

REVERENCE FOR GOD

Near Atlanta, Georgia, there is a landmark familiar to people all over the nation as the scene of a great memorial to the Confederacy. Called Stone Mountain by the Georgians, it stands a half mile above the surrounding countryside--a gigantic boulder of solid granite. Near the top of this mountain there is an inscription carved in the stone which was done by some unknown climber in 1889. The words are these: "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."

Surely the one who defied the hard stone to carve these words must have felt that these were eternal words, else he would not have climbed so high, not carved so deeply. He may have gone back in his mind's eye to the first time that these words were written in the hard stone of another mountain. Then God was the writer and His finger made the impression in the stone. (Exodus 31:18) The scene was on Mount Sinai, 3,000,000 people were camped at the base of the mountain waiting in great fear for their leader to return from the scene of the thunderings and lightnings in the midst of the mount. While they were waiting, Moses was up there in the presence of Almighty God receiving the laws to govern the conduct of this great people. God, Himself was the author of these laws and His servant, Moses, was acting as mediator between God and His chosen ones.

Among the Ten Commandments, which formed a part of the law given on this occasion, are found the same words which are now found on the side of Stone Mountain in Georgia. Since their initial utterance some 3500 years ago, they have been repeated thousands of times. They have been printed in the Book which is perennially the best seller in the world, the Bible. They are words that are familiar to all who have even a faint knowledge of the Bible. "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain:..."

It is from this, the third Commandment (Exodus 20:7), that we take our lesson today.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO TAKE THE NAME OF THE LORD IN VAIN? To take the name of the Lord in vain is to speak His name in a light, irreverent, disrespectful manner; it also means to make an oath in the name of God and then to give false testimony. None of the names of God should be used in a light, frivolous manner. Of course the commandment which we are now studying was given to the Israelites, but reverence for God has always been essential to acceptable obedience. Paul said to Titus: "But speak thou the things which become sound doctrine" or as the revision has it, "...which befit sound doctrine." (Titus 2:1) Showing disrespect for the name of God does not befit one proclaiming sound doctrine.

"Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire. (Hebrews 12:28, 29) Frivolous use of God's name does not indicate reverence for Him nor does it show that the one who so uses the name of God has any fear of Him. In teaching his disciples to pray, Jesus said: "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven Hallowed be thy name..." (Matthew 6:9) This is a petition that God's name be lifted up and honored above every other name. To the children of Israel, God said: "And ye shall not swear by my name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the Lord!" (Leviticus 19:12) It is as true now as it ever was that to swear falsely is to profane the name of God: and yet one has only to go to the courts of law to hear the truth twisted and false evidence given under oath. Men are altogether too careless about the truthfulness of their remarks. Paul places liars in the same category with murderers and adulterers. And remember that Paul was speaking for God and with the stamp of approval of the Holy Spirit upon the words which he wrote. In giving false testimony under oath, three sins are committed. First, a lie is told. Jesus said that Satan is a liar and the father of lies. To tell a lie is to do the will of Satan and those who do the will of Satan have no hope for an inheritance with Jesus Christ. Secondly, Justice is perverted. Another of the Ten Commandments deals with the perversion of Justice. God also said: "Thou shalt not bear false witness". Thirdly, God's name is profaned. In taking an oath in court one says in substance, "I swear (or affirm) to tell the truth the whole truth and nothing but the truth, SO HELP ME GOD." When you make such an oath and then proceed to tell a lie it is the equivalent of asking God to have a part in your sin. It is a declaration before men that the name of God has no sacred or real meaning in your life. God will have no partnership in such lying. His name is made common by such use of it. God's name is also perverted when it is used as a byword in common conversation, and it is also grievously profaned when it is used in cursing and swearing.

A striking example of the manner in which the Lord considers an irreverent use of His name, is recounted in Leviticus 24. Two men engaged in a fight and one of them blasphemed the name of God and cursed. He was arrested and brought before Moses. God had not named a punishment for this particular sin, so Moses did not know how to dispose of the case without asking God. The man was held awaiting the verdict which God would bring. So God spoke unto Moses and told him to take the man and have those who heard his blaspheme the name of God hold his head and then have all the people to cast stones upon him until he was dead. This action was carried out as God had directed. Certainly this is graphic evidence of the displeasure of the Lord over the misuse of His name.

