

The Second Commandment

You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain.

⁵⁰ The First Commandment has instructed the heart and taught the faith. This commandment now leads us forward and directs the mouth and tongue to God. **For the first things that spring from the heart and show themselves are words** [Matthew 12:34]. I have taught above how to answer the question “What does it mean to have a god?” Now you must simply learn to understand the meaning of this commandment and all the commandments, and to apply it to yourself.

⁵¹ If someone now asks, “How do you understand the Second Commandment?” or **“What is meant by taking God’s name in vain, or misusing God’s name?”** answer briefly in this way: **“It means misusing God’s name when we call upon the Lord God—no matter how—in order to deceive or do wrong of any kind.”** Therefore, this commandment makes this point: **God’s name must not be appealed to falsely, or taken upon the lips, while the heart knows well enough—or should know—that the truth of the matter is different. This is what happens with people who take oaths in court, where one side lies against the other.** ⁵² For God’s name cannot be misused worse than for the support of falsehood and deceit. Let this remain the exact German and simplest meaning of this commandment.

⁵³ From this everyone can easily see when and in how many ways God’s name is misused, although it is impossible to list all its misuses. But, to explain this in a few words, all misuse of the divine name happens first in worldly business and in matters that concern money, possessions, and honor. This applies publicly in court, in the market, or wherever else people make false oaths in God’s name or pledge their souls in any matter. This is especially common in marriage affairs, where two go and secretly get engaged to one another, and afterward, break their engagement.

⁵⁴ But the greatest abuse occurs in spiritual matters. These have to do with the conscience, when false preachers rise up and offer their lying vanities as God’s Word [Jonah 2:8].

⁵⁵ Look, all this is dressing up one’s self with God’s name, or making a pretty show, or claiming to be right. This is true whether it happens in common, worldly business or in higher, refined matters of faith and doctrine. Blasphemers also belong with the liars. I mean not just the most ordinary blasphemers, well known to everyone, who disgrace God’s name without fear. (These are not for us to discipline, but for the hangman.) **I also mean those who publicly disgrace the truth and God’s Word and hand it over to the devil. There is now no need to speak about this further.**

The Small Catechism The Second Commandment

You shall not misuse the name of the Lord, your 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.

Line 50

What Springs from the heart?

Discuss the relationship between what is in the heart and what comes from the mouth?

Lines 51-53

How is this commandment broken?

⁵⁶ Here, then, let us learn and take to heart the great importance of this commandment. Then, with all diligence, we may guard against and dread every misuse of the holy name as the greatest sin that can be committed outwardly. **For to lie and to deceive is in itself a great sin. But such a sin gets even worse when we try to justify our lie and seek to confirm it by calling on God's name and using His name as a cloak for shame [1 Peter 2:16], so that from a single lie a double lie results—no, many lies.**

⁵⁷ For this reason, too, God has added a solemn threat to this commandment, “For the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain” [Exodus 20:7]. This means that this sin shall not be pardoned for anyone or go unpunished. For just as He will not fail to avenge if anyone turns his heart from Him, so He will also not let His name be used to dress up a lie. ⁵⁸ **Now unfortunately, this sin is a common plague in all the world. There are so few people who do not use God's name for purposes of lying and all wickedness in contrast to those who trust in God alone with their heart.**

⁵⁹ By nature we all have within us this beautiful virtue, that whoever has committed a wrong would like to cover up and adorn his disgrace, so that no one may see it or know it. No one is so bold as to boast to all the world of the wickedness he has done. **All wish to act by stealth and without anyone being aware of what they do.** So, if anyone is caught sinning, God's name is dragged into the affair and must make the wickedness look like godliness, and the shame like honor. ⁶⁰ This is the common way of the world, which has covered all lands like a great flood. So we get what we seek and deserve as our reward: epidemics, wars, famines, raging fires, floods, wayward wives, children, servants, and all sorts of filth. Where else should so much misery come from? It is still a great mercy that the earth bears and supports us [Numbers 16:28–50].

