

## The Third

## C O M M A N D M E N T.

**Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain : for the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.**

**I**T is a known Rule; that all the Precepts of the Law respect either those Duties which we owe immediately unto God, or those which we owe immediately unto Man, the former constitute the first, the latter the second Table. The Commands of the first Table are prescribed us, for the regulating our Divine Worship; which is either internal and more spiritual, or external and more visible. The internal Worship of God, with the humblest veneration of our Souls, and most sincere affections of our hearts, is required of us in the first Commandment, as I have already declared. The external Worship of God consists of three parts, Prostration of the Body; Profession of the Mouth; and the Observation of prefixed Time. And each of these hath a particular Command to injoyn them.

The first of these, *viz.* Prostration of the Body, is required in the second Commandment; of which I have spoken.

The second, *viz.* Profession of the Mouth, comes next to be considered. And to guide and regulate this, we have our Rule prescribed in the third Precept of this Table:

*Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain, &c.* In which words we have:

*First,*

# An Exposition upon

- I. *First*, A Prohibition, *Thou shalt not take, &c.*
- II. *Secondly*, A Commination or Threatning, *For the Lord will not hold him guiltless that, &c.*

In the Prohibition three things are to be inquired into:

- I. *First*, What is meant by the Name of God?
2. *Secondly*, What it is to take the Name of God?
3. *Thirdly*, What it is to take God's Name in vain?

- I. *First*, What is meant by the Name of God?

I answer, The Name of God hath sundry Acceptations in the Scripture:

- I. *First*, Sometimes it is taken for the Nature and Being of the Deity itself. Nor is it an unusual Figure to put Name for that Thing or Person that is expressed by it; as *Revel. 3. 4. Thou hast a few names in Sardis, that have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white:* that is, thou hast a few Persons in Sardis. So likewise we may observe it to be frequently used when the Scripture speaks of God, and Christ, *Psal. 20. 1. The name of the God of Jacob defend thee;* that is, let the God of Jacob himself, who is the only True and Almighty Potentate, be thy Shield and thy Defence. *Psal. 135. 3. Sing praises unto his name;* that is, offer your returns of Thanks and Praises unto that God from whom you have received your Mercies and Salvation. So *Psal. 115. 1. Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy name give glory;* that is, let the glory which is due unto thee be intirely ascribed unto thyself. And so concerning Christ, *Luke 24. 47. Repentance and remission of sins are to be preached to all nations in his name;* that is, through him. And *John 1. 12. He gave power to become the sons of God, to as many as believed in his name;* that is, to as many as believed in him. And thus it is used in innumerable places.

*Secondly,*

2. *Secondly*, Sometimes the Name of God is taken for the whole System of Divine and Heavenly Doctrine revealed to us in the Scriptures : Thus the Psalmist, *I will declare thy name unto my brethren* : Which the Apostle cites as spoken in the person of Christ, *Heb. 2. 12.* and the meaning is, That Christ should declare and make known to the World, a true spiritual Doctrine, and way of Worship ; and teach them a Religion which should both perfect their Reason, and save their Souls. And as a Testimony of the accomplishment of this Prophecie, our Saviour himself tells us, *John 17. 6. I have manifested thy name unto the men whom thou gavest me.* And *v. 26. I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it ;* that is, I have instructed them in the true Religion, and right Worship of the great God. And so it is taken likewise *Micah 4. 5. All people will walk every one in the name of his God, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever :* That is, we will walk in that way of Worship and Religion which is appointed and approved by the Lord our God.

3. *Thirdly*, The Name of God is taken for that whereby God is called, and by which his Nature and Perfections are made known unto the Children of Men : For Names are imposed to this very intent, that they might declare what the thing is to which the Name doth belong. Thus when God had created *Adam*, and made him the Lord of this visible World, he caused the Beasts of the Field, and the Fowls of the Air to pass before him, both to do Homage to their new Sovereign, and likewise to receive Names from him, which according to the perfection of his knowledge, did then aptly serve to express their several natures, and were not only Names, but Diffinitions too : And so when we read of the Names of God in Scripture, they all signifie some expressions of his Infinite Essence, in which he is pleased to spell out himself unto us, sometimes by one Perfection, and sometimes by another.

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Now these Names of God, are either his Titles or his Attributes. Concerning which I have formerly treated at large in expounding to you the first Petition of the Lord's Prayer, *Hallowed be thy name*; and therefore shall here only mention them, and so proceed.

1. *First*, His Titles are his Name: And they are some of them Absolute; and such are these glorious Titles of *Jah, Jehovah, God, I Am, I Am hath sent thee*, saith God to *Moses*. And these are Names altogether incomprehensible and stupendous; others are Relative, respecting us. So his Name of Creator, denotes his infinite Power in giving Being to all things: Lord, and King, signifie his Dominion and Authority in disposing and governing all that he hath made: Father signifies his Care and Goodness in providing for us his Offspring: Redeemer, his Mercy in delivering us from Temporal Evils and Calamities, but especially from Eternal Death and Destruction. These, and other such-like Titles God doth assume unto himself, to express in some measure, as we are able to bear, what he is in himself.

