

Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino, The Ten Commandments, Session 4: Commandment 3, What's in a Name?

This is Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino in his teaching on the Ten Commandments. This is session 4, Commandment 3, What's in a Name?

Well, now we're going to be talking about the third commandment. The name of the Lord is not to be taken in vain.

"What's in a name?" asked the immortal Bard in Romeo and Juliet. Juliet asks Romeo to forswear his name because that which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet. So, Romeo and Juliet seemed to think that the problem just lay in what they were called, and if they could get rid of those names, then all of their problems might disappear, and they could be together.

But by the end of the play, of course, they have found out that their names contain a lot of baggage and that they have a lot more to do than just be a handle or a convenient thing to call somebody. So ancient people took names even more seriously than did Shakespeare and certainly more seriously than even people do today. In several Bible stories, the concept of the name figures pretty prominently.

I mean, whenever somebody would enter into a new relationship with an overlord, they would oftentimes get a new name. We see Daniel and his friends given new names by the king of Babylon. We see some of the kings given new names when they are incorporated into the Syrian and Babylonian empires.

We have this fellow by the name of Abram, whose name means pretty much exalted father, or we could say big daddy, maybe, or something of that sort. But when he enters into a covenant relationship with God, his name is changed to Abraham, which means basically the same thing. But the fact that God could give him this new name indicates the new relationship that they have.

We have a fellow by the name of Jacob, Yaakov, whose name has multiple significances and is related to the story of how he was born grasping onto the ankle of the heel of his twin brother. And Yaakov has that sense of the one who grasps, one who takes hold of something specifically to which maybe they are not entitled. And of course, we know a little bit later in Jacob's story that he cheats his brother out of his birthright, proving himself once again to truly be a grasper after those things, which he doesn't have a right to.

But one of the more interesting stories about the significance of names comes in the story of David and Abigail. And in this case, David is on the run from Saul, and he comes to the house of a fellow by the name of Nabal, and Nabal refuses to give any

kind of comfort or aid to David, and David decides to kill the man. And Abigail, the wife of Nabal, goes out and pleads for her husband and says, My Lord, please just don't pay a whole lot of attention to my husband, Nabal.

His name is Nabal. And as a man's name is, so is he. Because Nabal just happens to also be the Hebrew word for a fool.

So, she says his name means fool. And indeed, he is a fool. Not exactly the most respectful way to speak about one's husband.

But, but, hey, it all worked out in the end. Nabal ends up dead and Abigail ends up married to King David. So anyway, this notion that names are somehow attached to the nature of a person runs very deep in the ancient Near Eastern world.

And if the names of a king or the names of a foolish man are deeply associated with their natures, of course, too, we might expect that the name of the Lord would be deeply connected to his nature. Names were thought to be almost like an extension of a person, and people could be very protective of their names, particularly divine beings sometimes. And we have this wonderful story where Jacob is wrestling with a, well, an angel of the Lord for all through the night, or the angel of the Lord for those who want to be picky about such things.

But after they wrestle all night, as morning is coming, Jacob asks the divine being,, Please tell me your name. And the divine being kind of rebuffs him and says, Why are you asking my name? Protective of his name, he doesn't want to reveal his name for some good reasons, as we'll see in a couple of minutes here. But the angel then blesses Jacob and uses his own name in the blessing.

Names could reveal character. Names could be a kind of extension of a person. When you gave somebody your name, in a sense, you made yourself vulnerable to them.

And we see when God and Moses are coming into a relationship that there's a little bit of a, of a complication regarding the name of the Lord, where Moses says to God at one point, he says, well, , could you please tell me, when I go to the Israelites and say, the God of your ancestors has told me to, to come and deliver the people, well, what do I tell them your name is? And God answers and says, I am that which I am. Tell them simply, I have sent you. Well, you know, not really much of a name there.

Clearly, all kinds of theories, which I'm not going to go into at this point, about the significance of that are. But, but at that point, God seemed unwilling to really reveal the covenant name Yahweh, which he would reveal a little bit later to Moses. When you revealed your name, in some sense, you made yourself vulnerable because once you give somebody your name, they can misuse your name.

And that is really what the third commandment is all about. You know, when you look at the words of this commandment, we're going to dissect this a little bit here. , we look at the words of this commandment.

You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God. The word here is the very common Hebrew verb Nasa. And Nasa can mean to lift up, to carry, it can mean to use, it can mean to employ. it doesn't necessarily have any sense of meaning of abuse or anything of that sort.

