

# “There’s Something about that Name”

Exodus 3:13-14, 20:7 <sup>1</sup>

Have you ever given much thought to how much effort is spent in choosing the names for the things we buy? A *Google* search turned up over 173 million pages having to do with choosing product names. As one example, here are just a few names we give to the cars we drive: Avalanche; Intrepid; Legend; Odyssey; Park Avenue; PT Cruiser; Thunderbird. Every product name is exhaustively researched to be certain that its sound and its associations will create positive impressions in the minds of potential customers.

Of more significance are the names we give to diagnose and treat disease. No matter what the problem, it feels more manageable once it has a name. Whether the disease is asthma, hypertension, shingles, tooth decay, or even a particular form of cancer, knowing its name gives a sense of control, suggesting cause, course, and treatment.

Choosing names for people is important, too, isn’t it? Most of us give careful thought to the names we give our children. We consider what the names mean, how they sound, and what the initials and nicknames might turn out to be. Sometimes we choose a name because it represents someone in our family who has been important to us, or whose character we hope this child emulates. Sometimes we choose the name of a famous person or a biblical person for the same reason. Sometimes we choose a name simply because we find it beautiful.

However a child’s name is chosen, it becomes beautiful, significant, and prophetic just as soon as it is given. That particular sequence of letters and sounds becomes special, and indeed, *holy*, because it represents a particular, unique, beloved person.

Our personhood is wrapped up in our name, and its spelling and pronunciation are important. The slightest change in pronunciation or the slightest change in spelling makes those sounds and letters refer to someone else, not to us. That’s one of the main reasons why I work hard at learning names, and why I do my best to pronounce your name the way you do.

For example, my given name is “David,” and I answer to that, but I’m really “Dave.” On the other hand, I have a dear friend in Louisville who is most emphatically “David,” not “Dave.” I don’t remember how I became one and not the other, but the difference is a visceral one. I’ll bet that’s true for you, too.

A person’s name represents who they are as well as who they might become. God was so concerned about this that God actually named people Himself or changed their names at certain key moments of their lives.<sup>2</sup> And even now, when a person receives Jesus Christ as Savior, his or her name becomes eternal, because it is written down in *the Lamb’s Book of Life* (Revelation 21:25).<sup>3</sup>

Your name is perhaps your most precious possession, because it represents the essence of who you are. Your name represents your character, and besides the persons you’ve introduced to Jesus, your character is all you’re going to take with you when you cross over into eternity.

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<sup>1</sup> A sermon by Dr. David C. Stancil, delivered at the Columbia Baptist Fellowship in Columbia, MD on July 5, 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Key examples would be Abram to Abraham (Genesis 17:5), Sarai to Sarah (Genesis 17:15), and Simon to Peter (John 1:42).

<sup>3</sup> Ron Mehl, *The Ten(der) Commandments: Reflections on the Father’s Love* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Press, 1998, pp. 84-85.

In this sense, God's Name is like ours, because God's Name represents God's character. The Bible actually gives hundreds of descriptive names for God, of which these are just a few:

A Consuming Fire (Deuteronomy 4:24)	My Redeemer (Psalm 19:14)
A Sure Foundation (Isaiah 28:16)	My Salvation (Exodus 15:2)
Bread of Life (John 6:35)	My Savior (Psalm 42:5)
Comforter in Sorrow (Jeremiah 8:18)	My Strong Deliverer (Psalm 140:7)
Defender of Widows (Psalm 68:5)	My Stronghold (Psalm 18:2)
Faithful & True (Revelation 19:11)	My Support (2 Samuel 22:19)
God Almighty (Genesis 17:1)	Our Father (Isaiah 64:8)
God of all comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3)	Our Guide (Psalm 48:14)
God who saves me (Psalm 51:14)	Our Help (Psalm 33:20)
King of Kings (1 Timothy 6:15)	Our Leader (2 Chronicles 13:12)
Light of Life (John 8:12)	Our Peace (Ephesians 2:14)
Lord of Lords (1 Timothy 6:15)	Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6)
My Advocate (Job 16:19)	Refuge & Strength (Psalm 46:1)
My Confidence (Psalm 71:5)	Righteous Judge (2 Timothy 4:8)
My Friend (Job 16:20)	Sovereign Lord (Luke 2:29)
My Hiding Place (Psalm 32:7)	The Good Shepherd (John 10:11)
My Hope (Psalm 71:5)	Wonderful Counselor (Isaiah 9:6)

God has many names, but God has one Name that is very personal. God said to Moses, *"I am the LORD [Yahweh]. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God Almighty [El Shaddai], but by my name the LORD [Yahweh] I did not make myself fully known to them"* (Exodus 6:3). The truth is that the Name was—and is—regarded as so holy by the Jews that they do not pronounce it, even today, and so we're not altogether sure how to pronounce it.

