"God's Reputation" Exodus 20:7 October 23, 2005 Dr. Jerry Nelson

For the past five weeks and the next several weeks we are doing a "series within a series."

This year we have been studying the book of Exodus.

The series within that series is our current study of the Ten Commandments.

In the introductory sermons to the Commandments, I emphasized that for the Christian the **commands** of God must be understood in the context of the **grace** of God.

That was done on Sept 18 with the sermon entitled, "The Law of God in the Life of the Christian" and on September 25 in a sermon entitled, "The Beauty of God in the Beauty of the Law."

Exodus 19 and all that precedes it demonstrate that the **grace** of God forms the background for Exodus 20 and the commands of God.

The indicative (what is) forms the basis of the imperative (you must).

That is consistent with the NT emphasis – Ephesians 4:1 "I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

Obedience to God's commands doesn't save us or keep us saved – it is the believer's response to grace.

But obedience **is the proof** of the reality of God's grace in our lives.

Therefore Christianity is concerned not only with salvation in the ultimate sense of 'heaven when we die' but also with morality, ethics, Christ-like living – the life we are privileged to enjoy.

We are called to be a holy people not just a justified people.

Paul writing to believers wrote, Hebrews 12:14 "Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.

James said it also, James 2:26 "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

There are those who would say the commandments of God in the OT are no longer binding on believers today because we are now under grace and commanded simply to "love."

Terence Fretheim in his commentary on Exodus refutes that idea so well: "The will of God does not lose its particularity in the command to love; it simply opens up those particularities to limitless possibilities. Love always means going beyond whatever laws may be articulated, but it needs their particularity for instruction purposes, charting something of what love may entail in specific situations." 223

And so the believer's motivation to obey is not simply fear but the much greater motivation of love – a love for God.

And the negative formulations (the "You shall nots!" of the Ten Comandments) indicate that God's primary concern is not to **create** the Christian community, He has already done that by his grace, but God's concern is to **protect** His new community from behaviors that have the potential of destroying it.

And so along with many others, I have set forth at least four reasons for why we study and respond to the 10 Commandments today:

- They reflect the perfect character of God;
- They <u>tell us how to reflect God's character</u> in our lives SO THAT others may see the beauty of God in us;
- The commandments <u>restrain sin in the society</u> of church and world:
- And they <u>drive us to Jesus for mercy</u> to forgive us, where we fall short, <u>and grace</u> to enable us to reflect his glory in our obedience.

Special Assistant to the President, Karl Rove, has been in the news a lot lately.

Why? Mainly for one reason – his relationship to the President.

Most of us wouldn't even know of Karl Rove if it weren't for that relationship.

The point is that everything he does reflects on the President.

The President's reputation is affected by Karl Rove.

The CBS Sportsline on October 16 posted the following article: "Minnesota Vikings owner Zygi Wilf is angry and embarrassed over accounts of drunkenness and sexual misbehavior by his players on a charter cruise, and said Friday the team will now have a conduct code. Wilf said, "I expressed my anger and I expressed my embarrassment, my embarrassment on behalf of my family and the people who work hard here,"

The actions of those players reflected on the owner of the team.

The Wilf family reputation is affected by those players.

We affect God's reputation among those around us.

That is a sobering thought.

If God's reputation depends on me, what will those around me think of him?

Asked more positively, "How can I represent God to those around me so that they will think of him as highly as he deserves?"

For me, these questions flow out of the 3rd 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 all of us know what this commandment is about, right?

We know it's about cursing – what we commonly call swearing.

And the commandment says we are not to use God's name in our cursing.

So when we smash our thumb or a driver cuts us off in traffic we aren't supposed to say "God...whatever!"

Why not? What's the big deal? We don't mean anything by it.

Well the Commandment certainly speaks to such language but it also means much more than that.

Let me explain by starting in a different place.