Following this incident He caused Moses to write this in the book of the law: "And he that blasphemeth the name of Jehovah he shall be put to death."

Reverence for Jehovah leads one to have respect for everything that pertains to Him. David did not slay Saul because he recognized that Saul was God's anointed, and he had enough reverence for God not to harm his appointed servant, even though that servant sought David's own life. This reverence for God should keep one from speaking disrespectfully of the church and from using God's name and God's word in common jokes.

In the sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "...Swear not at all". To forswear oneself is to be guilty of perjury; that was strictly forbidden under the old law. "If a man voweth a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth." (Numbers 30:2). From this we learn that the Hebrews were allowed to bind themselves with oaths but with the rigid requirement that the oath be fulfilled, for they made an oath to the Lord that the vow would be carried out. It does not appear that Jesus was here talking about the oaths of the court but rather he was speaking of the habit that the Jews were guilty in swearing by the heavens, the earth and by their heads. These things were unauthorized by the law. The only oath that the Jews were allowed to make under the law was the vow in the name of the Lord. It may be assumed that Jesus did not seek to abolish the taking of oaths in the connection with the administration of the law, for this would have meant setting aside a part of the law before it had been fulfilled. It does not seem that the taking of oaths was expressly forbidden if they were taken in the proper scriptural manner, for well after the words of Christ were spoken, Paul, who was not one whit behind the chiefest apostles did make an oath to the church at Corinth, saying, "Moreover I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth." (2 Corinthians 1:23.) We conclude that oaths which are taken in the name of God upon solemn occasions are not included in the prohibition. In the 37th verse of this chapter Christ indicates that his concern was for the light frivolous use of the name of God and the tendency to make an oath quickly and without authority, for he says "Let your speech be yea, yea; nay, nay". James says "Let your yea be yea and your nay, nay: that ye fall not under judgment." (Jac. 5:12)

Jesus said, "out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh." That which comes from within indicates the source from whence it comes. Jesus spoke words of kindness and set love up as the guiding rule of man's life. His words came from a soul filled with love greater than the love that any man has ever felt.

His words were filled with wisdom and Jesus is recognized even by his enemies to be the wisest of the wise. His words were filled with truth and no man can doubt His honesty of purpose. Truly the words of Jesus indicate the inner man, the inner Christ. A Christian girl went to a party and there she met a young man who was very handsome. She wanted to meet him, and before the evening was over the occasion arose for her to meet him. They began to talk and within a few minutes she had realized that he was not the handsome person that she had thought he was when viewed from a distance. What brought about the change so quickly? She had heard him speaking and the things which she heard convinced her that he was not a good person, for his speech was slangy and he showed a lack of reverence for the name of God. "Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh".

Jesus also said: "And I say unto you, that every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give an account thereof in the day of judgment. For by their words shall they be justified and by their words shall they be condemned." (Matthew 13:36-37) Some one has said that "Words are the vehicles of ideas, but sometimes the vehicles go out empty--idle chatter in which no ideas are conveyed." Here Jesus seems to be speaking mainly of evil words, rather than the pleasant nothings which men are prone to utter. For the Pharisees had been bringing false charges against Him and speaking evil of His power from God. In fact they had accused him of working with power from the devil. In this connection Jesus said that they would have to give an account for every idle word which they spoke. What made these words of theirs "idle words"? They were spoken without thoughtful consideration. They were accusing him without first examining the evidence that his power was from God. They wanted to believe that He was from Satan and spoke without a basis for belief other than their desires to hurt him. Jesus said that words so spoken will have to be accounted for in the day of judgment.

This language should serve as warning to us against the common practice of passing on adverse judgment without considering all of the facts. Such judgments reveal more about the character of the speaker than of the one upon whom the judgment is passed. "For by thy words shall thou be justified and by thy words shall thou be condemned."

As creatures of the most high God, we can bring glory and reverence to His Name or condemnation and shame by the words which open our hearts to the world about us. Any light, frivolous use of the name of God will reveal a light, frivolous regard for Him in our daily living. Any time that an oath is taken and God is called to witness the oath, that oath must be fulfilled in truth, for if it is not, the name of the Lord is perverted, and just as a final warning: "The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain."