult him like that." I think we need more men and women today like Branch Rickey who will stand up and say, "This vulgar language has got to stop."

2. Empty speech

Not only is there vulgar language, there might be also profanity that could be called "vain" or "empty" speech. That's what the real meaning of this word is: Don't take the name of the word in vain, vain is the word that means "empty." Today we have a lot of empty profession in our churches. In other words, there are a lot of people who are saying the right thing but they don't really mean what they say. Someone wrote that the Third Commandment is broken more in churches at 11:00 on Sunday mornings than it is combined at any other time during the week. In other words, thousands of Christians gather and make empty professions. They are what Jesus said in Luke 6. "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' and you don't do the things I tell you to do?" The word, "Lord" means "boss, master." How can you claim Jesus is your Lord if you are not willing to obey Him? There are thousands that say, "Lord, Lord, Lord, Lord" and it's a vain profession.

3. Empty prayers

We also have empty prayers in our churches today. Jesus warned against empty, repetitious prayer. He called it "vain jangling," where all you say is the same thing over and over again, but there's no sincerity in it. It could be anything from when you bow your head before eating a meal and saying, "God, bless this food," and not really meaning it. It's just something you say.

I recall when I was playing football in high school. Before every game, the players gathered in the dressing room and we all hit a knee and bowed our heads and we would say, (deep voice) "Our father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name." I don't know why football players always talk differently at a time like that, but we would go through the Lord's Prayer, reciting it together and we would come to the end and we'd build to a crescendo, "for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen." Then we would jump up and yell, "Yeah, let's go out and kill these guys!"

I have confessed to the Lord, many times, that what I was doing every time I prayed the Lord's Prayer as a football player, I was taking the name of the Lord in vain, because I wasn't thinking about the Lord. I wasn't thinking about praying. I was just thinking about getting out there on the field and playing football. So, you can commit this sin by vain professions, empty professions, empty prayers, even empty praise.

4. Empty praise

A lot of people sin when they sing. I'm not talking about how it sounds. They sin when they sing, because they don't really think about what they are singing. For instance, there is that line from that beautiful hymn that says, "Take my silver and my gold, not a mite would I withhold," and there have probably been thousands of Christians who've sung those words and yet they hang on to their silver and gold with all of their strength. The only way to break the Third Commandment is not by vulgar language alone; it is by empty talk about the Lord.

III. USE YOUR MOUTH TO EXALT HIS NAME

On the positive side, God says you should use your mouth to exalt his name, thereby exalt his character. Some people think the Ten Commandments is just a bunch of "thou shalt not's." Did you know in every command of God there is also a promise? It's like God says in the Ten Commandments, "Help yourself to happiness. Do yourself a favor, let me bless you." There are some people who only look at the negative. For instance, they think, "How mean of God to put Adam and Eve in the garden and tell them they couldn't eat of that fruit." Well, my friend, that's not what God said. God placed them in the garden, in the paradise, and said, "Here. Enjoy it all. Help yourself to what I've given you, but I reserve for myself just this one single tree. Don't mess with it."

The same is true with the Ten Commandments. These are not God's way of saying, "I don't want you to enjoy life." It's just the opposite. He's saying, "I want you to experience life and experience it more abundantly." The way you do that is by honoring and exalting the name of God by sincerely saying good things about the Lord.

Several years ago I was preaching at a church in Pensacola, Florida. A man came up to me after the service and said to me, "Dykes. D-Y-K-E-S – is that right? I said, "That's right." He said, "I grew up in Panama City, Fl and I knew a man named Orlo Dykes." (That's my dad) "I remember that this man quit school when he was 12 years old and worked in a bakery and a saw mill so he could earn money for food for his mother and his four sisters. I remember that he was a good guy. Was he any relation to you?" When he said those good things about the name of my dad, I was happy to say, "Hey! That's my dad. That's my dad!" He honored the name of my dad. But if he had come up to me and said, "I heard this guy named Orlo Dykes and he was an absolute scoundrel," I would have wanted to punch him out. He wouldn't have been honoring and exalting the name. That's what we need to do as we talk to others about God, we need to always honor God and exalt his name. We also need to honor him when we speak TO God. Our prayer should always be full of praise and thanksgiving.

That's what praise is: Bragging on God. Sometimes we go to God with a shopping list. Polly-wanna-cracker prayer. God, gimme, gimme, gimme... Have you ever had somebody brag on you for who you are and maybe what you've done? It makes you feel wonderful. You get all tingly all over. We are made in the image of God and God has commanded us to praise HIS name. Brag on him—to him. That's what he has told us to do. It's just part of his nature.

The Bible says we should exalt the name of the Lord. By the way, God's name in the Old Testament is YAHWAH, but he says, he wants you to know him by his name in the New Testament—and that name is Jesus. The Bible says in Romans 10:13, "Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved." It doesn't say, "Whosoever shall call upon the Lord will be saved." Whosoever shall call upon the NAME of the Lord and the Bible says in Acts 8:12, "There is no other name under heaven given among men whereby you must be saved." In Philippians 2 the Bible says God has given him a name that is above every other name, that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

If you want to know God, you know him by Jesus Christ. He says, "I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me." Isn't it sad today how many people really don't

know what God's name is? Have you ever heard God referred to as "the man upstairs" or "the good Lord?" My friend, "the good Lord" won't save you. "The man upstairs" won't save you, but the Lord Jesus Christ, he alone can save you.

One day when you die and you stand at the gates of heaven and there happens to be an angel that who asks you "Why should I let you into heaven?" don't you dare say, "Because I was a member of some church." Don't you dare say, "Because I was baptized." Or don't you dare say, "Because I gave money to the church" because there is only one name and one name alone that will gain you access into eternity with God: Jesus.

CONCLUSION

I have always admired William Booth, the founder of the Salvation Army, because he understood you need to put something in somebody's stomach before you can put Jesus in their heart. He always had a well-rounded ministry of caring for people, body, soul and spirit.

When William Booth was on his deathbed, there were some business affairs of the Salvation Army in limbo. The attorneys told his wife, Catherine, "Before General Booth dies, it is very important that you get him to sign his name on some of these documents." William Booth was not far from departing and going to be with the Lord and his wife, Catherine, went in and said, "Sweetheart, I need you to sign your name to these documents. It's very important for the future of the Salvation Army." He revived a little bit and signed the four or five documents then he died and went to heaven. It was only later they discovered that in every blank he had signed, Jesus, Jesus, Jesus.

When you die friend, there is only one name that will be worth dying for.

OUTLINE

I. GOD'S CHARACTER IS LINKED TO HIS NAME

II. PROFANITY INSULTS GOD'S CHARACTER

1. Vulgar speech
2. Empty speech
3. Empty prayers
4. Empty praise

III. USE YOUR MOUTH TO EXALT HIS NAME



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes