

THAT SACRED NAME

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God himself, comes to earth to speak with a grocery manager Jerry. In one of their conversations, Jerry, without thinking, says to himself, "O God!"

And God says, "Yes, Jerry? What is it?" And Jerry says, "Huh?? Oh, it's nothing, Lord. It's just an expression. A figure of speech. Nothing more."

And then God says, "Jerry, that's why I'm here. I want people to know that I'm not just a figure of speech. I'm more than just a phrase that people blurt out when they get frustrated. I want you to tell people to take me seriously. That I am the Lord!"

"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." Ex. 20:7.

Think a moment of the word "take." It means to lift up, to bear, not simply to utter. We are to take the name of God, else there would be no force in the commandment not to take it in vain. But the blessedness of the commandment lies in the assurance that when we take it, it will not be in vain. It will accomplish something for us. It will make and keep us guiltless, for "the name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." Prov. 18:10.

An illustration of this is given in the book of Acts. In the third chapter we have the record of the healing of the lame man at the gate of the temple. He never had walked, but when Peter said to him, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk" (Acts 3:6), "he leaping up stood and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God." Acts 3:8. When the multitude gathered round in amazement, Peter said: "The God of Abraham and of Isaac and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified His Son Jesus; . . . whom God hath raised from the dead, whereof we are witnesses. And His name, through faith in His name, hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know; yea, the faith which is by Him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all." Acts 3:13-16.

Then the next day, when the Apostles were brought before the Jewish Council, Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, "Ye rulers . . . in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even in Him doth this man stand

here before you whole . . . And in none other is there salvation; for neither is there any other name under heaven that is given among men, whereby we must be saved.” Acts 4:9-12, R. V., margin. This miracle gives us a vivid illustration of what it is to take the name of the Lord not in vain.

There is salvation in that name. “Thou shalt call His name Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins.” Matt. 1:21. His name is what He Himself is. Note the words used by Peter: “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, even in Him doth this man stand here before you whole.” Acts 4:10. To stand in the name of Jesus is to stand in Jesus. The name is the person. God is the Saviour, and His name is in Christ.

There is a dear elderly Christian woman, Nassima Burgess, who fell desperately ill and was taken to the hospital. She requested to be anointed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Happily we obliged her request and appealed to the Lord to raise her up. The Lord glorified His name by restoring her health and strength from near death. This was some ten years ago. She is still serving her Saviour and a witness to His healing power.

The name of the Lord is not to be taken as a charm; it is not magic, but reality. When Paul was at Ephesus, wonderful miracles were wrought by him in the name of the Lord Jesus. It is not some utterance of the name that is of value, but the recognition of the being and character of the Lord.

His name is His character, His personality, and cannot be separated from Himself. Names of men and things with us are mere matters of convenience and fancy; they mean nothing. And this is doubtless one reason why people do not better understand the force of “that glorious and fearful name, the Lord thy God.” To take the name of God in reality is to take the life and experience the power of it. “They that know Thy name will put their trust in Thee; for Thou, Lord, hast not forsaken them that seek Thee.” Psalm 9:10. God has never failed any person; we may go to Him in the name that is above every name, asking for His own sake to take away our sins, and to cleanse us, and we shall never be disappointed. What a blessed promise! “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.” The Lord says to the one who trusts Him, “I will set him on high, because he hath known My name; he shall call upon Me and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him and honor him. With long life will I satisfy him, and show him My salvation.” Ps. 91:14-16.

The disciples of Jesus are baptized “into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.” Matt. 28:19, R. V. To be baptized into the name of the Lord is to be swallowed up in His life, so that one can say, “I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me.” Galatians 2:20.

Since the life is the life of Christ, it is perfectly proper for the person to bear the name of Christ, just as the wife bears the name of her husband. We are joined by death to Christ in a bond that “neither life, nor death, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature,” can break. His name is our salvation. We are baptized into it, and it is the strong tower, into which we run and are safe. So again we rejoice in the assurance given in the third commandment, “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.”

Justine Bateman gave her life to Christ. And she got a role on a show (“Men Behaving Badly”). And right away in the first season, they wanted her to do something that went against her faith. It was either taking the Lord’s name in vain. Or doing something sexual. Or dressing a certain way. But she took a stand. She said, “I’m a Christian. And I don’t feel like I can do what you’re asking. She quit the show. And went into another line of work. She said, “I’m not going to do anything in my life that would dishonor the name of Jesus Christ.”