It's just talking about how the name is used. It can also simply mean, to utter. It includes the use of the, of the spoken word, in this, or the, and there are several other places in the Bible where Nasa is used as a reference to, to spoken words, but, but certainly it is used for a lot more things than just that you shall not take the name of the Lord.

Clearly, we're talking here about Yahweh, the revealed covenant name, which God eventually gave to Moses. , probably didn't originally refer to the word Elohim, God, you know, in our day and age, people consider when, they, when somebody utters the word God as an oath or as a exclamation that we call that swearing and people say, don't take the name of the Lord in vain. Well, God was probably not originally what they had in mind here.

It's kind of an extension that we've given to that, which probably didn't refer to El, or the title Adonai. Certainly, the principle could be extended to these titles, and that's what has happened, by the way, in Judaism to this day, they try not to pronounce even God or Adonai, which has become, in some circles, a little bit touchy.

So, but, it's interesting if you read, literature written by very conservative, Jewish writers, oftentimes they will spell the name of, even the word God will be spelled G dash D because even writing the name is considered to be a disrespectful and perhaps a violation of the commandment, or if not a violation, getting close to violating the commandment and, and very observant Jews don't want to even get close to the possibility of breaking any of these laws. As an English name, it could also mean reputation in Hebrew. And this is an important point as well, because, , when we, , you know, your, your dad will, will tell you, you know, son, you're bear my name and you know, you haven't, the thing that you have to make sure that you protect more than anything else is your good name that of course means your reputation and the same thing could be true in ancient Israel, that the name of the Lord could refer to the Lord's reputation.

You know, when, when the Psalms speak of the name of the Lord shall be praised and things of this sort, I really don't think that what they had in mind there was the kind of thing that we oftentimes see in modern praise music where, Oh, you've got

such a beautiful name. God, I love the name Jesus so much. You know, I really don't think that's what they had in mind.

It really has more to do with the reputation of the Lord, where the acts of the Lord, with the things that God has done in God's nature. Name can refer to all of that. So, there's certainly something more going on than just thinking that the name is so cool or something of that sort.

Then the third important point here, the word in vain, you shall not take the name of the Lord, your God in vain, modern translations have tried to do all kinds of things with this. They've tried to say something like, You should not misuse the name of the Lord, your God. I think that's probably one of the most common of the translations these days.

The old King James version said in vain, and that's really the most accurate translation of the Hebrew here. the word translated in, in, in vain is shvah, shvah in the modern pronunciation, but, shvah is, , a word which has a sense of emptiness or triviality, and it's kind of an interesting point that, our, in those people who are familiar with the English pronunciation methods know that, that when we have a light vowel that you just pass over as trivial, it's called a shvah in English. Well, that comes from this word, from this Hebrew word.

And so, it has a sense of something which is used and considered to have no weight or considered to be trivial, meaningless, or can refer to a falsehood. Words of shvah, words of vanity, refer to lies, okay? The Ten Commandments, as we've said before, are summary statements, and their meanings get kind of filled out in other places in the law, and in other places in the Bible. So we've got this statement: You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

That seems like a pretty ambiguous sort of statement. And what does it mean to take the name of the Lord your God in vain? Well, we don't have to guess because there are actually several passages a little bit later in the Torah that tell us what they're talking about here. And we get this clear sense of what they had in mind.

One of the most prominent ways to misuse God's name was in blasphemy. Blasphemy, both the Hebrew and Greek words for blasphemy, basically mean to slander somebody. To blaspheme the Lord is to deliberately insult God, especially by using the divine name.

This is kind of an interesting thought. Now, again, the name can be either reputation or it can be actually literally the name. So, to blaspheme the Lord could mean to speak evil things about the Lord, or it could mean specifically to use the divine name in an insulting fashion.

So blasphemy against the name of the Lord. In Leviticus 24:10, we have a kind of scary passage here. The Israelite, an Israelite woman's son and a man of Israel, fought in the camp, and the Israelite woman's son blasphemed the name and cursed.

This is referring to a man whose father was an Egyptian. His mother is Israelite. he is from an Egyptian background, so he doesn't really know much better, but anyway.

So, he uses the name of the Lord and apparently uses it in some kind of cursing way, making fun of it or something of this sort. They brought the man to Moses, and the Lord said to Moses, Speak to the people of Israel, saying, whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. Whoever blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death.

