

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Series:	The Heidelberg Catechism		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	65		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	Exodus 20:7; Isaiah 13:8		
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What's in a Name

35. Lord's Day

Question 99. What is required in the third commandment?

Answer: That we, not only by cursing (a) or perjury, (b) but also by rash swearing, (c) must not profane or abuse the name of God; nor by silence or connivance be partakers of these horrible sins in others; (d) and, briefly, that we use the holy name of God no otherwise than with fear and reverence; (e) so that he may be rightly confessed (f) and worshipped by us, (g) and be glorified in all our words and works. (h)

(a) Lev.24:11 And the Israelitish woman's son blasphemed the name of the LORD, and cursed. And they brought him unto Moses: (and his mother's name was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan:) Lev.24:12 And they put him in ward, that the mind of the LORD might be shewed them. Lev.24:13 And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Lev.24:14 Bring forth him that hath cursed without the camp; and let all that heard him lay their hands upon his head, and let all the congregation stone him. Lev.24:15 And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, Whosoever curseth his God shall bear his sin. Lev.24:16 And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the LORD, shall be put to death. (b) Lev.19:12 And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD. (c) Matt.5:37 But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil. James 5:12 But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation. (d) Lev.5:1 And if a soul sin, and hear the voice of swearing, and is a witness, whether he hath seen or known of it; if he do not utter it, then he shall bear his iniquity. Prov.29:24 Whoso is partner with a thief hateth his own soul: he heareth cursing, and bewrayeth it not. (e) Jer.4:2 And thou shalt swear, The LORD liveth, in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness; and the nations shall bless themselves in him, and in him shall they glory. Isa.45:23 I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, That unto me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear. (f) Rom.10:9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. Rom.10:10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation. Matt.10:32 Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven. (g) Ps.50:15 And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me. 1 Tim.2:8 I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting. (h) Rom.2:24 For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written. 1 Tim.6:1 Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed. Col.3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in

your hearts to the Lord. Col.3:17 And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

Question 100. Is then the profaning of God's name, by swearing and cursing, so heinous a sin, that his wrath is kindled against those who do not endeavor, as much as in them lies, to prevent and forbid such cursing and swearing?

Answer: It undoubtedly is, (a) for there is no sin greater or more provoking to God, than the profaning of his name; and therefore he has commanded this sin to be punished with death. (b)

(a) Prov.29:24 Whoso is partner with a thief hateth his own soul: he heareth cursing, and bewrayeth it not. Lev.5:1 And if a soul sin, and hear the voice of swearing, and is a witness, whether he hath seen or known of it; if he do not utter it, then he shall bear his iniquity. (b) Lev.24:15 And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, Whosoever curseth his God shall bear his sin. Lev.24:16 And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the LORD, shall be put to death.

37. Lord's Day

Question 101. May we then swear religiously by the name of God?

Answer: Yes: either when the magistrates demand it of the subjects; or when necessity requires us thereby to confirm a fidelity and truth to the glory of God, and the safety of our neighbour: for such an oath is founded on God's word, (a) and therefore was justly used by the saints, both in the Old and New Testament. (b)

(a) Deut.6:13 Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name. Deut.10:20 Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name. Isa.48:1 Hear ye this, O house of Jacob, which are called by the name of Israel, and are come forth out of the waters of Judah, which swear by the name of the LORD, and make mention of the God of Israel, but not in truth, nor in righteousness. Heb.6:16 For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. (b) Gen.21:24 And Abraham said, I will swear. Gen.31:53 The God of Abraham, and the God of Nahor, the God of their father, judge betwixt us. And Jacob sware by the fear of his father Isaac. Gen.31:54 Then Jacob offered sacrifice upon the mount, and called his brethren to eat bread: and they did eat bread, and tarried all night in the mount. Jos.9:15 And Joshua made peace with them, and made a league with them, to let them live: and the princes of the congregation sware unto them. Jos.9:19 But all the princes said unto all the congregation, We have sworn unto them by the LORD God of Israel: now therefore we may not touch them. 1 Sam.24:22 And David sware unto Saul. And Saul went home; but David and his men gat them up unto the hold. 2 Sam.3:35 And when all the people came to cause David to eat meat while it was yet day, David sware, saying, So do God to me, and more also, if I taste bread, or ought else, till the sun be down. 1 Kin.1:28 Then king David answered and said, Call me Bathsheba. And she came into the king's presence, and stood before the king. 1 Kin.1:29 And the king sware, and said, As the LORD liveth, that hath redeemed my soul out of all distress, 1 Kin.1:30 Even as I sware unto thee by the LORD God of Israel, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne in my stead; even so will I certainly do this day. Rom.1:9 For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers; 2 Cor.1:23 Moreover I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth.

Question 102. May we also swear by saints or any other creatures?

Answer: No; for a lawful oath is calling upon God, as the only one who knows the heart, that he will bear witness to the truth, and punish me if I swear falsely; (a) which honour is due to no creature. (b)

(a) 2 Cor.1:23 Moreover I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth. Rom.9:1 I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy

Ghost, (b) Matt. 5:34 But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Matt. 5:35 Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Matt. 5:36 Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. James 5:12 But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.