We are exhorted, “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.” Gal. 3:17. So we are to pray in His name, and the assurance is, “If ye shall ask anything in My name, I will do it.” There are many unconscious forgers at the bank of heaven. How many there are who in their prayers use the expressions, “in Jesus’ name,” and, “for Jesus’ sake,” without a thought of what they mean. Thus they take the name in vain. They come with the name of the Lord without the Lord Himself.

When we truly bear the name of Jesus, we are sunk out of sight, for it is He who lives, and not we, and it is He in us asking that He may be delivered from the power of sin in our flesh. He is dwelling in our flesh, in order that He may cleanse us from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit. “In the days of His flesh, when He had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto Him that was able to save Him from death,” He was heard. Heb. 5:7. He was saved

from death, in that He was saved from sin. He “suffered in the flesh, being tempted,” but He suffered not for Himself. The Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all, and it was the infirmities of our sinful flesh that oppressed His soul, He is still pleading in sinful flesh, presenting His life in our behalf, and longing to be relieved from the burden of sin with which we make Him serve.

How can a guilty sinner, already convicted of law-breaking, appear before the Lord, in the presence of that law that sends forth thunder and lightning, and a storm of indignation upon the wicked? He dare not; but he need not, for it is not he, but Christ. Knowing and confessing that Christ is come in the flesh, the sinner comes with boldness to the throne of grace, for he comes in the name—in the person—of Jesus. If he truly believes in the name of Jesus, it is Christ using his tongue to utter the petition; and when he knows this, he can always make his requests with thanksgiving, no matter with how strong crying and tears his supplications be made; for Christ in the days of His flesh obtained deliverance from those very sins.

So when I use that name, I must claim all that the name comprehends. Christ never offered a petition in vain. He said, “Father, I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me; and I know that Thou hearest Me always.” John 11:41, 42. Whatever we ask in His name indeed, will be granted. God will clear and hold guiltless every soul who takes that name for all that it means. Such an one will not take it in vain.

During the Bradshaw evangelistic meetings, one Angela, came to the Crown Plaza all the way from San Jose. She had heard about the meetings from the advertising and was interested in prophecy. She was convicted about Jesus and the Sabbath, but her family who was exposed to the truth she was hearing, opposed her. She even committed to a Sabbath for baptism into Jesus. There had been much prayer in Angela’s behalf. God must work His miracle to remove the stumbling-blocks. She never showed for her baptism. But God wasn’t finished. Some weeks later after she had witnessed to her loved ones, her father even gave his blessing for her baptism and himself came to understand the seventh day Sabbath. Angela was baptized right here a year or so ago. It was the prayer of faith in God’s redeeming name that gained the victory.

“The Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto Aaron and unto his sons, saying, On this wise ye shall bless the children of Israel, saying unto them, The Lord bless thee, and keep thee; the Lord make

His face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee; the Lord lift up His countenance upon thee, and give thee peace. And thou shalt put My name upon the children of Israel, and I will bless them.” Num. 6:22, 27. The name of the Lord is mercy and grace and peace. This name put upon the soul, keeps it. The Lord says of the one who believes Him, and thus has the victory that has overcome the world, “I will write upon Him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, . . . and My new name.” Rev. 3:12. So the trusting soul will be as safe as the New Jerusalem, and as God Himself.

Those who trust in the name have the name written upon them, and that shows to whom they belong. This is a pledge of safety, for the Lord will keep His own. His name upon us shows that we are His property, and He will defend us with His life against all adversaries. The devil knows the name of the Lord, and trembles at its power. He knows that God has put a hedge about every soul who trusts in His name. Though Satan goes about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, we are safe so long as we abide in the name of the Lord; and that name abides for ever. “They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever.” Ps. 125:2. What a glorious promise, then, is the commandment that we shall never take the name of the Lord our God in vain!

A man stepped from the shadows and asked, “Did you ever serve in the Union Army?” “Yes,” Mr. Sankey answered, “in the spring of 1860.” Can you remember if you were doing picket duty on a bright, moonlit night in 1862?” “Yes,” Mr. Sankey answered, very much surprised. “So did I, but I was serving in the Confederate army. When I saw you standing at your post, I thought to myself, ‘That fellow will never get away alive.’ I raised my musket and took aim. I was standing in the shadow, completely concealed, while the full light of the moon was falling upon you. At that instant, just as a moment ago, you raised your eyes to heaven and began to sing. ‘Let him sing his song to the end,’ I said to myself, ‘I can shoot him afterwards. He’s my victim at all events, and my bullet cannot miss him.’ But the song you sang then was the song you sang just now. I heard the words perfectly: ‘We are Thine; do Thou befriend us. Be the Guardian of our way.’ Those words stirred up many memories. I began to think of my childhood and my God-fearing mother. She had many times sung that song to me. When you had finished your song, it was impossible for me to take aim again. I thought, ‘The Lord who is able to save that

man from certain death must surely be great and mighty.’ And my arm of its own accord dropped limp at my side.”

