

Honor the Name **Deuteronomy 5:11**

It's taken awhile, but this spring Amy and I finally splurged on some new Amery Warriors clothing to demonstrate our support and allegiance to our home team. So we now have red, white, and black t-shirts and hooded sweatshirts with the Amery Warriors logo on them that we proudly wear to different sports events. By doing that we are intentionally crossing a line when it comes to identification – people don't wonder who we're cheering for; we are telling everyone that we belong to the Amery Warriors fan club.

Now along with that allegiance come some unwritten expectations – mainly that we will demonstrate a good and respectful attitude along with good sportsmanship. Fellow fans, coaches and players will appreciate us if we conduct ourselves in a way that is consistent with the values of the Amery athletic program and sports teams. They will be happy to have us cheering for them and wearing the school colors.

But have you ever been to a sports event and come across a fan who embarrasses their home team? For high school teams it might be the fan who's constantly yelling at the ump or referee, complaining about the "terrible call." Or the fan who's taunting or belittling the other team or opposing fans. In cases like that, you hope that person isn't wearing your school colors or cheering for your team because they're an embarrassment and they give everyone else a bad name.

When you identify with a team or program your conduct and behavior matters because it's a reflection on the organization as a whole and just one person can ruin the reputation for everyone. You see this underlying importance of a code of conduct in other things as well – it can be a big deal when it comes to honoring your family name, or representing a certain company or organization. The sentiment is that if you bear someone's name, you need to bear it well, or it would be better if you didn't bear it at all.

What about people who bear the name of Christ? There are a lot of people who identify themselves as Christians in America – they do so publicly in a number of different ways: by going to church, getting baptized and confirmed, wearing a Christian t-shirt or hat, getting a Christian tattoo, putting a bumper sticker on

their car, claiming to be a Christian on Facebook, or just talking about the church they go to. But just like fans at a sports event, there are some Christians that say and do things that don't reflect the name they bear very well at all. Sometimes the things they do are really embarrassing and the exact opposite of what Christ would want them to do. Oftentimes it's professing Christians who ruin the reputation of Christ in America more than anyone else.

How much does God care about this? Does he care about the reputation we bring to his name? Does he care about the details of how you live your life? This morning we are going to look at the third commandment in the ten commandments to see what God has to say. We've been looking at how God has given us his commands for our good and this morning we are going to see how that applies to the third commandment.

Read Deuteronomy 5:11.

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.

A lot of people think this command has to do with swearing and forbids the use of God's name as a swear word, and that is certainly a practice God wants us to rid ourselves from. Even the expressions "Oh my God!" or "I swear to God" that are so common in our culture are ways we use God's name in vain that we should try to avoid. According to the website Judaism 101, many Jews believe this command prohibits falsely or frivolously swearing by God's name in making an oath, which is another practice we need to avoid. But neither of these explanations seem to fully capture the intent behind this command.

In order to find its meaning we first need to talk about the significance of God's name. In this translation it shows up as the word "LORD" in all capital letters. Anytime you see that, you know that in the original language it is the Hebrew letters: YHWH – which is commonly pronounced "Yahweh" – though no one actually knows the exact pronunciation anymore. The first time God gave that name for his people to use was in Exodus 3:13-15 when God spoke to Moses at the burning bush. When Moses was about to go to Egypt to lead God's people out of slavery, he asked God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" ¹⁴ God said to Moses, "I am who I am." And he said,

“Say this to the people of Israel: ‘I am has sent me to you.’”¹⁵ God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel: ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’ This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.”

We think of people’s names differently than they did in ancient Israel. We think of them more like just an identifying label, but according to the website Judaism 101: *“In Jewish thought, a name is not merely an arbitrary designation, a random combination of sounds. The name conveys the nature and essence of the thing named. It represents the history and reputation of the being named.”* So by giving Moses the name “Yahweh,” God wasn’t just giving Moses a new identification label, he was using a very particular name to reveal his self-existence, eternity, and sovereignty, and that he was a faithful God who keeps his covenant promises. This was the name God wanted his people to know and remember him by. In speaking his name, it was to capture the essence of who he was – a God who was one-of-a-kind, in a class all by himself. The Reformation Study Bible says this about the name Yahweh: *“His name is His disclosure of His nature, for which he is to be revered and glorified forever. The name in all its forms proclaims His eternal, self-sustaining, self-determining, sovereign reality – the supernatural mode of existence that the burning bush had signified.”*

So the name of the LORD, or Yahweh, because it is a revelation of who God is, is to be highly and carefully revered. It is to be treated with the utmost honor and respect that is due to God himself, which brings us back to the third commandment: *“You shall not take the name of [Yahweh] your God in vain, for [Yahweh] will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.”* Taking God’s name in vain was a serious offense against God himself.

