

Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino, Ten Commandments

Session 4, Commandment 3: What's in a Name?¹⁾

Abstract, 2) Briefing Document, 3) Study Guide, 4) FAQs

1. Abstract:

Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino's "The Ten Commandments, Session 4: Commandment 3, What's in a Name?" **explores the third commandment: not to take the Lord's name in vain.** He begins by **discussing the ancient understanding of names** as extensions of a person's nature or reputation, citing biblical examples like Abram becoming Abraham and Nabal meaning "fool." Tomasino explains that **taking God's name in vain encompasses more than just casual profanity; it includes blasphemy**, which is slandering God's reputation or using His name disrespectfully. Furthermore, **the commandment forbids breaking vows made in God's name and using His name in magic or for personal gain**, highlighting how such actions demonstrate a lack of respect and can undermine faith. Ultimately, **Tomasino emphasizes that misusing God's name for selfish ends, even within the church, is a critical violation** of this commandment.

2. Briefing Document: Briefing Document: The Third Commandment - What's in a Name?

Source: Excerpts from "Tomasino_10Commands_Ses04_English.pdf" by Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino.

I. The Profound Significance of Names in Ancient Thought

Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino's session on the Third Commandment, "What's in a Name?", highlights the profound importance of names, particularly in the ancient Near Eastern world, contrasting sharply with modern perceptions.

- **Beyond a Mere Handle:** Unlike Juliet's dismissive "What's in a name?" (Tomasino, p. 1), ancient cultures viewed names as deeply intertwined with one's nature, identity, and destiny. Names carried "a lot of baggage" and were

"more than just a handle or a convenient thing to call somebody" (Tomasino, p. 1).

- **Reflection of Character and Nature:** The changing of names upon entering new relationships (e.g., Daniel, Abram to Abraham, Jacob's multiple significances) signifies a transformation in identity or status. Abram's name change to Abraham, indicating a new covenant relationship with God, illustrates this (Tomasino, p. 1).
- The story of Nabal and Abigail explicitly states this connection: "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" (Tomasino, p. 2).
- **Extension and Vulnerability:** Names were considered "almost like an extension of a person" (Tomasino, p. 2). Revealing one's name, especially for divine beings, implied vulnerability, as it could then be misused (Tomasino, p. 2). God's initial reluctance to reveal the name Yahweh to Moses ("I am that which I am") underscores this protective stance (Tomasino, p. 2).
- **Reputation and Action:** In Hebrew, a "name" could also mean "reputation." The phrase "name of the Lord" in the Psalms, when referring to being praised, often refers to God's "reputation," "acts," and "nature," rather than merely the pronunciation of the word (Tomasino, p. 3-4).

II. The Third Commandment: "You Shall Not Take the Name of the Lord, Your God in Vain"

The core of the briefing revolves around understanding this commandment, whose meaning is often misconstrued in modern times.

- **"Nasa" - To Lift Up, Use, Employ:** The Hebrew verb "Nasa," translated as "take," signifies "to lift up, to carry, it can mean to use, it can mean to employ" (Tomasino, p. 3). It refers to the *manner* in which the name is used, not merely its utterance.
- **"Shvah" - Emptiness, Triviality, Falsehood:** The word "in vain" translates from the Hebrew "shvah," meaning "emptiness or triviality," "no weight,"

"meaningless," or even "a falsehood" (Tomasino, p. 4). This forms the basis for the various ways the commandment is violated.

- **Specific Referent:** The commandment primarily refers to "Yahweh," the revealed covenant name of God (Tomasino, p. 3). While modern extensions include "God" or "Adonai" (leading to practices like writing "G-d" in conservative Jewish circles), the original intent was specific to Yahweh (Tomasino, p. 3).

III. Key Violations of the Third Commandment

The source details three primary ways the name of the Lord is taken "in vain," along with modern equivalents.

A. **Blasphemy:** Deliberately insulting or slandering God.

- **Verbal Insult (Literal Name):** This involves "using the divine name in an insulting fashion" (Tomasino, p. 4). The Leviticus 24:10 passage demonstrates this with a man stoned to death for "blasphemed the name and cursed" (Tomasino, p. 5). The Mishnah interprets this as explicitly uttering the divine name (Tomasino, p. 5).
- **Besmirching God's Reputation:** This extends to speaking "evil things about the Lord" or "slandering God" (Tomasino, p. 4, 5). Psalm 139 illustrates this parallelism, equating "speaking against you with malicious intent" with "take your name in vain" (Tomasino, p. 5-6).
- **Treasonous Nature:** Blasphemy is not merely about God's ego, but about its impact on the community. For ancient Israel, it was "a kind of treason because what it is doing is undermining the faith of the nation in their God" (Tomasino, p. 7). This protects "God's people" and their "trust in the Lord" (Tomasino, p. 7).
- **Modern Equivalents:** Openly mocking Christianity or God's character, as seen in some atheist literature, is considered a modern form of blasphemy. While it doesn't carry the same legal implications in non-theocratic societies, it still "undermines, in many ways, faith in God" and is "hurtful" (Tomasino, p. 11-12).

B. Breaking of Vows / False Oaths: Swearing by God's name with no intention of keeping the promise.

- **Solemnity of Oaths:** In ancient Israel, vows were encouraged to be made "in the name of the Lord" (Deuteronomy 6:13), signifying utmost seriousness and commitment (Tomasino, p. 7).
- **Profaning God's Name:** Leviticus 19:12 explicitly states, "you shall not swear by my name falsely. And so, profane the name of the Lord, your God" (Tomasino, p. 7). This is a "total lack of respect, total lack of fear for the Lord" (Tomasino, p. 8).
- **Jesus' Teaching:** Jesus emphasizes integrity, advocating for a simple "yes" or "no" instead of oaths. "But I say to you, don't take any oath at all... Let what you say simply be yes or no; anything more than this comes from evil" (Tomasino, p. 8-9). This is echoed by James (Tomasino, p. 9).
- **Modern Equivalents:** Politicians making promises "I swear to God that I shall do everything in my power to lower your taxes" with no genuine intent, or individuals in personal disputes swearing to God while knowingly being untruthful, are common examples (Tomasino, p. 12).

C. Using God's Name in Magic: Employing the divine name to manipulate or coerce, rather than out of reverence.

- **Name as a Tool for Manipulation:** Ancient magicians used the names of spirits and gods in spells to control or compel them (Tomasino, p. 9). The theorized origin of "Abracadabra" from "in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" illustrates this practice (Tomasino, p. 9-10).
- **Perverse Parody of Prayer:** This practice is seen as a "perverse parody of prayer," disrespecting divine power by attempting to "employ the power invested in the name of the divine being for one's own selfish ends" (Tomasino, p. 10).
- **Historical Context:** While less direct evidence in the Old Testament, later Jewish magical texts and Roman magic (which frequently invoked Yahweh) demonstrate this practice (Tomasino, p. 10).

- **Modern Equivalents:** Though literal magic spells are less common, the principle applies to "people who use God's name in various ways to bring about their own personal benefit" (Tomasino, p. 12-13). This includes:
- **Co-opting for Selfish Ends:** Greedy individuals (e.g., Crusades, cynical ministers) using God's name to "incite people to go out and fight against their enemies" or to build careers/ministries for wealth (Tomasino, p. 13).
- **Attaching God's Name to Personal Preferences:** "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" (Tomasino, p. 13). This can manifest in church disputes where personal desires are framed as "the will of God."

IV. Overarching Principle: Humility and God's Sovereignty

At its core, the violation of the Third Commandment stems from a lack of humility and a misunderstanding of God's nature.

- **God is Not "Tame":** The crucial takeaway is the recognition 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" (Tomasino, p. 14).
- **Serving God's Ends, Not Our Own:** The commandment challenges the human tendency to "use God to attain our ends" (Tomasino, p. 14). Instead, the proper relationship is to "allow God to use us to obtain his ends" (Tomasino, p. 14).
- **Co-opting God is a Primary Violation:** "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" (Tomasino, p. 14).

4. Study Guide: Understanding the Third Commandment: What's in a Name?

This study guide is designed to help you review and deepen your understanding of Dr. Anthony J. Tomasino's lecture on the Third Commandment.

I. Key Concepts and Themes

A. The Significance of Names in the Ancient World

- **More than a handle:** Names were not merely labels; they were considered extensions of a person's nature, character, and even destiny.
- **New relationships, new names:** Changes in names often signified a new relationship or status (e.g., Abram to Abraham, Jacob's wrestling encounter).
- **Revelation of character:** Names could reveal inherent traits (e.g., Nabal meaning "fool").
- **Vulnerability:** Revealing one's name could make one vulnerable to misuse.

B. The Nature of God's Name (Yahweh)

- **Covenant Name:** Yahweh is presented as God's revealed covenant name to Moses, distinct from general titles like "Elohim" or "Adonai."
- **Extension of God's Nature/Reputation:** The Lord's "name" also encompasses His reputation, character, and actions. Praising God's name means acknowledging His deeds and nature, not just uttering the word.
- **Protection of the Name:** God's reluctance to immediately reveal His name to Moses, and the angel's refusal to reveal his name to Jacob, underscore the protective nature associated with divine names.

C. Understanding "Take the Name in Vain" (Nasa Shvah)

- **Nasa:** Hebrew verb meaning "to lift up," "to carry," "to use," "to employ," or "to utter." It does not inherently mean abuse.
- **Shvah:** Hebrew word meaning "emptiness," "triviality," "meaningless," or "falsehood."
- **Core Meaning:** Using God's name in a way that is empty, trivial, meaningless, or false; treating it without the weight or respect it deserves.

D. Specific Ways the Third Commandment Can Be Broken

1. **Blasphemy:**

- **Definition:** To slander, deliberately insult, or speak evil things about God.
- **Literal Name Blasphemy:** Using the divine name (Yahweh) in an insulting or mocking fashion (e.g., the Leviticus 24:10 incident where uttering the name was considered a grave offense in some interpretations).
- **Reputational Blasphemy:** Besmirching God's character or reputation by speaking maliciously against Him (e.g., Psalm 139, Jesus's trial for claiming equality with God, mocking Christianity/God's character today).
- **Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit:** A hardened heart that refuses to acknowledge God's work and attributes it to evil, indicating an unyielding attitude.
- **Reason for Seriousness:** Not God's "fragile ego," but to protect the faith and trust of the community in God, preventing spiritual treason.

1. **Breaking Vows/False Oaths:**

- **Context:** In the Old Testament, vows were often made "in the name of the Lord."
- **Violation:** Swearing by God's name falsely, without intention of keeping the oath, or to manipulate others.
- **Jesus' Teaching (Sermon on the Mount):** Encourages integrity where one's "yes" and "no" are sufficient, eliminating the need for oaths altogether, as all things are ultimately connected to God.
- **Modern Relevance:** Politicians, individuals in relationships, or anyone invoking God's name to sound sincere while lacking genuine intent or piety.

1. **Using God's Name in Magic/Manipulation:**

- **Ancient Practice:** Magicians used names of spirits/deities to manipulate them for selfish ends (e.g., execration texts, Abracadabra's potential origin).
- **Violation:** Employing the power invested in God's name for personal gain, without true reverence or respect for His power and reputation.

- **Modern Equivalents:** Using God's name to incite others for greedy/selfish causes (e.g., Crusades, self-enriching ministries, co-opting God's will for personal preferences in church decisions).
- **Underlying Issue:** A lack of humility, attempting to use God for one's own ends rather than allowing God to use us for His.

E. Modern Applications and Nuances

- **Profanity vs. Commandment:** The commandment goes beyond casual profanity; it speaks to the deeper issue of disrespecting God's character and power.
- **Theocracy vs. Modern Society:** The direct consequences (like stoning) are linked to ancient Israel's theocratic structure. Outside the covenant community, direct "breaking" of the commandment may be seen differently, though its effects on faith and respect remain.
- **Satan's Tools:** Mockery and undermining faith can be seen as calculated tools to discredit God.
- **Humility:** The overarching principle is recognizing God's sovereignty and not co-opting Him for personal agendas.

II. Quiz: Short Answer Questions

Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. According to Dr. Tomasino, how did ancient people view names differently from modern individuals, and how did this understanding influence their perception of God's name?
2. Explain the significance of the name changes for figures like Abram and Jacob in the Bible, as discussed in the lecture.
3. What does the Hebrew word "Nasa" mean in the context of the Third Commandment, and why is this understanding important for its interpretation?
4. Define the Hebrew word "Shvah" and explain its contribution to the meaning of "taking God's name in vain."

5. How is "blasphemy" understood in the context of the Third Commandment, encompassing both literal and reputational aspects?
6. Explain why the Israelites were encouraged to swear "by the name of the Lord" when making vows, and what constituted a violation of this practice.
7. How did Jesus' teaching on oaths in the Sermon on the Mount relate to the Third Commandment, and what was his core message?
8. Describe the ancient practice of using divine names in magic spells and explain why this practice was considered a violation of the Third Commandment.
9. According to Dr. Tomasino, what is the primary reason the Bible takes blasphemy so seriously, beyond God's "ego"?
10. What is identified as arguably the most prominent modern way people break the Third Commandment, particularly within the church?

III. Quiz Answer Key

1. Ancient people viewed names as deeply connected to a person's nature and character, not just a label. This meant God's name was seen as an extension of His divine nature, making its use a serious matter reflecting respect or disrespect for God Himself.
2. Name changes like Abram to Abraham (exalted father to father of a multitude) or Jacob's renaming after wrestling signified a new, deeper covenant relationship with God and a transformation in their identity or destiny, indicating God's authority over their lives.
3. "Nasa" means to lift up, carry, use, or utter. This is important because it indicates the commandment is not just about *abusing* the name, but about *how* the name is used – it must be lifted up and carried with due weight and respect, not trivially.
4. "Shvah" signifies emptiness, triviality, meaninglessness, or falsehood. When combined with "Nasa," it means not to use or utter God's name in an empty, trivial, meaningless, or false manner, implying a lack of reverence and sincerity.

5. Blasphemy involves slandering or deliberately insulting God. This can mean literally using the divine name in a mocking or disrespectful way, or it can refer to besmirching God's character, reputation, or actions by speaking evil or false things about Him.
6. Israelites were encouraged to swear by the Lord's name to affirm the seriousness and truthfulness of their vows, acknowledging God as the ultimate witness and enforcer. Violating this meant swearing falsely, making an oath without intent to keep it, thus profaning God's name by associating it with a lie.
7. Jesus' teaching emphasized complete integrity, stating that a simple "yes" or "no" should suffice, and anything more (like swearing oaths) "comes from evil." His message was that genuine honesty makes oaths unnecessary, as all truth ultimately stems from God.
8. Ancient magicians used divine names in spells to manipulate spirits or deities for personal gain, as names were seen as extensions of a person's power. This was forbidden because it treated God's name as a tool for selfish manipulation rather than revering His sovereign power.
9. The Bible takes blasphemy seriously not because of God's "fragile ego," but because speaking against God undermines the faith and trust of the community in Him. It's akin to spiritual treason, which can destabilize the entire covenant community.
10. The most prominent modern way people break the Third Commandment, especially within the church, is by co-opting God to their own causes. This involves attaching God's name or will to personal preferences, selfish agendas, or greedy motives, effectively using God for self-benefit rather than serving His ends.