Not only does the third commandment speak of saying a wrong word with our lips, but it goes down deeper within. It says: don’t pretend to be a follower of God when in your soul you know you aren’t. Don’t make or even let people think of you as a great person when you know it’s a lie. God has put into this commandment an assurance that He will give you authenticity of character. No deceptive veneer on the outside with cheapness underneath; no paint covering up flaws within.

Furniture may be simple in design, but it is solid through and through. No veneer to fool you when you look at it in the showroom. Many new cars have burlled walnut or rosewood trim inside that is mere plastic painted over to look like expensive wood; it makes you think you’re riding in a luxury car, but costs the factory only a few pennies.

But cars aren’t the important thing. We’re talking about the kind of character God wants to see in us. If you become a billionaire, but in the end realize that your character is only a plastic imitation, you can’t be happy. So, in order to save us from that embarrassment now and in the end, the dear Lord has given us this third commandment—an assurance that if we will believe His good news gospel, He will guarantee to make us into a wonderful character of truth, uprightness, and purity. We will become a beacon of light in a dark world, a refuge where people will come for rescue out of the storm. Nothing can bring you such happiness as to know that both God and man honor you for being genuine through and through.

The world has been through the “Stone Age” and the “Bronze Age,” but now we are in the “Plastic Age.” Stone and bronze can endure the test of fire, but plastic cannot. The Apostle Paul speaks of the final test of character all of us must meet. He likens character-building to building a house. There is a “foundation” already built—the Good News about Jesus reveals Him to be that foundation: “God has already placed Jesus Christ as the one and only foundation” (1 Corinthians 3:11, GNB). He has already built a “foundation” for eternal life for every human being, demonstrated that He has fought our battle, conquered, “condemned sin” in our sinful flesh. He has already done the hard work by laying the “foundation” for a gorgeous palace-character for each one of us. It’s a beautiful illustration of good news.

Everybody has to have a “house” to live in. We come into the world without one, just like we come into the world naked. We don’t know how to “build” the character/house we need. Jesus came to teach us the art of building a character/house. Yes, He came to save us and He has saved us; we are “alive.” But in the judgment day we will be terribly embarrassed if we have done nothing with the salvation He has already given us.

Therefore Jesus came to live among us, to take our flesh upon Himself, to live life as we must live it, to demonstrate before us a perfect character. We could never be happy in heaven unless we develop the self-denying character like His that says more than professing to be His followers. The close test of the final judgment must demonstrate that we are such in truth. This is what Paul means by “building a house.”

So great is the love of Jesus for us each one individually and personally that Paul says He has already built the “foundation” of such a “house” for us. Now, day by day, we are “building” on it. The very fact that we are alive shows something is happening. Architects will tell you that a sizable part of the expense of building any good house is the cost of the foundation. The question now is, What kind of a “house” are we building on it day by day?

Let’s permit Paul to tell us what he means: “Each one must be careful how he builds. . . . Some will use gold or silver or precious stones in building on the foundation; others will use wood or grass or straw. And the quality of each person’s work will be seen when the Day of Christ exposes it. For on that Day fire will reveal everyone’s work; the fire will test it and show its real quality. If what was built on the foundation survives the fire, the builder will receive a reward. But if anyone’s work is burnt up, then he will lose it” (1 Corinthians 3:10-15, GNB).

Now we begin to see what kind of good news the third commandment brings us. It’s an assurance that if we believe God’s gospel, He will see to it that we build a house that will endure the fire!

Suppose you are homeless. Someone has built a foundation of a house for you, ready-made. So for the sake of illustration, let’s assume you are lazy, and you gather some twigs and build yourself a grass hut on that beautiful, strong stone foundation. Then one day a forest fire sweeps through and your “house” goes up in smoke.