Listen to this more literal translation of the 3rd Commandment, "You must not lift up the name of the LORD your God falsely/frivolously..." or "for nothingness"

(Herbert Huffmon in William Brown (editor) <u>The Ten Commandments</u>, 207 and Ryken Pre-published Exodus, on 3rd Command.)

At least two things demand understanding in this verse:

- 1. What is it we are not supposed to lift up falsely, frivolously or misuse? God's name!
- 2. What does it mean to lift up something falsely or to misuse it?

Let's begin with the first question:

Quite explicitly it is **the name** of the LORD our God that we are not to misuse.

For us a name is something we <u>have</u> but for God his name is who he **IS**. (Ryken)

Obviously, I don't mean he is merely a name but that God's name expresses his very being, his essence.

Now that is **not** totally foreign to us.

We all identify very closely with our names.

It hurts us when we hear our name identified with something objectionable, even when it isn't referring to us specifically.

It bothers me a little that the host of the sleazy Jerry Springer television show bears my first name.

We are even more offended when someone, with us in mind, uses our name in a mean-spirited joke or worse yet in a demeaning, derogatory way.

We so closely identify with our name that it stands for all we are.

Much more, God's name communicates his very being –
his creative power, his redeeming love, and his protecting
promises. His name carries weight.

Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God."

Glory is a translation of the Hebrew "kabod" which means weight. The name of the LORD is weighty. (Douma, 97)

Again, God's name represents all he is.

So when we use that <u>name</u> we are speaking of <u>him</u> – whether we mean to be or not.

And if we sense that <u>our</u> name is worthy of respect, how much more <u>the name of the Holy Lord</u> of the Universe who has saved us and will keep us forever as his own.

Look at the name we are talking about: Genesis 1:1 "In the beginning God <u>created</u> the heavens and the earth."

Psalm 47:2 "How awesome is the LORD Most High, the great **King** over all the earth!

Daniel 2:20-22

"Praise be to the name of God for ever and ever; wisdom and power are his.

DA 2:21 He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning.

DA 2:22 He reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what lies in darkness, and light dwells with him.

Lamentations 3:22-23

"Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail.

LA 3:23 They are new every morning; great is his faithfulness.

Romans 5:8 "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."

Psalm 117:2 "For great is his love toward us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures forever.

Joshua 1:5 and Matthew 28:20 "I will never leave you nor forsake you." "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

The name of God represents the very person of God.

When we use the name, we are using him, whether we mean to be or not.

Now the 2nd question we asked was: What does it mean to misuse the name of our God - or to use it falsely or frivolously.

I am going to suggest three words that encompass much of what it means to misuse God's name:

- 1. Profanity
- 2. Perversity
- 3. Hypocrisy

I begin by mentioning profanity.

As I said earlier, we have equated profanity with what we commonly call swearing.

Profanity is the use of profane language.

The verb "profane" means to take something, which is holy or sacred, and treat it with contempt or even indifference.

- We profane the Bible when we rip out its pages to start a fire on our camping trip.
- We profane the American flag when we use it to wipe our feet.
- We profane our mother when we disrespectfully call her "ma" or "our old lady."

To profane something is to take it from its significant use and use it for common purposes.

We profane God; we use his name in vain, when we carelessly, thoughtlessly, flippantly use his name as if the name, and the person behind it, don't represent anything important.

So profanity is more than using God's name in what we call swearing.

Are not the following slogans a profane use of God's name and work?

T-shirt slogans "God is rad, He's my dad" or "This blood's for you."

Or when we say "Praise the Lord" as an equivalent of "That's great" we use his name in a vain, empty way.