2. *Secondly*, His Attributes also are his Name: Some of which are incommunicable, as his Eternity, Immenstity, Immutability, Simplicity, &c. which are so proper to the Divine Nature, that they belong to no created Being; others are communicable, and so Mercy, and Goodness, and Holiness, and Truth, &c. are the Attributes of God: Communicable they are, because some Rays of them may be found in the Creatures; but yet in that infinite degree and excellency which they have in God, so they are incommunicable, and proper only to the Deity. And therefore tho' Angels or Men may be said to be holy, or just, or good, yet none of them are so originally; none are so infinitely and unchangeably, none are so simply, and in the abstract, but only God himself.

These then are the Names of God.

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And here in the Text, *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain*; we must understand it concerning the Name of God in this last exception, that is, for any Name of his whereby he is pleased to reveal himself unto us; whether it appertain to his Titles, or to his Attributes; neither of these must be taken in vain.

*Secondly*, Let us consider what it is to take the Name of God. I answer briefly: To take the Name of God is no other than to make use of it, either as the Object of our Thoughts, or the Subject of our Discourses: And so we find this Phrase used, *Psal. 16. 4. I will not take up their names into my lips.* And *Psal. 50. 16. What hast thou to do, that thou shouldst take my covenant in thy mouth?* That is, that thou shouldst speak, or make mention of it. So that to take God's Name is to speak, or mention it.

*Thirdly*, Let us consider what it is to take God's Name in vain. To this I answer: God's Name is then taken in vain,

*First*, When it is used without propounding to ourselves a due end. 1.

*Secondly*, When it is used without due consideration and reverence. 2.

*Thirdly*, When it is used in an undue and unlawful action. 3.

*First*, When it is used without propounding to ourselves a due end: The end specifies the action: if the end be vain the action must be so too. Now there are but two ends that can justify and warrant the use of any of God's Names, either his Titles or his Attributes; and they are,

*First*, The Glory of God. And, 1.

*Secondly*, The Edification of ourselves and others. Whatsoever is besides these, is light and frivolous, and can be no good ground to us to make any mention of his great and terrible Name, which is so full of Glory and Majesty, that it should never be uttered, but where the subject of our

Discourse is serious and weighty. I will not now speak of those who vend the holy and reverend Name of God with Oaths and Blasphemies; a sin by so much the more heinous and abominable, by how much less temptation there is to it, either of pleasure or profit; this is an Iniquity to be punished by the Judge: And would to God Laws were put in severe execution, to cramp the black Tongues of all such prophane Wretches, whose number so abounds and swarms, that we can no where walk the Streets, without being assaulted with whole vollies of Oaths and Curses. But for others who are of more blameless Conversation, may it not be observed how their Discourses and familiar Tattle are filled up with the Name of God and Lord: I beseech you consider, what end do you propound to yourselves in thus using the great and terrible Name: Are all your Discourses so serious as to bear the burden of that great Name? Are they all immediately directed to the advancement of his Glory? Or do they all promote the benefit and welfare of those who hear them? If so, than indeed the Name of God can never be more seasonably used: But if you make the highest Lord, serve only to express some small Wonderment, or the great God only an expletive to fill up a gap in your Speeches; certainly these are such low and mean ends, that God will not hold thee guiltless. He accounts himself contemned when you mention his Name to such idle purposes, and will revenge the dishonour that you do him by it.

2. *Secondly*, The Name of God is taken in vain, when it is used without due consideration and reverence: Whensoever we make mention of him, we ought seriously to ponder his infinite Greatness and Glory, and to bow our hearts in the deepest prostration before that Name, to which all the Powers in Heaven and Earth bow down with most humble Veneration. But is it possible for those who speak of God promiscuously and at random, is it possible that they should utter his Name with Reverence, when all the rest of the

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Discourse is nothing but Froth and Levity? Nay, if they be reprov'd for it, will they not alledge that for their Excuse that which is their very Sin, That they did not consider it? And what! will you dare to bolt out the great Name of the great God without considering it? Is that a Name to be sported with, and to be tost too and fro upon every light and vain Tongue? The tongue of Man is call'd his glory, *Psal. 57. 8. Awake up my glory.* And shall the glory of Man, be the dishonour of God? shall that which was created to be a principal Instrument of magnifying and exalting God's Name, run it over without affection or reverence? Those things which we most of all condemn and despise, we use as by-words and lay no great stress nor sence upon them. And truly when we speak of God, without considering how great, how glorious and excellent a Being he is, how holy, just, and powerful, we do but make him a by-word, which is the highest contempt and indignity that can be cast upon him. And therefore the best means that can be used to secure us from that Habit and wicked Custom; that many of us have inured ourselves unto, of taking God's Name in vain, is seriously to consider whose Name it is, even the Name of the great God who is present with thee, and hears thee pronounce it: That God to whom the greatest and most glorious Things compared, are base and vile Nothings: That God who is jealous of his Honour, and will dreadfully revenge himself upon the Contemners of it. And if thou hast but wrought these Considerations into thine heart, and habituated them to thy thoughts, thou wilt for ever be afraid to speak of his Majesty vainly and irreverently.

