

## I. Introduction

A. Twenty some years ago, a list of rules appeared on Austin's bedroom door. He was six or seven at the time and had two younger brothers, at whom the rules were clearly directed. There were eighteen commandments. Among them:

1. Number one: Obay me (O B A Y)
2. Number two: If I make any more rules, obay them
3. Number three: Don't hurt Fiesty – the cat
4. Number Four: Don' make my room messy.
5. Number Five: No spitting
6. Number Six: Don't scratch, bite or hit.
7. Number Seven: Don't throw things unless I let you.

B. You get the point. (BTW, about a day after these went up, I helped Ben write out the rules that went on his door. Eventually Sheri and I reasserted our right to make all house rules.

C. Looking at this list highlights that the Ten God gave us are better.

## II. Let me step back for a moment.

A. Three weeks ago, I previewed this series, noting that the Ten Commandments was not a list of heavy-handed and oppressive “thou shalt Nots” designed to keep up from having fun. But a wonderful gift from a loving God who wants to help us live a life that works.

B. Two weeks ago, we looked at the first of the ten – directions to make sure the God is our god. Last week we looked at the second commandment – the call to make sure we worship God for who He is – not who we try to make him.

C. We are now looking at the third commandment. The last of the three governing our relationship with Him.<sup>1</sup> Like numbers one and two – and like six through ten that will follow - this commandment is stated negatively. We are told what we cannot do. And I've been clear that we shouldn't pitch a fit over this. Being told the few things to avoid is much more freeing than we might think. We're not being told what we have to do, but some things to avoid. Plus, behind each of the negative commandments is a grand positive. Today we learn that: we can live lives that matter, to us and to God. We can bring him glory, exalt his reputation.

III. Exodus 20:7: **You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.** There are two important words here: *name* and *misuse*.

IV. The most common understanding of this commandment is that we shouldn't swear – or, more specifically, we should not be ask God to damn this or that, or type OMG when we text.

A. OK, yeah, kinda sorta. But not really. Using God's name as a swear word is a bad idea. Ironically, it implies that there is power in God's name. After all, when people swear there really only are a few words that work. No one gets mad and says: Napoleon! Or, Julius Caesar!<sup>2</sup> It doesn't work. In an odd way, swearing is a recognition of the power of God's name.

B. And there are good biblical reasons not to use coarse language.<sup>3</sup> James warns us that the tongue can set things on fire. And Jesus implies that we are accountable for every word that we say. If you read the Bible, it becomes clear that God takes our words more seriously than we do - that what we say is no small matter. So we should be slow to speak and very cautious about course language. There are 1 good reasons not to swear, but the third commandment is not really one of them.<sup>4</sup>

V. The third commandment is much bigger than that. Let's take the two key words one at a time. The first is "name."

A. I've spoken about names before, and when I do I make a handful of points about modern naming:

1. First, today we often pick names because we like how they sound, or we like their vibe. Often people get books of names and go through them until they find one they can agree on. We looked at a book. I remember getting to Zowie and going back to the A's and starting over.
2. Second, we intuitively know that names matter. They tell us things about the person. Just prior to getting married I moved to Georgia to be with Sheri, and I got a job on a construction crew, where I replaced Bo Gator. I didn't ever meet Bo, and that was not his real name. But it was the only thing you were allowed to call him. Based on the fact that: he went by Bo Gator, he named his son Little Bo - or more precisely, Little Bo Gator Harley Davidson French. I didn't need to meet him. I knew a lot about him already. By the way, the same summer I was hearing about Bo, Winston Lord was the US Ambassador to Great Britain. If I gave you two names and said – one of these guys is in a motorcycle gang and the other is Ambassador to Great Britain, I think you could guess.
3. There are other modern ways we know names matter: we talk about people being a name dropper; and we have laws against someone slandering our name or forging it. Names matter.
4. And then there is the timeless illustration of a child who is having trouble getting their way with another child, using the name an adult. "You have to open the door, Mom says so!" They pull rank by implying two things: an intimate relationship and a sense that you are representing what they want to happen. You are lined up with their will.