Whenever you see God referred to as "the LORD" in your Bible, the Name being translated is this personal Name of God, which we think is pronounced "Yahweh." The Name can be translated in several ways, but it basically means "I AM THE ONE WHO ALWAYS IS."

My friends, there is power in the Name of God (Jeremiah 10:6), and every time we pray the Lord's Prayer, we pray, *"hallowed be your name"* (Matthew 6:9). And because you and I live on this side of the Resurrection, we know that God has an even more intimate name than *Yahweh*. This Name is *Y'shua*, Jesus.

And just as there is power in the Name of the Father, there is power in the Name of the Son (John 17:11). Demons screamed and tore themselves from their victims at the sound of His Name. At the Name of Jesus, the eyes of the blind were opened, withered legs became strong, and dead bodies came up out of the grave. Still today, the demons fear Him, and they cannot destroy where the power of His Name protects. The Bible tells us that *"The name of the LORD is a strong fortress; the godly run to him and are safe"* (Proverbs 18:10).

It is through the Name of Jesus that we have eternal life (John 20:31). The Bible tells us that *"salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven . . . by which we must be saved"* (Acts 4:12). The Name of Jesus is the Name *"that is above every name."* The Name of Jesus is the Name at which *"every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth"* (Philippians 2:9-11). Bill and Gloria Gaither were right when they wrote,

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus; there's just something about that name!  
Master, Savior, Jesus, like the fragrance after the rain.

Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, let all heaven and earth proclaim:  
Kings and kingdoms will all pass away, but there's something about that name!<sup>4</sup>

And all of this brings us to the third of the Ten Commandments: “*You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name*” (Exodus 20:7). Let's think about that for a little while.

There are several ways in which we misuse, or fail to honor the holiness of God's Name. I suppose the one we think of first is cursing or swearing, particularly the terrible phrase that combines God's name with “damn it,” or “damn you.” These words are terrible for several reasons. In the first place, using God's name in such a way certainly does not honor God's holiness, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment tells us quite plainly that God does not allow such disrespect to go unpunished.

But beyond this, using these words is dishonest, because no person who uses them actually means them. If we understood the awful reality to which this curse refers, we'd realize with a shudder that there is no provocation sufficient for calling down this curse on someone else. And the truth is that this curse not only calls on God to do something we don't really want God to do; it calls on God to do something that God does not do.

When all is said and done, God does not damn anyone. The word isn't even in the Bible. The idea is that of being condemned, which has to do with passing judgment; yet when even the most horrible persons stand before God's judgment seat, God does not send them to hell. People do go to hell; but those who go into that awful, utter, and unending darkness go by their own choice. Humans go to hell because they choose, in a thousand ways, to thumb their noses at God, who loves them with an everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3). And in the end, God lets them have what they have chosen, terrible though it is.

Common cursing and swearing represent the efforts of inarticulate people to seem powerful. But far from demonstrating power, such speaking is evidence of impotence and weakness, though it does have an effect. There is a proverb that says, “Sow an act, and reap a habit. Sow a habit, and reap a character. Sow a character and reap a destiny.”

Jesus told us—and warned us at the same time—that our mouths speak what our hearts are full of.<sup>5</sup> This is why I pay a lot of attention to what I call “The Spirituality Test.” What I say—or even think—when provoked or hurt, that first uncensored exclamation of the spirit, gives an extremely accurate read on the spiritual condition of the heart. And Jesus told us that “*everyone will have to give account on the Day of Judgment for every empty word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned*” (Matthew 12:36-37).