⁶¹ **Therefore, above all things, our young people should have this Second Commandment earnestly pressed upon them [Deuteronomy 6:7]. They should be trained to hold this and the First Commandment in high regard. And whenever they sin, we must at once be after them with the rod [Proverbs 13:24]. We must hold the commandment before them, and constantly teach it, so that we bring them up not only with punishment, but also in reverence and fear of God [Ephesians 6:4].**

⁶² **Now you understand what it means to take God's name in vain. In sum it means (a) to use His name simply for purposes of falsehood, (b) to assert in God's name something that is not true, or (c) to curse, swear, use spells, and, in short, to practice whatever wickedness one may.**

Line 56

How should you use the name of the Lord?

Lines 58-59

Genesis 3:8 And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

Why do people think they can hide their sins from God?

⁶³ Besides this you must also know how to use God's name rightly. **For when He says, "You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain," He wants us to understand at the same time that His name is to be used properly.** For His name has been revealed and given to us so that it may be of constant use and profit. ⁶⁴ So it is natural to conclude that since this commandment forbids using the holy name for falsehood or wickedness, we are, on the other hand, commanded to use His name for truth and for all good, like when someone takes an oath truthfully when it is needed and it is demanded [Numbers 30:2]. **This commandment also applies to right teaching and to calling on His name in trouble or praising and thanking Him in prosperity, and so on. All of this is summed up and commanded in Psalm 50:15, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me." For all this is bringing God's name into the service of truth and using it in a blessed way. In this way His name is hallowed, as we pray in the Lord's Prayer [Matthew 6:9].**

⁶⁵ Now you have the sum of the entire commandment explained. With this understanding, the question that has troubled many teachers has been easily solved: **"Why is swearing prohibited in the Gospel, and yet Christ, St. Paul, and other saints often swore?"** [Matthew 5:33–37; 26:29; Acts 21:20–26]. ⁶⁶ The explanation is briefly this: We are not to swear in support of evil, that is, to support falsehood, or to swear when there is no need or use. But we should swear for the support of good and the advantage of our neighbor. For such swearing is truly a good work, by which God is praised, truth and right are established, falsehood is refuted, peace is made among men, obedience is rendered, and quarrels are settled. For in this way God Himself intervenes and separates right and wrong, good and evil. ⁶⁷ If one party swears falsely, he lives under this judgment: he shall not escape punishment. Even if this judgment is delayed a long time, he shall not succeed. So everything he may gain from his falsehood will slip out of his hands, and he will never enjoy it. ⁶⁸ I have seen this in the case of many who perjured themselves in their wedding vows. They have never had a happy hour or a healthful day, and so perished miserably in body, soul, and possessions.

⁶⁹ Therefore, I advise and exhort as before that with warning and threatening, restraint and punishment, the children should be trained early to shun falsehood. They should especially avoid the use of God's name to support falsehood. For where children are allowed to do as they please, no good will result. This is clear even now. The world is worse than it has ever been, and there is no government, no obedience, no loyalty, no faith, but only daring, unbridled people. No teaching or reproof helps them. All this is God's wrath and punishment for such lewd contempt of this commandment.

⁷⁰ On the other hand, children should be constantly urged and moved to honor God's name and to have it always upon their lips for everything that may happen to them or come to their notice [Psalm 8:2; 34:1; Matthew 21:16; Hebrews 13:15]. For that is the true honor of His name, to look to it and call upon it for all consolation [Psalm 66:2; 105:1]. Then—as we have heard in the First Commandment—the heart by faith gives God the honor due Him first. Afterward, the lips give Him honor by confession.

Lines 63-64

What is the right way to use God's name?

The Small Catechism

The Second Commandment

You shall not misuse the name of the Lord, your 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.**

See: Psalm 50:15, 103:1, 118:1; Luke 17:11-16

Line 66

"we are not to swear in the support of evil"

What does this mean?

