

END-TIMES ISSUES



#66 Commandment #3 – The concept of "vain."

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1

THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

Taking God's name "in vain" – don't dare to do it!

"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not leave anyone unpunished who **takes His name in vain.**"

Exodus 20:7 (BSB); also Deuteronomy 5:11.

"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 (NIV); also Deuteronomy 5:11.

"Never use the name of the LORD your God carelessly. The LORD will make sure that anyone who **carelessly uses his name** will be punished."

Exodus 20:7 (GW); similar in Deuteronomy 5:11.

2

A basic concept... a basic warning.

Mistreating God's name:	Consequence:
Taking it in vain.	Not left unpunished.
Misusing it.	Not considered guiltless.
Carelessly using it.	Will be punished.

It's a simple concept...
But it's a warning that many church-goers think doesn't apply to them.

I'M SAVED, SO IT DOESN'T MATTER IF I TAKE GOD'S NAME IN VAIN!

← **THIS IS A CONTRADICTION!**

I'LL STILL GET TO HEAVEN!

3

What does it mean to "take God's name *in vain*"?

HERE'S ONE WAY TO FIND OUT:

① **We can compare translations**, and see if that gives us an idea. (It does.)

Mistreating God's name:	
Taking it in vain.	↔ Most common translation.
Misusing it.	↔ Second-most common.
Carelessly using it.	

- It's easy to understand! We don't have to be linguistic scholars to understand it!
- ❖ **What does it apply to?** Many people think this command is only about using God's name when cursing and swearing. But from this comparison, we can see that nothing in the passage *limits* it to such activities. In other words, *any* form of misuse would be included.
- Knowing this, we could look in Scripture for examples of things that are included in the concept of "misuse."

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HERE'S ANOTHER WAY TO FIND OUT:

② **We can look deeper into the issue:** Looking at the meanings of the words, examining similar passages, etc.

- Many helps** are available that just about anyone can use – no need to know the original languages! Many are available as books or on the internet – often at low cost or even free.
- Many Bibles** include marginal comments or verse references to related passages.

❖ **Regarding the word "vain":** We're going to look at Old Testament words that are often translated as "vain" or "vanity."

- Knowing the original languages is not a *mandatory requirement* for learning to follow the God of the Bible. But it may give us additional helpful insights.

We will see that "vain" (as used in the Bible) can refer to things that are: ✓ empty, ✓ of limited value, ✓ worthless.

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"VAIN / VANITY" – IN THE SENSE OF BEING "EMPTY."

רִיק (rîq) – has both noun and other word forms

TYPICAL EXAMPLES OF HOW THIS WORD IS USED:

⇒ **Often used to describe something that is empty, or is being emptied.**

- An empty container, being "empty-handed," etc.
- Can refer to a weapon (sword) that has been pulled from its sheath. (The sheath has been "emptied" so that the sword can be used.)

⇒ **Figuratively – something that is useless.**

- Can refer to "empty" plans, results, values, etc.

I SPENT WEEKS ON THIS PROJECT, AND NOTHING WAS ACCOMPLISHED! IT WAS **ALL IN VAIN!**

IT'S **EMPTY!**

WHAT I ACCOMPLISHED

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❖ "Empty plans" against God will not succeed.

- They will achieve nothing. They are emptied of value.
- The New Testament quotes this passage (using the equivalent N.T. Greek word), in Acts 4:25-26.

Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot **in vain**?
The kings of the earth take their stand
and the rulers gather together,
against the LORD
and against His Anointed One: ...
Psalm 2:1-2 (BSB); read the whole psalm!



❖ Sometimes God's people may get discouraged.

- Emotionally, we may feel as though all our efforts have come up "empty." [We need to consider the final outcome—vs. 16-17.]
- The N.T. reminds us that our labor in the Lord is "not in vain" (using the equivalent N.T. Greek word), in 1 Corinthians 15:58.

Surely **in vain** I have kept my heart pure
and have washed my hands in innocence.
Psalm 73:13 (NIV); read the whole psalm!

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"VAIN / VANITY" – LIKE A "BREATH" OR "VAPOR."

הֶבֶל (hē·bēl) – noun (occasionally a verb)

TYPICAL EXAMPLES OF HOW THE WORD IS USED:

- ⇒ Used to describe things that don't last, often contrasted to something that is permanent.
 - Efforts and activities that fail to have lasting value.
 - Relying on something that will prove to be unreliable or false.
 - Everything in this present life, because we lose it all when we die. (Much of it *does* have value; but it's only temporary, when compared to eternity.)
- ⇒ Figuratively, an idol.
 - Used as a synonym for "idol," since idols are but a "puff of air," when compared to the true God. (The next Hebrew word we look at can also be figuratively used for an idol, but for a different reason.)

