

Exodus 20:7 Call on the name of the Lord!

Pentecost 6 July 12, 2009

Grace and peace are yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior...

God's Word given to help us honor His name is written in Exodus 20:7

This is the Word of our God. We pray: Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemers praise, the glories of my God and King, the triumphs of His grace! Amen. (CW #340)

Dear Friends, in Christ,

How important is a name? If we were to get a phone book from a country on the other side and the world, and simply open the book to a page and point to a name, that name would probably mean nothing to us. If we were to open a local phone book and find a name of a close friend or relative, that name would bring with it all kinds of good memories to us. That name becomes important because we know who the person. How important is God's name? To some people God's name is as foreign as a name on a page from a foreign phone book. To us who have opened a Bible and who know the truth about God, His name fills us with awe and love so that we can

Call on the name of the Lord!

First, let us increase our sensitivity about the wrong use of God's name. The Commandment reads, "*You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses His name.* (v. 7) What does it mean to misuse or take God's name in vain? It is to speak God's name as if it had no value. It would be to use His name as if it wasn't connected to the true God at all. We don't intend to take God's name in vain, but it can happen to us, i.e. when we are saying the words of the Lord's Prayer but our minds are thinking about something else.

In Martin Luther's explanation to this commandment, he listed 5 areas of danger in the misuse of God's name. He wrote, "We should fear and love God that we do not curse, swear, practice witchcraft, lie or deceive by His name." (Small Catechism) We can think of the example of David and Goliath. Every day Goliath came out and cursed the name of the true God. The boy David challenged him to a fight while properly calling on God's name for help.

So, should we use God's name to curse others who stand against God? Should we call His damnation on them? No! Jesus said, "*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.*" (Luke 6:27-28) To curse by God's name is the play judge. That is not our role as Christians.

If someone continues to fight against God, God will handle the situation. The Bible states, "*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*" (Hebrews 10:31) Rather, we are to set the standard for people around us by not cursing. We are to use God's name in a way that honors Him, that shows that we respect His name. God revealed His name to us so that we might be saved from judgment. We should want as many people as possible to share in the true understanding of that saving name. One commentator said it well. The Bible is telling Americans, "What they need today is a new mouthwash that cleanses their words instead of their breath."

We are also not to use God's name to swear an oath falsely. We are not to use God's name to help us back up a story that is questionable. The name of God is to be associated with things that are certain and true. That is the way the Bible uses God's name and that is the way we are to use God's name. We can swear an oath in court. We take a vow or oath at our confirmation day or on our wedding day, asking God to be a witness to the truth of our faithfulness.

To practice witchcraft is to put superstitions on an equal level with God's saving name. Some people turn to horoscopes to learn of their future instead of trusting what the Bible states, "*My times are in God's hands.*" (Psalm

31:15) Some people turn to psychics to get answers instead of calling on the Lord in prayer. Let's not waste our time or money with superstitions when we have the name of the Lord close to us always!

The Bible warns about people who lie by using God's name. It calls such people false prophets. If we hear of people who are not speaking the truth of God's Word, we are not to listen to them or support them. For God is against them. Also, we are to be careful not to deceive by God's name. We don't want to pretend to be religious. We want all our words to come from a true faith in Christ. We are to look to God for the truth and remain faithful to it!

Second, let us grow in understanding of the right use of God's name. God promised in His Word, *"Wherever I cause my name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you."* (Exodus 20:24) How positive God's name should be to us since we know that He is the source of our blessings. Another verse states in Proverbs, *"The name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous run to it and are safe."* (18:10) This verse pictures people who are under attack from an enemy. They run to a city with a fortress in it and are safe. So, we can say, "A mighty fortress is our God."

Martin Luther explained that there are four ways to honor God. He wrote, "Call upon Him in the day of trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks." We call on God's name in faith. God encourages us to do this. Psalm 50 states, *"Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor Me."* (Ps. 50:15) I have no doubt that there are many times when God helps us or sends His angels to rescue us and we don't even know it. How much better for us when we ask Him to help us. Then, when He answers, we will realize how good God is to us!

The Bible describes this goodness. It states of Jesus, *"Everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name."* (Acts 10:43) It also states, *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."* (Acts 4:12)

Connected with calling on the Lord is prayer. We have the privilege of calling God "our Father." We pray "hallowed be Thy name." We know that God's name is holy in heaven, but we want it to be honored and used properly by us and by all people on earth. We pray as families and as members of God's family. Every time we pray, the saving name of the Lord is being praised. So, let us be faithful in prayer.

Praise is another way we honor God's name. Christian churches have always been known as singing churches. When we learn of the great love of God in sending His Son to save us from sin and death, we can't help but sing. When Moses and Israel were brought safely through the Red Sea and the enemy was stopped, the people of Israel broke into singing. We know that God has promised to work everything in life for our good. By His grace in Christ He will bring us to an eternal life of perfect joy in heaven. How can we not respond with songs of praise!

Last, we honor God's name when we thank Him. Remember the Bible lesson of Paul and Silas. They were innocent, but arrested, beaten, and left in a dark dungeon. They responded with hymns of praise and thanks to God. There was an earthquake which opened the prison doors, and people could have escaped. But, those tough criminals had heard Paul praising the name of the true God remained, held by a power much greater than prison bars.

You and I know that saving name from God's Word. God could have let us die in the prison of our sinfulness. But, instead He sent His Son who died for our sins and gave us His holy life to save us. It's only right that we respond with praise and honor to our God as it states in the hymn: "My gracious Master and my God, assist me to proclaim, to spread through all the earth abroad, the honors of Your name. Jesus, the name that calms our fears and bids our sorrows cease. 'Tis music in the sinners ears; 'Tis life and health and peace." (CW #340) Amen.