

# QUANTOCK MINISTRIES

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*A Bible teaching and preaching ministry  
for the Christian community*

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## **EXODUS 20 v 7 – WHAT’S IN A NAME?**

This the third of the Ten Commandments seems simple enough: “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses His name”. The usual explanation of this commandment today relates to straightforward blasphemy, seen as the profane and flippant use of any of the names associated with the Trinity, whether of the Father, the Son or the Holy Spirit. Certainly, there is now much common abuse of God’s name in the English language. The frequent misuse of any of the names of Deity is always seen in the Bible as a sin, just as much as disobeying any of the other nine commandments.

Constantly hearing such profane language can and should be very hurtful to any true Christian, although the way we express our displeasure may take various forms. Perhaps bygone generations of Christians would immediately rebuke anyone misusing the Lord’s name, although that doesn’t seem very advisable in this unbelieving and violent age. Phrases such as (and I quote) “for God’s sake” and “O my God” have become so much part of everyday conversation, even among children, that most people using such expressions appear to have no real idea what they mean. If I’m a party to conversations when blasphemy is used, I try to remember the instruction given by Peter (“always be prepared to give ... the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect”, 1 Peter 3 v 15), and maybe just wince a bit. If that provokes a reaction, I have an opening to gently explain that as a Christian I do not like to hear the Lord I worship referred to so flippantly. As with many situations in life, if our response is with gentleness and respect, we have a much greater impact than we would by expressing anger and criticism. Anyway, people soon realise that our speech is different if we follow Ephesians 4 v 29 and Colossians 4 v 6, and that can be so effective.

However, I believe the third commandment goes much deeper than just the misuse of God’s name in speech. To understand the depth of what is being taught here, we will take three steps into the subject.

### 1. Progressive revelation

This is a very useful term used by Bible students to describe the way God has revealed His truth progressively throughout His dealings with humanity, as revealed in scripture. It applies to many aspects of divine revelation: for example, the nature of redemption, the administration of God’s grace, the person and work of God the Son, the inclusion of the gentiles in the divine plan, and much other truth. It certainly applies to our understanding of God’s name. A good illustration is the circular dimmer switch we may have to control the light in a room in our home. By means of a dimmer switch the degree of illumination within the room gradually increases, and with it our awareness of what the room contains.

Abraham, a man from a pagan background, understood God by the name “El Shaddai”, meaning “God the Provider”. This became the basis of his relationship with God and the ground of his tremendous faith that God would provide all the needs for himself, his family and his future. Later, Moses was given a deeper understanding of God’s character by means of the name “Yahweh”, meaning “I AM WHO I AM” (Exodus 3 v 13 – 15 and 6 v 2 – 3). This was a major step forward, for by this name God showed Moses that He is the source of all existence, all being, Himself uncreated, and powerful without limit (see also Romans 1 v 20). In fact, the Israelites were so overwhelmed by this understanding of God and His holy supremacy that they would not utter Yahweh fully, and preferred to avoid doing so by using the word “Adoni”, which means “Sovereign Lord”. This is why throughout the Old Testament we find God referred to as “the Lord”. Therefore, we must remember that when we refer to God (Father or Son) as Lord, we are really referring to

all that Yahweh stands for, and we rightly recognise the Lord Jesus as the “I AM”. Jesus pronounced Himself as the I AM in seven great illustrations, which are well worth studying in this context.

As we move on through the scriptures, we find further understandings of God’s nature by the names used: for example, David referred to Him as “my Shepherd” (Psalm 23 v 1). The possibility of such personal intimacy with God was a real revelation, confirmed by Jesus later when He called Himself “The Good Shepherd”, John 10 v 11 etc. Jesus was also the One who taught us to think of God as a Father figure (e.g. Matthew 6 v 9). The Jewish religious authorities in His day didn’t like the idea of such intimacy, but Jesus went on to teach us of His own relationship with God the Father, both as a Son and as an obedient Servant. In doing so, together with His teaching on the Holy Spirit, He laid the foundation for our full understanding of the Trinity as three distinct persons, bound together intimately, equally, and eternally in the Godhead – a revelation indeed! We also note that Jesus, when talking to Nicodemus, having said in John 3 v 16 that salvation is for whoever believes in Jesus as the one and only Son of God, went on to say in v 18, “Whoever does not believe stands condemned because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son”.

Following the Lord’s return to His Father’s side, and sending us the Holy Spirit to comfort, guide, sanctify, and provide our guarantee that we are the Bride of Christ, the revelation continued to be developed and confirmed by the apostolic writings of the New Testament. For example, John, writing later in the first century, referred to Jesus as the “Logos” (the “Word”, John 1 v 1 – 4). This name confirmed that Jesus is exactly what Moses was taught about the nature of God, and Jesus is therefore unquestionably Deity. The Greek word Logos came from the teaching of the great Greek schools of philosophy, and referred to the ultimate and (to them) unknowable origin of all meaning, purpose and information involved in the existence and operation of the universe and all life. In other words, John is repeating exactly the meaning of Yahweh, but more specifically applying it to Jesus, and ultimately to the whole Godhead. This revelation is progressive indeed, for now it introduced the true nature of God not just to the Jews, but to the whole world of Greek thinking, which is still the basis of much universal philosophical thinking today. From the Apostles we should also note Paul’s comment in Philippians 2 v 9: “God gave Him [Jesus] the name which is above every name”, and that must be the ultimate progressive revelation in this matter!

## 2. The name labels the person

So now, we’re not thinking about any deeper meaning of names as actual words, although that was common enough in ancient languages, but not very relevant in modern English. Instead, we are recognising that someone’s whole personality is designated by the name that person bears. If, for example, people hear my name announced as the following Sunday’s preacher, they do not pause and reflect on the words that make up my name, but immediately consider whether they wish to be there to hear me, or whether to make alternative arrangements. The name brings to mind the character of its owner and our feelings about them, especially if they are a public figure. This is a very important element in the third commandment and its abuse. It is not just about misusing God’s name, but thereby besmirching the nature of the person referred to by the name, and is a far more serious problem. Take the three elements of our Saviour’s name – the Lord Jesus Christ. He is Lord because of His full deity, the I AM. He is Jesus because of His humanity, the Word made flesh. He is Christ because He is the coming Messiah who is returning to restore God’s original perfect fulness throughout the universe. This is the glorious person we think of and worship whenever we use His name, and to use any part of His name abusively is to ridicule and even deny the fulness of who He is.

## 3. We also bear His name

This full name of our Lord Jesus Christ shows that as a person He has all authority – the highest that Heaven can confer: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” Matthew 28 v 18. We are to bear that name (we are Christians) and as He is always with us, that authority is always with us also: “Surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age” Matthew 28 v 20. The Upper Room Discourse (John chapters 14, 15 and 16) explains how we are to abide in Him so that in a very real sense we “go in His name”, and thus bear His reproach. A very powerful outworking of this is seen in the experience of Peter and John soon after Pentecost. The main points in the story are in Acts 3 v 1 – 8, 4 v 5 – 12 and 4 v 17 – 18. The Sanhedrin were well aware that the authority of the person the Apostles followed was to be found in His name, but they completely failed to understand that their attitude profoundly broke the third commandment. Therein lay their condemnation!