Honouring God’s Name

Text: Ezekiel 36:22

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**Scriptures:** Matthew 1:18-23; Exodus 20:1-7; Ezekiel 36:16-32

Songs Chosen: [SttL] 236, 143, 232, 325, 527

Series: Heidelberg Catechism (LD36 Q&A99)

Theme: God’s great and holy name is borne by His people who defile His name when they sin, but who are forgiven in Christ who has restored the honour of God’s name

Proposition: Honour God’s great and holy name!

**Introduction**

What does your name mean? We generally don’t think of people’s names as being much more than a ‘tag’ or ‘handle’ today; except perhaps when choosing babies names; where we might consult a book as meanings. This afternoon we look at a name with infinitely greater significance than either yours or mine. It is God’s name - which is great and holy.

**1. God’s name is great and holy**

The 3rd commandment speaks of God’s name. "*You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain*” *(Exodus 20:7)*; literally ‘*Do not lift up the name of God as nothing/as empty’.* That is exactly what Israelites had done before and during their captivity: They had profaned (treated with irreverence/disregard), they had violated, polluted God’s name. To profane is the opposite of setting apart, consecrating, separating from all defilement. Look at verses 22 and 23 God speaks of His holy name/holiness of great name "*Therefore say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD: It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for the sake of my holy name, which you have profaned among the nations to which you came. And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them. And the nations will know that I am the LORD, declares the Lord GOD, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes*”.

For us this would be boasting, for God this is reality. He is holy and great. A truth which His name accurately describes. This is God who had delivered this covenant people from Egypt into the promised land. Here are Rahab’s words to the Israelite spies: "*we have heard how the LORD dried up the water of the Red Sea before you when you came out of Egypt, And when we heard it, our hearts melted and no courage remained in any man any longer because of you; for the LORD your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath*” (Josh 2:9-11).

Names in Scripture are not just ‘handles’ to identify someone. They are much more significant. Abram became Abraham meaning the “father of many” thereby expressing God’s covenant promises. Jacob (meaning ‘heel-holder’) became ‘Israel’ meaning ‘God strives’; after he wrestled with the angel).

Most importantly. God’s name is the revelation of his being. We see this in Exodus 3:14 ‘*And God said to Moses*, "*I AM WHO I AM"; and He said, “Thus you shall say to the sons of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you”*. His name is a statement of His self-existence. He is entirely independent of His Creation. Therefore, his name is a statement of His set-apartness from all else: His holiness.

We know that the Lord Jesus Christ is God, e.g. Luke 22:70 ‘And they [Sanhedrin] all said, "Are You the Son of God, then?" And He said to them, "Yes, **I am**." This is like the ‘I am**’** statements which Jesus makes as recorded in John’ gospel, for example “I am the bread of life”. The names of the Lord Jesus Christ encompass His work and person: Jesus is the Old Testament name Joshua which means “He shall save His people from their sins”, Christ means ‘anointed one’, Messiah, Immanuel = “God with us”.

1. **God’s name is borne by His people**

How we use God’s name expresses our respect/honour for Him. The third commandment: "*You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain*” (Exo 20:7) speaks of the LORD **your** God. LORD translates the covenant name of God. We see the same in our text. Ezekiel 36:20“*But when they came to the nations, wherever they came, they profaned my holy name, in that people said of them, 'These are the people of the LORD, and yet they had to go out of his land*.” The nations knew that Israel were His people.

Verses 26-28 contain the covenant promise through God’s gift of His indwelling Spirit:

“*And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules. You shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers, and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.”* (Ezekiel 36:26-28)

The New Testament makes clear that this promise is fulfilled in the new birth which Jesus speaks about to Nicodemus, as recorded in John chap 3. This promise is expressed elsewhere, for example:

 Ephesians 1:4 “*He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will*”; 1 John 3:1 “*See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are*.

We all bear family name –identifies us as God’s covenant people – Acts 11:25 “*disciples were first called Christians in Antioch*”.