*Thirdly,* The Name of God is taken in vain when it is used to an undue and unlawful action, especially when it is brought to confirm a Falshood either in Perjury or Herefie, which is a most horrid Impiety: And therefore it is observed, that the same word which is here rendered Vain, signifies

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nifies also False or Deceitful: So that this Precept, *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain*, may be rendered also, *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in falshood*. Not that this is the only unlawful using of it, but that this is the chief and most notorious abusing of it: And indeed what greater sin can there be, than to bring God to be a Witness to our Lye? to make him, who is Truth itself attest that which is Falshood and Deceit. And therefore *Proverbs* 30. 9. *Agur* prays against pinching Poverty, as well as superfluous Riches, *Lest*, saith he, *I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain*. That is, lest Poverty compel me to steal, and fear of Shame or Punishment tempt me to Swear by the Name of the great God, that I have not done it. This indeed is to take God's Name in vain in the worst and highest sence.

Suffer me now to close up this with some Practical Application of it to your Consciences:

- I. *First*, Let this convince you of the greatness and heinousness of this Sin, and deeply humble you that have been guilty of it. I well know, that the commonness, whether of God's Mercies towards us, or of our Sins against him, takes off much from our Observation, and abates them both in our Estimate: And because this is so common a Sin almost in the mouths of all Persons, our ears are so beaten to it, that we now little regard it. Possibly should we hear a Devil incarnate belch out some direful Oath, we should start and tremble at it: but when we hear the Name of the great God, and our only Lord, slip along in some trifling and impertinent Discourse, this we take no notice of; and the commonness of the Sin hath almost stifled all Reproofs: I beseech you Christians consider,

- I. *First*, That we are not to weigh Sins by the Opinion of Men, but by the Censure and Sentence of God: He hath no more allowed you to take his Name in vain, than he hath to blaspheme it: The irreverent using of it is as expressly



- 1. **preſſy forbidden, as the abjuring and curſing of it:** And when the Law of God hath not diſpenſed with us, it is moſt intolerable preſumption that we ſhould dare to diſpenſe with ourſelves.

Again conſider, thou that ſportest away the Name of God in thy ordinary Prattle, what wilt thou have to rely upon in thy greateſt diſtreſſes: The wiſe Man tells us, *Prov.*

*18. 10. The name of the Lord is a ſtrong tower; the righteous runneth unto it and is ſaved.* But alas, what comfort

canſt thou find in the Name of God in thy greateſt neceſſities, ſince it is the ſame Name thou haſt uſed and worn out before in the meanest and moſt trivial concerns: Thou haſt already talkt away the ſtrength and vertue of it, and wilt hardly find more ſupport from it in thy Tribulation, than thou gaveſt reverence unto it in thy Converſation.

Let us then be more cautious than to ſpend ſo excellent a Remedy againſt all Fears, and Sorrows, and Afflictions, vainly and unprofitably. *Thy name*, ſaith the Spouſe, *is an ointment poured forth.* *Cant. 1. 3.* But certainly if upon every ſlight occaſion we break the Box, and expoſe the Name of God to common Air, it will in time loſe its ſcent and vertue, and when we have moſt need of it, ſhall find no reſreſhment, no comfort in it. Beſides,

*Thirdly,* This common and irreverent uſing of the Name of God, will inſenſibly over-ſpread as with a Spirit of Prophaneneſs; we ſhall by degrees arrive to a plain contempt of God, whom we thus hourly and unneceſſarily take into our mouths: For what elſe is this but to make ourſelves rude and familiar with that infinite Majeſty, towards whom the profoundeſt testimonies of reſpect and reverence muſt fall infinitely ſhort of expreſſing our due diſtance? But by uſing his Name vulgarly and promiſcuouſly, what do we elſe, but make it our ſport, and blow it up and down with every idle breath, as Children do bubbles in the Air?

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4. Again, canst thou in Duty easily compose thyself to reverence the holy and dreadful Name of God, when thou hast thus accustomed thyself to name him without any veneration or respect in thy common Discourses? Certainly it is the hardest thing imaginable to make the heart fall down prostrate before that God whom thou invokest in Prayer, when once thou art used to invoke him slightly in thy ordinary Converse.

Let me therefore beseech you, O Christians, as you tender his Glory, of which he is jealous, whensoever you speak of God, or but mention his Name, you would do it with an holy Awe and Dread of his Divine Majesty; that you would seriously consider, that that Name to which every Knee bows, both of things in Heaven, and things on Earth, and things under the Earth, whether they be Angels or Devils, requires from you more respect and honour than to be idly blurted out with every rash and foolish expression.

And you who are Masters of Families, and have Children and Servants committed to your Care, beware that you stop this growing Sin in them betimes. It is the sin and shame of Parents, that they suffer little Ones to lisp the Name of God, and to learn the first syllables and rudiments of Oaths and Curses before they can well speak, whereby they lay a deep foundation for their future Impiety, and thereby bring the guilt of the next Generation upon us, who by indulging them in these young sins, do but introduce those habits of Wickedness into them, which perhaps can never afterwards be rooted out.