Michael Horton wrote, "The casual use of God's name is prohibited precisely because it wears away our sensitivity to the enormous reverence we owe it." (Horton, The Law of Perfect Freedom, 104)

George MacDonald records the following conversation: "Young Alister promised, "In God's name we will!"
His mother responded, "That is no occasion for an oath, Alister!"
But his brother defended him saying, "Alister meant it very solemnly."
To which his mother replied, "Yes, but it was not necessary... The name of our Lord God should be as a precious jewel in the cabinet of our hearts, to be taken out only at great times and with loving awe."
(Cited in Boers Lord Teach us to Pray 59 from MacDonald's The Highlanders' Last Song 113 GLN used this illustration in sermon on the Lord's Prayer "Father, Make Your Name Holy")

Do we use God's name without seriousness.

Do we use "Praise the Lord" as a cliché.

Do we carelessly use God's name on our T-shirts or bumper stickers or in jokes.

In this, the sin is much greater for a Christian who knows the real God than for someone who doesn't even think He exists.

We begin to use God's name <u>as they do</u> in meaningless ways and thereby contribute to the idea that his name is meaningless and so is he.

How can we who are known by him, loved by him and kept by him use his name in such vain, profane, frivolous, flippant, meaningless ways?

Philippians 2:9-11

"Therefore God exalted Jesus to the highest place

and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

We must not misuse the name of our LORD.

The second way I suggest we misuse the name of the LORD is by perversity.

Perversity has to do with using a name incorrectly or improperly instead of the way it should be used.

The most obvious example of that is when someone shouts in anger, "God damn you."

What a perversion of God's name.

Someone is using God's name to damn others when God's name is primarily connected to his redemption not damnation.

He came to save the world, not condemn it.

With those words, they have invoked God as an accomplice in an action that is completely contrary to God's intention.

I remember from childhood when in anger toward my brother I would say, "Dad said..." when dad had said nothing of the kind.

My father was especially incensed when we misrepresented him.

Oh how careful we must be to not misrepresent God.

It is a sober task to teach or preach or to counsel our children on what God does or does not say.

But the perversion goes beyond that.

- What about the business man who uses his religion to gain advantage in his sales?
- What about the politician who uses God's name to suggest the politician's sincerity or the rightness of his cause?

- What about the athlete who suggests that God is on his side or that his last touchdown was God's doing?
- What about the religious leader who claims that God told him or her such and such?
- What about the political activist who tries to make God a Republican or a Democrat, a Capitalist or a Socialist, or a hater of homosexuals or a lover of lesbians?

One man wrote, "In the past twenty years, God has been used to justify American nationalism, militarism, opposition to child care for working mothers, and even such debatable issues as the retention of the Panama Canal. He has been used as a mascot for the conservative, white, middle-class establishment, the guarantor of such evangelical rights and family values as that of owning submachine guns. This smacks of using God..." (Horton, The Law of Perfect Freedom, 101)

Terence Fretheim wrote, "The name of God is commonly associated with empty phrase or easy religion or the latest ideology of a social or political sort. (God's) name thereby gets dragged down to the level of the contexts in which it is used. As people hear it so used, they may come to associate the name of God fundamentally with a cause they wish to avoid or reject. Consequently, they will not be drawn to this God and the name will not receive its due honor and respect." Terence Fretheim, 228

And what about we who pray asking God to bless our plans, our ambitions, or our goals?

Jan Lochman wrote, "To misuse the name of God means, therefore, that instead of placing ourselves at God's disposal we place him at ours, domesticating his holy name for our unholy or pseudo-holy purposes... Nothing is more perverse than selfishness in the guise of religion; we try to make God the servant of our purely secular ambitions..." (Jan Lochman Signposts to Freedom, 55)

The perversion is in making God an accomplice in what is not his work or his goal.

Exodus 20:7 "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God..."

Lastly I must mention hypocrisy.

And this is probably the greatest misuse of the name of the LORD.

Because misusing God's name also has to do with disobedience to God's will.

Obedience and God's name are linked in Scripture:

- Deuteronomy 28:58-59 "If you do not carefully follow all the words of this law, which are written in this book, and do not revere this glorious and awesome name--the LORD your God--⁵⁹ the LORD will" discipline you.
- Likewise Matthew 7:21 "Not everyone who says to me, `Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

To claim the name of God (to call our selves Christians) and live oblivious to or contrary to his expressed will is to use his name in vain, as an empty word representing an empty God.