IV. Essay Format Questions

1. Discuss the multi-faceted understanding of "name" in the ancient Near East and its implications for interpreting the Third Commandment. How does this compare to a modern understanding of names, and why is this ancient perspective crucial for grasping the commandment's depth?

2. Analyze the three primary ways Dr. Tomasino identifies the Third Commandment as being broken: blasphemy, false oaths, and the use of God's name in magic/manipulation. For each, provide specific examples from the text and explain the underlying principle or attitude that constitutes the violation.
3. Dr. Tomasino argues that the severity of the Third Commandment (e.g., stoning for blasphemy) is not due to God's ego but to protecting "God's people." Elaborate on this argument, explaining how speaking against God or misusing His name could be detrimental to the ancient Israelite community.
4. Compare and contrast the Old Testament's instruction on swearing oaths with Jesus's teaching on the same topic in the Sermon on the Mount. What continuity and discontinuity exist, and what does Jesus's emphasis on "yes" and "no" reveal about the deeper meaning of the Third Commandment?
5. Beyond literal profanity, discuss the "modern equivalents" of breaking the Third Commandment, as presented by Dr. Tomasino. Focus on the concept of "co-opting God to our causes" and provide examples from political, religious, and personal spheres, explaining how these actions constitute "taking God's name in vain."

V. Glossary of Key Terms

- **Abram/Abraham:** Biblical patriarch whose name was changed from Abram ("exalted father") to Abraham ("father of a multitude") by God, signifying a new covenant relationship and destiny.
- **Adonai:** A Hebrew title meaning "Lord" or "Master," often used as a substitute for Yahweh by observant Jews to avoid uttering the divine name.
- **Ancient Near East:** A historical region and cultural area in West Asia and Northeast Africa, where the concept of names holding significant power and connection to a person's nature was prevalent.
- **Aslan:** A character from C.S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*, used as an analogy to represent God as powerful and not "tame," emphasizing that humans serve Him, not the other way around.

- **Blasphemy:** The act of insulting, slandering, or showing contempt or lack of reverence for God or sacred things. In the context of the Third Commandment, it can be literal (misusing the divine name) or reputational (speaking evil of God's character).
- **Covenant:** A solemn agreement, often between God and humanity, establishing a relationship and outlining responsibilities and promises. God's revealed name, Yahweh, is His covenant name.
- **Elohim:** A common Hebrew word for "God" or "gods," a general title for divinity, distinct from the specific covenant name Yahweh.
- **Execration Texts/Bowls:** Ancient texts or artifacts (often bowls) used in magic, where names of enemies were written and curses invoked, often using the names of deities, sometimes smashed as sympathetic magic.
- **Jacob (Yaakov):** Biblical patriarch whose name means "one who grasps" or "heel-grabber," reflecting his birth story and character. He wrestled with a divine being, who blessed him but did not reveal his name.
- **Mishnah:** An authoritative collection of rabbinic traditions and interpretations of Jewish law, compiled around the 3rd century AD. It interpreted blasphemy to require the actual utterance of the divine name.
- **Metonymy:** A figure of speech in which a thing or concept is referred to by the name of something closely associated with that thing or concept (e.g., "heaven" for God, as discussed by Jesus).
- **Nabal:** A biblical figure whose name literally means "fool" in Hebrew, and whose foolish character is highlighted in the story with David and Abigail.
- **Nasa:** A common Hebrew verb translated as "to lift up," "to carry," "to use," "to employ," or "to utter," in the context of the Third Commandment.
- **Oaths/Vows:** Solemn declarations or promises, often made by invoking a divine name, to guarantee sincerity or commitment. Breaking such oaths was a serious offense.
- **Profane (Verb):** To treat (something sacred) with irreverence or disrespect. In the context of the commandment, to profane God's name is to use it in a common, unworthy, or false manner.

