

[R1527]

TAKING GOD'S NAME IN VAIN.

"Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain."—[Exod. 20:7](#).

WHILE it is true, as the Apostle Paul states ([Col. 2:14](#); [Eph. 2:15](#)), that the handwriting of the ordinances or decrees of the Jewish law, which was found to be only unto death, was taken away by the vicarious sacrifice of Christ Jesus, so that there is now no condemnation to them that are in him, by faith in his blood, and also that the ceremonial or typical features of the law, having been fulfilled, have likewise passed away ([Rom. 8:1](#); [Matt. 5:18](#)), it is nevertheless true that the moral precepts of that law never have passed away, and never will, because they are parts of the eternal law of right.

Among these precepts is the above, generally known as the second commandment—"Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain; for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain." It behooves us, therefore, to consider what the Lord would esteem as a vain use of His name. The expression, "in vain," signifies falsely, or, to no purpose; and, it will be seen, is a finer distinction of irreverence than either profanity or blasphemy. To profane the name of God is to use it with disrespect and irreverence; and to blaspheme His name is to revile, slander, reproach and abuse it. While, therefore, it is unquestionably wrong to either profane or abuse the holy name of our God, those also who in a milder sense take it in vain, are, we are assured, not held guiltless.

"Behold," says the [Psalmist \(51:6\)](#), "thou desirest *truth* in the inward parts"—in the heart; and the Apostle Paul exhorts, saying, "Let every one that nameth the name of Christ [Jehovah's representative] depart from iniquity." ([2 Tim. 2:19](#).) "But unto the wicked God saith, What hast thou to do to declare my statutes [laws], or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth? Seeing thou hatest instruction and castest my words behind thee. When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him, and hast been partaker with adulterers. Thou givest thy mouth to evil, and thy tongue frameth deceit. Thou sittest and speakest against thy brother; thou slanderest thine own mother's son."—[Psa. 50:16-20](#).

The prophet [Isaiah \(29:13\)](#) prophesied of such a class; and alas, many have arisen in fulfilment of his words. Our Lord applied the prophecy to some in his day, saying, "Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy *of you*, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. But in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."—[Matt. 15:8,9](#).

Seeing with what aversion the Lord regards anything short of simple sincerity and honesty of heart in those who claim to be Christians or children of God, with what carefulness should we take upon us His worthy name! In claiming to be the divinely recognized children of God and followers of His dear Son, we stand before the world as God's representatives, and, presumably, all our words and actions are in harmony with His indwelling spirit. We stand as guideposts in the midst of the world's dark and uncertain way; and if we are not true to our professions we are deceitful sign-boards causing the inquirer to lose the right way and to stumble into many a snare. To take the name of God, then, claiming to be His sons, and Christians, or followers of Christ, without a fixed determination and careful effort to fairly represent Him is a sin against God, of which none who do so will be held guiltless.

"Let every one," therefore, "that nameth the name of Christ, depart from iniquity." "If I regard iniquity in my heart," says the Psalmist, "the Lord will not hear me." ([Psa. 66:18](#)) To undertake the Christian life is to engage in a great warfare against iniquity; for, though the grace of God abounds to us through Christ to such an extent that our imperfections and shortcomings are not imputed to us, but robed in Christ's imputed righteousness we are reckoned holy and acceptable to God, we are not, says the Apostle ([Rom. 6:1,2](#)), to continue in sin that grace may abound; for by our covenant with God we have declared ourselves dead to sin and that we have no longer any desire to live therein. But having made such a covenant with God and taken upon us His holy name, if we continue in sin or cease to strive against sin, we are proving false to our profession.

"Shall we," then, "who are dead to sin, live any longer therein?" God forbid. Let not sin reign in your mortal body, but reckon yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. ([Rom. 6:1,2,11,12](#)) This means a great deal. It means a constant warfare against the easily besetting sins of our old nature; and the struggle will be long and constant until the power of sin is broken: and then only constant vigilance will keep it down. A Christian, therefore, who is true to his profession is one who daily strives to realize an increasing mastery over sin in himself, and who, therefore, is able from time to time to distinguish some degree of advancement in this direction. He grows more Christ-like—more self-possessed, more meek and gentle, more disciplined and refined, more temperate in all things, and more fully possessed of the mind that was in Christ Jesus. The old tempers and unlovely dispositions disappear, and the new mind asserts its presence and power. And thus the silent example of a holy life reflects honor upon that holy name which it is our privilege to bear and to represent before the world—as living epistles, known and read of all men with whom we come in contact.

