

From the series, Happy Corrections, because the Bible doesn't say what you think it says

The 10 Commandments, swearing, and what God really hates

- We think we know all about the 10 Commandments.
- We know they are basic rules for how God wants people to live, we think they are pretty clear.
- But I'd propose, we don't always understand in practical ways what they mean and how to live them out.
- That's what we're going to talk about in this lesson with a focus on one particular commandment that we often incorrectly apply and that doesn't say what people think it says.

The context for this lesson is after Israel was rescued from Egypt

- After God's incredible blessings of deliverance, the visible presence of God in the cloud and fire to guide them day and night, the giving of manna and quail to eat, and water from the rock,
- They arrive at Mt. Sinai.
- God has showered His gifts on them, clearly rescued and provided them for them as His people and NOW He tells them how they are supposed to respond.
- First, He gives them an overview in Exodus 20:1-17 in what we know as the 10 Commandments.

Before we get into the specifics of them

- Though separated by thousands of years we have much in common with Israel—
- We are both on a journey as the people of God.
- God did extraordinary miracles to redeem the people out of Egypt; Jesus died on the cross to redeem us from our sins.
- Without His work, we'd still be lost, slaves to sin and the miserable results of it.
- God doesn't redeem us and then drop us.
- For us to experience all He has planned for us, we need the happy corrections of how we ought to live in HIS ways, AND avoid doing what He truly hates.

Those happy corrections are found in....

- The laws and commandments that are truly—
- ***Guidelines for life fulfillment, peace, and joy, for what will make us function best as God's beloved and chosen, not simply a list of what not to do.***
- The 10 Commandments provides a good foundation and summary, and we will reread them.
- Then we'll greatly expand the meaning and application of ***one commandment*** people often don't interpret or apply correctly.
- And then we will look at how the implications of applying it correctly can totally change our lives.

Here is the foundation, the 10 Commandments

- *I am the LORD thy God. Thou shalt have no other gods before me.*

- *Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.*
- *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.*
- *Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.*
- *Honor thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.*
- *Thou shalt not kill.*
- *Thou shalt not commit adultery.*
- *Thou shalt not steal.*
- *Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor.*
- *Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbors'.*

What do you think is the command most people interpret incorrectly?

- Here are some options.....
- Jesus expanded the meaning of not killing and of adultery to our thoughts.
- We wonder how far we can go in “just kidding” before stepping into “bearing false witness.”
- We easily confuse “admiring” other people’s nice things with coveting.
- ***All of these can be misinterpreted but the one most often incorrectly interpreted is none of these—this command touches the core of what it means to represent our God, our Savior and Lord to the world.***

It is...*Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord your God in vain*

- What does this really mean and what are the implications of disobeying it?
- People most often interpret it as we shouldn’t use God’s name as a swear word in anger or as an expletive and though we certainly shouldn’t do that, I (and many other Bible commentators) think ***its true meaning is far more.***
- ***And if we understand it correctly, it gives us a foundation for how to live as God’s redeemed people.***
- ***Understanding it correctly would have kept Israel out of wandering for 40 years and us from living our lives in futility.***
- ***These are big claims, so let’s look at this in more detail.***

What does it mean to take someone’s name?

- If you take the name of your husband when you marry or if you are a child of a family—***you bear the family name and certain things are expected of you.***
- Other examples include: if you go to a well-respected school, you bear the name of that school and again there are certain expectations of you. People expect more from a Harvard graduate because of the name they bear.
- If we are a citizen of a country, we bear that name to the world. If you are member of the military, you have a code of conduct. A Marine is always a Marine.
- We are supposed to reflect the character of the name we bear.

When we take God's name

- It is an awesome responsibility.
- The children of Israel were the people God redeemed from Egypt—they were known by His name.
- **When we take the name of Christian—we are the saying we are a person who belongs to Jesus.**
- God takes our commitment to taking His name, to identifying as His child, very seriously.
- He says He will not hold the person guiltless who takes His name in vain.

Matthew Henry, (from 1700's, this isn't a new idea) the esteemed theologian and Bible commentator, puts it this way

- *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.* It is supposed that having taken Jehovah for their God, . . . **We take God's name in vain, by hypocrisy, by making a profession of God's name, but not living up to that profession.** Those that name the name of Christ, but do not depart from iniquity, as that name binds them to do, **name it in vain;** their worship is vain (Matt. 15:7-9), their oblations [offerings] are vain (Isa. 1:11, 13), their religion is vain, Jas. 1:26.
- Let's look at the verses he cites.