When we become a Christian we take God's name, just as a wife takes her husband's name.

If she breaks the covenant of marriage, she has taken her husband's name in vain.

If we profess Christ and are insincere in our talk and disobedient in our walk we take Christ's name in vain.

For a man or woman to claim Christ's name but not increasingly leave their sinful ways is hypocrisy and it profanes that name.

We claim the name of God but disregard his lifestyle commands, neglect the study of his word, pray only sporadically and selfishly, or meet with God's people only when convenient.

Clarence Jordan said, "We take it (the name of God) and on we go and it means nothing. We keep sailing under the same old banner, living the same old life, having the same old attitudes, walking the same old way. The name has meant nothing to us. It doesn't change us. (Understand) you don't (most of all) take the name of the Lord in vain

with your lips. You take it in vain with your life. It's the people...whose lives are totally unchanged by the grace of God. They're the ones who take the name in vain." (Clarence Jordan The Substance of Faith 134)

This misuse of God's name, this hypocrisy, extends to our worship:

- Do we sing his name, pray his name and otherwise pretend to belong to him, bearing his name, but insincerely?
- Do we go through the motions of worship using God's name thoughtlessly?
- Do we sing about his great work and person without meaning?
- When we worship and use God's name are we doing so with sincerity and reverence?

John Durham wrote, "Yahweh's name...must be honored, blessed, praised, celebrated, invoked, pronounced and so shared. To treat Yahweh's name with disrespect is to treat his gift lightly, to undermine his power, to scorn his Presence, and to misrepresent to the family of humankind his very nature as "The One Who Always Is." (Durham Exodus 288)

I began by asking about God's reputation.
What is his reputation among those who know <u>us</u> as Christians?

The Apostle Paul wrote, in one of the worst indictments imaginable: Romans 2:24 ""God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you."

He said it more positively to Titus 2:5, We are to act righteously "so that no one will malign the word of God."

The story is told of a young soldier who was taken to Alexander the Great for trial for misconduct.

Three times the General asked the young soldier his name and all three times the young man answered that his name was also "Alexander."

The third time, the General warned him to either change his name or change his conduct.

Atheist, Frederick Nietzsche said that he could believe in the Redeemer (Jesus) if Christians would look more redeemed.

Puritan writer Stephen Charnock wrote, "It is a sad thing to be Christians (in church), heathens in our shops and devils in our closets (private acts)."

Our hypocrisy misuses, profanes, the name of the LORD our God.

What is the opposite of misusing God's name?

It is to take his name seriously and thus to take him seriously.

It is to take his commands seriously.

It is to use his name only seriously.

It is to live our lives seriously.

Is **God's** reputation rightly reflected in my life and my words?

Michael Horton said, "May Christian politicians in our day speak for the weak...May Christian educators execute their calling with excellence...May Christian business people carry out their honorable vocation with uncommon dignity, integrity, and respect for their clients, consumers, employees and employers. Let Christians become widely known again as the best workers an employer could hire, and let homemakers and home builders set their compass toward creating dynasties of faith, their children taking their own places in society as salt and light... Let us long for the day when God's name is no longer blasphemed among the Gentiles because of us." (Horton, 110)

In Marie Chapian's book <u>Of Whom the World was not Worthy</u> there is a marvelous story that I've told before.

In the former Yugoslavia there was an evangelist by the name of Jakov who met a man named Cimmerman in one of the towns.

He befriended Cimmerman and tried to tell him of Jesus' love for him. Cimmerman abruptly interrupted Jakov and told him he wanted to hear nothing more about it.

"Christianity" for Cimmerman carried a very different meaning.

He spoke of the past when in the name of Christianity some had come to their town and amidst much plundering and killing had even killed his own nephew.

