

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

(According to the original book by H.H. Pope Shenouda, III)

The Third Commandment

"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain"

"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain" (Ex. 20:7, Deut. 5:11).

• **You Shall Not Take the Name of the Lord Your God in Vain:**

The first and second Commandments relate to God's worship while the third relate to God's name. Let's now contemplate a little on God's name and what is proper to Him. His Name is Holy, Great and Wonderful:

It is not a common name, and we say in the incense of the vespers the beautiful words of the Song of Songs, *"Your name is perfume poured out* and everywhere they offer incense to Your Holy name, a pure offering" (*Song 1-3*).

The all holy Virgin said also in her praise *"for the Mighty One has done great things for me, and Holy is His Name"* (*Lk. 1:49*). David the prophet said as well, *"Holy and awesome is His name"* (*Ps 111:9*). This attribute of holiness of the Lord's name is highlighted by the Lord in the first request of the Lord's Prayer as He told us to pray first *"Hallowed be Thy name"* (*Mt. 6:9*).

If we remember that God is Holy, we shall mention His name with all respect and awe saying all the time *"Hallowed be Thy name"*. So, when we utter the word Holy (Agios) in the Church we bow down with reverence; for it is God's name.

The Seraphim "the angelic rank" sang to Him *"Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory"*. They uttered His great name with reverence while standing before His throne in awe. Covering their faces with two wings, and covering their legs with two. *"The pivots on the thresholds shook at the voices of those who called, and the house filled with smoke"*. This made Isaiah the Prophet frightened and said *"Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips"* (*Isa. 6:1-5*).

This holy name (by which the Seraphim sang to Him) is the same name by which the four incarnate living creatures who are standing around the throne and singing day and night without ceasing, *"Holy, Holy, Holy, the Lord God the Almighty, who was and is and is to come"* (*Rev. 4:8-10*). And whenever they mentioned the holy name of God with reverence, the twenty-four elders fell before Him who lives forever and ever and cast their crowns before His Throne. God's name is holy and His name *"is great among the nations"* (*Mal. 1:11*).

See how Jeremiah the Prophet speaks to Him *"Your name is great in might"* (*Jer. 10:6*), and Joshua Son of Nun says, *"What will You do for Your great name"* (*Josh. 7:9*). David the prophet sings to Him also saying *"Your name will be magnified forever"* (*2 Sam. 7:26*), *"The Lord of hosts is His name"* (*Jer. 50:34*).

There is also the beautiful psalm by which we praise the Lord our God saying, *"O Lord, our Sovereign, how*

majestic is Your name in all the earth! You have set Your glory above the heavens... O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is Your name in all the earth" (Ps. 8:1,9). Wonderful and majestic indeed is His name. When He told Manoah of the birth of Samson and Manoah asked about His name He said, "Why do you ask My name? It is too wonderful" (Jud. 13:18).

Also, when Isaiah the Prophet prophesied about His birth from a Virgin he said, *"He is Named Wonderful, counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting, Prince of peace" (Isa. 9:6).* Yes, wonderful is the name of God. St. James the Apostle refers to it as *"the excellent name" (Jas. 2:7),* and the psalmist describes it saying, *"I will proclaim Your name, for it is good".* Regarding this holy, great, wonderful, awesome, good and excellent name of God, He Commanded us *"You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain" (Ex. 20:7).* What else?

- **By His Name Wonders and Signs Are Performed:**

How beautiful was the answer of St. Peter the Apostle when the cripple asked him alms, he said to him, *"I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth stand up and walk" (Acts 3:6),* and the man stood and began to walk. When the high priests arrested Peter and John and inquired: *"By what power or by what name did you do this?"* they answered, *"by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom you crucified".* What a powerful name it is indeed! Therefore the disciples prayed to God and asked Him, *"grant to Your servants to speak Your word with all boldness, while You stretch out Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of Your holy child Jesus" (Acts 4:29,30).*

More wonderful still is the fact that the power of this name was effective even when used by some evil-doers who perished and who-many as they were - will say to the Lord on the last day, *"Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and cast out demons in Your name, and do many deeds of power in Your name?" (Mt. 7:22).* It means that God's name was powerful and effective even though used by undeserving persons.

Thus we should not make wrongful use of this powerful name by which wonders and signs are performed.

