



From Your Pastor

A Study of the Shorter Catechism "Speaking Well of God"

Third Commandment-Questions 53-56

WSC 53: Which is the Third Commandment? A. The Third Commandment is, Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord they in vain: for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain. / **WSC 54: What is required in the Third Commandment?** A. The Third Commandment requireth the holy and reverend use of God's names, titles, attributes, ordinances, word, and works. / **WSC 55: What is forbidden in the Third Commandment?** A. The Third Commandment forbiddeth all profaning or abusing of any thing whereby God maketh himself known. / **WSC 56: What is the reason annexed to the Third Commandment?** A. The reason annexed to the Third Commandment is, That however the breakers of this commandment may escape punishment from men, yet the Lord our God will not suffer them to escape his righteous judgment.

Memory Verses: *"Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!"* (Psalm 115:1)

An Explanation: When we are young, many of us are introduced to the children's prayer: *"God is great, God is good, let us thank Him for our food. By His hands we are fed, thank you, LORD for daily bread."* This is a summary of how to uphold the Third Commandment in reliance upon God's grace. This helps us to understand how to love God from the heart, acknowledging and honoring His good Name, and recognizing His kindness to us. Because God is good, because He is great, because He is wise, because He is wonderful, and because He is our God, we desire to honor His name. The Bible speaks of "giving His name glory" and this is what the believer desires to do. Believers desire to glorify God's Name as the Church's inspired hymnbook teaches us (see Psalms 5:11; 8:1; 44:8; 63:4; 86:9; 145:1-2). "Speaking well of God" is exemplified in Psalms 34 and 145:

"I will bless the LORD at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together!" ... "I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever. Every day I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever" (Psalms 34:1-3; 145:1-2)

As God's beloved children we are to acknowledge that God has revealed Himself through His Word so that we can honor Him. We are taught to pray: "Hallowed ("Holy") be your Name". We are called as believers to acknowledge and honor God's Names, Titles, and Attributes, as He has revealed Himself: For example, "Lord Almighty" (2 Corinthians 6:18), "Covenantal-Faithful Lord" (YHWH, Exodus 3:14-15; 34:6-7; Psa. 145:13), "Eternal One" (Psa. 90:2; 103:17), "Holy, Holy, Holy" (Isaiah 6:3; Rev. 4:8), "Faithful" (Psa. 31:5; 1 Jo. 1:9), "My God and King" (Psa. 145:1), "True" (Numbers 23:19), "JESUS" (Matt. 1), "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" (2 Cor. 13:14), etc. God's Name is WHO HE IS; it is the truest and fullest revelation of Himself to us and to our children (cf. Deut.

29:29). We are to acknowledge and honor His Name as His children and servants; we are to honor His Name as our Lord and Master and our Heavenly Father. Therefore, we are to believe God and live consistently and sincerely in reliance upon His grace according to His truth.

Knowing and obeying God's word and recognizing His works are part of acknowledging and honoring His Name. Concerning these, we might ask ourselves: *"Am I showing signs of apathy toward God's Word, especially the reading and preaching of it?"* If so, I need to repent of breaking the Third Commandment. To fail to listen, hear, and obey God's holy Word is to break the Third Commandment. *"Am I acknowledging the goodness of God in His providence, or in the guiding and directing of all things in this world and in my life particularly?"* To fail to acknowledge God in all of our circumstances is to break the Third Commandment.

Perhaps you have attributed God's good works of providence in my life to mere "chance", "luck", to some hereditary genius, to mere cause and effect, not gratefully taking note of answered prayers, and not recognizing the goodness and kindness of God as the ultimate cause of everything that happens to me and to the world. If so, then I need to repent of breaking the Third Commandment. We should seek to always remember that failure to acknowledge God's good providence is to break the Third Commandment. Falling into the temptation of questioning God's goodness in hard times or robbing God of His glory by giving yourself or others the first fruits of your gratitude and praise in good times. Have you ever recently told of good and amazing events that have taken place in your life, but failed to acknowledge God as the ultimate Source and Cause of the benefits you experienced? Have you failed to thank Him for prayers answered? Now is a good time to take time to do so.