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❖ An "idol" – a puff of air, when compared to the true God.

They have provoked My jealousy by that which is not God;
they have enraged Me with their worthless **idols**. (KJV uses the word "vanities.")
Deuteronomy 32:21a (BSB)

This is Hebrew poetry.
"That which is not God"
parallels the concept
"worthless idols."

- Idols are a mere "puff of air," when compared to the "weight" of God's glory, honor, power, greatness, majestic splendor, etc.



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❖ The book of Ecclesiastes – a "commentary" about life.

Vanity of **vanities**, says the Preacher,
vanity of **vanities**! All is **vanity**.
Ecclesiastes 1:2 (ESV)

The word "vanity" is present about 35 times, though some translations may use the words: *futility* or *meaningless*.

- People often misunderstand the message of this book, and interpret it as "pessimistic," or "the best of *human* wisdom" (with *God's* wisdom presented in the last chapter).
- In reality, it tells us that things *in this present life* are temporary, and (therefore) have no lasting meaning. It is actually a *positive* message, because:
 - ✓ It reminds us to prepare for eternity.
 - ✓ It assures us that injustice will not last.
 - ✓ It tells us that things in this present world *can* have value (though it's only temporary).

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★ In this life, good things and injustice are both temporary. ★
Don't let *either* of them control your life!

- We can praise God that injustice has no long-term meaning. *It will not last forever!*

There is something else **meaningless** that occurs on earth:
the righteous who get what the wicked deserve,
and the wicked who get what the righteous deserve.
This too, I say, is **meaningless**.

Ecclesiastes 8:14 (NIV)

- We can heed God's reminder that temporary things are not to be our #1 priority!

Whoever loves money never has enough;
whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with their income.

This too is **meaningless**.

Ecclesiastes 5:10 (NIV)

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- We can praise God that it is *good* to enjoy life, when we can. We can do this, fully aware that we will someday die. (Other Scripture passages show us *how* to enjoy life in a God-honoring way.)

So I commend **the enjoyment of life**, because there is nothing better for a person under the sun than to **eat and drink and be glad**. Then joy will accompany them in their toil all the days of the life God has given them under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 8:15 (NIV)

Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this **meaningless** life that God has given you under the sun—all your **meaningless** days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun.

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in **the realm of the dead, where you are going**, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.

Ecclesiastes 9:9-10 (NIV)

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★ **How to have a good focus!** ★

❖ **We can enjoy the things of life, but don't cling to them!**

WHY? BECAUSE:

1. YOU WILL GET OLD.

2. YOU WILL DIE (AND BE JUDGED).

However many years anyone may live, let them enjoy them all. But let them remember the days of darkness, for there will be many. Everything to come is **meaningless**.

You who are young, be happy while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth.

Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment.

So then, banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body, for youth and vigor are **meaningless**.

Ecclesiastes 11:8-10 (NIV)

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CONTINUED

❖ **The attitude to have, while enjoying life in your youth!**

A GOD-FOCUS NOW.

Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them" —

[[A poetic description of old age is here.]]

... Then people go to their eternal home and mourners go about the streets.

... and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.

"**Meaningless! Meaningless!**" says the Teacher. "Everything is **meaningless!**"

Ecclesiastes 12:1, 5b, 7-8 (NIV)

A GOD-FOCUS FOREVER.

NOW FOR THE CONCLUSION

CONCLUSION

❖ **The ultimate context in which we are to enjoy life:**

OUR PRESENT "VAIN" LIFE WILL INFLUENCE WHAT HAPPENS IN OUR FUTURE ETERNAL LIFE.

Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.


Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 (NIV)

- What we do here in this present life has meaning. *But only from the perspective of eternity.*

Don't live for what this present life offers you!

What is your life? You are a **mist** that appears for a little while and then **vanishes**.

James 4:14b (BSB)



"VAIN / VANITY" – WORTHLESS, A WASTE, FALSENESS.

נָפֹץ (šāwēl') – noun

TYPICAL EXAMPLES OF HOW THIS WORD IS USED:

⇒ **Things that are worthless/vain.**

- Things that are of **no value**, meaningless, useless; vain/vanity.
- Worthless communication – a lie, falsehood.

You shall not bear **false** witness against your neighbor.

Deuteronomy 5:20 (BSB)

(The parallel passage in Exodus uses a different word for "false.")

⇒ **Figuratively ...**

- Occasionally used as a synonym for "idol," because idols are worthless.

They burn incense to **worthless idols** ...