B. So, we have lots of laws about names. It turns out that the pages of Scripture make names even more important.

1. For starters, many Biblical names turn out to be descriptors of people: Adam means "human being;" Eve means "Life giving;" Abraham is "father of multitudes;" Ruth is "companion or friend;" In Biblical times, names often told you about the person. So much so, that when a person's character changed God changed their name: Abram becomes Abraham; Jacob becomes Israel; Simon becomes Peter; Change the person change the name.
2. There is more: the Greek word translated *name* is also translated as *reputation*, *authority* and *character*.<sup>5</sup> And then we have all of those passages that say things like: we need to baptize people in the *name* of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, or we need to pray in Jesus *name*. In the Lord's prayer we ask the Father to Hallow His *name*.<sup>6</sup> In John 14 we are told that those who believe *in the name* of Jesus gain eternal life.<sup>7</sup>

C. On top of all of this we have the importance surrounding God's name. This starts with the fact that He names himself. In ancient times they were aware that to name someone was to exercise power over them – as we see with Adam naming the animals. So God names Himself, and the name he reveals to Moses is – Yahweh – is a form of the verb to be which we translate “I Am,” or “I will be who I will be,” which is code for: Not who you make me.

D. We read about this in Exodus 3. After Moses finally accepts the call of God, he asks God, “what is your name?” Up until this point, God had gone by many titles – El, Elyon, Elohim, El-Shadai. But Moses asks God what his name is.<sup>8</sup> What He is really asking is not – “What are you called.” But “Who are you?” What are you like? And God says, “Tell them, ‘I am’ sent you. I will be who I will be.” This is the name Yahweh.<sup>9</sup>

E. I'd love to camp here because there is so much here – the name is rich, it was so highly valued by the Jews that they wouldn't say it or write it,<sup>10</sup> this is the name Jesus will use of himself at pivotal moments, such as in John 8:48.<sup>11</sup> But let me wrap all of this up by reading from *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC* by Frederick Buechner:

1. Buechner is my name. It is pronounced Beekner. If somebody mispronounces it in some foolish way, I have the feeling that what's foolish is me. If somebody forgets it, I feel that it's I who am forgotten. There's something about it that embarrasses me in just the same way that there's something about me that embarrasses me. I can't imagine myself with any other name—Held, say, or Merrill or Hlavacek. If my name were different I would be different. When I tell somebody my name, I have given them a hold over me that he didn't have before. If he calls it out, I will stop, look and listen, whether I want to or not. In the book of Exodus, God tells Moses his name is Yahweh, and God hasn't had a peaceful moment since.<sup>12</sup>

VI. I said two words are important in the third commandment. The first is *name*. the second is *schwa*. It means vanity, to empty or to hollow.

A. Which means, what we are being told is that we should not diminish the reputation of God – we should not hollow His character. Which has a lot less to do with using his name as a swear word and a lot more about claiming his endorsement when we are not fully submitted. Turn with me to the New Testament passage that reinforces this commandment.<sup>13</sup>

VII. Matthew 7:21-23 reads: “**Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’**”

A. I believe this passage, which is a very scary passage – perhaps the scariest in the Bible – helps us look at the essence of the Third Commandment.

B. Here are a few things that make this passage so unsettling.

VIII. **Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’** In Semitic languages, the repetition of a word emphasizes its meaning. Doubling up on “Lord” suggests that there will be people who think Jesus is their master. They are implying that their belief in and connection with Christ is strong.<sup>14</sup> But he implies that they are wrong.

IX. **Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.** Only those who are following God’s will not their own.

X. **Many:** Which implies, well, many people are wrong about their status with God

XI. **Many will say to me on that day: the day of judgment ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy (preach) in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!**

A. Their statements suggest that they have orthodox theology – i.e., they believe Jesus is Lord; there is emotional engagement – by repeating the word “lord”; and that they were active in Christian activities.

XII. **But Jesus says, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!** There is no actual relationship there.

A. Please note, this does not mean that orthodox theology, emotional engagement or active service do not matter. They do. A relationship with God is always marked by these three things. But these three can be faked. The key questions are: Is there actual submission of our will to God? And secondly, is there a true, intimate, saving relationship with God; and is there

B. What Christ is making clear is: it’s one thing to call me Lord and another to do the will of the Father

C. Tim Keller argues that many people are busy doing good things but remain very much in control of their life. They are all about their will not God’s, and Jesus is not fooled. Maybe this is you. Perhaps you can point to good things you’re doing – perhaps no miracles lately - but what sure looks like good fruit. “Look at what I do for others.” But Jesus is not fooled. You have not seriously given over your life. You have not given up your rights and submitted to the king, which is what it means to live in a kingdom. And here is a clue that this is the case: you sit in judgment over the Ten Commandments.

D. Ted Koeppel – of Nightline fame – talked about this in a commencement address at Duke back in the 80s. He noted that we want to remain in control at all times. He said:

1. We have convinced ourselves that slogans will save us. Shoot up if you must; but use a clean needle. Enjoy sex whenever and with whomever you wish, but wear a condom. No! The answer is no. Not because it isn't cool or smart or because you might end up in jail or in an AIDS ward, but no because it's wrong, because we have spent 5,000 years as a race of rational human beings, trying to drag ourselves out of the primeval slime by searching for truth and moral absolutes. In its purest form, truth is not a polite tap on the shoulder. It is a howling reproach. What Moses brought down from Mount Sinai were not the Ten Suggestions.