- **His Name is Frightful to the Demons:**

The seventy disciples returned with joy saying to the Lord *"in Your name even the demons submit to us" (Lk. 10:17).* They had that power though they were new in the ministry but this came as fulfillment of the Lord's promise *"And these signs will accompany those who believe: by using My name they will cast out demons; they will speak in new tongues" (Mk 16:17).* So, the holy apostles practiced this gift as we read about St. Paul the Apostle that he was very much annoyed of the evil spirit that was in the slave girl of Philippi and said to the spirit, *"I order you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And it came out that very hour" (Acts 16:18)*.

Amazing also is the fact that some evil doers were able - through the power of this name - to cast out demons and will say to the Lord on the last day, *"In Your name we cast out demons".* An awful name it is that frightens even demons. Should we not be afraid when we use such great name wrongfully though it is also a powerful name?!

- **A Name we Depend on in our Troubles:**

Beautiful indeed and giving comfort are the words of the divine inspiration in the Proverbs *"The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous run into it and are safe" (Prov. 18:10).* David the Prophet experienced this, so he said, *"All nations surrounded me, in the name of the Lord I cut them off. They surrounded me,*

surrounded me on every side; in the name of the Lord I cut them off. They surrounded me like bees; they blazed like a fire of thorns; in the name of the Lord I cut them off" (Ps. 118:10-12). Then he summed up his experience in the words, *"Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth" (Ps. 124:8).* Thus he talked to the Lord with familiarity saying, *"Through Your name we tread down our assailants" (Ps. 44:5),* and prayed Him, *"Save me, O God, by Your name" (Ps. 54:1).* God requires us to trust always in His holy name (*Isa. 50:10, Zeph. 3:12, Ps. 33:21*). We venerate the blessed name through which we acquire power and assistance and can never use it wrongfully being God's name. And what else?

- **A Name by which we have blessing and the gift of the Holy Sacraments**

How do we get the gift of Baptism through which we come to all sacraments? The Lord Christ commanded His disciples, *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Mt. 28:19).* Therefore, on the day of Pentecost, St. Peter addressed the Jews saying, *"Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven" (Acts 2:38).* Thus the people got baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (*Acts 10:48, 8:12*). See also what is written about the sacrament of the holy anointing, *"Are any among you sick? They shall call for the elders (priests) of the Church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord" (Jas. 5:14);* for a priest is a person who stands and ministers in the name of the Lord (*Deut. 18:5*). And when he gives blessing to the people he puts before him the verse, *"We bless you in the name of the Lord" (Ps. 129:8).*

Furthermore, the church from where we get the sacraments is God's house, carrying His name. The time is lacking to mention the work of God's name in each of the Church sacraments.

- **Since God's Name is the Source of Every Power, Gift and Blessing, What is our duty towards it?**

Yes, what is our duty towards the name of God that is called over us (*Acts 15:17*), by which we are distinguished from all the world, and which will be on our foreheads in the heavenly Jerusalem (*Rev. 22:4*)?

We ought to fear and venerate this holy name and use it with awe and respect as Moses the Prophet ordered, *"fearing this glorious and awesome name, the Lord your God" (Deut. 28:58).* Thus we may deserve the reward mentioned in the Revelation, *"For rewarding Your servants, the prophets and Saints and all who fear Your name" (Rev. 11:18).* We should utter the Lord's name with great humility as if we would say *"I dare not utter Your blessed name with my defiled lips"*.

Let us magnify the Lord's name *"and let us exalt His name together" (Ps. 34:3).* Let our respect for Him be mingled with love; for in Him we find protection and happiness and remember His love and compassion... Listen to the beautiful words of the hymn *"Sweet and blessed is Your name., on the mouths of Your Saints"*.

It is not proper to use God's name in trivial matters, it is unseemly for His glory. But we use it rather in prayers and praise with longing and joy as David the Prophet said, "I will lift up my hands and call on Your name. My soul is satisfied as with a rich feast" (Ps. 63:4), "Glory in His holy name" (Ps. 105:3), "and sing praise to the name of the Lord, the Most High" (Ps. 7:17). We should mention His name in our prayers and songs with solemnity, feeling His presence amidst us according to His promise, *"Where two or three are gathered in My name, I am there among them" (Mt. 18:20).* I say this, because we may not use God's name in trivial matters but only in prayers, **yet, we use it wrongfully as those who heap up empty phrases as the gentiles (Mt. 6:7), and for the sake of appearance they say long prayers (Lk. 20:47).** **We may also set stumbling blocks in the face of the people when we pray much while our lives are void of true spirituality.** Thus people suspect the value of praying and addressing God's name.

We may also use God's name wrongfully in prayers when our minds are distracted with something else, then the words of the Lord apply to us, *"This people honors Me with their lips, but their hearts are far from Me"* (Mk. 7:6).

