

Loving What Comes From God

The Second Commandment

A Sermon by the Rev. Peter Buss, Jr.

Glenview New Church—January 31, 2010

***“You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain, for the Lord will not hold him innocent who takes his name in vain.”
(Exodus 20:7)***

The second commandment draws our attention specifically to the Lord’s name. We are not to take it in vain. When we turn our attention in the direction of anyone’s “name”—the Lord’s or people that we know, or even our own name, we know that we’re not just talking about the name itself. We’re talking about a person’s reputation. We’re talking about a person’s character, and what proceeds from it. We’re talking about what he or she stands for.

In this regard, we note that people throughout history have put a lot of stock in guarding their “good name” or reputation. A Roman philosopher wrote in about 100 BC, “A good reputation is more valuable than money” (Publius Syrus). An English commander once lamented, “A good name, like good will, is got by many actions, and lost by one” (Jeffrey Amherst, approx. 1756). And the famous Greek teacher, Socrates, stated “Regard your good name as the richest jewel you can possibly be possessed of” (Socrates, approx. 440 BC).

While laudable and true in many ways, these concepts associated with one’s name seem to carry an element of personal pride with them. We know that vanity is the pursuit of reputation for reputation’s sake. There can also be a flavor of self aggrandizement there, which says, in effect, I’m important, and I want people to recognize that fact. In fact, most of us, if we are disparaged in any way, take it very personally.

But if we reflect further, we realize that the value in reputation is *not* in reputation alone. The reason it is important to have a credible reputation is on account of the things that open up to us on that account. With a good reputation, one can be trusted as a confidant, knowing that the information shared will be kept, and that good will is present. With a good reputation, people can be entrusted with important duties, and serve in consequential positions. If a person of good reputation says he or she will do something, we know it will happen. A good name means that people can accept the things we say as genuine, without worrying about duplicitous intention. The things to which we affix our name will be seen as binding and important to us. The opinions we put forward will tend to carry more weight if our reputation is strong.

But this sermon is not directly about our own reputations. It is about the Lord. So in similar ways, when we study the teachings regarding the second commandment in the Writings for the New Church, we discover these very same concepts with regard to the Lord, only on a much more important and pervasive level. The Lord does not command that we give Him due respect for the sake of reputation alone. The reason it’s important is on account of the things that He wants to do for us. If our concept of the Lord is full and positive, then He is trusted by us as a confidant—someone to whom we can pray, believing that it will be helpful (see *True Christian Religion* 298). To the extent that we fully grasp the

goodness of the Lord, we may entrust Him to a position of great importance in our lives—as the one from whom comes all that is good in our lives, and to whom we can turn in all facets of life. A true understanding of the Lord can lead us to believe that He will do what He says He will do—every time without fail. We can further trust that whatever He says is not only true, but it comes from absolute good intention—it is spoken for our benefit. This is true in the most important sense when we consider the work to which He affixes His name, with His Word (see *Apocalypse Explained* 960, *Arcana Coelestia* 8882). It is from Him, and indeed is Him, and should be treated with the same regard with which we treat the Lord Himself—as sacred, honored, not to be taken in vain.

With this general sense of what the second commandment is about, we turn our attention more specifically to the second commandment, to discover some of the many things the Lord teaches by means of it.

The Lord’s “name.” We begin with more of an understanding of what the “name” of the Lord means, so that we can be sure not to take it in vain. What we quickly come to realize is that the Lord is a multi-faceted God. There are many names for the Lord, each standing for one of His Divine qualities. But today we’re just going to focus in on the one most pervasive name that our God has given for Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ, noting that last week we learned that the Lord Jesus Christ is one and the same as Jehovah who gave the Ten Commandments, only in a more full and manifest form.

“Lord” emphasized His divinity; “Jesus” means “Savior,” and “Christ” means King or anointed one. So it is that this one name leads us to see our God as the Supreme Being who is our Savior and King. More than that, Jesus Christ is the name the Lord chose for Himself while He was on earth. So that name can call to mind for us all the things He did and said while He was here. We can think, for example, of the compassion He revealed when He brought a little girl back to life by touching her hand and asking her to arise (Mark 5:41). We can reflect on the zealotry He showed when He cast out the money-changers (Matthew 21:12-13), or the power He demonstrated when He calmed the raging sea by merely saying, “Peace, be still” (Mark 4:39). We can think about His desire to heal us, evidenced by such miracles as the healing of the woman with an issue of blood (Luke 8:43-48), or the cleansing of ten lepers (Luke 17:12-19). We gain perspective on the forgiveness He offers us all, as He offered to the woman caught in adultery (John 8:7-11). We can catch a glimpse of His infinite wisdom when we hear those simple words, “Whatever you want others to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12).