⁷¹ This is also a blessed and useful habit and very effective against the devil. He is ever around us and lies in wait to bring us into sin and shame, disaster and trouble [2 Timothy 2:26]. But he hates to hear God's name and cannot remain long where it is spoken and called upon from the heart. ⁷² Indeed, many terrible and shocking disasters would fall upon us if God did not preserve us by our calling upon His name. I have tried it myself. I learned by experience that often sudden great suffering was immediately averted and removed by calling on God. To confuse the devil, I say, we should always have this holy name in our mouth, so that the devil may not be able to injure us as he wishes.

⁷³ It is also useful that we form the habit of daily commending ourselves to God [Psalm 31:5], with soul and body, wife, children, servants, and all that we have, against every need that may arise. So also the blessing and thanksgiving at meals [Mark 8:6] and other prayers, morning and evening, have begun and remained in use [Exodus 29:38–43]. ⁷⁴ Likewise, children should continue to cross themselves when anything monstrous or terrible is seen or heard. They can shout, “Lord God, protect us!” “Help, dear Lord Jesus!” and such. **Also, if anyone meets with unexpected good fortune, however trivial, he says, “God be praised and thanked!” or “God has bestowed this on me!”** and so on, just as the children used to learn to fast and pray to St. Nicholas and other saints before. This would be more pleasing and acceptable to God than all monasticism and Carthusian acts of holiness.

⁷⁵ Look, we could train our youth this way [Proverbs 22:6], in a childlike way and playfully in the fear and honor of God. Then the First and Second Commandments might be well kept and in constant practice. Then some good might take root, spring up, and bear fruit. People would grow up whom an entire land might relish and enjoy. ⁷⁶ In addition, this would be the true way to bring up children well as long as they could be trained with kindness and delight. For children who must be forced with rods and blows will not develop into a good generation. At best they will remain godly under such treatment only as long as the rod is upon their backs [Proverbs 10:13].

⁷⁷ But <teaching the commandments in a childlike and playful way> spreads its roots in the heart so that children fear God more than rods and clubs. This I say with such simplicity for the sake of the young, that it may penetrate their minds. For we are preaching to children, so we must also talk like them. In this way we would prevent the abuse of the divine name and teach the right use. This should happen not only in words, but also in practice and life. Then we may know God is well pleased with this and will as richly reward good use of His name as He will terribly punish the abuse.

Line 73

In Lines 71-72, Luther describes a habit to develop from childhood. How would we follow his advice today?

What name do we live under?
See: Psalm 31:5

The Third Commandment

You shall sanctify the holy day.

⁷⁹ The word *holiday* is used for the Hebrew word *sabbath*, which properly means “to rest,” that is, to cease from labor. Therefore, we usually say, “to stop working.” Or “Sanctify the Sabbath.” ⁸⁰ Now, in the Old Testament, God set apart the seventh day and appointed it for rest [Genesis 2:3]. He commanded that it should be regarded as holy above all other days. This commandment was given only to the Jewish people for this outward obedience, **that they should stop toilsome work and rest. In that way both man and beast might recover and not be weakened by endless labor [Exodus 20:8–11].** ⁸¹ Later, the Jewish people restricted the Sabbath too closely and greatly abused it. They defamed Christ and could not endure in Him the same works that they themselves would do on that day, as we read in the Gospel [Matthew 12:11]. **They acted as though the commandment were fulfilled by doing no manual work whatsoever. This, however, was not the meaning. But, as we shall hear, they were supposed to sanctify the holy day or day of rest.**

⁸² This commandment, therefore, in its literal sense, does not apply to us Christians. It is entirely an outward matter, like other ordinances of the Old Testament. The ordinances were attached to particular customs, persons, times, and places, but now they have been made matters of freedom through Christ [Colossians 2:16–17].

⁸³ The simpleminded need to grasp a Christian meaning about what God requires in this commandment. Note that we don’t keep holy days for the sake of intelligent and learned Christians. (They have no need of holy days.) **We keep them first of all for bodily causes and necessities, which nature teaches and requires. We keep them for the common people, manservants and maidservants, who have been attending to their work and trade the whole week. In this way they may withdraw in order to rest for a day and be refreshed.**

⁸⁴ Second, and most especially, on this day of rest (since we can get no other chance), **we have the freedom and time to attend divine service. We come together to hear and use God’s Word, and then to praise God, to sing and to pray** [Colossians 3:16].

