

## Women's Bible Study Fall 2010

### 10 Apps For Life: A Modern Look at the Ten Commandments

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**God First: Exodus 20:7**

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We've called this series "10 Apps for Modern Life."

Now, unless you're somewhat modern to begin with, you won't even know what an app is. The word is short for "application", and it means a little computer program that you put on your phone which does something for you. Apps can provide information, entertainment, and make life easier.

How do I know this? Not by personal experience. I'm still using a cell phone that opens and closes and has no keyboard. But the people with apps...they're all around us. Every time John's men's group meets at our home someone pulls out their iPhone to share a picture, demonstrate some clever thing or check a fact. It's incredible. You'd think that books, photo albums and witty remarks didn't exist anymore...they've all been replaced by the iPhone.

To be fair, I know that the apps available for iPhones are incredible. For example, "My Starbucks" tells the coffee lover where every open Starbucks is and whether it has a drive through. "Peakfinder" locates every single mountain in the Rockies or Sierra Nevadas, pinpoints it by GPS and zooms to the view from the top. I want that one! LoseIt calculates your calories. There's even one called "Run2P" which tells you where in popular movies it's safe to get up and use the bathroom, and for how long, without missing anything crucial to the plot.

But there are some apps which add greatly to our knowledge. You can put the entire Bible on your iPhone, and with Kindle you can read books. However, the apps we're discussing in this series add far greater value to our lives than the mere acquisition of knowledge. Instead, they provide us with wisdom – wisdom about how to love God and respect others and live with them in community.

So the app we're looking at today is #3: God's Honor. Please turn to your Bibles, Exodus 20:7, where we read "**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). You might have learned this commandment in the King James Version: "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain..." To 'take in vain' means to trivialize. To make empty or ineffectual or unimportant. So let's begin by asking,

#### **I. What does the 3<sup>rd</sup> commandment mean?**

Remember that all the commandments flow out of the first: *You shall have no other gods before me.* The subsequent ones just explain how to make the first commandment stick. Last week we learned that creating an idol, something to worship in the place of God, stems from a wrong view of God. The third commandment also addresses a wrong view of God, when we fail to understand that God's name is holy. Why?

**First, God's name is holy because**

**A. Name reflects character**

Historically, a name was an incredibly important part of who a person was. It might describe their physical appearance, “Harald Redbeard”; it might describe whom they’re related to (“Kristin Lavransdatter”); it might describe where they lived, like my maiden name, Dahl, which means “valley” in Norwegian. To know someone’s name was a mark of intimacy, of knowledge.

God needed to make himself known to his people. They wanted a God they could see and touch. But God is Spirit, and so he had to introduce himself to his people with a name that would convey his character. He called himself “I AM” or “I WILL BE WHOM I WILL BE”. This phrase helps us remember that God is not created; he eternally exists. God is ongoing, not finite like us. The Jews found this name describing God’s character too holy to write, and it was pronounced out loud only once per year by the High Priest on the Day of Atonement. Because Hebrew is written without vowels, and because there was a great reluctance to write or speak God’s name because of its holiness, these four letters “YHWH” came to stand for God’s name. Pronounced “Yahweh”, this name means “He causes to be”. His name reflects the relational nature of God – he is the God who seeks, who sought out Abraham. It reflects the redemptive nature of God – he is the deliverer who saved Israel from Egypt and still saves us. It reflects the covenant nature of God – he keeps his promises and he keeps us. (Hughes, Kent, *Ten Words of Grace*)

**“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.” (Exodus 3:14)**

The Jews knew God by this name, Yahweh. But Jesus also staked his claim to the Godhead by stating:

**“I tell you the truth,’ Jesus answered, ‘before Abraham was born, I am!’” (John 8:58)**

It is from verses like that we understand that Jesus, God and the Holy Spirit are the Trinity, and that all of them work together in one person called the Godhead. And God has definite views on his name. He says,

**“My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations, says the LORD Almighty.” (Malachi 1:11)**

And we always see those Old Testament themes echoed by Christ in the New. He said, **“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.” (Matthew 6:9)**

When Jesus’ disciples asked him, *Lord, teach us how to pray*, he began by reminding them to make God’s name holy. And that is what the 3<sup>rd</sup> commandment asks us to do because Name reflects character, and God is holy.