Are they not using God's name wrongfully, those of whom the Lord said, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven", and those who will say to Him, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and cast out demons in Your name" (Mt. 7:22). Are they not also using God's name wrongfully, those who begin their meetings with prayers, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, then they quarrel in their discussions or speak improper words as if all their prayers were useless and the use of the Lord's name was in vain.

It is not proper to use the Lord's name with reverence only in prayers and worship, or when we are in the Church. We ought to use His name with solemnity on every occasion and everywhere.

We ought to glorify and praise God's name all the time as the psalmist said, *"Praise the name of the Lord. Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time on and forevermore"* (Ps. 113:1,2). Job the Righteous said in his tribulations, *"The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord"* (Job 1:21). **In any work we do, our objective should be the glorification of the Lord's name saying, "Not to us, O Lord, but to Your name give glory" (Ps. 115:1).**

We can also glorify the Lord's name by invoking the Lord's Name. Abraham the Patriarch built altars wherever he went, and invoked the name of the Lord (Gen. 12:8, 13:4). Isaac, his son, did the same (Gen. 26:25), and David the Prophet said, *"I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord"* (Ps. 116:4-13). Samuel the prophet also, *"was among those who called on His name"* (Ps. 99:6). We ought then to call on the Lord's name, so that, *"Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved"* (Rom. 10:13).

This is how we can preach the name of the Lord & let the people know His name that His name may be proclaimed in all the earth (Rom. 9:17).

It is our duty to do so as the scriptures say, *"I will proclaim Your name to my brothers"* (Heb. 2:12). The Lord Jesus Himself said addressing the Father, *"I have made Your name known to those I made Your name known to them"* (Jn. 17:6,26). **In preaching the Lord's name, we ought to labor and endure for the sake of His name;** as the Lord said about St. Paul the Apostle, *"I Myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of My name"* (Acts 9:16). And the angel said to the Church in Ephesus, *"you are enduring patiently and bearing up for the sake of My name, and that you have not grown weary"* (Rev. 2:3). Our fathers the apostles also endured persecution but were rejoicing, *"that they were considered worthy to suffer dishonor for the sake of the name"* (Acts 5:41).

This was just a hint about our obligation towards God's great and blessed name, which we should utter with solemnity and reverence, use it in worship and preaching and never use it wrongfully but whenever it is appropriate with the respect fit for it.

▪ **Wrongful Use of the Name of the Lord:**

The wicked use God's name without due respect, making light of it - in whatever talk they make even bad obscene talk. They even use God's name in insults and cursing and in their jokes and amusement. They do not revere God's name neither in their serious time or pastime.

This is the wrongful use of the name of the Lord, besides using it in oaths and blasphemy.

- **Swearing in the Old & New Testament:**

The Lord Jesus Christ prohibited completely swearing *"Do not swear at all... Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No', anything more than this comes from the evil one"* (Mt. 5:34-37). As for the Old Testament, the Law permitted swearing in truth only; for the Lord said, *"you shall not swear falsely by My name"* (Lev. 19:12).

Some would ask, why did God permit this in the olden times? Was swearing proper for revering God's holy name?

The answer is that God permitted it, because they lived in a time where paganism prevailed, and the heathen had their gods by which they swore. **Fearing that the people swear by the gods of the nations - which often happened - the Lord let them swear by His name, as a manifestation of the name of their God, and to distinguish them from the nations and as a protection for them lest they should swear by the strange gods.**

Thus the Law commanded, *"The Lord your God you shall fear, Him you shall serve, and by His name alone you shall swear"* (Deut. 6:13). This was repeated in the same Book, *"You shall fear the Lord your God, Him alone you shall worship, to Him you shall hold fast, and by His name you shall swear"* (Deut. 10:20). By the words *"by His name you shall swear"* was meant, not to swear by the names of the other gods which was widespread in those days.

This became evident when God commanded them by the mouth of Joshua, saying, *"So that you may not be mixed with these nations, or make mention of the names of their gods, or swear by them, or serve them, or bow yourselves down to them"* (Josh. 23:7). God said also to Jeremiah, *"And then, if they will diligently learn the ways of My people, to swear by My name 'As the Lord lives' as they taught My people to swear by Baal"* (Jer. 12:16).

The Lord was very angry when the people swore by Baal and other gods and said angrily to the prophet, *"How can I pardon you? Your children have forsaken Me, and have sworn by those who are no gods"* (Jer. 5:7).

Thus, it became a virtue in that pagan age that a person swears by the name of the living God, manifesting his faith in God and rejection of paganism. The Lord therefore addressed His people saying, *"Hear this, O house of Jacob who swear by the name of the Lord"* (Isa. 48:1).

