

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
[www.lutheranlccf.org](http://www.lutheranlccf.org)  
**Seventeenth Sunday After Trinity, September 18, 2016**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 19, 287:3, 358, 568, 46.

Lessons: Exodus 34:1-16, Romans 5:5-13. Matthew 5:33-37.

Sermon Text: Exodus 20:7.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

When is the last time you heard someone misuse God's name? Take it in vain? Doesn't this happen frequently? Probably not in church, for people are usually especially careful not to misuse God's name in a place of worship. Even in Roman times, the word "profane" was used, meaning that which was done or said in front of, or outside of the temples, not in them.

You know the second commandment: "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God." "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain," that is, uselessly or needlessly.

God is not satisfied with an external obedience to the letter of the Law, but our obedience must proceed from the right motive, from fear and love, as Luther uses the words, that is, from respect and honor, and love of God. Luther does not use the word "fear" here to mean "be afraid of". Whoever keeps these commandments merely to avoid punishment or to earn glory for himself, does not keep them in the right spirit. The fear of the Lord is to avoid what is forbidden, and the love of God is to do what is commanded. A slave obeys because he must obey, and is afraid of punishment. A good child obeys because he respects and loves his parents and superiors and wants to please them. God desires the cheerful and willing obedience of a child, not the forced and unwilling obedience of a slave. By introducing the explanation of each commandment with "we should fear and love God", Luther stresses this very point and so should we in our teaching of

### **THE SECOND COMMANDMENT**

- 1. God forbids using his name to curse, swear, lie, or deceive, or use witchcraft.**
- 2. God commands us to call upon his name in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.**

If we are not to misuse God's name, we must first understand what God's name is.

The name of a person are those words by which he is known and called. The Bible gives us many names by which we know and call upon God, words such as Jehovah, Lord, God, Christ, Savior, Comforter, and many others. In the Scriptures, these names also have a definite meaning. We may think of this as a narrow sense of the word "name".

In a broad sense of the word "name" is all we know about God, what he is, how he is, what he has done, his reputation. Thus the name of God includes everything we know of him from the Bible: his essence, his attributes, his works, his commandments and his promises. The name of God is ultimately God himself as he has revealed himself to us. One writer commented that we have a brief summary of the name of the Triune God in the three articles of the creed. That tells us especially of his person and his work.

Why did God reveal his name to mankind? What is the purpose of his name? In the Bible God has recorded his name. He tells us "*Wherever I cause my name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you.*" Exodus 20:24 (NIV) In the New Testament God is even more specific: "*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*" Acts 4:12 (NIV)

Because God's name is the name that brings eternal salvation to mankind, God forbids us to misuse his name. So what does this mean?

Such vain use or misuse of God's name is by no means an unimportant matter. We do not like it when people make fun of our name, or ruin our reputation. God will certainly punish those who in any way misuse his name.

What God forbids is anyone using his name uselessly, to no good purpose, thoughtlessly, insincerely, profanely, jokingly, unprofitably.

Luther uses five words. "We should fear and love God that we do not curse, swear, lie or deceive by God's name or use witchcraft – practice superstition. First we ask what is cursing by God's name? We think first of all calling down the anger and punishment and damnation of God upon any person or thing. Secondly, cursing by God's name is blaspheming God by speaking evil of him or mocking him.

To curse is the opposite of to bless. It means to call upon God that he should hurt, harm, punish, and damn or condemn someone. We must not even do this in our hearts. We must curse neither ourselves nor others. The cursing habit is a terrible habit, and it is no excuse to say that we do not really mean it. We are still misusing God's name. When we read in the book of James in the Bible "***With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers, this should not be***" James 3:9-10 (NIV) we realize that a tongue that utters vile curses is not fit to sing the praises of God. Now God surely pronounces curses upon sinners and false teachers, and to this every Christian would agree. But we have no right to curse anyone whom God has not cursed. We must even be careful in the words we use in repeating what God says in cursing others. When I was attending catechism instruction classes as a child, the minister was especially careful not to even use any examples of cursing.