- **Reputation:** The beliefs or opinions that are generally held about someone or something. In the context of the Third Commandment, God's "name" often refers to His character and reputation, not just the literal word.
- **Shvah:** A Hebrew word meaning "emptiness," "triviality," "meaningless," or "falsehood," used to describe the manner in which God's name is not to be used ("in vain").
- **Son of Man:** A significant title used by Jesus, referring to a figure in the book of Daniel who is given authority and dominion, interpreted by many in Jewish circles as being equal to God.
- **Theocracy:** A system of government in which priests rule in the name of God or a god. Ancient Israel operated as a theocracy, which influenced the severity of laws concerning offenses against God.
- **Yahweh:** The revealed covenant name of God in the Old Testament, given to Moses. It is considered the specific divine name in the Third Commandment.

4) FAQs

1. What is the significance of "name" in ancient cultures, particularly in the biblical context?

In ancient cultures, names were not merely labels but were deeply connected to a person's nature, character, and even destiny. They were considered an extension of the individual, and revealing one's name could imply a degree of vulnerability or a new relationship. This is evident in biblical stories where individuals like Abram and Jacob receive new names from God, signifying a profound shift in their relationship or identity. For example, Abram's name, meaning "exalted father," was changed to Abraham, which, while similar in meaning, symbolized his new covenant relationship with God. Similarly, the story of Nabal (whose name means "fool") and Abigail highlights how a name could directly reflect a person's character. Even divine beings, as shown in Jacob's wrestling with the angel, were protective of their names, recognizing the power and vulnerability inherent in revealing them.

2. How did the ancient understanding of "name" influence the Third Commandment, "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain"?

Given the ancient understanding of names as extensions of a person's nature and reputation, the Third Commandment takes on a much deeper meaning than just avoiding casual profanity. The Hebrew word "Nasa," translated as "take," can mean to lift up, carry, use, or employ, indicating how the name is used rather than just abused. The "name of the Lord" primarily refers to Yahweh, God's revealed covenant name, but can also extend to titles like Elohim or Adonai. More significantly, "name" in Hebrew can also mean reputation. Therefore, "taking the name of the Lord in vain" means to treat God's reputation, character, and revealed being as empty, trivial, meaningless, or false. This understanding broadens the scope of the commandment beyond mere verbal utterance to encompass actions and attitudes that undermine God's integrity.

3. What does "in vain" mean in the context of the Third Commandment?

The phrase "in vain" translates the Hebrew word "shvah," which conveys a sense of emptiness, triviality, meaninglessness, or falsehood. It refers to something used or considered to have no weight or significance. In the context of the Third Commandment, taking God's name "in vain" means using it in a way that treats God or His reputation as something insignificant, empty, or false. This includes actions that cheapen God's authority or suggest that His words or character are unreliable. It's not just about uttering the name but about the attitude and intent behind its use, implying a lack of reverence and respect for who God is.

4. What are the primary ways the sources identify "taking God's name in vain"?

The sources identify three primary ways of taking God's name in vain:

- **Blasphemy:** This involves slandering or deliberately insulting God, either by literally using the divine name in an insulting way or by speaking evil things about God's character and reputation. The Bible illustrates this with the stoning of the man who blasphemed the Lord's name in Leviticus and Jesus' condemnation for blasphemy by equating himself with God. Blasphemy against the Holy Spirit is also presented as a hardening of the heart against God's work. This is considered a form of treason, undermining the faith and trust of the community in God.

