

The Command to glorify God's Name

Ps. 89: 1, 4, 7

Ps. 29: 1, 3

Ps. 99: 1 – 3

Hymn 7: 1, 4, 9

Ps. 145: 1 – 3

Scripture reading: Lev.24: 10 – 23; Ps.99

Text: LD 36

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ,

God reconciled us to Himself and made us His own. Through our Lord Jesus we received a new life in fellowship with God, a new life in obedience to Him, a life in which we glorify Him and find our highest delight in Him. And thus the law was given to us not only that we may know our sin and misery, but that we may be instructed in the way of life.

How this new life looks like is spelled out in the law. This is how life in communion with God looks like. This is true life. There is no higher glory or perfection that we can possibly desire than the glorious and perfect fellowship with God and with our neighbour as prescribed in the law. That which God demands of us, is also our highest desire. Unto that glory and that fellowship with God we are called. And unto this end Christ died for us.

All temporal blessings and all the blessings of eternal life are only to be found in fellowship with God. And how this holy fellowship with God and with our neighbour looks like, is spelled out in the different commandments.

It is now with this understanding that we will also listen to the instruction of the third commandment:

“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” (Deut. 5: 11).

In a certain sense this commandment is the climax of the law. The first two commandments lay the foundation. To worship the one true God, and Him alone, is the foundation on which all the other commandments are built. But if the first two commandments lay the foundation for everything else, then the third commandment is the peak of the roof. The third commandment is a command to glorify God's name in all that we do. In fact, all things exist with this purpose: to glorify God. That is the purpose of all creation. That is the purpose of our being. All activity should be directed to magnify His name, and in all we do we shall hallow Him and praise His name. That is the meaning of the third commandment: we shall acknowledge God's majesty and fear and honour Him.

I proclaim God's Word to you with the theme:

God's Name is revealed

We are commanded to ...

1. **Acknowledge** the glory of His name
2. **Protect** the glory of His name
3. **Seek** the glory of His name

In the first place we note that we are commanded to

Acknowledge the glory of His name

God's "name" refers to the total of His self-revelation. He has revealed Himself to us in all His words and deeds. Everything that He revealed to us concerning Himself: that is His name. Throughout the history of salvation God has revealed Himself to His people. He has made a name for Himself.

He made a name for Himself when He created the heavens and the earth. He made a name for Himself when He destroyed the world with the flood, but saved Noah with his family. He made a name for Himself when He established an eternal covenant with Abraham.

In the first place He revealed Himself as God almighty who created heaven and earth. All men have to acknowledge Him as such. Before we know Him as our Saviour we first know Him as God. We worship Him first of all as our Creator; and even if we would know Him in no other way, that would be enough reason to owe Him everything. For everything that we may enjoy in this life comes from Him alone. That has not changed in the New Testament. When the apostle John sees the living creatures gathered before the throne of God, they – together with the twenty four elders – fall down before God to worship Him. And what do they say?

"You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created" – Rev. 4: 11.

The reason given for their worship is this: You created all things; by Your will we exist. All creatures have been created with the purpose to glorify their Creator. That is the final reason why we exist: to glorify God. As the apostle Paul says:

"...of Him and through Him and unto Him are all things, to whom be glory forever..." – Rom. 11: 36.

But, in addition to this revelation, the Lord revealed Himself also in a special way to His covenant people, as we sing in Ps.147:

"...The LORD His statutes has provided,
His steadfast love to Jacob showing,

His word on Israel bestowing.

He dealt thus with no other nation..."

And to Moses He says:

"Thus you shall say to the children of Israel: 'The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you. **This is My name forever**, and this is My memorial to all generations'" – Ex. 3: 15.

He has revealed Himself to His covenant people as their God, the God who stays faithful to His covenant promise to be a God to them. And in doing so He made a name for Himself. He made a name for Himself in Egypt with mighty wonders and signs. He made a name for Himself revealing His steadfast love to Israel. And so Israel was called and obliged to honour and to glorify God's name **more** than all the nations around them.

"...who is like Your people Israel, the one nation on the earth whom God went to redeem for Himself as a people – **to make for Yourself a name** by great and awesome deeds, by driving out nations from before Your people whom You redeemed from Egypt?" – 1 Chron. 17: 21.

Dear congregation, we are the true Israel. In Christ we are His new creation, saved and renewed by the power of God, by the great and awesome deeds of His salvation, to praise Him for His mercies. He adopted us as His sons "...to the praise of the glory of His grace..." – Eph.1:6

He predestined us to be "to the praise of His glory" – Eph.1:12.

He sealed us with the Holy Spirit of promise... "to the praise of His glory" – Eph. 1:14.

That is the ultimate purpose of our salvation: that we shall praise and glorify Him forever.

Yes, God made a name for Himself.

He has revealed Himself to us through our Lord Jesus Christ. In Him we see God's glory.

"No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him" (John 1:18).

And so the apostle John, when he sees the throne in heaven, adds also another reason why we should honour and glorify God's name. He sees the living creatures and the twenty four elders falling down before the Lamb, saying:

“‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honour and glory and blessing!’ And every creature which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and such as are in the sea, and all that are in them, I heard saying: ‘Blessing and honour and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!’” – Rev. 5: 12, 13.