## **Second, God’s name is holy and so B. Misuse has consequences**

The misuse of God’s name does have consequences. We read that in the second half of this commandment:

**“...for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.”  
Exodus 20:7b**

Now this prohibition applies *whether or not we understand that God's name is holy*. Ignorance is no excuse. Last summer we worshiped at York Minster, which is an ancient cathedral in the City of York in England. The place was so old that the room where we had coffee after church, the Chapter House, was built in 1286. During this very formal service we took communion by going forward and kneeling at an altar rail. The chaps came by dressed in gorgeous vestments carrying silver plate and chalice. The first one put the wafer in my outstretched hands. The next one came along with a single, communal cup. I had a sore throat, which I didn't think everyone else wanted. So I began to dip my wafer into the wine, a type of communion called "intinction", when he jerked the cup away from me, frowned and drew himself up to his height (which was considerable, since he was wearing some sort of pointy hat) and intoned disapprovingly, "We DO NOT practice intinction at the Minster." I sort of wilted into the floorboards, fearing that I'd just caused an international incident, but at the same time looked longingly after the Cup, which was receding into the distance. Was I really not going to get to take communion just because I didn't know the right thing to do? Finally the minion following along behind him saw my distress, came back and said, "The blood of Christ, shed for you," and allowed me to take a sip.

This story is funny but it's also sort of painful. My ignorance of the communion practice in that church did not excuse me. I could have looked around. I could have asked first. They have theological reasons for the way they administer communion. My opinion doesn't give me the right to dictate what they practice and believe. I could either participate the right way, or not at all.

So let me draw the obvious parallel. God's name is holy whether or not we understand that. Ignorance doesn't excuse us. Our wishes, our opinion, how we treat God's name doesn't affect the basic truth of God's holiness, reflected in his name. It's our job to obtain the truth and live by it, not expect God to change at our wishes. As Michelle explained last week, he's not a cosmic vending machine, where we put in our requests and get out what we want.

The third commandment also addressed a problem more prevalent in early Jewish history than in ours, and that was making frivolous oaths. Jews had become accustomed to making vows and not keeping them. A vow was often a religious promise, perhaps offering something in return for a fulfilled desire. For example, Nazarenes did not cut their hair or drink wine until the period of their vow had passed. So here's what God has to say about vows, then and now:

**"Whatever your lips utter you must be sure to do, because you made your vow freely to the LORD your God with your own mouth." (Deut.23:23)**

Rarely do we take vows these days. But the ones we do are pretty serious: an oath to speak the truth in court; a marriage vow; a promise at a child dedication to raise your offspring within the church. God hears those vows. And he expects us to keep them, because we took them in his holy Name.

So the Jews devised ways to add force to their words without actually taking a real vow. They might swear by the Temple, or by a landmark. Jesus addressed this in the Sermon on the Mount:

**"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." (Matthew 5:34-35)**

In other words, all things belong to God anyway, so we cannot get out of keeping our vows just because we swore by the hairs on our head rather than by the name of God. However, there's another issue beyond mere oath taking:

**“But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken.” (Matthew 12:36)**

It's not just vows that God expects us to keep. He expects us to reflect his holiness in ALL our speech. I find this verse terrifying. I have a lot of words to give account for. Unkind words. Untrue words. Hasty words. Bad words. Words that threw shame on the Savior whose name I bear. I find it helpful to consider when I'm speaking that Christ is listening. If we remember we're going to have to give account for all those words, we might keep a lid on some of them. Because, in a sense, those cruel, false and angry words are a form of taking God's name in vain. We bear his name: Christians. We make that name false when we represent him wrongly through our speech.

But there is one particular type of misuse of God's name that we must truly avoid **“I tell you the truth, all the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them. But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin.” (Mark 3:28-29)**

What sort of sin could not be forgiven? I thought God could forgive anything. And yes, he can. But the sin of blasphemy against the Spirit is attributing the works of God to Satan, and attributing the works of Satan to God. That's the context in Mark 3, at least, where this verse comes from. They said of Jesus, “He casts out demons by the prince of demons.” When someone can attribute Christ's work to Satan, they are hardening themselves against the truth of salvation and therefore, ultimately against God. And someone who rejects God willfully will be rejected by God. That's why the sin is unforgivable. But it's interesting that the only sin described as unforgivable has to do with breaking this third commandment.

So words DO have consequence. And particularly, they have consequence when we misuse God's name, and speak or act in a way that brings shame on Christ, whose name we bear.

