



March 2, 2017
The Second Commandment

“For true honor to God’s name consists of looking to it for all consolation and therefore calling upon it. Thus...the heart by faith first gives God the honor due [God] and then the lips do so by confession.”

--Martin Luther, *Large Catechism*

Read Hosea 13:1-8

It’s an oldie, but a goodie...

A photographer, who was also a confirmed atheist, decided to go into the woods to get photos of the fall foliage. While snapping shots, the photographer heard a noise behind him, and whirled around to see a huge bear coming through the bushes.

He dropped his camera and ran. Looking behind him, he noticed the bear was gaining on him! He ran faster and tripped over a root. Rolling over onto his back, the man saw the bear rise to his full height and raise a huge paw. The atheist cried out, "Oh, God, no!"

The birds stopped chirping. The brook stopped babbling. The gentle breeze stopped. The bear froze with his paw in the air. A booming voice said, "For years you've doubted my very existence, but now that your life is in peril you call my name to help you. Why should I do so?"

The man thought for a moment, and said, "Yes, you are right. If you are God, then it would be hypocritical of me to become a Christian at this point in my life. But, do you think that you could at least make the bear a Christian for today?" The booming voice said, "Done."

Everything started again. Then the bear put his paws together, and bowed his massive head and said, "Dear Lord, please bless this food we are about to eat."

Today we meditate on the Second Commandment: “*You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God.*” Let’s boil that down. Don’t use God as a means to your ends. Don’t use God to guarantee free throws. Don’t use God to underwrite your political platform. Don’t use God as your “Get out of jail free” card. Don’t use God as a throwaway exclamation—“OMG!” Don’t use God as a surefire wealth-producing scheme.

Don’t use God.

Luther’s explanation of this commandment in the Small Catechism has a clear prohibition. We shall not use God’s name to “curse, swear, practice magic, lie, or deceive.” We might think that we never do such things. But take a few moments and check yourself. I suspect you will find times when you use God as a backdoor out of trouble.

Luther’s explanation includes the appropriate ways to use God’s name—“in every time of need to call on, pray to, praise and give thanks to God.”

We can see how the Second Commandment is built on the First Commandment. The right relationship with God is to fear, love and trust God above all things. So the right use of God’s name is to rely on God and call for God’s help in very time of need. Asking for help is how we treat God as our God.

Don’t use God. Depend on God.

Let’s pray. Dear God, send your Holy Spirit into my heart today to create the gift of faith. Lead me to pray to God in trust and to use God’s name in love. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Do something: Make a list of all the ways that you see people using God for personal gain today. Have you put any of your own behaviors on that list?

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