And the whole community gets together and stones the guy to death. So, in this case, it clearly says that he blasphemed the name of the Lord, and it seems to literally mean the name in this case, according to the mission. Now, the mission, I interpreted the term terminal cave, which is the word blaspheme here. He blasphemed the name.

There it is. That word, no cave, in the Mishnah is interpreted as simply meaning utter. And according to the mission, now this man's great sin was that he actually uttered the name of the Lord.

And the mission, I actually said that no one could be convicted of blasphemy unless they had actually used and uttered the divine name, the name Yahweh. So, that's mission Sanhedrin seven, five. So, that certainly doesn't seem to have been the case in the trial of Jesus, where Jesus was accused of blasphemy.

Well, we might talk about that a little bit later, but, the, the, but the notion, was trying to put forth by the rabbis in the time of the writing of the mission, you know, third century AD approximately that you had to utter the name of the Lord in order to be guilty of blasphemy. Now, how about blasphemy against the reputation of God rather than just simply using the divine name? Psalm 139 equates slandering God with taking the name in vain. This is an interesting little verse here.

Oh, oh, that you would slay the wicked. Oh God. This is a kind of terrifying Psalm, by the way.

but they, oh, that you would slay the wicked. Oh God, oh, men of blood depart from me. They speak against you with malicious intent.

Your enemies take your name in vain. So, this is the kind of poetic parallelism where essentially we're doing the same type of thing, saying the same type of thing twice. So the first time we're saying, you know, they're speaking against you, bad things.

They're saying bad things about you, God. And then that is equated with your enemies taking your name in vain. So, this is clearly talking about blasphemy as, as, as besmirching God's reputation.

Jesus, again, he gets condemned for blasphemy in the New Testament. Why? Because he said he was equal to God. And several times they, they, we're, we're told that they wanted to put him to death.

One time, explicitly, we're told that it was because he made himself equal with God. According to John, and at his trial, Jesus was condemned of, of being worthy of death because he equated himself with the son of man of, from the book of Daniel, who at that time, many, of the, in Jewish circles interpreted as being one who was essentially equal to God. So by Jesus identifying himself as the son of man in that passage, Jesus is making himself God's equal.

And that was considered to be blasphemy because it besmirches God's good character, God's reputation. Now, Jesus had this warning that those who claimed the Holy Spirit's work was done by the devil were guilty of blasphemy against God and the Holy Spirit. Yeah.

And this is one of those sins that people, as a pastor, I've had people talk to me and say, you know, I'm afraid I blasphemed the Holy Spirit. And they say, well, what did you do? And they said, well, I made fun of somebody who was speaking in tongues. I don't really think that's what Jesus had in mind here, you know? Jesus says, You know, that this will not be forgiven in this world, nor the next.

A lot of people have a lot of anxiety over that. And it's kind of a, it's one of those statements that, there's a part of me that wishes that Jesus had never said it, but another part of me understands why and what was going on. And in the context, what Jesus is saying is that those people who are so hard-hearted that they will not acknowledge the work of God and will harden their hearts against the movement of God's spirit are essentially guilty of this kind of blasphemy.

And I'm not sure if it's so much the act, which is unforgivable, or if it's the attitude, because the attitude represents a hardness of heart. But that's just where I would go with that. And that's kind of an aside, I guess.

somebody might ask, you know, you know, sticks and stones might break my bones, but words will never hurt me. Why is God getting so upset about people saying bad things about him? Yeah. Does God have a fragile ego that he's afraid that, that people are going to, are going to make fun of him or something? Well, speaking against God and saying bad things about God and God's nature isn't just a matter of

making fun of somebody or something in a way among the Israelites to say evil things about the Lord.

It's a kind of treason because what it is doing is undermining the faith of the nation in their God. And so, just as in wartime, if somebody is speaking a lot of nasty things about the president and about his policies and so on, those persons can be convicted of giving aid and comfort to the enemy or of committing even treason in some cases. So too, in the case of Israel, if people were undermining trust in God and in the Lord's ability to deliver and keep his people, then that could be detrimental to the whole community and tear the whole community down.

So the reason why the Bible takes us so seriously isn't because of God's ego. It's because of God's people, protecting God's people, and making sure that they maintain a trust in the Lord and his ability to do what God has said he would do. Okay.

So that's one way of using the Lord's name in vain. Yet another way of taking God's name in vain is in the breaking of vows. Back in the times of the Old Testament, the Israelites were often encouraged when they wished to make vows that they would do so in the name of the Lord.