Jakov was distressed over how he could get Cimmerman to understand that those who had done so much wrong were not truly Christ-followers.

He said to Cimmerman - suppose I was to steal your coat and then wearing it were to rob a bank.

Suppose further, the police saw me in the distance, not recognizing me but recognizing your coat.

What would you say to them if they came to your house and accused you of robbing the bank?

"Well I would deny it," said Cimmerman.

"Ah, but we saw your coat," - they would say.

This analogy annoyed Cimmerman

Jakov would return from time to time to that village and each time would look for Cimmerman, befriending him, encouraging him and sharing with him the love of Christ without mentioning Jesus' name.

Finally one day, months later, Cimmerman asked Jakov, "How does one become a Christian?"

Jakov was delighted and led him to repent and believe.

Cimmerman bowed his knees and surrendered his life to Christ.

As he rose to his feet he turned to Jakov, embraced him and said, "Thank you for being in my life".

Then pointing skyward he said, "You wear his coat well."

We bear God's name.

What is His reputation among those who know us?

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

Other Notes:

Westminster Shorter Catechism:

Q: What is required in the third commandment?

A: The third commandment requireth the holy and reverent use of God's names, ¹ titles, attributes, ² ordinances, ³ word, ⁴ and works. ⁵

Q: What is forbidden in the third commandment?

A: The third commandment forbiddeth all profaning or abusing of any thing whereby God maketh himself known.

Westminster Larger Catechism

Q. 111. Which is the third commandment?

A. The third commandment is, Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.[560]

Q. 112. What is required in the third commandment?

A. The third commandment requires, That the name of God, his titles, attributes,[561] ordinances,[562] the Word,[563] sacraments,[564] prayer,[565] oaths,[566] vows,[567] lots,[568] his works,[569] and whatsoever else there is whereby he makes himself known, be holily and reverently used in thought,[570] meditation,[571] word,[572] and writing;[573] by an holy profession,[574] and answerable conversation,[575] to the glory of God,[576] and the good of ourselves,[577] and others.[578].

Q. 113. What are the sins forbidden in the third commandment?

A. The sins forbidden in the third commandment are, the not using of God's name as is required;[579] and the abuse of it in an ignorant,[580] vain,[581] irreverent, profane,[582] superstitious[583] or wicked mentioning or otherwise using his titles, attributes,[584] ordinances,[585] or works,[586] by blasphemy,[587] perjury;[588] all sinful cursings,[589] oaths,[590] vows,[591] and lots;[592] violating of our oaths and vows, if lawful[593] and fulfilling them, if of things unlawful;[594] murmuring and quarrelling at,[595] curious prying into,[596] and misapplying of God's decrees[597] and providences;[598] misinterpreting,[599] misapplying,[600] or any way perverting the Word, or any part of it;[601] to profane jests,[602] curious or unprofitable questions, vain janglings, or the maintaining of false doctrines;[603] abusing it, the creatures, or anything contained under the name of God, to charms,[604] or sinful lusts and practices;[605] the maligning,[606] scorning,[607] reviling,[608] or any

wise opposing of God's truth, grace, and ways;[609] making profession of religion in hypocrisy, or for sinister ends;[610] being ashamed of it,[611] or a shame to it, by unconformable,[612] unwise,[613] unfruitful,[614] and offensive walking,[615] or backsliding from it.[616].

Q. 114. What reasons are annexed to the third commandment?

A. The reasons annexed to the third commandment, in these words, *The Lord thy God*, and, *For the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain*,[617] are, because he is the Lord and our God, therefore his name is not to be profaned, or any way abused by us;[618] especially because he will be so far from acquitting and sparing the transgressors of this commandment, as that he will not suffer them to escape his righteous judgment;[619] albeit many such escape the censures and punishments of men.[620]

Heidelberg Catechism of 1536

What is required in the 3rd Commandment?

