



# One Page Sermon

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#### Words of Life: Do not misuse God's name

The name of God in Scripture is four letters in Hebrew, roughly transliterated to English as YHWH. This is a difficult thing to translate directly but YHWH can mean "I am that I am" or "I am all" or simply "I am." Most now use the word "Yahweh," others (based on mistaken Hebrew translations) use the term "Jehovah."

In most English Bibles you will not see YHWH or Yahweh. Instead you will see The LORD (with Lord in all capitals). The reason dates back to a long-standing tradition to not break the third commandment, "Do not use the LORD your God's name as if it has no significance" (Exodus 20:7a CEB). Afraid to misuse the term YHWH, translators have since changed it to the LORD. Some people take it a step further, and refrain from typing the word God, and instead use G-d.

Yet using God's name in vain must run much deeper than typing and spelling. For many, the third commandment is a prohibition against swearing. When you stub your toe, get cut off in traffic, or get frustrated with your computer, do you shout "G. D.!"? This would be a case of misusing God's name, but if that is the extent to which you think about misusing God's name, I think you may be missing the point.

For these Israelites, there were two main applications for this commandment. The first was in incantations. Egyptian priests and magicians would use the names of the Egyptian gods to invoke power. Their names would be used in incantations and stories of great deeds done in the name of these gods were plentiful. Remember even, the story of Moses and the magicians dueling with staffs and snakes at the first confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh.

This commandment then, is a call to the Israelites to be a unique people who worship a unique God. God is not a god of incantations and spells. God's power cannot be borrowed or manipulated. We as Christians can call upon the power of the Holy Spirit, but this power is power to love, compassion, patience, kindness, and mercy. This is the power that we can call upon in God's name, not the power of coercion, force, or manipulation.

The second application is a more legal one. This helps us unpack the second half of the commandment. This is a call to not break oaths that were made in God's name. The

verse appears to pile on eternal judgment for anyone who misuses God's name. Instead, you can read this command as:

"Do not swear by God's name falsely. If you do, you will not be acquitted." Having trustworthy courts and prohibiting lying is an important part of a just society. This idea comes up again later in the Ten.

The last, arguably most important, and probably least considered aspect of not misusing God's name are the many ways we attribute the wrong things or justify evil "in the name of God"

Consider for a moment tragedy that someone might chalk up to "God's will." To assign God's will to things like cancer, accidental deaths, natural disasters, miscarriages, or mental illness is to misuse the name of God.

Even worse, great movements of evil such as slavery, subjugation of women, violence against LGBT people, genocide of Native peoples, and wars of conquest have all been justified by those who claimed they were doing God's will. More evil has been perpetrated in the name of God than perhaps any other single cause.

As Christians, we must remember that when we take that name, we are literally taking upon ourselves the name of God. This means that everything we do is done "in the name of God." Avoiding misuse of God's name is about much more than what you say when you stub your toe. More importantly, how might we honor God's name?

Take up the name of Christ and honor God through your words, deeds, and actions. Honor God with your kindness. Honor God with acts of grace and forgiveness and inclusion.