2. There is also another kind of taking the Name of God in vain; and that is in our Duties and holy Performances. And this is done two ways:

1. *First*, When in our Prayers we ask those things of God which are unlawful, or unwarrantable; as when we pray on the behalf of our Lusts, to obtain provision to fulfil them, *Jam. 4. 3. Ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.*

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When we pray out of Envy, Malice, and Revenge, that God would make himself a Party in our unreasonable and angry Quarrels. Such Prayers as these are vain; for what we thus desire either shall not be granted unto us, or if it be shall be granted unto us in wrath.

2. Secondly, When we perform holy Duties slightly, and without affection, we then likewise take the Name of God in vain: and therefore all Hypocritical Services, all Batalogies, and heartless Ingeminations, are vain, and God's Name is not sanctified, but abused in them. For whatsoever we do in such a manner as we may be certain God will not accept, is done in vain: Now God will accept of no Performance which is not accompanied with the Heart, and filled with most devout Affections; and therefore they are performed in vain, and to no other effect, but to increase our guilt and our condemnation. Such Invocations are but Scoffings of God; and all the motions of our Lips, without the correspondent motion of our Hearts, is no better than making Mouths at God.

3. Thirdly, There is also another kind of prophaning the Name of God, and taking it in vain, which is of a far higher and more heinous nature, and that is by unlawful Oaths and Execrations.

Now an Oath in the general is a Confirmation of our Speeches, by calling in God to witness and attest the truth of them. Called therefore by *Tully* a Religious Affirmation. *De Offic.* And it is of two kinds, 1. 3.

Assertory, and  
Promissory.

The former, when we assert that such a thing either hath been, or is; or the latter, when we engage that for the future it shall be, and be performed by us: which Oath we do sufficiently, and with a good conscience keep, if we use our utmost endeavours to accomplish what we have thus sworn, although the effect may be impeded by many invincible

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cible Obstacles intervening.

Now because a Spirit of Errour and Giddiness hath seized on some Persons, who think that every Oath is unlawful, and the taking of the holy and reverend Name of God in vain, and so a violation of this Commandment; I shall therefore briefly state that much-controverted Question, Whether at any time, or in any circumstances it be lawful for a Christian to assume the Name of God in an Oath? and then I shall proceed to shew you what Oaths are unlawful, and execrable Sins.

For the first, I assert, That an Oath is so far from being always sinful; that it is sometimes a Duty, yea, an Act of Religion, and part of the Service and Worship of God; and therefore not onely lawful but necessary. This we find *Deut. 6. 13. Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve him, and shalt swear by his name.* Yea, the Psalmist mentions it as a matter of Exultation, as if some notable Service were done by it unto God, *Every one that sweareth by him shall glory.* And if we consult the approved Examples of holy Men in Scripture, we shall frequently find them either exacting Oaths from others, or else themselves invoking the Testimony of the most high God, to confirm the Truth of what they speak; the places are too numerous to be cited, and too well known to need it: But because the great Cavil against these, is that they are only Authorities produced out of the Old Testament, and we are now obliged by the Precepts of a Superiour Law-giver, the Lord Jesus Christ; therefore, I say, in answer, That the Objection argues too great a vilifying and contempt of those Sacred Oracles, which were given to the Church, by the hand of *Moses*; and that things of a Moral nature, as an Oath is, cannot in one Age of the World be a Duty, and in another a Sin, when it is attended with the same Circumstances. And yet further, for their satisfaction, let us see what is spoken concerning Oaths in the New Testament, or in

*Psal. 63.*  
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in the Old relating to it : In the Old we have a Prophecy of what should be hereafter in the times of the Gospel ; *Isai. 45. 23. I have sworn by myself, the word is gone out of my mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that unto me every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear.* And again, *Jer. 12. 16. And it shall come to pass, if they will diligently learn the ways of my people, to swear by my name, then shall they be built in the midst of my people.* But yet if neither of these will suffice, let us see some more immediate confirmation of this out of the New Testament itself: We find *St. Paul* himself more than once attesting the truth of those grave and weighty Matters which he delivers in his Epistles, by calling God to witness, which is the very form and nature of an Oath: So *2 Cor. 1. 23. I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet to Corinth.* And so again *Phil. 1. 8. God is my record, how greatly I long after you all.* And what other than a kind of Oath is that vehement Asseveration of the same Apostle, *1 Cor. 15. 31. I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ-Jesus, I die daily.* And again *Rom. 9. 1. I say the truth in Christ, I lie not.* And if you would yet have an Example somewhat more perfect, we may see it in the practice of an holy Angel, *Revel. 10. 6. The angel stood upon the sea, and upon the earth, and lifted up his hand to heaven, and swore by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and earth, and the things in them, that there should be time no longer.* So that you do abundantly see by all these Instances, that it is not simply and universally unlawful to assume the holy Name of God in an Oath, and to call him in to be a Witness to the Truth of what we affirm.