**So**

## **II. Why did God give it to us?**

First, he gave us this commandment

### **A. To teach us about his character**

All of the commandments flow from “God First”. This third one helps us see how to put God first in our speech by making his name holy.

Some of the best biblical descriptions of God tell us that we cannot see or know him. This is how Paul described God to Timothy:

**“...the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see.” (1 Tim. 6:16)**

So how could a holy God explain himself to the Israelites? They were used to gods they could see and handle, not a God of spirit who lived in unapproachable light. They needed to know how to worship a holy God. So God showed them what holiness meant by laying down certain prohibitions – for example, not just anyone could approach God, but only the high priest and that,

only once a year. In fact on the Day of Atonement tradition says that they used to tie a rope to the leg of the High Priest in case he was struck dead by God...that way they could just drag him out without having to venture into the Holy of Holies themselves. God's name was considered so sacred that the Jews refused to write it, and to this day Orthodox Jews omit the vowels when writing the word "G\_d". It's a measure of reverence for his holy name. God gave us this commandment to teach us about his holy character.

But he also gave it

### **B. To teach us how to worship him**

God said to Moses:

**“Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die, because I appear in the cloud cover over the atonement cover.” (Lev. 16:2)**

Remember what I just told you about the high priest and the rope around his leg? That would have been Aaron. He'd already learned that God required worship in a certain way, after two of his sons died while offering unauthorized worship before God. The whole essence of O.T. interaction with God was that it had to be mediated by a priest. Regular people couldn't just stroll in there and worship. But that all changed when Christ came along:

**“For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence.”**

**Hebrews 9:24**

**“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body...let us draw near to God...”**

**Hebrews 10:19-20; 22**

Ah, those are sweet words. We can **enter the Most Holy Place**. The **curtain is open**. Let us **draw near to God**. This means the barrier is gone. God is still just as holy. We are still just as unworthy. But God is not looking at us. He's looking at Jesus, who IS holy. And Jesus is right in the line of vision between God and us. What's more, we know that Jesus has given us a robe of righteousness - a covering that doesn't just make us look holy - it actually makes us holy because it's a reflection of the work of salvation and sanctification going on inside us.

So God gave the third commandment to teach us about his honor and holiness. Understanding that, we would not want to cheapen or diminish his name (which is the same as cheapening or distorting God's character) by the way we speak about God.

The trouble with the third commandment, you shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, is that we think we get a free pass on this one if we're not given to swearing. Ah, but there's so much more to it. So let's look at

### **III. How do we apply it today?**

First, we need to be

#### **A. Christ bearers**

When Mary was found to be pregnant an angel visited Joseph, her husband, and said “You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” (Matt. 1:21) Jesus, or Yeshua in the Hebrew, means “He saves”. After Jesus’ death and resurrection the disciples were filled with his power and began to speak and live the gospel throughout Jerusalem . Naturally, they began to be called by name of the man they followed. They became known as Christians, and this is explained in Acts:

**“The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch.” Acts 11:26**

Very quickly the word Christian became synonymous with “persecuted” for Christians were being hunted, tortured and killed by both Romans and Jews, who saw them as a threat to the existing power structure. So Christians learned to identify with the sufferings of Christ, and they found the worth of the gospel so great that they were willing to undergo sorrow and destitution and loss – experiences that normally make one ashamed - for the surpassing worth of following Christ. Here’s how Peter described it:

**“However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name.” (1 Peter 4:16)**

Most of us call ourselves Christians today, for we also identify with Christ our Savior. But we are not suffering for that choice, and so being called by Christ’s name doesn’t have quite the sting that it did in the first century. However, if we are going to bear the name of Christ, we need to bear his nature, because remember: name reflects character. Jesus told his followers:

**“By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.” (John 13:35)**

So to be a Christian, to be a Christ bearer, means that we display love as the hallmark of our interaction with each other. That’s what Christ did. That’s how we keep from dishonoring the Savior whose name we bear.

If we’re concerned about God’s honor we will also be

### **B. Promise keepers**

Remember the Jews were misusing the concept of oaths. They weren’t taking it seriously. It was as if they had their fingers crossed when they took a vow.

That’s why Jesus elaborated on the 3<sup>rd</sup> commandment in the Sermon on the Mount, and told people not to swear at all. He said,  
**“Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’ – anything apart from this comes from the evil one.” (Matthew 6:37)**

We can’t invoke anything that hasn’t been created by God and that isn’t under his control. So what’s the point of swearing? Let’s just say what we mean.