That we must not by cursing or perjury, nor by unnecessary swearing, profane or abuse the Name of God...and that we use the holy Name of God no otherwise than with fear and reverence, to the end that he may be rightly confessed and worshipped by us, and be glorified in all our words and works.

Stephen Carter in God's Name in Vain:

"In truth, there is probably no country in the Western World where people use God's name quite as much, or quite as publicly, for quite as many purposes, as we Americans do – the Third Commandment notwithstanding. Few candidates for office are able to end their speeches without asking God to bless their audiences or the nation, or the great work we are undertaking, but everybody is sure that the other side is insincere... Athletes thank God, often on television,, after scoring the winning touchdown, because like politicians, they like to think God is on their side. Churches erect huge billboards and take out ads in the paper...God's will is cited as a reason to be against gay rights and a reason to be for them. God is said not to tolerate poverty. Or abortion. Or nuclear weapons...Everybody who wants to change America, and everybody who wants not to,

understands the nation's love affair with God's name, which is why everybody invokes it." (In Ryken, prepublished Exodus 586)

Leviticus 24:11-16 "Now the son of an Israelite mother and an Egyptian father went out among the Israelites, and a fight broke out in the camp between him and an Israelite. ¹¹ The son of the Israelite woman blasphemed the Name with a curse; so they brought him to Moses. (His mother's name was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri the Danite.) ¹² They put him in custody until the will of the LORD should be made clear to them.

LEV 24:13 Then the LORD said to Moses: ¹⁴ "Take the blasphemer outside the camp. All those who heard him are to lay their hands on his head, and the entire assembly is to stone him. ¹⁵ Say to the Israelites: `If anyone curses his God, he will be held responsible; ¹⁶ anyone who blasphemes the name of the LORD must be put to death. The entire assembly must stone him. Whether an alien or native-born, when he blasphemes the Name, he must be put to death.

Exodus 22:28 "Do not blaspheme God or curse the ruler of your people."

Leviticus 19:12 "Do not <u>swear falsely</u> by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the LORD.

"Orthodox conviction must be clothed with a Christian lifestyle preoccupied with giving honor to God." (Douma, 97)

Acts 19:13-16, 17

Some Jews who went around driving out evil spirits tried to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who were demon-possessed. They would say, "In the name of Jesus, whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out." ¹⁴ Seven sons of Sceva, a Jewish chief priest, were doing this. ¹⁵ One day the evil spirit answered them, "Jesus I know, and I know about Paul, but who are you?" ¹⁶ Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.

AC 19:17 When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in high honor.

They were using the name of Jesus like magic to their own advantage.

"In the name of the Lord"

Genesis 4:26 We "call upon the name of the Lord."

Leviticus 24:16 Anyone who "blasphemes the name of the Lord" shall be put to death.

Deuteronomy 18:7 Minister in the name of the Lord

Deuteronomy 18:22 If a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord...

Deuteronomy 21:5 The priests bless in the name of the Lord

Deuteronomy 28:10 God's people are called by the name of the Lord.

1 Samuel 17:45 David came against the Philistines in the name of the Lord.

- 1 Samuel 20:42 David and Jonathan swore friendship with each other in the name of the Lord.
- 1 Kings 5:3 the Temple was built for the name of the Lord
- 1 Kings 18:32 Elijah built an altar in the name of the Lord
- 2 Kings 2:24 Elisha called down a curse on them in the name of the Lord.

Psalm 20:7 We trust in the name of the Lord.

Psalm 102:15 Nations fear the name of the Lord

Psalm 118:45 Let them praise the name of the Lord

Honor, fear, trust, love the name of the Lord

Exalt, praise,

Call on it, speak in it, prophecy in it, walk in it, take oaths in it, bless in it, baptized in it, die for it, command in it, anointed in it,

Jesus came "in the name of the Lord" (all four gospels)

Acts 2:21 "And everyone who calls

on the name of the Lord will be saved.'

1 Corinthians 6:11 "you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.