The grand Objection that lies against this, is taken from two places of Scripture ; the one is that of our Saviour, *Matth. 5. 34, 35. But I say unto you, Swear not at all ; neither by heaven, for it is God's throne : nor by the earth, for it is his footstool : neither by Jerusalem, for it is the city of*

## An Exposition upon

*the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more then this, cometh of evil.* Can any thing be more express against all manner of Oaths than this, where we have a cautious Enumeration of many of them which were most vulgar and common? The other place is that of St. James, Chap 5. 12. *But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath; but let your yea, be yea, and your nay, nay; lest you fall into condemnation.* Can any thing be more express, or more commanding than this, *Above all things, my brethren; and, Lest you fall into condemnation?*

But for Answer to this, we must know, That our Saviour, and his Apostle, do not here simply and absolutely condemn all Oaths; but onely that common and profuse swearing which the Scribes and Pharisees taught corruptly to be no sin: For in this point of Oaths they had divulged among the People three false Traditions; the one was, That it was lawful for them to swear commonly, and without restraint, by any Creature. The other was, That that was no binding Oath, wherein the Name of God was not expressly used; and therefore though they should swear by Creatures, yet were they not perjured, although they should not perform what they thus uttered; except some few Cases wherein Interest made them consciencious. This we have Matth. 23. 16, 17, 18. *Wo unto you, ye blind guides, which say, Whosoever shall swear by the temple, it is nothing: and whosoever shall swear by the altar, it is nothing.* That is, they taught that such an Oath was not obligatory, because it was only by Creatures. And yet even here they excepted such Oaths as were conceived and uttered by the Gold of the Temple, or the Gifts on the Altar, out of a politick Covetousness; that by so great a reverence shewn to the Gifts that were offer'd, the People might be induced to offer

offer more freely, and by that means their share of them might be the larger.

A third false Doctrine that they taught, was, That common swearing was no sin, although it were by the great God, if what they swear were true. And by this they give scope and liberty to confirm all that they said with an Oath, if they only took care to utter nothing that was false.

Now only against these three corrupt Traditions, are our Saviour's, and the Apostle's words directed :

1. For it is Perjury to violate an Oath conceived by Creatures, and that because of the near relation that all Creatures have unto God the great Creator. This reason our Saviour mentions in the fore-named place, *Swear not by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is his footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.* And more expressly *Matth. 23. 22. He that shall swear by heaven, sweareth by the throne of God, and him that sitteth thereon: even as he who shall swear by the temple, sweareth by it, and by him that dwelleth therein.* And so by the same proportion of reason, whosoever shall swear by any Creature, doth also virtually swear by the Almighty Creator of it: And therefore it is as much Perjury to falsify an Oath made by any of the Creatures, as though it were made by the great God himself; because the Creatures are all of, and from God. And,

2. Although it be Perjury to falsify an Oath taken by any Creature, yet it is a sin likewise, and utterly unlawful to make any such Oath, inasmuch as it is an idolatrous ascribing a Religious Worship unto the Creature which is due to God only. And in this sense especially, I understand these words of our Saviour, *Swear not at all; i. e. by any Creature.* And this the following Enumeration of Heaven, and Earth, and Jerusalem, and their Head, which were the usual forms of their Oaths, and by which our Saviour forbids them to swear, doth clearly prove to be his true meaning.

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3. These places teach that it is a sin to swear at any time, or by any thing, although the great God himself, unnecessarily and arbitrarily : And therefore swear not at all, unless some just reason, and cogent necessity constrain you to call in so great a Testimony to confirm the truth of what you speak : For common and quotidian swearing is an high contempt and irreverence shewn to the Majesty of that God whom we bring in to attest to every trifle and frivolous thing we utter. And this I take to be the true sense and meaning of these places of Scripture ; and that they do not simply and absolutely condemn all manner of Oaths, but the corrupt Doctrine of the Scribes and Pharisees, and the corrupt Practice of their Disciples, who thought it no sin to swear familiarly, if so be that they did not swear falsely. So that the meaning of, *Swear not at all*, is, Swear not unnecessarily and voluntarily.

Now to make an Oath lawful, it must have these three Qualifications mentioned by the Prophet, *Jer. 4. 2. Thou shalt swear, the Lord liveth, in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness.*

1. *First*, A warrantable Oath must be accompanied with Truth, for it is taken in the Name of the God of Truth : *Isai. 69. 15. He that sweareth in the earth, shall swear by the God of truth.* And therefore it behoves him to consider, whether what he deposeth be Truth, or not ; yea, moreover, we must be fully certain, that the thing is as we attest it : For a Man may be guilty of Perjury in swearing that which is true, if he either believe it otherwise, or be doubtful of it. And therefore he that is called to give his Oath, must look to these two things :

1. That his Words agree with his Mind.
2. That the Thing agree with his Words.

He who fails in the second, is *ψευδῆς*, a false Swearer : He who fails in the first, is *ἐπίσπρος*, a Forswearer ; and in both is a perjured Person.