So Deuteronomy 6, 13, it is the Lord, your God, you shall fear him. You shall serve by, and by his name, you shall swear. So instead of saying, back to Romeo and Juliet, you know, Romeo wants to swear by the moon that he'll always love Juliet.

And she says, Oh, swear not by the moon, the inconstant moon, you know? Now, of course, in Old Testament times, if they were swearing by the moon, they were probably swearing by the moon God, and saying, you know, by may, essentially something to the effect of may the moon God strike me dead or something. If I fail to do what I'm telling you, I'm going to do. And the book of Deuteronomy says, Don't swear by the moon.

Don't swear by the sun. Don't swear by any of these natural phenomena or any other spirits; swear only by the Lord. So it is in the name of the Lord, I shall do this, which I have told you I shall do.

Okay. But if you take an oath like that and you have no intention of keeping it, then this is a very bad thing. Hey, Leviticus 19:12, you shall not swear by my name falsely.

And so, profane the name of the Lord, your God, I am Yahweh. This is clearly again identified with taking the name of the Lord in vain. This is a case where you say something to the effect of, you know, I promise you, I shall pay you on Tuesday for all these goods, which you have given to me today in the name of the Lord, it shall be done.

And yet you don't have the funds. You don't think you're going to have the funds and you are simply doing this in order to manipulate somebody to sound like you're sincere. That is clearly a case of taking God's name in vain.

And that was something that the Lord took very seriously. Zechariah 5:3. Then he said to me, This is the curse that goes out upon the face of the whole land for everyone who steals shall be cleaned out according to what is on one side. Everyone who swears falsely shall be cleansed out according to what is on the other side.

Have you ever tried translating the book of Zechariah? It's a mess. Anyway, I will send it out, declares the Lord of hosts, and it shall enter the house of the thief and the house of him who swears falsely by my name, and it shall remain in his house and consume it, both timber and stones. So here in the book of Zechariah, God is talking about those people that he is going to sweep out of the land.

And this includes those people who swear by the name of the Lord, yet who have no intention of keeping their oaths. Taking false oaths demonstrates a lack of respect for God. Essentially, what you're thinking is I can use God to get what I want, and I don't have to worry about God doing anything about it.

Total lack of respect, total lack of fear for the Lord. And Jesus, he addresses this one directly in the New Testament. And when talking about the 10 commandments and the sermon on the mount, this is the aspect of the third commandment that he focuses on.

Again, you've heard that it was said by those of old, you shall not swear falsely, but you shall perform to the Lord what you are sworn. But I say to you, don't take any oath at all, either by heaven, for it's a throne of God, or by the earth, for it's his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it's the city of the great king. Do not take an oath by your head because you cannot make one hair white or black.

That while you say simply be yes or no, anything more than this comes from evil. So Jesus' instructions regarding this are, yeah, you've heard it said, don't go breaking your oaths. Don't go saying you're going to do something in the name of the Lord and then not do it.

Jesus says, well, really, if you're a person of integrity, you don't really need to make an oath at all. You know, your yes should be good enough. Your no should be good enough.

And so don't go trying to make these oaths. And he uses a principle we call metonymy, where two things that are associated by nature kind of get associated in a rhetorical sense here, you know, where he's talking about heaven is, don't swear by

heaven, he says. At this point in Jewish history, they were already inserting the word heaven as a kind of metaphor, rather than an epithet for God, rather than saying the Lord.

So instead of saying, you know, the Lord shall provide for your needs, they would say heaven shall provide for your needs. We still do that today, don't we? You know, but it wasn't for them. It was a way of avoiding saying the name of the Lord.

Right. So, Jesus says, don't go swearing by heaven because essentially that's still the same thing, swearing by the Lord. But Jesus says, just be people of integrity.

Don't go trying to make yourself sound sincere if you don't need to. So it is better not to swear at all. And this is James as well, James echoing Jesus here.

But above all, my brothers do not swear either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath. But let your yes be yes and your no be no so, that you may not fall under condemnation.

So James echoing there the words of his Lord, as he often does in very practical terms, that oaths are essentially a kind of a dangerous territory to be treading upon. Yet another way to misuse God's name, and this is one that we might not think about very much because it doesn't seem to be as it doesn't seem to have as much immediate application in our society. But the use of God's name in magic and it was forbidden to use God's name in magic spells.

And yet we find that it was often done. We don't have a ton of evidence for this in Old Testament times. We know that it happened.

