

BLESS GOD, LEVITICUS 24:10-23

Ten Step Program #3

◆**Intro:** The year was 1097. Turkish Muslims had conquered the Holy Land making pilgrimages of European Christians impossible. The man went by the title Pope Urban II. He called for all men to help expel that wicked race. His words were in part, "I send word...more over, Christ commands it. Remission of sins will be granted to those going thither." Historians recorded this:

◆"The Franks entered the city magnificently...on Friday, the day Christ redeemed the whole world on the cross."

"...within the Temple about 10,000 were beheaded. If you had been there your feet would have been stained up to the ankles in the blood of the slain. What more shall I tell? Not one of them was allowed to live. They did not spare the women and children."

◆These were the Crusades; two centuries of Holy Wars waged in the name of God. It makes you wonder what else we do in or with God's name.

◆**1.** The main point of the 3rd Commandment is that we do not give God a bad name, but rather a good name. That we show God to be holy and majestic as he really is, rather than make him appear as someone cheap, and unimportant. The term in our text is "blasphemy"(v11,16). The Hebrew word's origin might help us get at the meaning. It is נקב, (*naqav*) which means to pierce or make a hole. A *neqev* is a pipe. We talk this way in our language as well. We say...

◆"We shot his argument full of holes."

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◆ We “find a loop hole” in a law thus rendering it irrelevant.

◆ We “poke” fun of someone.

◆ **So on the negative side, blasphemy is when I poke holes in God's reputation. The positive side of the command is that we are to give God the good name he deserves.** And there's the beautiful word of Commandment #3: Bless.

◆ A. Let me show you something else. Verses 17-22 summarize what is called the “Law of Retribution.” It appears in other ancient codes as well. But rather than a demand for equal injury, it was a restriction on the extent of punishment that said the punishment must fit the crime, and not go beyond it. So if someone gave you a black eye, that did not mean you were free to beat them to a pulp so they never do it again. If someone knocked out your tooth, the most retribution he could receive was the knocking out of a tooth. It didn't mean you *had* to knock out his tooth, as other laws in Moses show. You certainly couldn't sue him for defamation of image, emotional suffering, and the consequent loss of wages, like we do like today.

◆ B. Now in that context of fair retribution we have the account of the blasphemer being punished with death. He's half Hebrew, half Egyptian. But nationality is not privilege nor an escape clause. He can't be let off because he's one of God's people. Neither can he be an exception because he's not Hebrew. All men answer to the throne of God. What's the crime that death fits? Cursing God, that is, *the death* God's reputation. So taking

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God's name in vain is killing God's good image in the world around me, instead of bringing him honor in the world around me. And, not incidentally, this always kills us.

◆ This would also indicate that making God look vain or useless is tantamount to death itself. Punishment equals the crime, right? Disrespecting God always leads to the killing of human life.

◆ **2. How do we make God look small and unimportant?** So what are some ways you and I might give God a bad name or kill off his presence in my world? It dishonors God when I treat him like nothing more than a tool for my momentary projects. Or that the only time I ever mention him on Facebook is in a phrase like OMG! But there are other ways we give God a bad name.

◆ **A) Hypocrisy:** Nobody likes a hypocrite. Not even thugs like a hypocrite. The world is always accusing the church of being full of hypocrites. That's because it's an easy mark. What the unbelieving world finds unbelievable is people who declare God with their lips, but deny him with their lives.

That shows God's influence to be invalid at least in you, at least at that moment.

◆ So you're just nice as pie at church, but at the office, in the factory, even with some of the same church people, you're a tyrant, or a chronic complainer, or dishonest about the time clock, or the first person to disappear when time's

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up. You'd be better off not letting anyone know you follow God, because you are giving God a bad name by your behavior. *People, even unbelieving people, expect that if God is real, relating with him should make some good difference.*

◆ Let me share an example of giving God a good name. Lets say, you were out to give God a good name! A church in MI I know of needed a few rooms repainted. There was a fellow in the congregation who, due to economic times, was often without work. He was a house painter. The Council observed this and decided to "get a bid" from him along with some others. Then one elder spoke up. "Lets not get a bid. Lets call him and tell him he has the job if he wants it. We all know he's often out of work. Lets give him work! Then when he submits the bill, lets pay it right away, and add 100 bucks, because you know he's gonna cut the costs because it's his church!" That my friends is giving God a good name.

◆ Want to know how to take God's name in vain? Let everyone know you're a follower of God with your words, and that you worship him regularly, and think teaching kids God's ways is important –and then be tight-wad, penny-pinching person who goes only as far as he has to, never beyond the call of mere duty.

◆ Whenever I help someone lose their taste for God, I am breaking the 3rd Commandment and vs!! Hypocrisy is one of

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the biggest offenders in this area. Whereas, when you are generous because you know God's goodness; when you are helpful even to inconvenience – people notice something of the image of God.