Here is one passage cited by Matthew Henry

- *Isaiah 1:11-17* *To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats. . . .*
- *Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them.*
- **Anyone can show up at worship—living it, being a true representative of the God you claim to serve—that is quite a bit more challenging.**

Jesus quoted Isaiah in the passage Matthew Henry cited

- *You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: "These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are merely human rules."* Matthew 15:7-9
- Just saying the right words or showing up for religious services isn't enough.
- We are to live up to our family name 24/7.

BUT how do we do this?

- How do we develop this family resemblance? How do we reflect that we belong to God?
- We won't learn it from the world around us.
- And the newly freed slaves from Egypt did not know what to do either.
- Another phrase that is often talked about in sections on how we are supposed to be like our God in both Old and New Testaments, is that we are to be "holy"

What to be holy means

- The idea of being holy is a key idea in both the Old and New Testaments,

it begins in Exodus 19: 6 where it says *And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation.*

- Holy comes from the Hebrew word **qāḏaš**
Most often defined, **to be set apart, consecrated, sacred, used for holy purposes.**
- The books (Exodus-Deuteronomy) where Israel is told how to live, define in practice what it means to be set apart.
- And all the rules they were told to follow defined ways to live that are different than the people around them, the people of Egypt.
- And a side note—**yes, set apart means different, you may not be or do as everyone else does if you want to please God. You must settle that in your heart. You will be different and that can be challenging.**

Defining Holiness from *the Message* introduction to Leviticus

- Eugene Paterson reminds us, ***“Because the core of all living is God and God is a holy God, we require much teaching and long training for living in response to God as he is and not as we want him to be. Leviticus and the others also [he is referring to this section of the Bible what we know as the books of the Law are] a narrative pause in the story of our ancestors as they are on their way, saved out of Egypt, to settle in the land of Canaan. It is a kind of extended time-out of instruction, a detailed and meticulous preparation for living “holy” in a culture that doesn’t have the faintest idea what “holy” is.***
- We are in a similar situation today, we live in a culture that doesn’t have the faintest idea what “holy” is.
- We must learn it from somewhere else than our culture.

Being holy means learning to live as God wants and we know they didn’t

- Because when we get to Numbers 13-15 and it is time for them to demonstrate to all the world that they are the people God had redeemed out of Egypt and are now going to take the land He gave them. . . .
- What happened? They didn’t believe God and ended up judged by having to wander 40 years in the desert.
- ***I want us to look at what brought them to that situation.***
- ***And how it applies to us and a very practical way we can avoid taking God’s name in vain and doing what He hates when we are faced with difficult life situations.***

They couldn’t quit complaining, which is symptomatic of not trusting God

- It started when they first left Egypt—they complained about the food.
- They just left 400 years of slavery, and they were complaining about food!
- ***They never got over the habit of complaining.***
- The problem is that grumbling, complaining, is in reality, criticizing God and His decisions for our life.
- You can’t be happily bearing God’s name as His child and then criticize and complain about all He does for you.
- It might have seemed like a small sin and justified one after all they’d endured for 400 years.
- BUT IT WASN’T—the sin of complaining is never small—it grew and grew until it destroyed first their trust in God, their witness as His people, and then their very lives.

Instead of becoming people who proudly wore the name of God and trusted Him

- They continued to grumble about “their hardships” in Numbers 11 and on and on.
- They “craved other food” and complained again about the manna.
- They complained about Moses’ leadership.
- They were punished severely for all their actions, but they didn’t quit complaining and the underlying sin of not trusting God, of not listening to Him, of thinking they knew better,
- When the biggest test of their journey came....

And they were at the border of the Promised Land....

- ***Numbers 13:5 After exploring the land for forty days. . . . This was their report to Moses: “We entered the land you sent us to explore, and it is indeed a bountiful country. . . .²⁸ But the people living there are powerful, and their towns are large and fortified. We even saw giants there, the descendants of Anak!, ... the land and we traveled through and explored will devour anyone who goes to live there.***
- They forgot God never said there wouldn’t be giants or battles, but He did promise He would go before them and fight them.
- They didn’t believe God—they forgot that they had taken His name as His people, and their habit of complaining won out.
- God had enough and condemned that generation to wander in the desert for 40 years until they all died.

Their problem and our lesson is to remember “little” bad habits, little sins never stay little....