*Secondly*,



*Secondly*, A lawful Oath must be taken in judgment, discreetly and deliberately, advising and pondering with our selves before we swear : And here we must consider both the Matter, whether that be right and good ; and the Ends, whether they are duly propounded by us. And there are but two Ends that can warrant an Oath ; one is the Benefit of ourselves or others : the other is the Glory of God. And whosoever shall swear without a due consideration of these Ends, and an holy and sincere desire to accomplish them by his Oath, he swears rashly and unwarrantably.

*Thirdly*, A lawful Oath must be taken in Righteousness and Justice : And therefore it is very wicked to bind our selves by an Oath, or Vow, to do things that are either impossible or sinful.

*First*, The Matter of a just Oath ought to be possible ; and therefore we see how cautious *Abraham's* Servant was, when his Master made him swear, to take a Wife for his Son *Isaac*, of his Kindred, *Gen. 24. 5.* *Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me into this land.* And so should we in all our promissory Oaths, caution and limit them with those reasonable Exceptions, of as far as we know, and can lawfully endeavour.

*Secondly*, The Matter of a just Oath must be not only possible, but lawful and honest too ; for if it be unlawful, we are necessarily insnared in sin ; for either we must violate God's Command, or our own Oath. And therefore it was a most wicked Oath in the *Jews*, who combined together against *Paul*, and bound themselves under a Curse, that they would neither eat nor drink, till they had killed him. And so every Oath which ingageth Men to Sedition, disturbance of Government, and Rebellion, is in itself an unlawful Oath, and obligeth them to nothing but to repent of it, and renounce it.

According to these three Quallifications must every Oath be regulated, else it is not a lawful Oath, but an horred

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Contempt of God, and taking of his Name in vain.

But to speak no more concerning lawful Oaths, let us now consider those which are too common among us; such I mean which are apparently unlawful and sinful.

Two things make an Oath unlawful;  
Falshood, and  
Rashness.

1. *First*, When it is False: And this indeed is a most desperate sin, to vouch a Lye upon God's credit, and to father a Falshood upon him who is the God of Truth, yea, Truth itself. This manifests the highest Contempt of God, when we call him to witness that which the Devil prompted us to speak. Should not we ourselves take it for an high Affront and Indignity, to be made Vouchers of other Mens Lyes, and Tales and Properties to put off their Falshoods? How much more then, is it a most hellish Wickedness, committed against the great God, to assert a known Lye, and then call in God to attest it for a truth? Which is no other but to father a Brat of the Devil, who is a Lyer, and the Father of Lyes, upon God, who hates Lyers, and hath appointed severe Torments for them: See how dreadfully God is incensed by this Sin, *Jer. 7. 9, 15, 16.* where he speaks of it as almost an unpardonable Offence, *Will ye steal, and murder, and swear falsely? Therefore will I cast you out of my sight, as I cast out your brethren. Pray not thou for this people, neither left up a cry nor prayer for them, neither make intercession to me: for I will not hear thee.* And so *Zech. 5. 4.* speaking of the Curse that should go forth over the face of the whole Earth, *I will bring it forth, saith the Lord of hosts, and it shall enter into the house of the thief, and into the house of him that sweareth falsely by my name: and it shall remain in the midst of his house, and it shall consume it, with the timber thereof, and with the stones thereof.*
2. *Secondly*, As false Swearing is a notorious prophaning of the Name of God, so likewise rash Swearing in our common

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and ordinary Discourses : A sin that generally abounds and prevails amongst us ; almost every mouth is black with Oaths ; and we may see the very Soot of Hell hang about Mens lips : Nay, I have observed it, especially in these parts, to be not only the sin of more lewd and profligate Wretches, who mouth their Oaths with sound and cadence, but of those too who would be thought very severe and strict Christians, who scarce speak a word without a Drawle, or a sentence without an Oath, and who will pule and whine even in Swearing itself. If these Men separate to be better instructed, I wish with all my heart their Teachers would be pleased so far to condescend from their higher Speculations, as to instruct them, that to attest any thing by their Faith, or by their Truth, is a wicked Oath. For all Oaths which are conceived by any other thing besides the great God, how modest soever they may be in their sound, yet are more impious in effect, than those louder ones, which immediately call God himself to witness : and therefore the Prophet speaks of it as a most heinous, and almost unpardonable sin, *Jer. 5. 7. How shall I pardon thee for this ? thy children have forsaken me, and sworn by them that are no gods.* For since an Oath is a sacred thing, and part of Divine Worship, those that swear by any created Being (as certainly their Faith, and Truth, and Conscience is, if they have any) are guilty not only of vain Swearing, but of Idolatry too.

But some will say, What so great Evil can there be in an Oath, as long as it is Truth which they assert by it ? This I know is the common Reply and Excuse of those who are guilty of this Sin, and reprov'd for it.