But what does it mean to “take the name of Yahweh in vain”? Some translations say, “misuse the name of the LORD your God.” And, like I said earlier, most people assume this has to do with swearing or making flippant oaths, but this command has more to it than that. If you go to the original Hebrew language, the word “take” means “to carry,” or “to bear.” So to take the name of “Yahweh” is to carry or bear his name upon yourself – to identify yourself as belonging to him – he is your God and you are his worshipper. It’s similar to wearing your team’s clothing and cheering for them, or bearing your family name. The Israelites were the covenant people of Yahweh. He had chosen them, and they had chosen him. They

had taken the name of Yahweh upon themselves for all the neighboring nations to see. By taking his name, they were effectively becoming a demonstration of what the God “Yahweh” was like. They would glorify God among the Gentiles by obeying his commands and walking in his ways for which he would in turn pour out blessings upon them.

Because of this, God commanded them to not take his name upon themselves “in vain.” The word for “vain” means: “emptiness, falsehood, deception.” So, I think to take the name of Yahweh in vain is to say that you belong to him, but then live and act in a way contrary to his nature – contrary to his name. It’s to claim him as your God, but then walk in disobedience to his commands. It’s to grossly misrepresent the One who’s name you bear. It’s like the fan that’s embarrassing his team and other fans because of his rude behavior. Or the family member that’s bringing dishonor to the family name because of the choices they make. And just like a team or family doesn’t want its members to do that, God doesn’t want his people to do that either. If you bear God’s name, bear it well, or it would be better if you didn’t bear it at all. “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.”

The Israelites were notorious for breaking this command. One of the places you can see their guilt in this area is in Ezekiel 36:16-23 when God gave Ezekiel this word concerning his people: *“The word of the LORD came to me: ¹⁷ ‘Son of man, when the house of Israel lived in their own land, they defiled it by their ways and their deeds... ¹⁸ So I poured out my wrath upon them for the blood that they had shed in the land, for the idols with which they had defiled it. ¹⁹ I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed through the countries. In accordance with their ways and their deeds I judged them. ²⁰ But when they came to the nations, wherever they came, they profaned my holy name, in that people said of them, ‘These are the people of the LORD, and yet they had to go out of his land.’ ²¹ But I had concern for my holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations to which they came. ²² ‘Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord God: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. ²³ And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord God, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes.”*

When God entered into the covenant with his chosen people he wanted them to be a light to the Gentiles. By taking his name upon themselves and walking according to his ways they would glorify him among the nations and he would pour out his blessings upon them. So he gave them the third command and included a warning: *“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.”* He gave them this command for their good, so they would receive blessing from him and not fall under his hand of discipline and judgment. Sadly, they failed miserably. They took his name in vain, profaned it among the Gentiles, thus becoming a stumbling block instead of a light, and came under his serious judgment because of it.

I think by now the application of this command for our lives today is becoming pretty clear. We live under the new covenant and when we turn to the Lord and put our faith in Jesus Christ, we take his name upon ourselves – quite literally. We are known as “Christians.” So we bear the name of Christ. It reminds me of baptism – we have a baptismal service coming up at the end of August and this is what baptism is all about. When you get baptized you’re publicly identifying yourself as belonging to Christ. You’re bearing the name of Christ. It’s what God wants us to do and if you haven’t yet, I encourage you to talk to me. But as we’ve seen, God wants us to take this very seriously – I believe God’s word for us today through his third commandment is this: *“Do not bear Christ’s name in vain.”* Don’t call yourself a “Christian” and then live in a way that is contrary to Christ. If you do, you profane the name of Jesus among your neighbors, classmates, coworkers, family, and friends and become a stumbling block instead of a light. To put a positive spin on it: *“If you call yourself a Christian, make sure you act like one.”*

This command is repeatedly given to us in the New Testament in various ways.

- 1 Cor. 10:31 *“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”*
- Ephesians 4:1 *“I therefore... urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.”*
- Colossians 3:17 *“And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”*
- 1 Thessalonians 2:12 *“Walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.”*

- 1 Peter 1:14-16 “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance,¹⁵ but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,¹⁶ since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

Bearing the name of Christ is a highly serious matter to God – much more serious than most professing “Christians” in America treat it. There are so many people who call themselves Christians but live in a way that is contrary to Christ. We actually have names for them – we call them “nominal Christians” or “carnal Christians” or “cultural Christians.” They are bearing the name of Christ in vain without giving it a second thought, but God “will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.” It would be better if they didn’t claim to be a Christian at all.

As people who call ourselves Christians, we must take the third commandment very seriously. God has given it to us for our good – so that in honoring his name by the way we live our lives he will pour out his blessings upon us and we will not fall under his hand of discipline and judgment. With that in mind, we need to ask ourselves a couple of questions:

1. Am I a person who claims to be a Christian, but lives in a way that is contrary to Christ? If so, now is the time to confess and repent before God and seek his forgiveness. Jesus died on the cross to provide forgiveness and salvation for all who have taken his name upon themselves in vain. So if that describes you, I urge you to turn to him in faith and repentance and allow him to transform your life.
2. Are there any areas of my life that are not in alignment with the will of God?” Maybe you aren’t taking God’s name in vain to the extent of being a “carnal Christian,” but maybe there are areas you know are in disobedience and in that way you are misrepresenting the name you bear. I hope you see that this too is a serious matter – any sin that we willingly allow to remain and cast a shadow on our Savior needs to be repented of, and I encourage you to do that this morning. Confess that sin to God and seek his strength to walk in obedience in that area. Confess it to another person and ask for their help.