For all this, profanity is perhaps the least of our offenses against this commandment. Surprising as it may be, the greatest offense to the Name of God is not accomplished in rough places where God's holy Name is interspersed with sewer talk, but in churches, where the words of songs and prayers are spoken, but not really meant. We take God's Name in vain when we call God “Lord” but do not really mean what we say (Romans 10:9).

There are many persons—perhaps some of us—who would be terribly shocked to be accused of gross profanity. These persons may never have allowed an oath to cross their lips, and may even boast of this. Yet these same persons may actually break the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment more often and more terribly than the most profane person on the street. These persons “talk

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<sup>4</sup>Bill & Gloria Gaither, “There's Something About That Name,” 1970.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 12:24, 15:18; Luke 6:45.

the talk,” but they don’t “walk the walk.” They are “Sunday Christians,” pretending to be what they are not.

This is a far more terrible thing than speaking God’s Name in anger, calling down a curse without content. Persons who profess to follow Christ, but deny Him by how they live, are doing far more to block the coming of the Kingdom than those persons who swear openly with no pretense of belief. It is no wonder, Paul wrote, “*that the world blasphemes the name of God because of you*” (Romans 2:24).

One of the many ways in which we Christians fail to “walk the walk” has to do with the integrity of our promises. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment warns us against failing to honor God’s Name by making a promise in God’s Name with no intention of keeping it, or of making such a pledge and breaking it because it becomes uncomfortable or inconvenient to keep it.

How many of us generally pride ourselves on our honesty but consistently fail to meet our explicit commitments such as making a phone call, paying a bill, showing up to meetings on time, or even praying for one another? What about commitments such as the honoring of contracts, honest paying of taxes, or honoring the bonds of friendship?

Our fulfillment of our promises makes a powerful statement about the nature of our integrity, for it requires far more than just telling the truth in the present. To have integrity in the biblical sense requires the rigorous, almost fanatical fulfillment of our promises over time, which sometimes requires the willingness to endure a higher cost than we expected to make sure that our promises are kept (Psalm 15:4).<sup>6</sup>

In this respect the Jewish leaders of Jesus’ day were masters of evasion, even as we are today. They would swear by heaven, or by earth, or by Jerusalem, or by their own heads, and they would feel themselves quite free to break such an oath, because it didn’t actually include the name of God. But Jesus told us that God is inevitably present in every transaction, in every moment of our lives, whether God’s Name is overtly mentioned or not.<sup>7</sup>

And because all promises and pledges are actually made *before God*, we are therefore obligated before God to honor every single one of our commitments. If we’re wise, then, you and I will carefully count the cost of any commitment before making it; and, having made it, we will consider ourselves honor-bound to keep it.

The fact that we have to put people on oath in a court of law is a sad thing. It ought to be possible to take a person’s word as true without requiring an oath that the truth is being told. What the world needs, and what the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment requires, is that you and I be persons who can be trusted to speak the truth and to keep our promises, oaths or no oaths, convenient or costly. Nothing else will do.

One of the highest compliments that a person can ever receive is that it be said, “He is as good as his word,” or “She is as good as her word.” The Essenes, an ancient sect of the Jews, noted that “He who cannot be believed without swearing is condemned already.”

You may have seen the list floating around the Internet that records some of the answers a group of children gave to the question, “What does love mean?” Here are a few of them:

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<sup>6</sup> David Hazony, *The Ten Commandments: How Our Most Ancient Moral Text Can Renew Modern Life* (New York: Scribner, 2010), pp. 79, 83.

<sup>7</sup> *Vocatus atque non vocatus, Deus aderit.*

- “When my grandmother got arthritis, she couldn’t bend over and paint her toenails anymore. So my grandfather does it for her all the time, even when his hands got arthritis, too. That’s love.”
- “Love is what makes you smile when you’re tired.”
- “Love is when my mommy makes coffee for my daddy and she takes a sip before giving it to him, to make sure the taste is okay.”
- “Love is what’s in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening presents and listen.”
- “Love is like a little old woman and a little old man who are still friends even after they know each other so well.”
- “Love is when your puppy licks your face even after you left him alone all day.”
- “*You really shouldn’t say ‘I love you’ unless you mean it. But if you mean it, you should say it a lot. People forget.*”
- “When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You know that your name is safe in their mouth.”

Let me read that last one again: “*When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different.* **You know that your name is safe in their mouth.**” That’s what the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commandment is all about.