◆B) By-standing. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, an influential clergyman executed for his efforts to resist the Nazis during World War II, famously said, "*Silence in the face of evil is itself evil. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.*" But in America, we have become quite good at lethargic by-standing. One popular TV show on ABC, sets up a "What Would You Do?" situation to see if people will take a stand against wrong, like purse snatching, or verbal abuse in a restaurant. We're all glad when someone does. But many do not.

◆There is today and astounding lack of **voting**, lack of speaking up on such important things as what kind of person leads our country, what kind of laws get passed, what a marriage ought to be, etc. We have a culture that lives in fear of offending someone more than in honor of God and truth. I'm not saying that whenever someone uses the name of Jesus to comment on a stubbed toe, we ought to beat them with a 10lb Bible. You could however tell that person that Jesus is the perfect one to seek because he has the power to heal!

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◆ In contrast to the world, the God-follower sees herself as part of a greater whole, a kingdom presence, a recognizer of reality. Therefore when unreality is present in her world, she knows it has to do with her. She is not a mere individual. She bears the image of God, and it should not be hid.

◆ Check out **v14**. Everyone who heard the blasphemer had to lay their hands on his head; the ceremonial symbol of "we're all involved in this." That's why the community had to carry out the punishment. We are responsible as image bearers of God to promote his good image in his created world.

◆ Suppose you're in a meeting and someone makes a statement that you know to be false because you know another part of the story. Suppose someone commits a crime outside your window, selling drugs, or maybe beating another person. Many citizens would opt for what's easy. They'd say, things like

◆ "that's none of my business." Or

◆ "what difference could I make." or

◆ "the risk to my well-being is too great."

◆ The follower of God is not free to say these things. If you are a believer, you represent God in his world.

◆ **3. How to bless God's name and bring him honor.** Lets remember that the commandment isn't only about don't but also

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about do's. Some things need to rise. What are some ways we can bless God, or give God a good name?

◆ A. Include God in your conversations. Israel was *commanded* to swear by God's name. (Dt.6:13). That is, Israel was to make the true God the witness to their truth telling.

◆ Let me ask you, does anyone ever hear you talk about God? When you observe some beauty in creation, is it some fictitious Mother Nature you praise? When you're buying, say, a Christmas tree and marveling at that pine aroma, can you bring yourself to say "Isn't it amazing how God makes a tree smell so good?" If there is a creator behind all this, then he deserves the credit!

◆ When you speak with someone going through difficulty and you're just about to part ways, how do you encourage them? "Hang in there. I hope things improve for you."? It's the perfect opportunity to honor our Master!: "I will pray that God helps you. I know he cares." The simplest way to bless God's name is to use it well in your day.

◆ Include him in your stories as though the worldview you hold that believes that a supernatural power actually acts in your existence, is real!

◆ Let people outside your Christian circles hear about any of God's answers to your prayer? Or about something you discovered in the Bible? Don't instruct them. Inform them of what you are learning. These

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are all things that point to God's reality and proper place in life.

◆B. Mean what say and say what you mean without needing to add a curse. Jesus taught his disciples that they didn't need to swear.

◆*"But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes', and your 'No', 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one. "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also."* Matthew 5:33-39, NIV.

◆[Interestingly, both the topic of swearing by God's name and the Lex Talionis are both addressed by Jesus, just the both appear in our text. Jesus affirms the limitation of injury, and adds the expansion of grace. In doing so God's name is blessed. What do people learn when your yes means yes? That followers of God are trustworthy. Their words create hope and life rather than tear it down.]

◆*"But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language from your lips."* Colossians 3:8, NIV.

◆Everything from anger to filthy language tears people down.

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◆ *"Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen." Ephesians 4:29, NIV.*

◆ What does unwholesome talk do? It tears people down. It shrinks life.

◆ **Conclusion:** Why is it a big deal to cast a shadow of doubt across the name of God? Suppose your name is Albert. Suppose every time someone cut me off I used your name. ("Oh my Albert, what do you think you're doing!?") ...Spill my bowl of potato chips. ("Blast, that's an Albert!). ...My team misses a touchdown pass. ("ALBERT IT ALL! I can't believe it!") ...My car gets stolen: ("Some Albert stole my alberting car!") When I'm searching for all that is good, right, hopeful, and rescuing, do you think Albert is going to come to mind? Am I ever going to seek out an Albert for help? Will my kids ever take anyone named Albert seriously?

◆ We must ask why God would be so angry at misuse of his name. I will tell you. God is your source of life. God's son gave up his life to give you yours. When we shrink the name of God we shrink our and everyone else's likelihood of seeking in him freedom and hope, forgiveness, and contentment. When we lose sight of God human life invariably suffers and dies.

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◆ Again, why does God give us his commandments? Why do you not let your kids play in the streets? Do you hate your kids. Do you despise streets? Are you just a killjoy? No. Your rules are about what's best for your children. It's the same with God. The 3rd Commandment is at its core a secret to hope that we teach ourselves by blessing God. Speak of him. Point to him. Look to him. Lean toward him. He is your hope.