To this I answer, *First*, Although it may be true that they speak, yet it is a most provoking sin, so far to debase the holy and reverend Name of God, as to bring it to attest every trivial and impertinent thing they utter ; and if it be by any Creature, it is by so much the worse. No Oath

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is in itself simply good, and voluntarily to be used; but  
 \* *Juro*; only as Medicines are, \* in case of necessity. But to use,  
*sed (quantum mihi videtur)* it ordinarily and indifferently, without being constrained  
*magna necessitate compulsum* by any cogent Necessity, or called to it by any lawful Authority, is such a sin as wears off all Reverence and Dread of the great God: and we have very great cause to suspect, that where his Name is so much upon the Tongue, there his Fear is but little in the Heart.  
*ro non mihi credi nisi faciam, & ei qui mihi non credit non expedit quod non credit.* Aug. Serm. 28. de verb. Apoll.

Μελέτη δὲ αἰετὴ τῇ τηρεῖν περὶ ὅρκου σέβας, τὸ μὴ παντὸς, μὴδὲ ὡς ἐπιχεῖ, χυθῶν τῷ ὄρκῳ, μὴδὲ ἐπὶ τοῖς παρεκχυθεῖσι, μὴδὲ εἰς ἀπαλήψαν λόγου, μὴδὲ εἰς πᾶσαν διαγνώμην, ἀλλ' ὡς οἴοιτε τηρεῖν αὐτῇ τιμῇ χρῆσθαι ἐν τοῖς ἀναγκάσις αἵμα, καὶ πίκρῳ, καὶ τοῖς ὅτις ἐδωμία ἄλλη τῶν τοιούτων συνηρία παραφαίνεται εἰ μὴ διὰ μόνου ἐν τῷ ὄρκῳ ἀληθείας. Hierocles in Carm. Pyth. 2.

2. Secondly, Though thou swearest that which is true, yet customary Swearing to. \* Truths will insensibly bring thee

\* Ἐν τῇ σωματείᾳ τὸ ὁμνῶν, ῥάδιος ἂν μεταπείσοι τις εἰς ἑποχίαν. For which reason he forbids Men to swear commonly, that they may not swear falsely. Οὕτω γὰρ ἂν πρῶτον τὸ αἰεὶ εὐοχεῖν, εἰ μὴ κατὰ χρεοσίμωδα τοῖς ὅρκοις. Hierocles in Carm. Pyth. 2.

Περὶ τῆς ὀρκῆς, ἀσχετοῦς ἑποχίας. Phofy. Epilt. 1.

to swear Falshoods; for when once thou art habituated to it, an Oath will be more ready to thee than a Truth; and so when thou rashly boltest out somewhat that is either doubtful or false, thou wilt seal it up, and confirm it with an Oath, before thou hast had time to consider what thou hast said, or what thou art swearing: For those who accustom themselves to this Vice, lose the observation of it in the frequency; and if you reprove them for

Swearing, they will be ready to swear again, that they did

not swear. And therefore it is well observed of St. Augustine. *Melius nec verum juratur quam jurandi consuetudine, & in perjuriam sæpe caditur, & semper perjurio propinquatur*: We ought to forbear Swearing that which is Truth, for by the custom of Swearing, Men often times fall into Perjury, and are always in danger of it.

Now

Now to dehort you from this Sin of common Swearing, consider,

*First*, That it is a Sin which hath very little or no temptation to commit it. The two great Baits by which the Devil allures Men to Wickedness, are Profit and Pleasure : But now this common rash Swearing is the most unprofitable barren Sin in the World : What Fruits brings it forth, but only the Abhorrence and Detestation of all serious Persons, and the tremendous Judgment of God ? The Swearer gains nothing by it at present, but only the reputation of being a Devil incarnate ; and for the future, his gains shall be only the torments of those Devils and damned Spirits, whose Language he hath learnt and speaks. He that sows the Wind of an Oath, shall reap the Whirlwind of God's Fury. I.

Again, what Pleasure is there in it ? which of his senses doth it please and gratifie ? *Were I an Epicure* (\*saith one) *I would* \* Herbert's Church-Porch. *abate Swearing.* Were Men resolved to give themselves up to all manner of sensual Delights, yet there is so little that can be strained from this common Sin, that certainly unless they intended to do the Devil a pleasure, rather than themselves, they would never set their black mouths against Heaven, nor blaspheme the great God who sits imthroned there. Ask them why they indulge themselves in such a provoking Sin ; Why, some cannot forbear out of meer custom ; and others are pleas'd with the lofty sound, and gentile phrase of an Oath, and count it a special grace and ornament of Speaking : And what ? are these temptations ? are these such strong and mighty provocations, that you cannot forbear ? Shall the holy Name of the great God be torn in peices by you only to patch and fill up the rents of your idle Talk ? If this be the motive and inducement that makes you commit so great a Sin, (as commonly there is no other) know, that you perish as Fools perish, and sell your Souls to Dam-  
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nation and Eternal Perdition, for very Nothing.