God has made a name for Himself. First of all He revealed Himself as the Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth. And He should be worshipped as such. But He revealed Himself to us even closer in His Son as our mighty Redeemer. And so we are saved to the praise of His glory. He has revealed Himself to us that we may see His glory and worship.

Now, the third commandment demands that we receive this self-revelation of God with awe; that we tremble at His name, that we hallow the majesty of His name and that we be zealous and careful to honour His name with godly reverence.

Scripture refers to this as “the fear of the Lord”.

Without this fear and holy respect for the Lord there can be no true worship.

We shall not use His name in vain; that is: we shall use His name only with fear and the highest reverence. If anyone thinks that he can worship God in a casual and cool way, he is blaspheming God. If God is not worshipped with fear and reverence, then He is not worshipped at all. Where the fear of the Lord is absent, worship is absent.

God has made a name for Himself, a name before which we have to fall down and worship. He made the heavens and the earth that we may fear Him; He brought us with a mighty hand out of slavery that we may revere Him.

To understand God's law we have to remember that the law is spiritual. The law judges in the first place our souls, our hearts and minds. Each commandment reaches to the heart. For the Lawgiver Himself is spiritual and He is not so much interested in our outward show than in the purity of our hearts. And so also the third commandment requires from us a new heart in which God is enthroned – hallowed and honoured and glorified.

The third commandment does not teach us only to refrain from certain words and unnecessary oaths, but to hallow God **in our hearts and minds** and in everything that we do, that **all** our thoughts and **all** our words and **all** our actions shall be directed to hallow the majesty of His name. This commandment applies each moment to every aspect of our life.

God revealed Himself to us; He made a name for Himself. When our ears are open to hear His name, our heads will bow in worship. When our eyes are open to see His glory, our necks will no longer be too stiff to bend in worship.

Whenever God reveals His name, honour and praise is His due. As much as we know Him, as much we are to fear and honour Him. That is the third commandment.

What then does this mean for the practical side of our daily life?

We note in the second place that we are commanded to...

Protect the holiness of His name

To use God's name in vain, means to use it lightly, without thinking, or without respect, that is: in a casual way and without fear. If we may **not** use His name lightly or casually, the meaning is that we should know the fear of the Lord and use His name only with the highest reverence.

In the society in which we live God's name is, however, constantly abused, as if His name is merely an exclamation mark to express our filthy emotions. Or His name is used merely as gap filler in conversations, throwing it in between. That has become characteristic for TV programs and films, but you will also hear it at the post office or in the shopping centres or over the radio.

In the Old Testament such abuse of the Lord's name was punished with death. We read an example of that in Lev. 24. The man was stoned. The Lord puts this sin on the same level as murder. There is no sin greater than to use the Lord's name in vain. To use His name in lightly or without reverence is, so to speak, to slap the almighty God in His face. It is to despise His majesty.

In the New Testament one who uses God's name in vain is not stoned, but he is excommunicated and finally, in the final judgement, such a person will be thrown into the eternal fire of God's wrath.

We have to keep this in mind all the more in our own day. For, it may **seem** to us as if this sin remains unpunished. The blasphemer is not thrown into jail, no, he is the hero in the film. The blasphemer is not even rebuked, no, he is cheered by the crowds. Yet, God is in heaven and He will not let this sin go unpunished. As Judge of heaven and earth He will avenge this sin even in the generations.

Now, the Catechism states that we can also become guilty of this sin if we remain "silent bystanders", and that God's wrath is also on those who do not prevent and forbid this sin as much as they can.

This has an enormous implication for us. It means that we have to **address** those who use the Lord's name in vain. We may not be silent bystanders.

With meekness, but also with the fear of the Lord in our hearts, we have to admonish and rebuke those who abuse His name – on the playground, at a barbeque, at a social; but also in the chopping centre or wherever we move. It does not mean that we have to grab each man on the shoulder that passes us by, but it does mean that we will speak up as much as we can whenever the majesty of God is openly despised in this way.

Or else, if we remain silent, the salt has lost its saltiness.

When you are a silent bystander you share in the same sin, as your silence is an approval allowing it to continue. It does not mean that it is in our power to stop it, but we should speak up for the glory of our Father's name.

The sin of being a silent bystander increases if you would watch a program on TV in which the Lord's name is abused. And on how many programs are His name not abused? If you do not stand up and switch the TV off, you have become a blasphemer yourself. A Christian may not watch something for his own pleasure and entertainment that dishonours God. How can you allow something in your house that blasphemes God's name?!

Does it still shock you when His name is abused and blasphemed? Is it like a blow through your own face every time that His name is used in vain? Do you still fear His name?

Yes, when we love and fear the Lord the misuse of His name is like a slap in our own face. But if someone is no longer shocked by it and silently allows it without reproof, or even watches such programs for his own amusement, he has become a blasphemer himself.