E. I doubt Ted Koeppel could get away with saying this today, because it is so utterly against today's values. We no longer hold to capital T truth, now we talk about your truth and my truth – which is whatever we deem it to be. Because our will is what matters. We remain in charge. We do not submit to God.

F. What we do is look to God to fulfill our agenda. We look to God to bless our plans - some turn to God for health and wealth and prosperity. Others look to faith for: intellectual stimulation; emotional engagement and socially acceptable good works. These are all good, but, are you only willing to do what you want to do? Are you – am I? – willing to give up our independence and say, “I will not hollow God's name. I will treat him as God and King?”

G. Men and women, to understand the first tablet of the Ten Commandments requires that we understand that we are not god. God is god. We are sitting in judgment of God and His plan, we understand that He is King. And we are to live in away that we advertise that He is king and we are part of His Kingdom. This is not the way modern people think. We want to look into our heart to decide what is right and wrong.

H. This is so true that we are now going back to bring our heroes in line. A while back the NEA ran an ad that was designed to look like an article, citing Dr. Martin Luther King. They wrote: “Dr. Martin Luther King taught us to be guided by faith in America's people and their social conscious. He taught us that the highest principles of justice are not found outside, but are found in ourselves.” No! No! That is Orwellian doublespeak. In *Letters from a Birmingham Jail*, Dr. King says: “A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law.” He didn't say, “Look inside yourself,” but to look at the Word of God.<sup>15</sup>

XIII. I said that, if we look at the Matthew 7 passage, the two questions that emerge are: 1) am I willing to follow God, to elevate His will over my own?; and 2) do I have a true, intimate, saving relationship with God?

- A. Let me rehearse a point I make all the time: a Christian is someone who obeys because they know God as father, not in hopes of earning God's acceptance. We either serve in an effort to court favor, or we serve because we are amazed at the favor we've been given.
- B. Why do we feel the need to do more? Why do we feel the need to prove ourselves? Keller asks, "Why, if we get ten compliments, can one criticism wipe them out?" Some of us blame our family of origin. "My parents messed me up." Maybe, but this is true for almost everyone. A big part of the reason for feeling this way is because we are broken. But another <sup>16</sup>.
- C. What are you striving for? To get accepted into grad school. To get this job. To be promoted? OK, why do you want those? To be happy, fulfilled. OK, but why do you need those to be happy? Why can't you be happy without anyone loving you? Why can't you be happy without getting into grad school? Why can't you be happy w/o that raise? What is wrong with us that we are so incomplete?
- D. The Bible says, we are trying to cover for ourselves. We are trying to prop ourselves up. We are trying to be our own savior. We are trying to earn our own self-respect. We are trying to prove ourselves to our self. We know something is wrong with us. The Bible suggests that we are not giving credit to God. We are trying to prove that we are OK.
- E. How do you take upon yourself Jesus as savior, by renouncing that I am not my own savior, he is. We stop thinking God will be pleased with me because I am helping people. And we lean into God's mercy and grace. We accept. We yield.
- XIV. Let me circle back to something much earlier in the sermon – the child demanding that a door be opened by saying, "You have to do this because Mom says so!" We noted that that appeal implies: that they are doing the will of Mom and that they actually know Mom.
- A. That is a big part of what we are getting called to here. I will interact with God on the basis of His will, His definition. He is the one who is God. He defines reality. We stop trying to be god and let God be God. We accept His will and we accept His love.
- XV. Prayer we need to pray:
- A. Lord, my intellectual faith is incomplete, my emotional love for you is cold, my best deeds are rooted in selfishness. But I ask, because of what Jesus did for me – dying my death and living the life I should have lived – that you would accept me. Let his value accrue to me.
- B. Have you done that? Unless you see what is going on, you have not.
- C. But we need His goodness.

D. We renounce is all.

E. It's free grace. Have you submitted your will to him? Renounce self-salvation! We are self-addicted. Before the Gospel gets us we are as addicted to self-salvation as a drug-addict. And self-addiction fears the message of Gospel, because it means God is King and Jesus is savior.

1. Moses didn't want to go to Pharaoh
2. Abraham didn't want to take Isaac up the hill
3. Jesus didn't want to go to the cross
4. That is what a king does.
5. I hope there is no one in this room that ever hears to Jesus, "Away, depart."

