



Taking the Lord's Name in Vain



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AMERICA'S CULTURE WAR

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Any person who has earnestly read the Bible understands that God's Word has much to say about how we use our words. God condemns gossip (1 Timothy 5:12-13), lying (Ephesians 4:25), filthy talking (Ephesians 5:4), and a host of other detrimental uses of language. On the other hand, He commends building others up (Ephesians 4:29), telling the truth (Ephesians 4:25), preaching the Gospel (Matthew 28:18-20), and a plethora of other constructive uses of our words. In truth, the power of death and life are in the tongue (Proverbs 18:21). It can be used to save, encourage, and build up, or it can be used to kill, destroy, and tear down.

One of the things that the Bible has consistently denounced is the taking of the Lord's name in vain. In fact, one of the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament states: "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” (Exodus 20:7). The word “vain” means “for no reason” or “useless.” Thus, God was instructing the Israelites to avoid using His name in a useless, disrespectful way. Instead, the Israelites were supposed to revere the name of God and use it in a serious, considerate way. Many of the ancient Israelites were so respectful of the name of God that they would not even pronounce it or write it for fear of using it in vain. Those who did write it would often throw away the quill they had used, because they thought that any quill that had written God’s name was holy and should not be used for regular words.

While it is true that the Ten Commandments in their original form are not binding on people today (Lyons, 2001), it is also true that God continues to be serious about the vain use of His name. In Matthew 12:36-37, Jesus explained: “But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified and by your words you will be condemned.” While Jesus’ warning against idle words is broader than just using the Lord’s name in vain, it certainly would include that as well.

Unfortunately, many today no longer respect God’s name. Not only does the skeptical community misuse and abuse God’s name, many of those within Christendom have lost respect for His name as well. One of the most common abuses of God’s name is the exclamation, “Oh my God.” This phrase is used by millions of people every day who give no thought to God when they are using His name. They say these words in an idle, useless, vain way that shows contempt for God. Both the Old and New Testaments (Colossians 3:8) explain to us that God views this as a sin and will not hold him guiltless who uses His name in such a way. Another common way the Lord’s name is abused is in statements of exclamation, such as “Good Lord,” or “Lord, no,” or “Lord, have mercy.” Unfortunately, many who understand the fact that the phrase, “Oh my God” is using the Lord’s name in vain, fail to see that saying “Good Lord,” without thinking about the Lord, is equally wrong. Notice that Exodus 20:7 says not to take the name of “the Lord your God in vain.” That verse includes both the terms “Lord” and “God.”

Since the Bible explains that Satan is the “god of this world,” it only makes sense that he would incorporate things into culture that are sinful and wrong. The cultural acceptance of the phrases “Oh my God,” “Good Lord,” “Lord have mercy,” and a host of vain uses of the Lord God’s name is exactly what we should expect from the world’s sinful culture. We should remember, however, that Christians are not to conform themselves to the sinful mold of this world (Romans 12:1-2). Instead, Christians are called to live a life of reverence to God and obedience to His Word. Let us all carefully consider what comes out of our mouths and determine that we will not use the Lord God’s name in vain.

REFERENCE

Lyons, Eric (2001), “Which Law Was Abolished?” Apologetics Press,
<https://apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=11&article=531>.



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