However, this commandment is not concerned about words only. It reaches to our heart. To use the Lord's name in vain is only one extreme example of the transgression of this commandment. Just as murder is an extreme example of breaking the fifth commandment. Or just as adultery is an extreme example of breaking the seventh commandment. The transgression of the third commandment is already present in the heart when the fear of the Lord is lacking. Then it will, as a result, also show in words and in deeds. But the words and the deeds will only be the outward symptoms of sin in the heart, in this case the sin of not fearing God; the sin of being cool and casual in the presence of God; the sin of making light of His majesty.

The Lord's name is most often misused by religious people in their prayers and in their singing. If you pray to God as if He is your playmate, you are using His name in vain. It would be better for a man not to worship God at all, than to try and worship Him without fear.

But, brothers and sisters, to instruct ourselves, how do **we** sing the psalms? When the name of the Lord repeatedly occurs in the psalm, and the psalm itself is a prayer, what are you doing if you sing it without thinking? If you do not mean the words that you sing, are you not using His name in vain?

What is **supposed** to be worship is then changed into the greatest sin: disrespect for God.

Cool and casual worship is blaspheming God.

Can the fear of the Lord be seen in the way that you come to hear His word? Did you come this afternoon in prayer and in holy fear to receive God's word?

If this command applies to our daily lives, much more to our worship!

Let us then protect the holiness of God's name starting with our own hearts; let us have open ears to hear His name proclaimed to us in all His majesty and glory.

We have to protect the holiness of God's name especially in our worship, but on the other hand we are not to separate worship and religion from our daily life. We have to honour the Lord not only with our mouths, and not only certain hours of the week, but in all that we think and do. If we would say: "Lord! Lord!", but do not obey, that is abusing His name. If someone calls himself a Christian while he lives like the world, he is abusing God's name, as

the apostle Paul says that God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles when His covenant people are disobedient – Rom. 2: 24.

There are a vast number of ways in which even religious people abuse the name of the Lord. To mention only one further example: when people say: "The Lord has said to me!" or: "The Lord has revealed to me!" while the Lord has not spoken. In the Old Testament that was an abuse of the Lord's name by false prophets, but we find this abuse very often in our own day when people ascribe their own dreams and experiences to the Lord, saying that the Lord has shown them this, or told them that, while the Lord has not said that. We are taught by this commandment to be very careful, thoughtful and sober whenever we use the Lord's name. Let us not try to use His name to confirm our own words and thoughts as if it is His.

And so we could continue to mention a hundred transgressions of this commandment in our own day, but let us search our own hearts whether the fear of the Lord is present. Let us first of all hallow the Lord's name in our own hearts, and then we will no longer be silent bystanders when the majesty of God is despised.

In the last place we note that we are commanded to

Seek the glory of God's name

The negative side of the commandment is that we shall guard against all sorts of misuse of the Lord's name. The positive side of this commandment is that we shall seek the glory of His name.

Positively this commandment teaches us to call on His name with reverence, to call on Him as our God and Saviour, to marvel at His greatness and His mighty works, to speak about His goodness and to confess Him before men.

Yes, positively, not only our mouth, but our whole live should be directed to the glory of His name – here in the worship service, but also when we relax

together with friends having a pleasant social. Our conversations shall be holy, as men and woman who fear the Lord; not by having only religious conversations, but by fleeing from sin in all our words and deeds, by living constantly before His face, by living in the fear of His name.

Also when we have a barbeque God has to be honoured in all that we say and do. When the Lord says: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (Mt.5:16), He does not mean that we should do goods works in order to be seen by men, but He means this: that if our whole life is directed to glorify Him, it will be evident. It will be seen in all that we do, and not only when we try to do something special. No, it will be seen in the ordinary life of every day. It will be seen when you wash the dishes, it will be seen in your attitude, and it will be seen in the clothes that you wear. The fear of the Lord will be seen in the ordinary life of a Christian. Our good works are not to be an outward show, but the result of a new heart that loves and honours God.

The same applies when the apostle Peter says:

"Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against your soul, having your conduct honourable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation" – 1 Peter 2: 11, 12.

He does not mean that they have to go and do something special in order to be seen by men, but by our abstaining from fleshly lusts God will be glorified when people see our sober lives.

Dear congregation, when we look at ourselves in the light of this commandment, we have to acknowledge our sin. We can only blush when we think of the dishonour that we often bring on the name of the Lord. We are again reminded of our sin and misery. And so we flee all the more to Christ, trusting in Him alone for the forgiveness of all our sins.

But, dear congregation, the instruction of this commandment is also given for another purpose; not only that we may know our sin and misery, but that we may be instructed in the new life of obedience. Through Christ our Lord, who has set us free from slavery to sin, who has reconciled us to God to live in fellowship with Him, we now rejoice in this commandment. We rejoice in the majesty of our God. We also long for that day when we will reach the goal of perfection: the day of Christ's coming!

Then we will praise and glorify our God and Saviour forever and ever.

But we also thank the Lord for His salvation as we experience now already the beginning of this obedience; although it might be a small beginning. We trust Him that He will also complete the good work that He has started in our lives.

We shall not use His name in vain; we shall honour and praise Him with fear, for in Christ we know Him. He is both our Creator and Redeemer.

We know His name; therefore we worship.

We know Him; therefore we serve Him with fear and reverence.

Amen.