The formation of such a noble and pure character is the legitimate result of the reception of divine truth into a good and honest heart. Or, rather, such is the transforming power of divine truth upon the whole character when it is heartily received and fully submitted to. "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth," was the Lord's petition on our behalf; and let none of the faithful fall into the error of some—of presuming that the sanctifying work can go on better without the truth than with it. We need the instruction and guidance and inspiration of the truth for holy living; and our Lord's words imply that all the truth that is necessary to this end is in the Word of God, and that consequently we are not to look for any further revelations through visions or dreams or imaginations of ourselves or others. The Word of God, says the Apostle ([2 Tim. 3:16,17](#)), "is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

It reveals to us the spirit, mind or disposition of God, and exhorts us to let the same mind dwell richly in us; and, in conjunction with the study of the mind of God as revealed in His Word and communion with Him in prayer, we receive the blessed influences of His spirit, which bring us more and more into conformity with His perfect will. To live a holy life is not to do some great and wonderful things: it is only to live from day to day a life of quiet humble conformity to the will of God, of secret communion with Him in our closet devotions and daily walk, and of zealous activity to the extent of our ability and opportunity in His service. There is in reality no such thing as the "wonderful piety," the "eminent piety," or the "wonderful faith" of which we often hear and read. There is nothing wonderful about piety: we ought to be pious. Why not? And when our piety becomes "eminent," let us beware of self-righteousness and sanctimonious vain-glory. Neither is there anything wonderful about a clear and steady faith and confident trust in the sure promises of God. Why should we not have faith sufficiently sure and strong? The Christian who bears the strongest testimony for God is the one whose faith is just simple enough to take Him at His word, and whose piety consists simply in reverent and loyal obedience to the will of God and in the faithful study of His will, with a view to personal conformity to it. Such

need not hesitate to take the name of God—to declare themselves the children of God, and Christians or followers of Christ, and to openly profess that thus they are daily submitting themselves to God to be led of His Spirit.

But let us beware of the error of those whom the Psalmist in the above words describes as "wicked"—who bear the name of Christ in vain, who claim to be God's children and to be led of his spirit, but whose actions show that they hate instruction and cast the words of the Lord behind them—who make common cause with the "thieves and robbers" who are striving to teach men to climb up to life by some other way than that of God's appointment, and whose whole course is in opposition to God and His truth while they proclaim themselves His representatives and ambassadors. Let us indeed beware of such a lamentable condition—of so taking the name of God "in vain." And let all such hear the solemn inquiry and accusation of our great Judge—"What hast thou to do to declare my statutes, or that thou shouldest take my covenant in thy mouth?" etc. The words of our text assure us that such shall not be held guiltless. Nor will those be who in any way become the aids or abettors of these; for if we consent with "thieves" and become partakers with "adulterers," we shall surely share their reward of divine indignation.

The Lord would have His people separate and distinct from all such, and would not have them fellowship or aid them in any way. He does not own them, and would not have us bid them God speed. Nor would He encourage them to bear His name, to assemble with His people for prayer and praise, or to pose as His ambassadors of truth. The only proper course for such to pursue is to repeat their first works—to repent and turn humbly to God and to heed His instruction.

When we thoughtfully consider what it is to take the name of God in vain, we are overwhelmed with the thought of how many are doing it. Few indeed are applying their hearts unto instruction, yet, without the least hesitation, multitudes are taking the name of God and of Christ in vain. Some do so recklessly because it is customary among respectable people—because Christ's name is a passport of some value in social and business life. Others assume the name as a cloak for false doctrines, as, for instance, "Christian Scientists," whose deceptive doctrines sap the very foundations of Christianity, even denying the personal existence of God and seeking to mystify the very evidence of our senses as to actual human existence. And what gross and hideous doctrines have not shielded themselves under the name Christian, vainly taken? "In vain they do worship me," saith the Lord, "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." ([Matt. 15:9](#).) Therefore, let all that name the name of Christ depart from iniquity and apply their hearts unto instruction, and verily they shall be led of God in green pastures and beside still waters—their table will be richly and bountifully spread, and their cup of blessing and joy and gladness will overflow; while the wrath of God will in due time be revealed against all who take His hallowed name in vain, however they may band themselves together, and however loudly they may proclaim themselves heaven's appointed messengers.

"Not my own!" my time, my talent,
Freely all to Christ I bring,
To be used in joyful service
For the glory of my King."

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