But your neighbor built with stone, and when it’s all over he still has his house. Wouldn’t you be embarrassed, especially if you had been

showing your friends through your “nice house,” proud of your architectural skill? The grass was cheaper and easier to find than stone! You had only what appeared to be a fine house, nicely thatched with mere grass.

“Fire will reveal everyone’s work; the fire will test it and show its real quality” (verse 13). But people’s opinions about us are not what matters in that judgment day. Have we professed the name of Christ in vain?

The good news in the third commandment tells us that He will save us from making that false profession: “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.” Believe “the truth of the gospel,” and you will find that “the gospel of Christ . . . is the power of God to salvation” (Galatians 2:5; Romans 1:16). Day by day the Holy Spirit will motivate you to lay stone on stone. You may not be conscious of any progress, but the most delicious joy will be to discover at last that the “house” the Lord has enabled you to “build” is a magnificent palace that “fire” cannot destroy.

Paul describes that although all of us are by nature “strangers and foreigners,” now we are “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:19-22).

This takes us a step further. Not only are we building a character/house; what we are building in the end will turn out to be a temple for the Lord to dwell in! For eternity! The assurance in the third commandment is therefore of a deliverance from fear—fear of that final judgment day of fire.

In everyone’s heart, that fear lies just below the surface. It can poison all the springs of joy. There’s “a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation” that no one can evade; it’s there, even sometimes when we wake up at three in the morning. Now the third commandment delivers from that fear. It means: You will not be ashamed in the judgment day! Precious good news!

Here’s another illustration God uses to help us understand: getting some clothes to cover our nakedness. Almost everybody has dreamed of being in a crowd of people without proper clothing. “Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame” (Revelation 16:15). The third commandment becomes an assurance: God will give you clothes to

wear! It's through believing the good news. "By grace you have been saved through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). Putting on the free wardrobe is our job; building the house on the ready-made free foundation is our job. But even the faith through which we build "is the gift of God" (verse 9).

I do not know how to pick out clothes for myself. Some folks enjoy doing that for themselves. For me, I trust others to know what looks right on me. For example, my wife is a good judgment of clothes. Oftentimes, kindly friends in church give clothing gifts. I make it a point to put on the clothes given to me. For the most part, they have made good choices. You see, sometimes I'm not too particular about what I wear. But others know better what works. God knows what clothes suit us best. In trusting His judgment He gives clothes of righteousness provided by our Saviour Jesus. He is the righteousness of God.

God's great third commandment contains a warning that we dare not disregard. "The Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain" (Exodus 20:7). His name is holy, no matter how many times in ignorance your lips have taken it in vain. When you "see" what happened on the cross, how the Son of God took your place, died your second death, endured the hiding of His Father's face—then something begins to happen in your hard heart. It is melted; tears come into your eyes. Never again will you want to take that holy name upon your lips in anger or in jest! Now you have begun to get acquainted with the One whose "name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6).

Now your lips, your speech, are different. Like the disciples who had spent time with Jesus, the crowd understood they were "different." The people said, "The way you speak gives you away!" (Matthew 26:73, GNB). The proud person becomes humble, the profligate becomes pure, the filthy language becomes clean. This is Jesus saving us from sin, now!

One day soon the process of "building" will come to an end. A decree will go forth from Heaven concerning every human being on earth. "Stop right now! This is it! What you have built, that's it for eternity!" On the very last page of the Bible we read about that day: "He who is unjust, let him be unjust still; he who is filthy, let him be filthy still; he who is righteous, let him be righteous still; he who is holy, let him be holy still. And behold, I am coming quickly, and My

reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work” (Revelation 22:11, 12).

But the same good news that permeates the ten commandments comes through again on that last page of the Bible. God has only happiness prepared for you:

“Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie. ‘I, Jesus, have sent My angel to testify to you these things in the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, the Bright and Morning Star.’ And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely” (Revelation 22:14-22).

John Wesley had been an Anglican clergyman for many years before he became a Christian. He had been a missionary in Georgia—and still was not a Christian. His conversion experience happened on the evening of 24th May 1738. Wesley had gone very unwillingly to a non-conformist meeting in London where someone was reading Martin Luther’s preface to the Epistle to the Romans. Wesley said: “About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation: and an assurance was given me, that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death.”

Make your choice just now, and say, “I come!” God has promised in the third commandment that He will hold you “guiltless” forever. “Happy are those whose sins are forgiven, whose wrongs are pardoned. . . . whom the Lord does not accuse of doing wrong” (Psalm 32:1, GNB).