⁸⁵ However, this keeping of the Sabbath, I point out, **is not restricted to a certain time**, as with the Jewish people. It does not have to be just on this or that day. **For in itself no one day is better than another [Romans 14:5–6]. Instead, this should be done daily. However, since the masses of people cannot attend every day, there must be at least one day in the week set apart.** From ancient times Sunday (the Lord’s Day) has been appointed for this purpose. So we also should continue to do the same, in order that everything may be done in an orderly way [1 Corinthians 14:40] and no one may create disorder by starting unnecessary practices.

The Small Catechism

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God so that we do not despise preaching and His Word, but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it.

Lines 79 - 81

Where is your rest?

Line 84

What is the intention and meaning of this commandment for the Christian?

See: Colossians 3:16

Lines 85-86

Why do we set aside at least one day a week for public worship services?

⁸⁶ This is the simple meaning of the commandment: People must have holidays. Therefore, such observances should be devoted to hearing God's Word so that the special function of this day of rest should be the ministry of the Word for the young and the mass of poor people [Nehemiah 8:2–3, 8]. Yet the resting should not be strictly understood to forbid any work that comes up, which cannot be avoided.

⁸⁷ So when someone asks you, "What is meant by the commandment: You shall sanctify the holy day?" Answer like this, "To sanctify the holy day is the same as to keep it holy." "But what is meant by keeping it holy?" "Nothing else than to be occupied with holy words, works, and life." For the day needs no sanctification for itself. It has been created holy in itself. But God desires the day to be holy to you. Therefore, it becomes holy or unholy because of you, whether you are occupied on that day with things that are holy or unholy.

⁸⁸ How, then, does such sanctification take place? Not like this: sitting behind the stove and doing no rough work, or adorning ourselves with a wreath and putting on our best clothes. But as said above, we occupy ourselves with God's Word and exercise ourselves in the Word.

⁸⁹ Indeed, we Christians ought always to keep such a holy day and be occupied with nothing but holy things. This means we should daily be engaged with God's Word and carry it in our hearts and upon our lips [Psalm 119:11–13]. But as said above, since we do not always have free time, we must devote several hours a week for the sake of the young, or at least a day for the sake of the entire multitude, to being concerned about this alone. We must especially teach the use of the Ten Commandments, the Creed, and the Lord's Prayer, and so direct our whole life and being according to God's Word. ⁹⁰ At whatever time, then, this is being observed and practiced, there a true *holy day* is being kept. Other things shall not be called a Christians' *holy day*. For, indeed, non-Christians can also stop working and be idle, just as the entire swarm of our Church workers do. They stand daily in the churches, singing and ringing bells, but they do not keep a holy day in true holiness, because they do not preach or use God's Word but teach and live contrary to it.

⁹¹ God's Word is the true "holy thing" [*Heiligtum*; relic] above all holy things. Yes, it is the only one we Christians know and have. Though we had the bones of all the saints or all holy and consecrated garments upon a heap, still that would not help us at all. All that stuff is a dead thing that can sanctify no one. But God's Word is the treasure that sanctifies everything [1 Timothy 4:5]. By the Word even all the saints themselves were sanctified [1 Corinthians 6:11]. ⁹² Whenever God's Word is taught, preached, heard, read, or meditated upon, then the person, day, and work are sanctified. This is not because of the outward work, but because of the Word, which makes saints of us all. Therefore, I constantly say that all our life and work must be guided by God's Word, if it is to be God-pleasing or holy. Where this is done, this commandment is in force and being fulfilled.

Lines 87-88

"But what is meant by keeping it holy?" "Nothing else than to be occupied with holy words, works, and life."

How then, does such sanctification take place?

Line 90

How do we keep the day of worship holy?

Lines 91-92

What makes you holy?