We have a lot more evidence for it in New Testament times. Since a name is an extension of a person, magicians would often use the names of spirits in spells. And we have, again, lots and lots of spells from Babylon, lots of spells from Egypt.

And one of the major aspects of those spells is that they employ the names of gods and spirits as a method of trying to manipulate them. And it's kind of interesting the way it's often used. It's that the names are often run together or they're kind of mixed up.

And this is associated with a lot of interesting developments. Abracadabra. Abracadabra is a phrase, of course, which we associate with magicians and typically with magic shows, but originally was used much more seriously in magic.

It has been theorized, and I think it's probably a pretty good theory, that Abracadabra actually is a corruption of the Aramaic phrase for in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. So and yeah, Ab, his father, the spirit is

Aracham, and we have and the son, of course, Bar. So, Abracadabra, this is very much the way that they would oftentimes use names in magic spells, as they would kind of mix them up and then make little rhymes and things of this sort.

We see this quite often. And this would be another way of using God's name in a disrespectful manner. And we find this in execration texts, execration texts.

We've got a lot of these kinds of things, Aramaic execration bowls. We have also texts, but the bowls were the fun ones, because what they would do is they would write the names of their enemies and these bowls, and then they would use the name of some God that they would invoke to bring a curse upon them. And then they would take the bowls and they would smash the bowls as a kind of sympathetic magic, a way of showing what they wanted to happen to their enemies.

And execration basically means cursing. So again, like I say, the names of deities were often invoked in these things. Names of powerful spirits are often used to order less powerful spirits.

And this is if any of you are fans of like sword and sorcery fantasy type novels, we see there's a lot where some magician will use the name of some great spirit in order to compel some demon to do his will. And that was kind of the sort of thing that, again, goes way, way back to ancient times. In a way, it's a kind of perverse parody of prayer.

And, you know, Jesus warned us that when we pray, we shouldn't use meaningless repetitions like the pagans do. You know, we shouldn't be doing these kinds of sing-song things that were really more of a magic kind of thing rather than an actual spiritual kind of thing. So magic, in a way, invokes the gods, uses the gods in a way that is disrespectful because it does not respect the gods' power.

It doesn't respect the god's reputation. Rather, it tries to employ the power invested in the name of the divine being for one's own selfish ends. So, almost certainly that's part of what this commandment had in mind, even though this one doesn't have as much clarity from the Old Testament.

It is very clear from later times, from the intertestamental period, and from Jewish magical texts, of which we have quite a few. A little bit of trivia that blew me away when I first learned this. In Roman magic of the Common Era, as we call it, they invoked the names of many deities.

But the name that was used more often and appears more often in Roman magic texts than any other is the name Yahweh. The Romans apparently thought that the secret name of the Lord, which the Jews were so careful to protect, must have some kind of real superpower. And so they invoked it frequently in their own magic texts.

Kind of remarkable and ironic when you think about it. Modern equivalents of all three of these practices continue in our own day. This commandment, even though you know, it sounds kind of, you know, you should not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain, sounds kind of old-fashioned.

This kind of thing continues very much in our own day. And the attitudes which are invoked here also continue in our own day. We're not just talking about profanity here.

Blasphemy. We've talked about how blasphemy can refer to besmirching the reputation of God as well as besmirching the name of God. You know, this one kind of fell out of phase, out of, there was a time when deists and even atheists, well, there was a time when there weren't many atheists.

It's kind of interesting that Voltaire, who was a deist, was very, very resentful of atheists because they thought that they gave the whole anti-God movement a bad name. But atheism was frequently considered a kind of insanity up until the 19th century or so. But in our day, the atheists have come out of the closet and have become openly mocking of Christianity and of beliefs in God.

And mocking in ways that are not intelligent or not, and not nearly as clever as they think they are. You know, why Jesus should be so funny, I really don't know, but they seem to think so. Some of the books that have been written refer to God as the most vile character in the history of all literature, and so on and so forth.

Those kinds of things which besmirch God's character and his acts, as well as those which mock God's name, I believe, are violations of this commandment. Indeed. Now, it doesn't have the same kind of importance in our day.

We do not live in a theocracy. We don't have to worry about maintaining the kind of national unity. If this kind of thing were happening within the church, if people within the church were mocking God and mocking God's name, I think that would be an entirely different matter.

Since it's the people outside the church, I'm not sure, I mean, they're not bound by the commandments anyway. Not that any of us really are bound by the commandments, but they're not answerable to the Ten Commandments. So we can tell them, you know, you're taking the name of the Lord in vain.

