

# **ILLINOIS LUTHERAN CONFERENCE**

## **Topical Bulletin, April 2019**

There has been much talk in the media over the past several months regarding words and terms now labeled “offensive” among people of color, and people of abnormal sexual orientation which modern society considers acceptable alternative lifestyles. However, despite the so-called concerns about “offensive speech” among the media and the general populace, there has been generally no concern regarding the misuse of God’s name and the offense thereby given to the Lord and to Christians who wish to see the Lord honored. Therefore, in this month’s Topical Bulletin we will examine and ponder the Commandment God gave us as found in **Exodus 20:7, “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.”** Note well that the Lord God takes it very seriously when His name is taken in vain, “for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.” *Divine just punishment will come upon the impenitent.*

*To take God’s name “in vain” means to employ any name of God uselessly or carelessly or flippantly; or, to curse, swear, use witchcraft, lie, or deceive by God’s name.* The foregoing definition is indeed accurate when one considers the Hebrew word translated into English as “vain” in Exodus 20:7 is the masculine noun *shawv* which Wilson’s Old Testament Word Studies defines as follows on page 465: “evil; specially falsehood, a lie; emptiness, vanity, nothingness; ...taking (up) the name of God in vain includes false as well as light swearing.” And, **Holladay, Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the OT (HOL)** states regarding the term “vain” in its context in Exodus 20:7— to “use a name unnecessarily, idly; misuse a name.”

People take God’s name in vain quite frequently in speech and in today’s popular practice of texting as is evident with the often heard or read “OMG” or “Good Lord” or “Jesus Christ”— those expressions NOT being used in prayer and praise but merely as flippant remarks to express shock or surprise. Such uses of God’s name in vain are a sinful disgrace which dishonors the Lord and certainly displeases Him. Furthermore, the common curse where the word “damn” is placed after “God” is yet another heinous sin of the tongue in taking God’s name in vain.

God’s name deserves respect and reverence, not misuse and abuse. Accordingly, Luther’s Small Catechism (page 53, Concordia Publishing House 1943 edition) states the facts well where it reads: “**THE SECOND COMMANDMENT; GOD’S NAME; Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord, thy God, in vain.** *What does this mean?* We should fear and love God that we may not curse, swear, use witchcraft, lie, or deceive by His name, but call upon it in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks.”

God’s name is every name by which God has made Himself known to us in the Holy Scriptures, and also every statement in the Holy Bible in which God tells us about Himself. Thus, God’s attributes are also His names (e.g. the omniscient, the eternal, the omnipresent, and the omnipotent).

*Consider a number of Scripture passages with underlining for emphasis and comments following:*

“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness *was* upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.” (Genesis 1:1-3 KJV)

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made." (John 1:1-3 KJV)

"For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one." (1 John 5:7 KJV)

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." (Matthew 28:19 KJV)

"Come ye near unto me, hear ye this; I have not spoken in secret from the beginning; from the time that it was, there am I: and now the Lord GOD, and his Spirit, hath sent me." (Isaiah 48:16 KJV)

*Comment: notice the various names of God in the preceding five Scripture passages. We see "God", the Spirit of God", the "Word" that God "said"; we see the "Father", the "Son", and the "Holy Ghost"; we see the "Lord GOD" and His "Spirit" who sent the Eternal who was speaking, that is, the Son of God, the Word of God. Observe also that the three named divine Persons are revealed to us in the Bible as being One. Thus, the one true God is three distinct Persons. The expression in 1 John 5:7 "these three are one" is where the term TRIUNE comes from— Three-in-One. Hence, none of the aforementioned names of God is to be taken in vain by misuse, abuse, or mockery, nor are the terms "Trinity" or "Triune" to be misused, abused, or mocked since those terms accurately convey Biblical truth regarding the true God. Furthermore, to call anything other than the true triune God by the name "God" – with a capital "G" – is taking God's name in vain, for all false gods are NOT GOD in the proper and highest sense of the term.*

"And Moses said unto God, Behold, *when* I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What *is* his name? what shall I say unto them? And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The LORD God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: *this is* my name for ever, and *this is* my memorial unto all generations." (Exodus 3:13-15 KJV)

"And God spake unto Moses, and said unto him, I *am* the LORD: And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob, by *the name of God Almighty*, but by my name JEHOVAH was I not known to them." (Exodus 6:2-3 KJV)

"If thou wilt not observe to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful name, THE LORD THY GOD." (Deuteronomy 28:58 KJV)

"Fill their faces with shame; that they may seek thy name, O LORD. Let them be confounded and troubled for ever; yea, let them be put to shame, and perish: That *men* may know that thou, whose name alone *is* JEHOVAH, *art* the most high over all the earth." (Psalm 83:16-18 KJV)

"I *am* the LORD: that *is* my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images." (Isaiah 42:8 KJV)

“Thus saith the LORD, your redeemer, the Holy One of Israel; For your sake I have sent to Babylon, and have brought down all their nobles, and the Chaldeans, whose cry *is* in the ships. I *am* the LORD, your Holy One, the creator of Israel, your King.” (Isaiah 43:14-15 KJV)

“Thus saith the LORD the King of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts; I *am* the first, and I *am* the last; and beside me *there is* no God. And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming, and shall come, let them shew unto them. Fear ye not, neither be afraid: have not I told thee from that time, and have declared *it*? ye *are* even my witnesses. Is there a God beside me? yea, there is no God; I know not any.” (Isaiah 44:6-8 KJV)

“As for our redeemer, the LORD of hosts is his name, the Holy One of Israel.” (Isaiah 47:4 KJV)

“Thou shewest lovingkindness unto thousands, and recompensest the iniquity of the fathers into the bosom of their children after them: the Great, the Mighty God, the LORD of hosts, is his name.” (Jeremiah 32:18 KJV)