But we must carefully examine all that we say. Think about all the words which people use which are secretly, or unknown to most people misusing God's name. Please excuse my use of language as I give you two examples. Words like "gosh" and "jeeppers" aren't directly saying "God" or "Jesus". But what do that people mean when they say all such words? Isn't it an attempt to say something that we think will excuse us, because "I didn't really use God's name or Jesus' name!" But the intent of the heart is clear. Remember that Jesus said "***Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.***" Matthew 5:37 (NIV)

Talk about these things on the way home today. Your children have talked about such words and phrases in Catechism Instruction and have been instructed to write down such examples of secretly or unknown to most people misusing God's name. In fact, God said "***These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.***" Deuteronomy 6:4-7 (NIV)

Swearing by God's name is taking an oath in which we call upon God to witness the truth of what we say or promise, and to punish us if we lie or break our promise. In swearing we call upon God to 'prove' the truth of what we say or promise. Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount: "***you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.'*** 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. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.***" Matthew 5:33-37 (NIV)

There are times and occasions when we are permitted and even required to swear by God's name. We may be required to swear in court when we are asked "Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth so help you God?" We may also be called upon to swear for the glory of God or the welfare of our neighbor. It is sinful to swear falsely, thoughtlessly, or in sinful, uncertain, or unimportant matters.

God also forbids lying and deceiving by his name. This is a command against teaching false doctrine and saying it is God's Word or God's revelation. This warning underscores the importance of learning correctly the Word of God. Included in this command is a warning against covering up an unbelieving heart or a sinful life by a show of piety. This is hypocrisy.

We are also forbidden to use witchcraft or practice superstition. We read in Deuteronomy: ***“Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD, and because of these detestable practices the LORD your God will drive out those nations before you.”*** Deuteronomy 18:10-12 (NIV)

This is using God’s name to perform supernatural things with the help of the devil, such as conjuring, fortune-telling and consulting the dead, or seeking the aid of people who practice these and similar satanic arts. You may have memorized this commandment as a command not to “practice superstition”. What is all superstition except not trusting in the Lord God?

In 1 Samuel chapter 28 we have the history of Saul, who had expelled all mediums and spiritists from the land. After the death of Samuel the prophet, Saul became very frightened of the Philistine army. He inquired of the Lord, but the Lord did not answer him through prophets, priests, or dreams. So he demanded that his followers find him a medium or a ‘fortune teller’. But she was rightly suspicious. She knew Saul had banished all mediums and thought this was a trap. But she conjured up a vision that Saul thought was the dead prophet Samuel. In this vision Samuel told Saul ***“The LORD has done what he predicted through me. The LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hands and given it to one of your neighbors--to David. Because you did not obey the LORD or carry out his fierce wrath against the Amalekites, the LORD has done this to you today. The LORD will hand over both Israel and you to the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The LORD will also hand over the army of Israel to the Philistines.”*** 1 Samuel 28:17-19 (NIV) This all came true.

Think of all the things which people do – or don’t do – superstitiously, as if they are things which will help them. There are hundreds, perhaps of thousands of superstitions. I’d like to only mention two here, and remind families that I ask our children in catechism instruction classes to list superstitions. Think about those things which supposedly bring “bad luck” or “good luck”. And what is “luck”? Strictly speaking, there is no such thing as “luck”, for God permits things to happen to us. Nothing happens to us without God’s permission or guidance.

But not only does Luther – and Scripture – teach us “thou shalt not” but we also learn how to use God’s name correctly. We are to call upon it in every trouble. We are to pray even when we are not in trouble. We do this by asking for blessings, such as daily bread, protection, an understanding heart, success in our work, steadfastness in faith and strength to lead a holy life. Christ promises ***“Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.”*** Matthew 7:7 (NIV) We are to praise and give glory to God – privately and publicly. We are to give thanks in all things. The more we think of what God has done for us, the more shall we thank him. We should also use God’s name by reading and hearing his Word, as we shall also hear in the third commandment.

We have to admit that we are not guiltless in connection with the Second commandment. As a mirror, it shows us our sins because we have not always used God’s name as he wants us to use it.

But there is hope. Jesus saves us from our sins against the second commandment. He did this by obeying the second commandment perfectly for us and he saved us by dying to purify us from every sin.

And so, for all who believe in Jesus Christ as Savior, the second commandment serves as a guideline. It shows us that God wants us to thank him for his goodness by using his name in ways which are pleasing to him. And, of course, we learn what is pleasing to him from his Word.

And so we turn to Jesus for salvation from all our sins. Without him, there is no hope. With faith in him, ***“we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.”*** 1 John 1:7 (NIV) Believe that and be saved eternally! Amen.