

There’s a book entitled, “*What’s in a Name?*” Among the sections in the book is one listed as unusual names. How would you like to have the name: Cletus Clodfelter, Rotten Earp, Jinglebells Kaplan or Ivan Odor?

There’s another section with the names of people who seemed destined for their careers. Joe Bunt ... baseball coach. Dan Druff ... barber. Goforth and Ketchum ... police officers who wound up being partners.

Names! Everyone has one, including God. It’s in the Second Commandment that God is telling us about his name. What he’s telling us is that his name is a big deal. That’s why we want to make sure we all know **WHAT’S IN A NAME?** Why is it so special that he protects it with a Commandment?

God’s name isn’t just a label. It’s a handle that helps us pull God down to our level so that we can examine him. “*Lord*” reminds us that he’s in charge, he’s the master. “*Almighty*,” tells us that God can do anything. “*Savior*” informs us that he was willing to sacrifice himself to save sinners. “*Christ*” indicates he’s the One God anointed or chose to save all those sinners.

There are over 600 names for God in the Bible. To explain what each name means would take a book the size of ... well, the Bible. That’s exactly what the Bible is. It’s a book that explains God and his name. Reading the Bible is like browsing God’s Facebook page and he doesn’t hold back any personal information about himself. He reveals what opens the doors to his mansion and unlocks the treasures of his grace.

**WHAT’S IN A NAME?** The Bible tells us a name reveals 3 things.

**1 – A name reveals a person’s reputation.** You’ve probably heard people say: “*Harold made a name for himself.*” They’re talking about a reputation. These names in the news: Donald Trump, Jordan Love, Giannis, LeBron, Vladimir Putin. We connect what we know about that person ... their

reputation ... with their name. That’s true of Bible names too. Out of all the babies that have been baptized in our church over the past 131 years, none of the girls were named “*Jezebel*” and none of the boys were named “*Judas.*” Why? Reputation!

**2 – A name reveals a person’s character.** In the Bible, people received names that identified their characteristics.

- “*Eve*” means living – she was the mother of all the living.
- “*Isaac*” means laughter. Sarah, his mother, laughed when told she would get pregnant at her age.
- “*Jesus*” means salvation – he would save us. God gave a new name when he changed their life.
- Abram, “*exalted father*” was changed to Abraham “*father of many*,” when God promised he would be the father of the Jewish nation.
- Jacob, “*heel-grabber*” was changed to Israel, “*struggles with God*,” after he wrestled with God.
- “*Simon*” became “*Peter*” or rock, because of his rock-solid confession that Jesus was the Christ, the Son of God.

**3 – A name reveals a person’s authority.** When you see flashing blue lights in your rear-view mirror, you pull over and stop because the police officer in the car with the flashing light has authority. If you’re eating dinner and your spouse answers your phone and says: “*It’s Pastor Marshall.*” You might say: “*Tell him I’ll call him back later.*” But if they say: “*It’s Joe Biden,*” you’re going to answer because that name represents the authority of the President of the United States.

“**What’s in a Name?**” God’s name is a big deal. When we misuse it, he’s telling us, “*You’re damaging my reputation, my character and my authority.*”

In Martin Luther’s meaning to the Commandment, he identifies the damage done to God’s name

when we: **curse, swear, lie or deceive.** Let's discuss curse, swear and their cousin profanity.

**Cursing.** Cursing is using God's name to pronounce a sentence of damnation to hell on something or someone. It's bad enough when we ask God to send the hammer to hell that found our thumb while we were trying to hit the nail, but to ask God to send someone to hell because of an unkind word or action is inexcusable and clearly forbidden by the God who made us.

**Swearing.** Not all swearing is sinful. Asking God to witness the truth and punish the lie is appropriate in a court of law – *swear to tell the whole truth.* It's appropriate for elected officials and the military – *swear to uphold and defend the Constitution of the United States.* But in our day-to-day situations, God says you don't need strong words like: "*I swear to God*" to be believed." Just a simple: "*Yes,*" or "*No.*" Your word is enough.

Now, there's other things like, "*Oh, my God,*" or "*God,*" or "*Jesus Christ.*" Those are neither cursing nor swearing. But it's using God's name in a thoughtless and a careless way. That's not showing the proper reverence and respect his name deserves.

Then there's **Profanity.** Profanity is neither cursing nor swearing. It's just vulgar language. I teach my Confirmation class: *Profanity is the linguistic key of the inarticulate.* People use profanity in an attempt to impress others, when it actually shows a lack of intelligence and a lack of command of the English language. People use profanity when angry and frustrated. It takes discipline and shows intelligence to control your speech, especially when you're upset.

Listening to how we at times use God's name leads us to confess: "*Lord, I'm so sorry for misusing your name. I was careless and forgot how important your name is.*" On one occasion Peter gave Jesus his rock-solid confession. On another, he cursed and swore up and down he never heard of the guy.

After Peter and his Savior made eye-contact, he wept bitterly and repented. Jesus forgave him.

When we repent of the hurt we've caused, Jesus forgives the words we've used.

Having been forgiven, make the commitment to use God's name with respect. Don't have separate vocabularies – one at home, and one at work; one with family and one with friends.

Luther also included some positive ways to use God's name: ***Call upon his name in every trouble, pray, praise and give thanks.*** Let's pick prayer, and calling on his name in every trouble.

Prayer is so simple and such a privilege, but it can also be the easiest way to misuse God's name. Are you always thinking about what you're praying as you rattle off the Lord's Prayer, or your Meal Prayers, or your Bedtime Prayers? Does God even care? Of course he does!

Compare that to Jesus' prayers. His were heartfelt to his Father when he gave thanks at meal time: feeding the 5,000 and instituting the Lord's Supper. When he needed to get away from everyone with some alone time with his Father. And when he was in trouble: his temptations in the desert, his cup of suffering in Gethsemane and his crucifixion on Calvary.

Prayer is a privilege granted only to those who call God their Father because we're his sons and daughters by faith in his Son. If your child gets into trouble what do you tell them to do? "***Call me,***" right? As God's children, he's given us his name so we can do the same thing: "***Call upon his name in every trouble.***"

God wants to bless you with and through his name. It's the only name that opens the door to heaven. Thank God that you know his name ... which would have been impossible ... if God hadn't revealed his saving name to you: "***Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.***" Now that is one special name!