*Comment: observe in the nine foregoing Bible passages other names of God that are not to be taken in vain— “I AM”, “LORD God”, “Lord”, “God almighty”, “JEHOVAH”, “redeemer”, “Holy One”, “creator”, “King”, “LORD of hosts”, “the first”, “the last”, “the Great”, and “the mighty God”. The various names of the true God make it plainly evident that nothing else and no one else deserves the honor, reverence, respect, and worship due the one true God.*

“For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.” (Isaiah 9:6 KJV)

“Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this *is* his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.” (Jeremiah 23:5-6 KJV)

“Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just *man*, and not willing to make her a publick example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the Lord appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.” (Matthew 1:18-23 KJV)

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16 KJV)

“That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of *things* in heaven, and *things* in earth, and *things* under the earth; And *that* every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the

Father." (Philippians 2:10-11 KJV)

*Comment: the foregoing five Bible passages deal primarily with God the Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, and His various names and titles of honor. To dishonor Jesus by taking His name in vain is to dishonor God the Father too, for John 5:23 declares "That all men should honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which hath sent him." Accordingly, the various jokes about Jesus and the mockery heaped upon Him in unbiblical plays, musicals, and T.V. shows are all sins of taking His holy name in vain.*

"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 KJV)

"And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, Whosoever curseth his God shall bear his sin." (Leviticus 24:15 KJV)

*Comment: note that committing perjury is taking God's name in vain, as is defiling God's name by any misuse of it. Cursing God is blaspheming Him and is yet another sin in taking God's name in vain.*

"Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near *me* with their mouth, and with their lips do honor me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men: Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, *even* a marvelous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise *men* shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent *men* shall be hid." (Isaiah 29:13-14 KJV)

"Behold, I *am* against the prophets, saith the LORD, that use their tongues, and say, He saith." (Jeremiah 23:31 KJV)

*Comment: hypocritical worship of God and teaching false doctrine while attaching God's name thereto are yet other common sins of taking God's name in vain. Furthermore, changing the Holy Bible and then calling such per-versions God's Word is another sin of taking God's name in vain.*

"Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of musick, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made; *well*: but if ye worship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that God that shall deliver you out of my hands?" (Daniel 3:15 KJV)

*Comment: King Nebuchadnezzar's pompous sarcastic remark against the true God was a failure to honor the name of the Lord and was therefore taking God's name in vain. We all know what happened when the true God delivered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace, for Daniel 3:26 reports: "Then Nebuchadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace, and spake, and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, ye servants of the most high God, come forth, and come hither. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, came forth of the midst of the fire." Nebuchadnezzar stood corrected.*

"Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." (Matthew 7:21 KJV)

*Comment: empty lip-service to the Lord is taking His name in vain, "for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7 KJV)*

"Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy *against the Holy Ghost* shall not be forgiven unto men." (Matthew 12:31 KJV)

*Comment: maliciously speaking against the Holy Ghost and His work against better knowledge is taking God's name in vain and will not be forgiven since such sin is against sin's remedy.*

"This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with *their* lips; but their heart is far from me." (Matthew 15:8 KJV)

*Comment: Jesus Christ is not impressed with hypocrisy, for mere words of honor toward the Lord which issue from an unbelieving heart is taking the name of the Lord God in vain and is sinful.*

"Then answered all the people, and said, His blood *be* on us, and on our children." (Matthew 27:25 KJV)

*Comment: the Jews took the Lord's name in vain by calling down God's anger upon themselves when delivering Jesus to be crucified, dishonoring God's only begotten Son.*

"And they that passed by reviled him, wagging their heads, And saying, Thou that destroyest the temple, and buildest *it* in three days, save thyself. If thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross. Likewise also the chief priests mocking *him*, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God." (Matthew 27:39-43 KJV)

*Comment: the Jews blasphemed the Lord while He hung on the cross as they mocked Him and spoke evil of Him, thereby taking the Lord's name in vain.*

"Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be." (James 3:9-10 KJV)

*Comment: our tongues are NOT to be used for cursing our fellow men, for to call God's anger down upon another is taking His holy name in vain.*

"There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee." (Deuteronomy 18:10-12 KJV)

"Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told

you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." (Galatians 5:19-21 KJV)

*Comment: using God's name to perform supernatural things with the help of the devil is taking God's name in vain and is sinful. Using God's name to spread false doctrine – heresies – is taking God's name in vain and is sinful.*

"Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name." (Deuteronomy 6:13 KJV)

"For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation *is* to them an end of all strife."  
(Hebrews 6:16 KJV)

*Comment: when called upon by civil government to take an oath in court to testify to the truth, we are permitted, yea, required, to swear by God's name and tell the whole truth in honor of God and His name.*

"And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." (Psalm 50:15 KJV)

"Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, *bless* his holy name." (Psalm 103:1 KJV)

"O give thanks unto the LORD; for *he is* good: because his mercy *endureth* for ever." (Psalm 118:1 KJV)

"I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name." (Psalm 138:2 KJV)

"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matthew 7:7-11 KJV)

*Comment: examples of the proper use of God's name are evident in the foregoing five Bible passages. Prayer to the true God, worship and praise to the Lord and expressing our thankfulness to Him, are ways to use His name aright, as is highly valuing His Word which He has magnified above His name. We must strive to abide by the Holy Word of God and never add to it or take away from it.*

Let us endeavor to always use God's name aright and to avoid all forms of taking His holy name in vain. Indeed, "Praise ye the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power. Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness. (Psalm 150:1-2 KJV) Let us never forget that our Lord Jesus Christ says: "If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31-32 KJV)

m.e.l.