

DOCTRINE FOR THE YOUNG

THE LORD WILL NOT HOLD HIM INNOCENT

by the Rev. Peter M. Buss

Why do the Ten Commandments contain only one severe warning like this: We are not to kill, or steal, or commit adultery, or lie; “but the Lord will not hold him innocent that takes His name in vain”? (Ex 20:7)

Taking the Lord’s name in vain means using His names in angry, or violent, or even dirty speech. The Lord’s names are (among others) Jehovah, God, the Lord, Jesus, and Christ. They should be used in speaking about the Lord, in worshiping Him, and in praising Him. To use them in common speaking such as a swear word, or to express surprise, or anger, is to take His name in vain.

It is so common, isn’t it? People do it all the time. We find that there are people in the world who can’t talk without using the Lord’s names as swear words. Even religious people do it, and (sadly) some members of our own church may have done it. It happens so often that people tend to think it is a bad habit. It is like smoking, or biting your nails—perhaps a bit worse. But everyone does it, so it’s not all that evil.

The Lord doesn’t say that. He says, “Thou shall not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him innocent that takes His name in vain.” In saying this, He ranks profanity—the abuse of the Lord’s names—as one of the most serious evils.

It is not just a bad habit. Perhaps with a very few people outside of the church, who have been brought up to think nothing of it and don’t know better, it could be a bad habit. But with most people, it is worse than that. Let us think of the fact that people take the Lord’s name in vain in front of religious people. This is not the way they behave normally. A person would not insult a friend’s wife, or mother, or father. He would know that that is improper behavior. But he will insult that person’s God freely, without worrying how he feels. Why? Is that just a bad habit? Does he just do by habit what he knows offends the people who are listening?

It is a silly way to talk. To insult the Lord is childish. The Lord Himself isn’t hurt by it, and people who put the Lord’s names into their sentences all the time sound stupid, if you stop to listen to them. They think it makes them big, somehow—it is as if they are saying, “See how big I am, I can insult God.” That is a stupid way to behave, yet people who are normally sensible and not stupid, do this all the time. Why?

If New Church people do this, it means they ignore the most holy teachings they have. They have been taught from childhood to think of the Lord in a holy way, and now they are “insulting” Him every time they speak His name in vain. How did they start? Did they just slip into a bad habit? Hardly. You don’t start something so different out of a bad habit.

What we *must* realize is that every time—every time a person takes the Lord’s name in vain, hell loves it, and gives that person a delight in doing it. This is the reason it is so common—not because of a bad habit, not because of people not knowing better—but because hell loves us to insult the Lord, and gives us a delight in it. This is why normally thoughtful people offend their friends in this way when they would never do it in any other way. This is why normally intelligent people try to “act big” and succeed in looking stupid by taking the Lord’s name in vain. They do it because the hells love it—and the hells make them insensitive, and the hells make them feel big.

Let us start, therefore, by seeing this evil in its proper light. It is not a bad habit, or a “thing big people do.” It is an evil, forbidden by the Lord, which the hells love us to do.

Among the most important reasons why we should not profane is its effect on us. It makes us feel wrongly about the Lord. As the Writings put it, if a person insults another person's name, he is insulting the whole person. If someone you know speaks your name in contempt, you know very well he is trying to show contempt for you, It is an insult. To use the Lord’s names in this way is showing contempt for the Lord and all the things that He does! Not only the Lord, but all things about Him are laughed at by the man who speaks of Him in this way.

This is why the Lord said that He would not hold him innocent who took His name in vain—because when someone treats the Lord with contempt, how is the Lord able to help him? If you knew a person was saying terrible things about you behind your back, and then he came to you with smiles and asked you to be his friend, could you do it? Could you do it, knowing that he would continue saying those things behind your back? Of course not. When a person comes to feel contempt for the Lord, how can he then turn to the Lord and ask Him for those holy things he has been making fun of? The Lord knows everything he does. So it is impossible for the Lord to hold innocent the man who insults Him in daily speech, and continues to do it, because that man has closed the way to Him. **IT IS NOT POSSIBLE FOR THE LORD TO HELP HIM UNTIL HE REPENTS.**

Another reason for the graveness of this evil is the affect upon all who hear people talk in this way. Think. Every time the Lord’s name is used in angry or dirty speech, it turns heaven away. Do you think the angels can bear to hear Him spoken of in these ways? Don’t you yourself feel, often, that you would like to get away when that happens?

Used wrongly, the Lord’s names are calling up hell, thus banishing and sending away heaven. Doesn’t that hurt the church, and hurt all those who love the church?

We must not say that people who do this are going to hell. We can never say that about another person. But a man who insults the Lord’ is doing a wrong thing! If he steals, he is also doing a wrong thing. The act is wrong. It hurts him. It hurts others. It hurts the church. Stealing is not just a bad habit either. It is an evil and we are not to pretend it isn't. Taking the Lord’s name in vain is an evil. We must shun it.

First, we must fight it in ourselves. But, to a degree, we should fight it in the world around us, too. Our church ought to stand for certain things, and not be weak about them. There are some things we believe very deeply, and we ought to stand up for them when we can. We believe deeply in marriage and ought never to laugh at jokes about adultery. We believe that the Lord is our God, and He is holy, and we ought not to stay silent when His names are wrongly used.

Of course, there are times when we have no business telling other people what to do. In a school, for example, we can't tell the other children what they ought to do, or not to do. But there are times when the Lord's names are taken in vain when we ought to speak out. For example, there is no reason at all why we should let our friends do this. If a friend does blaspheme, we ought to tell him that we do not think it ought to be done, and at least insist that he not do it in front of us. After all, if a friend insulted your father or mother, you would not let him do it, would you? Why then, when a friend insults your Lord, should you not speak up in His defense?

We know that everything we have comes from the Lord, and that He shows the most wonderful goodness to all of us each day—each moment. Everything that brings our happiness is from Him. So we ought to love and respect Him, and speak of Him only in special ways. We ought to be strong, and stand up for our faith in Him so that others may learn, too, that the Lord is holy.

Text: Exodus 20:7