But even this is not all the Lord offers us in terms of a clear understanding of His nature. The Writings for the New Church reveal a whole range of deeper concepts which are associated with the name “Lord Jesus Christ.” They teach us that He is all-powerful, all-knowing, and ever-present—adjectives we could only associate with God (see *True Christian Religion* 49). He is love itself and wisdom itself, and these qualities cause Him to do everything He does—from love by means of wisdom (see *Divine Love and Wisdom* 28-33).

In fact, if we wanted to summarize all the things we’ve been talking about, we could refer to that one concept that is spoken about over and over again in association with the Lord Jesus Christ, namely the Divine Human of the Lord. The Divine Human is a concept which the Lord directly connects with His “name” in the Word (see *Arcana Coelestia* 6887:3). If we put all the teachings of the Word together—all the descriptions of His Divine qualities, all the concepts of infinity, all the expressions of mercy shown by means of His life on earth—

what we end up with is one very complete and accurate picture of what kind of God He is. He becomes for us a God who is visible to our understanding. A God who is our Comforter, Counselor, Creator, Shepherd, Rock, Guide, Teacher, Healer, and Savior; a God who wants nothing more than to affect our lives for good to eternity, and has tremendous ability to do so.

The Word of the Lord. But a concept of who the Lord is, is only so helpful. A right belief in God is intended to be a starting point, not an ending point. We turn our attention, then, to another facet of the name of God, namely the things that He says or teaches.

The Word is also where we discover the Lord's will for our lives. In fact, it could be said that the only way we truly honor the Lord, is by paying attention to what He teaches regarding the life that we are to live. So we read, "The name of God means...the Word. This must not be profaned, because it is in itself Divine and most holy" (*Apocalypse Explained* 960). We read further, "Those who abstain from profaning the name of God, that is, the holiness of the Word, have religion. For no one has religion except from revelation, and with us, revelation is the Word" (*Apocalypse Explained* 963).

There is no way we can get into all the teachings of the Word which describe the Lord's will for us. There are simply too many. But there is a teaching which focuses our attention by saying, "The name of God is interiorly profaned by a life contrary to the Ten Commandments" (*Apocalypse Explained* 962). Since we're in the middle of a series on the Ten Commandments, let's keep our focus there.

When we fail to acknowledge God and live from Him (the first commandment), but instead stubbornly make up the rules ourselves—or as one teaching puts it, "to be led by self and one's own loves, and not by the Lord"—we are taking the His name in vain (*Arcana Caelestia* 10731; cf. 10360). When we steal, or live for honor, reputation, and gain alone, as the deeper levels of the seventh commandment forbid, we take the Lord's name in vain (see *Apocalypse Explained* 967, 978). When we dishonor marriage in ways the commandment against adultery forbids, we take the Lord's name in vain. When we hold others in contempt, or seek revenge in cruel ways, as the commandment against murder forbids, we take the Lord's name in vain (see *Arcana Caelestia* 8901, *Apocalypse Explained* 1012). And so it goes.

Blaspheming and Profaning. In all of this, we have danced around some negatives and some positives with regard to the second commandment. There are two terms in the Writings for the New Church that summarize what is forbidden in the second commandment. They are blasphemy and profanation.

Blaspheming means believing and speaking in negative ways regarding the Lord. We read, one blasphemes "when fun is poked at those things which belong to the Word or to religious teachings and belief, thus which are holy, and they are dragged through the mud and thereby defiled" (*Arcana Caelestia* 8882). This is true also of the Lord's very names, and of dragging the Lord Himself "through the mud."

Profaning is deeper. It's living contrary to what we know the Lord teaches in His Word. It is also acting in externally pious ways all the while believing interiorly that this necessary only to get what we want (*Arcana Caelestia* 8882). In either case there is a bringing

together of something good and wholesome with something ugly and dirty. That is what profaning means.

Loving what comes from God. On the positive side of the equation, what this commandment calls us to do is to love and honor our God and the things that come from Him. It calls us to consider His many Divine qualities, and to come to understand the wonderful God He is. It means that we cooperate with Him as He strives to plant the qualities of mercy, forgiveness, wisdom, and integrity within us. It calls us to pay careful attention to what He says, and to do our utmost to live by His teachings.

We learn from the second commandment that “the Lord will not hold him innocent who takes His name in vain.” Why is that? It’s because the Lord can’t do for us what He most wants to do for us if we don’t honor Him or the things that come from Him. Like a person with absolute integrity and a stellar reputation, if we could look the Lord in the eye, we’d see His love for us. If we could listen to His voice, we’d perceive the conviction and quality of compassion that stands behind all that He says. It is this love, conviction and compassion that He most wants us to honor by means of the second commandment.