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<sup>1</sup> Number four and to some extent number five as well are transition commandments. Number four – which addresses the Sabbath – is part of the first tablet of the law, those commands that deal with God. Number five, which is a call to honor our parents, begins the second tablet – those that focus on how we are to treat each other.

<sup>2</sup> Thanks to Earl Palmer for this illustration

<sup>3</sup> In *Silence: In an Age of Noise*, adventurer Erling Kagge, who took a fifty day solo hike to the South Pole, noted that many polar explorers stop swearing when they are alone because they feel as though it is too much negative energy.

<sup>4</sup> The third commandment has been used to prohibit several things: 1) witchcraft. In I Samuel 28 Saul visits the Witch of Endor – you might remember, Samuel has died, the Lord has left Saul and so he consults with a medium. And this woman, who is called the Witch of Endor, is described as the Medium of the “hollow” sound, which is the that same Hebrew word – Shwa – found in the third commandment; 2) vain repetition in prayer, designed to manipulate God by using the right words. Prayer is never taught as an art form. That we are never given any indication that there is something magical or special about the words we use when we pray. When Jesus spoke about prayer he uses very simple words. He cut through the religious jargon and He said: Ask, seek, knock. The high priestly prayer in John 17 models a prayer of honesty and reverence but not of some special formula. In Luke 22 – as He's praying just before being arrested and put to death – He says, in a brutally honest way: “Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me, but not my will but yours be done.” He shares his heart. Prayer isn't about special phrases. It's not an art form. Anybody can do it. Prayer is an amateur event.

While I'm offending people let me keep going. And say that we must be very careful to not hollow God's name by attaching it to other common statements. “The Lord told me to do this.... God spoke to me and said...” Please be careful with that. I'm not suggesting that the Lord isn't moving you in that direction. But not only can that kind of statement force others to doubt God or doubt you, if you are wrong it is no small thing.



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The final thing I will add here is, suggesting that the third commandment is violated when we type OMG, etc. seems to be an example of religious people making small things big and big things small.

<sup>5</sup> The Greek word for name in Rev. 3:4 is reputation in Mk 6:14, authority in Mt. 7:22 and character in Mt. 6:9.

<sup>6</sup> The word “name” occurs over 1,000 times in the Bible.

<sup>7</sup> John 14:26; 16:23.

<sup>8</sup> Prior to this every term we have for God has only been a title. Elohim: Which is simply God – in the plural. (El means God. And the plural form probably speaks to His tri-une nature); Adonai means Lord; El Elyon: El—again, for God—and Elyon for Most High; El Shaddai is God Almighty; El Elom is God eternal. These are titles. They are not unimportant. They tell us a lot about the Lord. He has chosen to reveal Himself to us through these titles. But they are not God’s name.

<sup>9</sup> God said to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites. I AM has sent me to you. **This** is a translation of the Hebrew word YHWH. And what He is saying with that name is I AM WHO I AM and Not who you make me to be. In juxtaposition to the idols of Egypt. In juxtaposition to your thoughts about a supreme being. I AM WHO I AM. I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE

<sup>10</sup> The Massorites – who lived ? and who translated the Old Testament – held the name of God so sacred that they would never say it. And in order to safeguard themselves from saying it they wouldn’t write it. And they did some funny grammatical stuff to a word that was already unique. Because every other word in Hebrew has three consonants – only God’s name – sometimes referred to as the tetragramaton – has four. But they changed the word so that when it was printed it had the vowels of *Adonai* so they would remember to say *Adonai*. *Adonai* means Lord. In your Bible you will find the word Lord written in two ways. If you look in ? you see it written. If you look in ? you see it written. As I mentioned in the past, if you sound out the consonants of YHWH mixed together with the vowels of Adonai we pronounced it Jehovah.

<sup>11</sup> Jesus is talking to the Jews about his relationship to the Father. And he alludes to Abraham saying, “Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad. And they counter, “What are you talking about. You are not even 50 years old . You haven’t seen Abraham. And Jesus says, “I tell you the truth, before Abraham was born, I am!” And they picked up stones to stone him.

<sup>12</sup> Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking*, page 12.

<sup>13</sup> I am indebted to Tim Keller here – both for directing me to the third commandment for a NT focus, and for many of the comments about Matthew 7.

<sup>14</sup> The Hebrew people knew God as Elohim – a generic title. But as noted earlier, in Ex. 3 they got his divine name – Yahweh. It was translated as *kyrios* – the Greek word for Lord. This suggests that they thought of him as divine and as master.

<sup>15</sup> Thanks to Tim Keller for this illustration.

<sup>16</sup> This is also a Tim Keller illustration.