You're breaking the third commandment. And they would probably reply, so what? And to a certain extent, I have to agree with them because, you know, they're not part of that covenant community. So let them do what they want, and they can live with the consequences.

But yeah, I mean, it clearly undermines, in many ways, faith in God. And it undermines the beliefs of those people who might be struggling, who might be fragile. And it's hurtful, but it's effective.

And I wonder, you know, if it's not in some way some new calculated tool of Satan. And well, you know, trying to be respectful of God and trying to argue logically, that didn't work, so let's just get insulting. False oath.

I swear to God that I shall do everything in my power to lower your taxes. Yeah, people might invoke God's name in order to sound sincere, and yet those people might have no piety really to speak of. And of course, most commonly, we associate this with politicians, but there are certainly a lot of other people who would do the same kind of thing.

People who want to sound sincere, who want to convince you that they will follow through on what they're saying they're going to do, will oftentimes invoke the name of God in our day and age. It's not just politicians. I had a young couple that I counseled a while ago who had a very, very troubled relationship.

And these two didn't have a lot of experience in church, but they had come to my church, started coming to my church, and then started coming to my office for marriage counseling. And it was always one of these, he said, she said kind of things. Whenever they would have a fight, whenever they, and sometimes it would actually be physical fights.

Whenever these things would happen, he would tell me his story, and he'd say, I swear to God, this is what happened. And then she would give her account, and she'd say, I swear to God, this is what happened. And they'd go back and forth, each one of them telling me a very different story from the other, each one swearing to God that what they were saying was true.

Why did they do that? Because, of course, they wanted to sound sincere. They wanted to convince me that they were the ones who were telling the truth. And probably neither one of them was telling the truth, but they wanted to sound as if they truly meant it.

And so they used God's name in an empty manner in order to try to convince me of their rectitude in the circumstances. Yeah, people still kind of do this sort of thing today. People use God's name for their own personal gain, as if they were doing magic spells sometimes.

Maybe we don't worry or think so much about magic. It probably does still happen, but it's not a big deal these days. But on a far larger scale and far more significant is

those people who use God's name in various ways to bring about their own personal benefit.

And some of these things we can think about would be, for instance, you know, the Crusades, where greedy lords and greedy clergy would sometimes invoke the name of God and God's honor in order to incite people to go out and fight against their enemies. And they wrap their greed in piety. They enlist unsuspecting people into their wickedness by using the name of God.

And I think I can add here in vain. How many politicians have built their careers by appealing to people's religious sensibilities? How many people have tried to build their ministries by using God's name in ways that don't really reflect a true kind of respect for the Lord? You know, it's hard to imagine the depths of cynicism that could lead somebody to think that becoming a minister is how they can make themselves rich. But they are using God's name in vain in those cases.

Another thing too, you ever been in church board meetings where people are convinced that something that they want some cause that they that they believe in has to be God's cause, and they will invoke God's name and again, attach God's name to whatever it is that they think is the important thing. I've been in meetings where God wants us to boycott carrots, you know. Maybe he does, I have my doubts.

But the point is that there are so many cases where people will attach God's name in a selfish manner to their own causes. A number of years ago, I was a member of a church that was located in a place that was right near a college campus. It seemed like a prime place for the church to be able to reach out and do great ministry on the college campus.

But a lot of the people who were in the church didn't feel that they had the skills or even the interest in ministering to college students. So there was a very strong faction in the church that wanted to sell the building and buy a new building outside of town. They were sure that they could get a very good price for the building because it was prime, prime property.

But there was an anti-move faction there. And the anti-move faction was really kind of the more pious group. They were saying, the Lord gave us this building, and the Lord doesn't want us to move.

And so their preferences became the will of God. I think that is perilously close to taking God's name in vain. What it really comes down to is a question of humility, recognizing who God is, recognizing who we are, and recognizing that we do not use God to attain our ends.

Rather, we are to allow God to use us to obtain his ends. We need to recognize that God can be dangerous, you know, love the line from the Chronicles of Narnia where Mr. Beaver explains to the children that Aslan is not a tame lion. No, he does not serve us.

We serve him. And so, we need to recognize that fact that co-opting God to our causes is essential. Essentially, I believe that probably the most prominent way that we break this third commandment in our world and in the church today.

This is Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino in his teaching on the Ten Commandments. This is session 4, Commandment 3: What's in a Name?