Especially during times of suffering and conflict, we should desire to want to praise the Name of the LORD. These are times when we should pray to have Job's heart and mouth, so that we can say: *"Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?!"* God commended Job in praising God's Name even in difficulty: *"In all this Job did not sin with his lips"* (Job 2:10b). God is good to all creation, both to the just and to the unjust, and His goodness and loving kindness is intended to lead all men to repentance (Psa. 104:14-15, 27-34; Matt. 5:45; Rom. 2:4). God will judge the unrepentant sinner who has failed to acknowledge His Name, and to dishonor Him in living ungratefully and idolatrously in light of His good and clear revelation (Romans 1:19-32).

Another way that we can fail to keep the Third Commandment is by failing to pray. God has commanded His people to pray, and to believe that when we pray He will hear us and greatly bless us above and beyond what we could ask or imagine (2 Chron. 7:14; Matt. 6:6-7; 26:41; Eph. 6:18-20; 1 Thess. 5:17). To not pray is either a failure to believe God is good and kind and merciful, or it is from doubt that prevents us from looking to Christ for all good things (James 1:5ff). Faith receives God as One who has sworn in His own name, to be good to all those who call upon Him in Christ for help! Let us honor God's name in prayer (Isa. 29:13-14). As Calvin wrote concerning the Third Commandment, *"Just as we are prohibited from taking [God's Name] in vain, so we are commanded to use it to His glory, by ascribing to Him all honor for strength, goodness, help, and comfort. This we do when we ask and expect these things from Him [in prayer]."*

Taking God's Holy Name in "vain" is also to speak carelessly about Him, or inappropriately and irreverently concerning Him. We live in a very irreverent culture that does not uphold God's honor and name. Even in the church, there is much irreverence and almost the absence of the fear of the LORD that is the beginning of wisdom. Let our mouths reflect hearts that fear God. But the Third Commandment is not about merely avoiding worldly talk, profanity, and foul, unedifying speech, it is about how we best acknowledge and honor God by using our mouths to praise God for His goodness rather than complaining, to sing loudly to Him for His faithfulness, to honor Him with our Spirit-tamed-tongues as we speak well of Him, for His honor and glory alone—even when we don't feel like it! The Apostle Paul teaches us not to allow corrupting talk come out of our mouths, but to use our mouths for the purpose of edification *"That it may give grace to those who hear"* (Eph. 4:29). We are called to edify and encourage! Let us give grace to all who hear us speak!

The LORD Jesus Christ has come to speak the beauty and glory of God's Name to sinners, to reveal Him particularly as a forgiving and faithful God who speaks kindly to us in Him, who promises His Spirit to those who are united to Jesus Christ, so that our hearts might be transformed and our tongues tamed for the glory of the Triune God! As Christians who have been set free from sin by His powerful Spirit, we have been freed to give God the glory that is due His name, and to tell of His goodness for all of our days.

And isn't He good to us? Isn't He great? Hasn't he, doesn't he, will he not continue to reveal His goodness and greatness to us in Christ by His Spirit?! Isn't it wonderful to be set free from the sinful, selfish bent that is ours by nature, seeking to talk of ourselves, and make ourselves glorious, in order that we might say honestly: ***"Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but to Your Name be all the glory!!"***

Prayer: Our Father in Heaven, Hallowed by Thy Name! We recognize how we have sinned against you, and desire to honor and exalt your Most Holy Name. We confess our sins in Christ, knowing that you are faithful and just to forgive us, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness in Him. By your Holy Spirit let us offer to you the sacrifices of praise in Christ, and may you warm our hearts with your grace, and tame our tongues to sing your praises! O for a thousand tongues to sing, indeed! Amen.

In Christ's love,

Pastor Biggs