See: 1 Timothy 4:5; 1 Corinthians 6:11

"The Word, which makes saints of us all."

See: Romans 10:17

⁹³ **On the contrary, any observance or work that is practiced without God's Word is unholy before God.** This is true no matter how brilliantly a work may shine, even though it is covered with relics, such as the fictitious spiritual orders, which know nothing about God's Word and seek holiness in their own works.

⁹⁴ Note, therefore, **that the force and power of this commandment lies not in the resting, but in the sanctifying, so that a special *holy exercise* belongs to this day. For other works and occupations are not properly called holy exercises, unless the person is holy first.** But here a work is to be done by which a person is himself made holy. **This is done (as we have heard) only through God's Word.** For this reason, particular places, times, persons, and the entire outward order of worship have been created and appointed, so that there may be order in public practice [1 Corinthians 14:40].

⁹⁵ **So much depends upon God's Word. Without it, no holy day can be sanctified. Therefore, we must know that God insists upon a strict observance of this commandment and will punish all who despise His Word and are not willing to hear and learn it, especially at the time appointed for the purpose.**

⁹⁶ **It is not only the people who greatly misuse and desecrate the holy day who sin against this commandment (those who neglect to hear God's Word because of their greed or frivolity or lie in taverns and are dead drunk like swine). But even that other crowd sins. They listen to God's Word like it was any other trifle and only come to preaching because of custom. They go away again, and at the end of the year they know as little of God's Word as at the beginning.** ⁹⁷ **Up to this point the opinion prevailed that you had properly hallowed Sunday when you had heard a Mass or the Gospel read. But no one cared for God's Word, and no one taught it. Now that we have God's Word, we fail to correct the abuse. We allow ourselves to be preached to and admonished, but we do not listen seriously and carefully.**

⁹⁸ Know, therefore, that you must be concerned not only about hearing, but also about learning and retaining God's Word in memory. Do not think that this is optional for you or of no great importance. Think that it is God's commandment, who will require an account from you [Romans 14:12] about how you have heard, learned, and honored His Word.

⁹⁹ **Likewise, those fussy spirits are to be rebuked who, after they have heard a sermon or two, find hearing more sermons to be tedious and dull. They think that they know all that well enough and need no more instruction.** For that is exactly the sin that was previously counted among mortal sins and is called *akadia* (i.e., apathy or satisfaction). This is a malignant, dangerous plague with which the devil bewitches and deceives the hearts of many so that he may surprise us and secretly take God's Word from us [Matthew 13:19].

Line 94

What are the holy exercises?

Line 95

What is the key to any day that is truly considered holy?

Lines 96-97

How do we sin against this commandment?

Line 99

See: Matthew 13:18-23

¹⁰⁰ Let me tell you this, even though you know God's Word perfectly and are already a master in all things: you are daily in the devil's kingdom [Colossians 1:13–14]. He ceases neither day nor night to sneak up on you and to kindle in your heart unbelief and wicked thoughts against these three commandments and all the commandments. **Therefore, you must always have God's Word in your heart, upon your lips, and in your ears. But where the heart is idle and the Word does not make a sound, the devil breaks in and has done the damage before we are aware** [Matthew 13:24–30]. ¹⁰¹ On the other hand, **the Word is so effective that whenever it is seriously contemplated, heard, and used, it is bound never to be without fruit** [Isaiah 55:11; Mark 4:20]. It always awakens new understanding, pleasure, and devoutness and produces a pure heart and pure thoughts [Philippians 4:8]. For these words are not lazy or dead, **but are creative, living words** [Hebrews 4:12]. ¹⁰² And even though no other interest or necessity moves us, this truth ought to urge everyone to the Word, because thereby the devil is put to flight and driven away [James 4:7]. Besides, this commandment is fulfilled and this exercise in the Word is more pleasing to God than any work of hypocrisy, however brilliant.

Line 100

Why do we need God's Word in our hearts?

See: Isaiah 55:11,
Mark 4:20

Line 101

How is God's word living and active?

See: Hebrews 4:12