Their swearing by God's name distinguished them from the heathen and so, *"all who swear by Him shall exult"* (Ps 63:11). The Lord even said concerning the spreading of faith, *"By myself I have sworn... to Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear"* (Isa. 45:23).

Then, when paganism diminished and there was no more reason to swear by the name of God, the Lord Jesus Christ said, "Do not swear at all" (Mt. 5:34) to maintain reverence to God's name, as they had gone far in using it improperly.... and swearing by God and the holies heedlessly.

Even their chiefs, the scribes and Pharisees set for them strange laws such as, *"whoever swears by the sanctuary is bound by nothing, but whoever swears by the gold of the sanctuary is bound by the oath... Whoever swears by the altar is bound by nothing, but whoever swears by the gift that is on the altar is bound*

by the oath". And the Lord Christ explained to them how corrupt were these doctrines (Mt. 23:16-22) showing them how holy was the altar and the sanctuary, "Whoever swears by the altar swears by it and by everything on it; and whoever swears by the sanctuary, swears by it and by the One who dwells in it; and whoever swears by heaven, swears by the throne of God and by the One who is seated upon it".

People neglected reverence to God's name in their oath that they used to swear while cursing themselves or the others or when doing something wrong. Even Saints did this.

An example is David the prophet, when Nabal of Carmel refused to give him food, David was very angry, ordered his men to strap on their swords and swore swaying, *"God do so to David and more also, if by morning I leave so much as one male of all who belong to him"* (1Sam. 25:22). And David was about to fulfil his oath and shed blood, when Abigail the wife of Nabal conciliated him with presents and soft words and asked his forgiveness, saying to him, *"When the Lord... has appointed you prince over Israel, my Lord shall have no cause of grief, or pangs of conscience, for having shed blood without cause or for having saved himself"* (1Sam. 25:30,31). This made David feel the fault he was about to make in fulfilling his oath. So, he replied, *"Blessed be your good sense, and blessed be you, who have kept me from avenging myself by my own hand"* (1 Sam. 25:33).

A Story:

There was a Christian who worked as a servant in the house of a person who swears often. Whenever the master swore, the servant used to bow and cross himself with the sign of the cross. The master often swore and every time he swore, the servant bowed and crossed himself. The master was greatly amazed and asked for the reason and the servant replied, "How can I not bow when I hear the name of my Great God, to whom every glory and reverence is due?!" The master was thus ashamed of not giving due reverence to God. He compared himself to that humble servant and abstained from using God's name wrongfully. So if we do not have such a servant to make us ashamed, we can rather be ashamed of the angels and the spiritual ranks such as the twenty four elders who fall before the throne whenever God's name is mentioned and cast their crowns (Rev. 4:10).

- **Types of awful swearing:**

If God has prohibited swearing utterly even though in truth so as not to make slight of God's holy name and make Him witness to our trivials, how much rather this prohibition applies to a person who swears falsely as if he is calling on God to confirm his lie! What a shocking thing! Some swear wrongfully that something has happened though it has not, and others swear wrongfully that they will do something while they are sure they will not.

More shocking still is the person who **swears that** he will do something bad; for example swears to kill so and so or show him up, dismiss or insult him. It is better for such a person not to fulfil his oath, else he would commit two sins: using God's name in vain, and the evil he swore to do. King Herod - ashamed of going back on his word-fulfilled his oath committing a greater sin by cutting off John's head.

A similar example is that of a **person who swears not to do a certain good or a certain virtue**; for example not to go to church or not to confess. Fulfilling such oath is another great sin added to that of swearing.

The oath becomes more sinful if something holy is included, as when a person swears untruly while he puts his hand on the Holy Bible or on a cross, or on the sanctuary, or when he swears by the holy offering, by the body of Christ or the priesthood of someone, making slight of such holies.

A **sin also is to compel someone to swear before you**, pressing on him and putting a stumbling stone in his way, thus taking part in his sin. A greater sin is when you do not believe him though he swore! Why then did you compel him to swear and disdain God's name while you do not believe his oath?? A greater sin still is when you make someone swear to do something wrong!

Some people swear merely being used to that, not revering God's name, without having any reason to do that and without being asked to. They may swear for an ordinary matter or even a slight thing or nonsense!

- **No respect for the person who swears:**

A person who swears often, in addition to his using God's name wrongfully, admits for sure that his words have no value to those who hear him and that they do not trust him; **for if they do trust him, they would believe him without need to his swearing. When he swears, he accepts the accusation of being a liar. Thus he tries to convince them that he is not!** He may swear and people do not believe him, so he goes on swearing and swearing and they go on unbelieving him. His words are not respected, and his oath has no value.