- Grumbling, complaining, criticizing God and people never stays little—it can be an entire approach to life.
- Our identity becomes that of Critic, not Christian.
- Here is how C.S. Lewis described it.
- ***“Hell begins with a grumbling mood, always complaining, always blaming others... but you are still distinct from it. You may even criticize it in yourself and wish you could stop it. But there may come a day when you can no longer. Then there will be no you left to criticize the mood or even to enjoy it, but just the grumble itself, going on forever like a machine. It is not a question of God “sending us” to hell. In each of us there is something growing, which will BE hell unless it is nipped in the bud.”***

Secular input on the results of complaining

- ***.....every time you complain you train your brain to keep finding fault with your environment. Sure, we may all feel like we need to get it all out there about our issues sometimes, especially around circumstances we can’t control. But once we start complaining we often find it hard to stop. . . . [and we need to be aware that] Stanford University says their research indicates complaining actually shrinks your brain — the hippocampus to be exact — and makes it more difficult for you to problem-solve or think critically. Damage to the hippocampus has also been known to be caused by Alzheimer’s disease. Just imagine: hurting your brain voluntarily the same way Alzheimer’s hurts your brain. Crazy.***
- <https://medium.com/fiore3-consulting/5-tools-to-stop-complaining-f27f83c5f071>

Why is it so serious

- We are taking God's name in vain because when we complain or criticize or grumble (all varieties of the same thing), because it is an obvious sign we aren't trusting Him.
- In addition, we are not acting as God's servants, his child, Jesus's disciple, INSTEAD we are putting ourselves in the place of God.
- We are determining what is right or wrong in our world, in others, in leaders and assuming humans must fix it—even though most likely we don't have nearly the expertise or knowledge of the situation or how to fix it that we think we do.
- Remember Job's friends

They had no idea what was really going on

- God was honoring Job above all people; pointing him out to Satan and the hosts of heaven as an example of a godly man.
- Satan challenged God and God allowed extraordinary loss and testing.
- Instead of being an encouragement and trusting God themselves, they picked at Job, accused him, and generally added to his misery.
- Remember God never answered Job's questions as to "why" but He did make it clear that his friend's false accusations and false views of how God works were wrong.
- We act the same as Job's friends (and get God's condemnation) when we call ourselves "Christian" but when it is ME and MY OPINIONS and PREFERENCES that define my words and actions, not the One whose name I bear.

Think of how different the outcome for Israel would have been....

- If they had not started the habit of complaining when they left Egypt.
- What if they worked on the habit of praise and thankfulness?
- What if they had prayed that no matter how challenging things might be that they would grow strong through their trials?
- What if they had trusted that God can use trials (and trying people) to accomplish much good in our lives?

If they had practiced being thankful, praising instead of complaining

- They would have built up a pattern of behavior that....
- Trusted God even when dangers threatened (Egyptians at the Red Sea).
- Relied on Him no matter circumstances (lack of water, food) looked like.
- Praised Him for the leadership they were given and followed them to victory.

We don't have to wonder, because we know what the result would have been

- They would have developed the spiritual muscles of trust so that when the truly difficult test came and they saw giants in the land—they would have been like David, who couldn't wait to defeat a giant who had spoken against his God.
- But they didn't—they were spiritually weak when they needed to be strong.
- We cannot act a certain way again and again and expect to change when tough times come.

We need to work on spiritual weight training, so we'll be strong when trials come

- We can stop complaining.

- We can substitute gratitude and praise for negativity—and substitutes work for all areas of life change.
- If you need help, are numerous apps available online in this area and forms of gratitude journals—as even the secular world understands how important it is.
- Doing what we need to do, bit by bit we build up our spiritual muscles, so when challenges come, we can learn to worship and speak in ways that do not take the name of our God, of Christian, of Christ’s disciple in vain.
- One more verse on this....

A closing challenge

- ***Do all you have to do without grumbling or arguing, [this should identify us] so that you may be God’s children, blameless, sincere and wholesome, living in a warped and diseased world, and shining there like lights in a dark place. For you hold in your hands the very word of life. Phil. 2:14,15, Phillips***
- If we refuse to grumble, argue, complain, and criticize it says we will be “light lights in a dark place.”
- Does that sound familiar—remember the lampstand in the Temple, always burning? Jesus as the Light of the world? The command for us to let our light shine? God doesn’t change—He filled the Tabernacle with light, Jesus personified God’s light, and He wants us to continue His work.
- Let us so live that we might not take our Lord’s name in vain in all our words and actions by not complaining, but by trusting and praising so that—
- We bear His name clearly and in so doing are ones who shed His light in a dark world that so desperately needs Him.

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