Others perhaps will plead for their Excuse, That they never use to swear, but when they are vexed, and put into a passion. But what a madness is this, when Men anger thee, to strike at God, and to provoke him far more than others can provoke thee? If thou art never so highly incensed, why shouldst thou throw thy poisonous foam in God's face? Hast thou no other way of venting thy passion, but to flie in God's face, and to revenge thyself on him, when Men have injured thee? Certainly thy passion can be no more a temptation to do this, than it would be to stab thy Father, because thine Enemy hath struck thee.

2. *Secondly*, It is a most foolish Sin, because it contradicts the very end for which they commit it: The common Swearer perhaps thinks that he shall be much the sooner believed for his Oaths; whereas with all serious and judicious Persons there is nothing that doth more lighten the credit of his Speeches, than his rash binding and confirming the truth of them by swearing. For what reason have I to think that Man speaks truth, who doth so far suspect himself, as to think what he relates is not credible, unless he swear to it: And certainly he that owes God no more respect, than to violate the sanctity and reverence of his Name upon every trifling occasion, cannot easily be thought to owe the Truth so much respect as not to violate it, especially considering that there are far stronger temptations unto Lying than unto Swearing.

3. *Thirdly*, Consider that the Devil is the Author and Father, not of Lying only, but of Swearing also: *Let your yea, be yea; and your nay, nay; saith our Saviour, for whatsoever is more than these, cometh of evil*, Mat. 5. 37. *ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ ἐστίν; i. e.* it cometh of the Evil One, who is still prompting the Swearer, and putting Oaths upon the tip of his Tongue.

I shall now give you some Rules and Directions, by the Observance of which you may avoid this too common Sin, and so conclude this Subject.

*First*, Beware of the first rudiments and beginnings of Oaths, if thou wouldst not learn them. And such are a company of idle words frequently used in the mouths of many, which formerly were bloody Oaths, but are now worn to raggs, and disguised into imperfect sounds and nonsense: few that speak them know what they mean; but if they did, certainly they would tremble at such execrable words that hide and dissemble the most horrid Oaths that can be uttered: Some of them being blasphemous, as those that are conceived by the Limbs of God; and others being idolatrous, as those which are conceiv'd by Creatures; as in that ordinary By-word of *Marry*, which is no less than swearing by the Virgin *Mary*. And it is a notable Artifice of the Devil to bring such foolish and masqued words into common use, that both they may swear that use them, although they know it not; and that by using themselves to unknown Oaths, they may be brought in time to take up those that are known.

Again, all vehement Asseverations have in them somewhat of the nature, and are dangerous beginnings of Oaths: And those who do accustom themselves to them, will in time think them not forcible enough to confirm their Speeches, and so be brought to attest them by Oaths: Make nothing therefore the pawn and pledge of a Truth, but speak it out simply and nakedly as it is in itself; and this will sooner conclude belief, than the most strong and binding Asseverations that thou canst invent. This Sin of Swearing is strangely growing and thriving; for by a customary using of Asseverations, we shall insensibly upon every occasion be tripping upon an Oath; and a custom of Swearing will at length bring in Perjury; and a custom of

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Perjury, Blasphemy, and make them deny that God by whom they have so often sworn themselves, and yet go unpunisht. Beware therefore that you allow not your selves any form of Asseveration; but *let your yea, be yea, and your nay, nay*; proceed no further, for Christ hath allowed you no more.

II. *Secondly*, Subdue as much as you can, all inordinate passion and anger: For anger is usually the cause and provocation of Oaths and Blasphemies. Anger is a fire in the heart, and swearing is the smoke of this fire that breaks forth at the mouth: And those who are violently hurried with this passion, do usually find nothing so ready at hand as an Oath; which, if they cannot be revenged on him whom they conceit to have done them the injury, they sling against Heaven itself, and thereby seem to take an impious revenge upon the Almighty God.

III. *Thirdly*, Labour to possess thy heart, and over-awe it with the most serious considerations and apprehensions of the Greatness and Majesty of God. This will be a good Preservative to keep thee from abusing and prophaning his Name in common and rash Swearing: Is he the great and terrible God of Heaven and Earth, and shall I put that Indignity upon him, to call him from his Throne to witness every Vanity and Trifle that I utter? Would I serve any mortal Man so, whom I respect? or would not he account it an Affront and Injury done him? How much more then will the great God be provoked, who is so great and glorious, that it tires the conceptions of Angels to apprehend his Majesty, how much more will he be provoked to have his Name, which he hath commanded to be sacred and reverend, daily rub'd and worn out between those lips that talk so many light, foolish, and impertinent Vanities.

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There are several other Violations of this third Commandment; as Blasphemy, rash Vows, unnecessary Lots, &c. which being chiefly to be condemned upon the same account as Swearing, and a vain irreverent Invoking the Name of God, I shall not treat of them particularly, but leave the sins and guilt of them to be estimated, together with a due consideration of the several circumstances that attend them.

The great positive Duty required in this Command, is the reverencing and sanctifying the Name of God, whensoever we make mention of him, or of any thing that relates unto him. But because I have in a former Treatise spoken concerning that Subject, I shall therefore wave it at present, and here put an end to the Exposition of this Third Commandment.

*On the second  
Petition of the  
LORD'S  
Prayer.*

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