What does all this look like? It looks like praying from a heartfelt desire for the Lord’s help and with a strong belief in His ability to help. It means examining our lives to see where we are blaspheming, or letting a spirit of derision enter into the ways we speak about God and the things of religion. It means remaining equally vigilant for ways in which we are failing to live according to the things we know that the Lord teaches, thereby profaning those holy teachings. It means ridding our lives of anything foul and unclean, and striving instead for purity. On the positive side, it looks like actions of mercy and compassion toward others. It sounds like conversations with friends about religion and the things of spiritual life. It involves thanksgiving to the Lord—acknowledging Him for the blessings that we value.

All of these things and many more are available to us in the Word, to which the Lord has put His holy name. The Word is where we come to understand who the Lord is and what He wants for our lives. Therefore He calls us by means of the second commandment to honor it, treasure it, and stake our reputation upon it.

“O LORD, our Lord, How excellent is Your **name** in all the earth...” (Psalm 8:1)

“Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His **name** together.” (Psalm 34:3)

“In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father who art in the heavens, hallowed be Thy name.” (Matthew 6:9) **Amen.**

Readings from the Word: Exodus 20:7, Leviticus 22:32-33, I Samuel 12:22, Psalm 34:3, 8:1, Isaiah 12:4, John 14:13-14 Matthew 18:20, 28:19, 21:9, 6:9; *Arcana Coelestia* no. 2009.

The second commandment of the Decalogue reads:

“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.” (Exodus 20:7)

The Lord also told the Israelites:

“You shall not profane My holy **name**, but I will be hallowed among the children of Israel. I am the LORD who sanctifies you, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: I am the LORD.” (Leviticus 22:32-33)

“The LORD will not forsake His people, for His great **name's sake**, because it has pleased the LORD to make you His people.” (1 Samuel 12:22)

In the Psalms we read:

“Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His **name** together.” (Psalm 34:3)

“O LORD, our Lord, How excellent is Your **name** in all the earth...” (Psalm 8:1)

In the Prophets it is said:

“And in that day you will say: ‘Praise the LORD, call upon His **name**; make known among the nations what He has done, and proclaim that His name is exalted.’” (Isaiah 12:4)

“In every place incense shall be offered to My **name**, and a pure offering; for My **name** shall be great among the nations,” says the LORD of hosts. (Malachi 1:11)

In the New Testament, the Lord said to His disciples:

“Where two or three are gathered together in My **name**, I am there in the midst of them.” (Matthew 18:20)

“If you ask anything in My **name**, I will do it.” (John 14:13-14)

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the **name** of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...” (Matthew 28:19)

Also in the New Testament we read:

“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the **name** of the only begotten Son of God.” (John 3:17-18)

“Then the multitudes who went before and those who followed cried out, saying: ‘Hosanna to the Son of David! ‘Blessed is He who comes in the **name** of the LORD!’ Hosanna in the highest!’” (Matthew 21:9)

And finally, from the Lord's Prayer:

“In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father who art in the heavens, hallowed be Thy name.” (Matthew 6:9)

Arcana Caelestia 2009

When the phrase 'your name will be' is used in the Word it means the nature of, that is, what a person's nature is going to be like. And since 'names' means the nature of, a name includes everything in its entirety within that person, for in heaven no attention is paid to someone's name, but when anyone is referred to by name, or when a name is used, a mental picture of his or her nature comes up, that is, of all that is his, with him and in him. This is why 'name' in the Word means the nature of. To make this matter clearer to the understanding let further confirmatory quotations from the Word be introduced, such as in the Blessing in Moses,

Jehovah bless you and keep you; Jehovah make His face shine upon you and be merciful to you; Jehovah lift up His face upon you and give you peace. So shall they put My name upon the sons of Israel. Num. 6:24-27.

From this it is evident what 'name' and 'putting Jehovah's name upon the sons of Israel' means, namely that Jehovah blesses, keeps, enlightens, is merciful, and gives peace, and that such is Jehovah's or the Lord's nature. In the Ten Commandments,

You shall not take the name of Jehovah your God in vain, for Jehovah will not hold him guiltless who has taken His name in vain. Exod. 20:7; Deut. 5:11.

Here taking God's name in vain does not mean His name but every single thing deriving from Him, and so every single thing belonging to the worship of Him, which must not be treated with disdain, still less be blasphemed and defiled by what is filthy. In the Lord's Prayer,

Hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, as in heaven so upon earth. Luke 11:2.

Nor in this instance is 'name' used to mean name but all things that belong to love and faith, for these are God's, or the Lord's, and derive from Him. Since the latter are holy, the Lord's kingdom comes, and His will is done on earth as it is in heaven, when they are upheld as being holy.