Remembering that we bear the name of Christ, we need to testify to his new nature in our lives by keeping our promises. When we say we’re going to do something, we do it, whether big or small.

I find this really difficult for two reasons. One is that I have trouble saying No and so I sometimes find myself promising to do things that I really don't want to do or don't have time for. Then it's hard to fulfill them. The other reason is that I am increasingly having trouble remembering what I said! So these days if I promise to do something, like meet a deadline or have lunch with a friend, I have to write it down. Or I won't be a promise keeper anymore.

So if we want to keep from heaping shame on the name of Christ, we need to be people of our word. And that can be tough, because our word includes our marriage vows. Our employment contracts. Our promise to raise our children in the body of Christ. We are his ambassadors. Are we also promise keepers?

Keeping the third commandment also means being  
**C. Holy worshipers**

Remember the pains that God went to in Exodus, Leviticus, and Deuteronomy to teach his people what was acceptable worship and what was not? That was to help them understand what holiness is. For once we understand holiness, then we are able to approach a holy God in a proper way.

Moses explained this in Deuteronomy:

**“For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.” (Deut. 7:6)**

A “treasured possession” is a good description of what we are to Christ. We are those he went to the cross and died for. So what does he look for as we bear his name? He wants us to be holy worshipers.

**“For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.” (1 Thess. 4:7)**

**“But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy.’” (1 Peter 1:16)**

Honestly, holiness would be impossible no matter how hard we tried if it weren't for two things. The first is that we receive a new nature in Christ at the time of our salvation. That new nature makes us enjoy pastimes we never did before, and not enjoy bad things that once gave us pleasure. So we have a new nature. But we also have the Holy Spirit. And part of his work in our lives is to help us become holy.

The reason God desires holiness in us is that he is holy, and our dirtiness of soul makes it impossible to have fellowship with him unless we belong to Christ.

My bike has a temperamental chain, and at least every other day, I'll shift gears and the chain comes off the derailleur. Naturally, this means I have to stop and put the chain back on. So after five minutes of struggling I finally get it re-threaded onto the gears. But now my fingers are covered in grease. I'm miles from home. So I rub my hands in dirt or sand. Now my hands are black with grease and brown with dirt, but at least I'm not leaving grease marks everywhere. How foolish to think that I could “wash” my hands in dirt. Just because they don't feel greasy anymore

because the dirt absorbs the grease doesn't mean that they are not filthy. Our efforts to clean ourselves up before God can seem like me washing my hands in dirt. The only real solution is to go home and use hot water and grease remover. And the only real solution for our soul's dirt is to go to Christ and ask him to clean us up so that we can have fellowship with God.

Finally, the third commandment means that we are

#### **D. Light bringers**

**“...I am the Light of the World. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”**

**John 8:12**

This is one of the great “I am” statements of Christ in the gospel of John. When we reflect his nature, we will fulfill what he told us in Matthew 5:

**“You are the light of the world...”**

**In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:14;16)**

This is a picture of Start Point lighthouse, on the coast of Devon. One day last summer Nick, John and I walked from East Prawle to Start Point, a distance of about six miles and back. This was one of my least favorite walks ever. It was so foggy you could hardly see the path. I had stubbed my little toe and it was so swollen that every step I took hurt, yet I was trying to be a good sport and keep up. Eventually we rounded Start Point and began to hear a repetitive, haunting noise. The fog dispersed the sound so that we couldn't tell if it was in front, behind or beyond us. Every three minutes we'd hear that mournful call. Suddenly the mist cleared, the sun came out and we saw the lighthouse. Then I understood where the sound was coming from and why it was so very important. The point sloped down to terribly jagged rocks, designed for wrecking ships. A lighthouse has stood on that point since 1836.

Now a lighthouse has one specific purpose: it warns of danger. It doesn't diversify. It doesn't get distracted and forget to direct attention to the light. It just keeps doing its job, year after year after year. My friends, we're light bringers. We reflect the light of Christ to the world and we prevent them from deadly danger by directing them to the One who can guide them. And Christ, the Lamb of God, is that light.

John wrote about heaven and said:

**“The city does not need the sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it.” (Revelation 21:23-24)**

Christ bearers. Promise keepers. Holy worshipers. Light bringers.

That's how we keep the third commandment. That's how we honor God's name.

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