- **Breaking Vows/False Oaths:** Swearing by God's name with no intention of keeping the oath is a serious violation. In ancient Israel, people were encouraged to swear by the Lord's name when making vows, signifying a deep commitment and invoking God as a witness. If such an oath was made falsely, it profaned God's name, demonstrating a lack of respect and a manipulative intent to use God for personal gain. Jesus reinforced this by advising against taking oaths altogether, emphasizing that a person of integrity should simply let their "yes be yes" and "no be no."
- **Using God's Name in Magic:** Employing God's name in magic spells was strictly forbidden. Names were seen as possessing power, and magicians often invoked the names of deities or spirits to manipulate them for selfish ends. This practice, common in ancient Near Eastern magic, is viewed as a perverse parody of prayer, disrespecting God's power and reputation by attempting to control Him for personal benefit. The frequent use of "Yahweh" in Roman magic texts illustrates this misuse.

5. Why is God "upset" about people taking His name in vain? Is it because of a "fragile ego"?

God's concern over His name being taken in vain is not due to a "fragile ego." Instead, it is a matter of protecting His people and maintaining their faith and trust in Him. In the context of ancient Israel, speaking against God or undermining His reputation was akin to treason. It threatened to undermine the nation's faith in God's ability to deliver and sustain them, which could be detrimental to the entire community. Therefore, the commandment serves as a safeguard for the well-being and unity of God's people, ensuring they maintain a steadfast trust in the Lord and His unwavering promises.

6. How do modern equivalents of taking God's name in vain manifest today?

Modern equivalents of taking God's name in vain continue in various forms:

- **Blasphemy:** While less tied to a theocratic state, openly mocking Christianity or God's character and acts, especially in ways that are not intelligent or clever, is seen as a violation. Within the church, mocking God or His name from within the covenant community would be especially problematic.

- **False Oaths:** Politicians or individuals who invoke God's name to sound sincere, promising things they have no intention or ability to deliver, are taking God's name in vain. This is a common tactic to gain trust or manipulate others, using God's name as an empty assurance. Even in personal interactions, swearing to God while knowingly being dishonest falls under this category.
- **Using God's Name for Personal Gain/Manipulation:** This is arguably the most prominent modern misuse. It involves co-opting God to one's own selfish causes, similar to using magic spells. Examples include religious crusades fueled by greed, politicians appealing to religious sensibilities for career advancement, or individuals building ministries for wealth. It also extends to church board meetings or community discussions where personal preferences are presented as God's will ("God wants us to boycott carrots," or "The Lord gave us this building and doesn't want us to move"). This demonstrates a lack of humility and a desire to use God to attain personal ends rather than allowing God to use oneself for His purposes.

7. What is Jesus' teaching regarding oaths in the Sermon on the Mount?

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus addresses the issue of false oaths, going beyond the Old Testament prohibition against swearing falsely. He instructs his followers: "Do not take any oath at all, either by heaven... or by the earth... or by Jerusalem... Do not take an oath by your head... But let what you say simply be 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil." Jesus emphasizes that a person of integrity should not need to make oaths to prove their sincerity. Their simple "yes" or "no" should be sufficient. He highlights that swearing by things associated with God (like heaven or Jerusalem) is still effectively swearing by God. His teaching promotes a life of such integrity that oaths become unnecessary, as any attempt to enhance one's sincerity beyond simple truthfulness may indicate a lack of genuine trustworthiness.

8. What is the overarching principle that unites the different forms of taking God's name in vain?

The overarching principle that unites all forms of taking God's name in vain is a fundamental **lack of respect and humility** towards God. It signifies a failure to recognize God's true nature and authority, treating Him as trivial, meaningless, or as

a tool for personal manipulation rather than as the sovereign Lord. Whether through slandering His reputation (blasphemy), making false promises in His name, or using His name to advance selfish agendas (like in magic or political/personal gain), the core issue is an attempt to co-opt God for human ends rather than submitting to His will. As the sources emphasize, it's about recognizing that "God can be dangerous," that "He does not serve us; we serve Him." Therefore, the commandment calls for a profound reverence and recognition of God's transcendence and His ultimate purpose.