If you do want your word to be respected, say it and let it be believed by whoever wants to believe and never mind him who does not believe. Time will prove to him that you were true. If he asks you to swear, do not swear, but say to him: this is the truth and you are free to believe it or not.

As long as your life is honest in the eyes of people, and as long as no one charges you of lying, then people will believe you without swearing. But be careful not to let people ask for a proof of your truth.

- **Examples of Disdaining God's Name:**

We notice that the third commandment did not say "*You shall not swear* wrongfully by the name of the Lord", but it said, "*You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain*". This makes the commandment wider and deeper; for thus it is not confined to wrongful oath but includes any wrongful use of the name of God.

God's name has become an easy word on the mouths of many people, using it in cursing and insulting others, in their jokes and stories and in their angry and threatening words during their quarrels! What a shame! They use God's name improperly, then they say in their prayer "hallowed be Thy name"! They forget that God's name should be used with complete veneration and respect proper for His holy glory.

Some people are used to pray when dining while sitting at the table. This does not glorify God's name. How can we talk to Him as we are sitting, while the angels and archangels stand before Him. Mar Isaac asks us to use God's name with all reverence due to Him as if we were standing before a flaming fire.

People often pray inattentively, and utter God's name with a distracted mind and unsteady body. Is it right to be less respectful to God because He condescends to our level!

When God gave the Ten Commandments, the mount shook and was rapped in smoke. There was thunder and lightning and the sound of trumpet. The people trembled in awe of Him. Should He then behave the same way with us so that we might dread Him and respect His name? Should He use the way of thunder and lightning because when He treats us kindly we do not respect Him? He addresses us; My children, I love you. Would we slacken depending on such love, and say our prayer while sitting or sleeping?! No, brethren, God does not acquit anyone who misuses His name.

Furthermore I hear some people mention the Lord's name without due respect. They just say Jesus, Jesus did such and such things, Jesus said... Why do you do that, brethren? The holy church, mentioning this blessed name, says "Our Lord, God and Savior Jesus Christ to whom glory is due forever". Perhaps some think that mentioning His name as merely "Jesus" is a kind of familiarity. But such familiarity, if it goes far, shall make one lose respect to God's name.

Another grave type of wrongful use of God's name is:

- **Blaspheming:**

I know that I am speaking to believers who do not blaspheme in the serious meaning of the word, i.e. cursing or insulting the name of God. But some people in the times of troubles may do something else such as grumbling against God, blaming Him, accusing Him of injustice or neglect or threatening Him to abstain from praying or to cut relations with Him, etc. This is utterly improper; for we should revere God and be careful in every word we utter.

If the person who insults his brother shall be liable to the council and who says 'you fool' shall be liable to the hell (*Mt. 5:22*), how more deserving hell shall be rather a person who says a bad word against God! It is not right to blaspheme against God or behave in a way that might cause others to blaspheme against Him.

- **God Does Not Acquit Who Misuses His Name:**

If we cannot swear by the earth because it is God's footstool, how much more deserving punishment is a person who uses God's name wrongfully. He has no excuse; he is not justified before God.

In the Old Testament, a person who blasphemed was put to death *"One who blasphemes the name of the Lord shall be put to death; the whole congregation shall stone the blasphemer. Aliens as well as citizens, when they blaspheme the Name, shall be put to death" (Lev. 24:16).*

God is jealous for His holy name (*Ezek. 39:25*). So He said about the children of Israel, *"When they came to the nations, wherever they came, they profaned My holy name... But I had concern for My holy name, which the house of Israel had profaned among the nations... for the sake of My holy name, which you have profaned against the nations" (Ezek. 36:20-22).*

Therefore **God said** *"who swears falsely shall be cut off... This is the curse that goes out... I have sent it out, says the Lord of hosts, and it shall enter the house of the thief, and the house of anyone who swears falsely by My name; and it shall abide in that house and consume it, both timber and stones" (Zeck. 5:3,4).*

He also warned the priests who do not give glory to His name, saying: *"If you will not listen, if you will not lay it to heart to give glory to My name, says the Lord of hosts, then I will send the curse on you and I will curse your blessings" (Mal. 2:2).*

How solemn indeed is the Lord's name. The Lord does not acquit anyone who misuses His name. Let us bless the Lord's name **all** the time and glorify it.

Your name is sweet and blessed on the mouths of Your holy people O my Lord Jesus Christ My good Savior.