I. WHAT IS GOD'S NAME?

1) In the Hebrew, there are four consonants used to spell God's name. In English, we see them as YHWH. We pronounce them as Jehovah or Yahweh. "What is the derivation and what is the meaning of the name Jehovah? Very early the Jews thought that Leviticus 24:11, 16 forbade them to pronounce the holy name of God. They always replaced it with Adonai. Later, when vowels were added to the Hebrew text, the vowels of Adonai were used. Thus, the pronunciation "Jehovah" came into existence. We cannot ascertain with certainty what the original pronunciation was, but most probably the pronunciation was *Jahweh*. However, we are already so used to the sound of Jehovah that it would almost be irreverent to change it at this stage. According to Exodus 3:14, Jehovah is a covenant name and signifies: a) self-existence; and b) God's immutability and faithfulness."¹

2) The name Jehovah comes from the Hebrew verb *to be*.

3) In Exodus 3:14, Moses was at the burning bush, and he asked God what His name was. God replied, "I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, "Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

a. God is the infinite being. He is the one who inhabits eternity. Psalm 90:2 says, "Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God."

b. God is the one who inhabits eternity. He is the eternal being. W.G.T. Shedd wrote, "The eternity of God in his essence as related to duration. It is duration without beginning, without end, and without succession: 'The eternal God' (Gen. 21:33); 'the one that inhabits eternity' (Isa. 57:13); 'from eternity to eternity, you are God' (Ps. 90:2); 'the king eternal' (Ps. 102:26-28; Isa. 41:4; 1 Tim. 1:17); 'the Lord of lords who only has immortality' (1 Tim. 6:16); 'I am Alpha and Omega' (Rev. 1:8). The French version of the Scriptures renders Jehovah by *l'Eternel*." He then cites Stephen Charnock, "Though there be a succession and order of things as they exist, there is no succession in God in regard to his knowledge of them. God knows the things that shall be wrought and the order of them in their being brought upon the stage of the world; yet both the things and the order, he knows by one act [of knowledge]. The death of Christ was the precede his resurrection in the order of time; there is a succession in this; both at once are known by God; ye the [one] act of his knowledge is not exercised about Christ as dying and rising at the same moment; so that there is a succession in things, when there is no succession in God's knowledge of things."²

c. He didn't say His name was Bill or Dave. We usually pick names because we like a particular one or we name a child after someone, e.g. a relative or someone we admire.

d. He did not say his name was Baal, Krishna, or Allah, which are all names given to false gods by people.

e. His last name is not DAMN!

f. His name is the transcendent, the eternal, the continuously present and holy pronouncement of “I AM.”

4) The exact pronunciation of God’s name has been lost, but when you call upon His name, you are calling upon Him.

5) Using His name in any form should be taken with great seriousness.

“When considering the meaning of the third commandment, we would do well to remember that this prohibition against misusing God’s name involves first of all *speaking* that name. The name Yahweh (Lord) must not be *spoken* without meaning or with deceitful intentions. Misusing this name means, among other things, taking it unrighteously upon our lips. On several occasions we read in the Bible that certain names are not to be named: ‘Make no mention of the name of other gods, nor let it be heard from your mouth.’ (Ex. 23:13; cf. Ps. 16:4). The names of the Baals must be removed from the mouth of Israel, ‘and they shall be remembered by their name no more.’ (Hos. 2:17).”³

CONCLUSION: “Although many people believe taking the Lord’s name in vain refers to using the Lord’s name as a swear word, there is much more involved with a vain use of God’s name. To understand the severity of taking the Lord’s name in vain, we must first see the Lord’s name from His perspective as outlined in Scripture. The God of Israel was known by many names and titles, but the concept embodied in God’s name plays an important and unique role in the Bible. God’s nature and attributes, the totality of His being, and especially His glory are reflected in His name (Psalm 8:1). Psalm 111:9 tells us His name is ‘holy and awesome,’ and the Lord’s prayer begins by addressing God with the phrase ‘hallowed be your name’ (Matthew 6:9), and indication that a reverence for God and His name should be foremost in our prayers. Too often we barge into God’s presence with presumptuous ‘to-do lists’ for Him, without being mindful of His holiness, His awesomeness, and the vast chasm that separates our nature from His. That we are even allowed to come before His throne is due only to His gracious, merciful love for His own (Hebrews 4:16). We must never take that grace for granted.

“Because of the greatness of the name of God, any use of God’s name that brings dishonor on Him or on His character is taking His name in vain. The third of the Ten Commandments forbids taking or using the Lord’s name in an irreverent manner because that would indicate a lack of respect for God Himself. A person who misuses God’s name will not be held ‘guiltless’ by the Lord (Exodus 20:7). In the Old Testament, bringing dishonor on God’s name was done by failing to perform an oath or vow taken in His name (Leviticus 19:12). The man who used God’s name to legitimize his oath, and then broke his promise, would indicate his lack of reverence for God as well as a lack of fear for His holy retribution. It was essentially the same as denying God’s existence. For believers, however, there is no need to use God’s name to legitimize an oath as we are not to take oaths in the first place, letting our ‘yes be yes’ and our ‘no be no’ (Matthew 5:33-37).”⁴

¹ G. Vos, *Reformed Dogmatics I* (Lexham Press, 2014), p. 4.

² W.G.T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (P & R, 2003), p. 279-281.

³ J. Douma, *The Ten Commandments: Manual for the Christian Life* (P & R, 1992), p. 73.

⁴ This summary is adapted from “What does it mean to take the Lord’s name in vain?” and can be found at www.gotquestions.org.