

Exodus 20:7

Name above all names

It's strange that you will sometimes hear someone say, when they find that they have been spoken about (perhaps not in the most glowing terms), "someone has been taking my name in vain". Which, you might think, is surely infringing this commandment by taking the whole thing "in vain".



But when we consider what God's "name" typically means, it should become apparent that this is not at all just talking about our speech, and we certainly shouldn't try to narrow it further to just refer to "cuss words". If, as the NT says, we are to "do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus", is there *anything* that we might do as believers that this third Word doesn't cover?

- **What do you understand by the words "name" and "in vain"?**

- **How might this Word affect ...**
 - our prayers?
 - our speech more generally?
 - our lives?

- **Are we bothered about ...**
 - the honour of God's name?
 - being "guiltless" before God?

Any time we hear of "the name of the Lord" in a verse or passage, we can substitute "the character of the Lord" in its place. God's name represents the sum total of his character. He is holy, loving, just, compassionate, omnipresent, omnipotent, sovereign, gracious, merciful, patient, infinite, and good. To pray "in the name of the Lord" is to pray according to his character. To call upon the name of the Lord is to ask God to act according to his character. To take shelter in the name of the Lord is to place our trust in who he is. To be baptized in the name of the Lord is to identify with his character as our salvation, our strength, and our new identity.

Has wise counsel questioned your plans? Just tell them that "God told you" this was the direction to take. Not interested in taking on a ministry opportunity? Just say you need to pray about it, and then a few days later say you sensed the Lord calling you in another direction. Need to add punch to your political view? Be sure to attach the word biblical to it in a way that implies all other positions are not. The sin of misattribution is the perfect smokescreen, presenting as piety and humility while masking pride and hypocrisy.

The most chilling form of misattribution is when we blame God for our own sin. Just as Adam pinned his fruit-eating ways on "the woman whom you gave me," we too can misattribute our guilt to God. This family that you gave me causes my anger to flair. This job that you gave me causes me to neglect my relationships. This house that you gave me tempts me to spend money frivolously. This body that you gave me feeds my pride or self-loathing.

We can also misuse the name of the Lord by speaking hallowed words while living hollow lives. When we preach a moral code that we ourselves do not strive to uphold, we become like those Jesus railed against during his ministry: "a people who honour God with our lips, but whose hearts are far from him". This is the parent who requires her child to apologise to her, but who never apologises for her own missteps. It is the mentor who dispenses godly wisdom to a younger believer that he has not himself learned to employ. It is the woman singing praise songs at the top of her lungs, eyes closed and hands extended, who has not cracked open her Bible in months.

Sometimes the most effective means of preserving the name of the Lord from misuse is to refrain from speaking at all.

In all twenty-one of the Epistles, he is referred to only twenty-eight times simply as "Jesus," but 484 times by the title "Lord" or "Christ." A staggering 95 percent of the times he is mentioned, he is referred to by a title of respect. But we tend to just call him Jesus. Does our frequent use of his given name indicate a lack of respect? It's certainly worth asking ourselves.

Jen Wilkins, *Ten Words to live by*