Jeremiah 18:15b (BSB)

❖ **Many passages tell us something about false speaking (lies) – testimony, oaths, visions and dreams (of false prophets), etc.**

They **lie** to one another; ...

Psalms 12:2a (BSB)

They speak mere words; with **false** oaths they make covenants.

Hosea 10:4a (BSB)

My hand will be against the prophets who see **false visions** and speak lying divinations.

Ezekiel 13:9a (BSB)

❖ **Others mention false or meaningless actions by people – values, activities, religious practices, attempts to avoid judgment, etc.**

Turn my eyes away from **worthless** things; revive me with Your word.

Psalms 119:37 (BSB)

In **vain** you [= Egypt] try many remedies, but for you there is no healing.

Jeremiah 46:11b (BSB)

❖ **This is the word used to warn us to not "take God's name in vain" – to not use it in a meaningless way.**

"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 (NIV); also Deuteronomy 5:11.

(Other translations: "Do not take his name *in vain*.")

- We need to realize that it doesn't tell us: "**Don't ever** use his name," but rather: "Just don't **misuse** it."
- If you **do** choose to **misuse** it ⇒ **there is a consequence:**

Consequence:	When you stand before God at the judgment day, do you want to <u>guarantee</u> that you <u>will be punished</u> ? Here's an easy way to do so!
Not left unpunished.	
Not considered guiltless.	

Will be **punished**.

WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE "LEFT UNPUNISHED" – to be considered INNOCENT?

נָקָה (nā-qā(h)) – verb (also noun and other forms)

⇒ In the Ten Commandments, this phrase is mentioned only here. But it's found in two other passages:

Yet He will by no means leave the guilty **unpunished**; ...
Exodus 34:7b (BSB)

Yet He will by no means leave the guilty **unpunished**; ...
Numbers 14:18 (BSB)

⇒ Quite clearly, if you're **guilty**, God wants you to **know for certain** what to expect at the judgment: You **won't** remain **unpunished**!

Jesus can take your punishment in your place, and you can receive his righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). But you need to be willing to humbly *repent* of your sin and *trust* God to *change* your heart and mind – including your attitude about using his name.

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⇒ What other verses say about this "punishment" concept. (People don't like being punished; but there are only certain ways to avoid it.)

❖ Conduct that **cannot remain unpunished**. There are many types, such as: adultery (Proverbs 6:29); any type of wickedness (Proverbs 11:21); pride (Proverbs 16:5); rejoicing in the misfortunes of others (Proverbs 17:5); lying (Proverbs 19:5, 9); being eager to get rich (Proverbs 28:20; see also 1 Timothy 6:9-10); etc.

• This also applies to nations (prophetic passages about future punishment): Jeremiah 25:29; 30:11; 46:28; etc.

We're all guilty of something that deserves punishment. The only way to get out of it is to rely on God to change us.

THE RESULT?

Then I will be blameless, **innocent** of great transgression.
Psalm 19:13b (NIV)

Don't live in denial, like Israel did: Jeremiah 2:35 (and context). It only increases your guilt.

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❖ Some additional issues that this word group focuses on:

- People who *are* innocent; people who *aren't*.
- Injustice, especially when it involves innocent people.
- Innocent blood, especially when it's shed by wicked people.
- Having "clean hands" – i.e., innocent of wrongdoing (or else forgiven of wrongdoing).

❖ In this present life, we may often be discouraged (as in Psalm 73, especially v. 13). But if we focus on having "clean hands" there is a promise we can look forward to:

For Israel, this meant the temple in Jerusalem. Today, we have a much greater temple to look forward to – see Revelation 21-22.

Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord?
Who may stand in his holy place?
The one who has **clean** hands and a pure heart,
who does not trust in an idol
or swear by a false god.
Psalm 24:3-4 (NIV)

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When we "take God's name in vain"
– when we misuse it –
what are we doing?

Of these 3 "vain/vanity" concepts,
which applies to "taking God's name in vain"?

- We are NOT treating God's name as *empty of meaning*.
- We are NOT treating it as having *temporary* meaning or value.
- We are showing that we consider it *useless* or *unimportant*. And since God's name represents his *person* and *power*, we are showing that we consider *God himself* to be *unimportant* and *powerless*.

If we do this, God tells us that **punishment is guaranteed**.



Jesus Christ – and the Good News about him –
is the *only* way out of our predicament.



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Our MISSION!

❖ We've learned some important things about attitude – toward **God** and toward **life**:

The two are interrelated, though the concept of "vain/vanity" applies differently for each of them.

⇒ Let's make this our goal: To **honor** God
(the *opposite* of taking his name in "vain"),
in the way we live our lives
in this temporary ("vain") world!

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