We could say that the church phone list should be all G’s: “God’s son, God’s daughter”. Your name has been changed; you have a new identity. A new birth certificate. Do you see great privilege God has given to you in Christ? This can help us to remember not to profane His holy name. Thinking about the slur on the name of God if we sin can be powerful constraint. Which brings us to our 3rd point:

1. **God’s name is defiled by sin**

The third commandment contains a warning about punishment: "*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). There are consequences for ‘lifting up the name of God as though it was nothing’. We can see this in God’s judgement on His people in their captivity in Babylon.“*I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed through the countries. In accordance with their ways and their deeds I judged them*” (Eze 36:19).

Israel had the 10 commandments; they knew the importance of God’s name, yet they still disobeyed. We are no different in that. We also know the commandments of God, yet we too disobey the Lord and our disobedient actions profane God’s holy name. With respect to the 3rd commandment this does not just include cursing, perjury or rash swearing but also (Heidelberg Catechism Lord’s Day 36A99) “*It requires that we use the holy name of God only with reverence and awe so that we may properly confess him, pray to him, and praise him in everything we do and say*”. Any of our actions, words and attitudes before the people around us have the potential either to profane or to honour God’s name.

In Jane Austin’s novel Pride and Prejudice, one of the sisters went off shamefully with a man to which Elizabeth said “we must all share in her disgrace”. The family name was tainted. You know the damage done when a prominent Christian leader falls – through their actions or words.

We can damage the name of God with our tongues: “*it is a restless evil and full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father; and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not to be this way.* (James 3:8-10).

When young children in a Christian family throw a tantrum and refuse to obey saying “I won’t” this is a slight to God’s name. If students at a Christian school pull one another down with their words, this reflects badly on the Lord’s name. When youth in the church disregard or are uninterested in the Word of God they treat person and work of God as zero.

Men, when we speak words of discouragement and are not tender to our wives, then we profane the Lord’s name. Wives, when you do not support your husband in helping him to bear name of Christ you do not honour the name of the Lord.

When any of us gossip or slander, we lift up the name of the Lord as though it is nothing. Let us learn from the example of the Old Testament people of God, but also see that:

1. **God’s name is restored in Christ**

God is concerned for His holy name/honour/reputation; He therefore acts. That’s what He promised to do in v23-32. by His actions: v23 “*I will show myself Holy through you before their eyes*”. This is fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ through His church: Ephesians 5:25b-27 “*Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her; that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she should be holy and blameless*”

The third commandment is fulfilled perfectly in Christ who bore God’s name. ‘*He is the image of the invisible God’* – Col 1:15. In verses 26 and 27 we hear the promise of Spirit; of a change of heart, cleansing. A promise of being made able bear the name of God with honour.

This promise is realised in the Lord Jesus Christ "*Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. "Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' (John 3).* We see the line of blessing and promise here in this passage. God is restoring honour to His name through the work and person of Christ.

We know that the Son of God came to earth as the greatest expression of God’s love. But also, to restore honour to Holy Name. This restoration is expressed in v32: “*It is not for your sake that I will act, declares the Lord GOD; let that be known to you. Be ashamed and confounded for your ways, O house of Israel*”.

How are we then to feel in light of God’s grace/Christ’s work for us? Like disobedient Israel “*be ashamed and confounded for your ways*”. To be ashamed here is to be disconcerted/put to shame/ embarrassed by shame, confounded = humiliated/dishonoured/insulted. If you break the third (or any) commandment of God (we all do), then if you feel shame/sorry leading to repentance – not just sorrow but desire to live differently, then in Christ God forgives you and restores His name in you.

Do not fear the punishment of the 3rd commandment–if you are ashamed by your sin when you profane His great and holy name through your words, actions and thoughts. *The LORD is near to the broken-hearted, and saves those who are crushed in spirit. The LORD redeems the soul of His servants; And none of those who take refuge in Him will be condemned. (*Psalm 34:18-22).

AMEN