



Do Not Profane Or Take God's Name In Vain by Gerald Cowan

*All Scriptures and comments are based on the **New King James Version**, unless otherwise noted.*

DO NOT PROFANE OR TAKE GOD'S NAME IN VAIN

FROM THE QUESTION BOX: *Is the use of the words "Oh my God," or "for God's sake" blasphemy against God? Is blasphemy worse than taking God's name in vain?*

Some would consider these terms blasphemous because they refer to God. But blasphemy is not a religious word as such. It means to speak irreverently against someone and can include outright slander and defamation. It implies an untruth or invalid charge though not necessarily a vulgarity. Nobody should be blasphemed although anybody could be. God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the name of God and the doctrine of God can be blasphemed (**Romans.2:24**; **1 Timothy 6:1**, etc). Men can also be blasphemed or spoken of in derogatory terms (**Matthew 12:31-32**, **Mark 3:28**). Some may think blasphemy is too strong a term for our language now unless it is a matter of cursing or somehow denigrating God or divine persons and things. But there are no degrees of blasphemy. Any vain, empty, or profane mention of God, any speaking against God in any way is blasphemy.

To develop properly the point in the question we should refer to the ten commandments listed in **Exodus 20**, in particular the third one which says, "You shall not (must not) take the name of the Lord your God in vain" (**Exodus 20:7**; **Deuteronomy 5:11**). Some parallel statements use the word profane – "you must not profane the name of your God" (for example, in **Leviticus 18:21** and **19:12**). We will notice shortly the particular meanings of these two words vain and profane, and how they apply to things related to God. In this commandment "the name of ... God" can be a reference to His person, his nature and character, and His authority – His unique place as the One and only God; the One who cannot be limited by images or in any other way; the One whose name, being, authority, and relationships must not be abused. Notice that God "will not hold guiltless any one who takes his Name in vain." "Guiltless" here is literally "clean" in Hebrew. To profane God or his name makes the guilty one unclean in God's sight. If one is not guiltless he must be guilty. Since one can be guilty and not know it, not be aware of the fact or implications of his guilt, it is imperative that we explain how and when it happens, and how to avoid it. We will notice a little later how the commandment can be and is violated, even by those claiming to be God's people.

How can one take God's name in vain, profane His holy name? The words vain, in vain, vanity and other cognates are used in scripture to mean empty, worthless, serving no good or valid purpose, producing nothing of real value or importance (compare **Matthew 15:7-9**; **Isaiah 29:13** "in vain do they worship me"). The modern word implies conceit, self-importance, etc. But it is never used in the scripture with that meaning. Any frivolous or thoughtless use of the Lord's name when He is

actually not being addressed or called upon is empty but that does not mean the person using it so is not guilty before God. For example: "Oh my God," or "my God," or "good God or good Lord," or "for God's sake" or "by God" when God is not really being addressed or considered, is taking His name (making reference to Him) in vain. Profane simply means out of order, inappropriate or improper, using something in a way that is contrary to its nature or function, or in any way that dishonors it. The name of God is profaned or taken in vain when used irreverently. In jokes. Some are not afraid to tell jokes in which God is either the speaker or the object – in either way He is subjected to ridicule. Even preachers are sometimes guilty of saying, "God spoke to me and said..." or making up stories that make a moral point by putting words in the mouth of God: "As God says," "as God's word teaches," or "to quote the Lord on this" ... when God has not spoken and/or the Bible does not contain the alleged words or teaching.

God's name is used in vain or profanely when it is attached to a lie, or to anything which He does not approve. For example: The Bible does not say – nor did God ever say to any inspired person – that one is "saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone." To say God said it or teaches it is a blasphemous vain profane lie. At this point we can say any corrupt or knowingly and deliberately inaccurate translation of the Bible is profanity, a vain profane use or reference to God's Word. Did you know that speaking approvingly of denominations is approving something God condemns as heresy (**1 Corinthians 1:10-13**) – to love something God hates is profanity. Another outstanding example of vain and profane use of God's name is misusing the words of God to justify and approve homosexuality. Note, *love*, in God's vocabulary does not justify any and all professions and practices – supposed loving actions of something called love. It has been said that *God is love* (**1 John 4:8**), therefore it must be true that love is God – so anything one can call "love" or "making love" and all who are in a "loving relationship" are godly, approved by God. That is sacrilegious blasphemy. Another matter: making improper oaths – swearing by the name of God – is a violation of the command. "*You shall not swear falsely by my name and profane the name of God*" (**Leviticus 19:12**). People may say, "I swear to God..." even when they are lying, making a false oath designed to mislead or convince others, but not really intended to bind oneself. Sometimes "I swear to God" means no more to the speaker than saying, "Cross my heart and hope to die if what I'm saying is not true." Occasionally in the Old Testament we find someone saying, "*May God do so to me, and more also, if ...*" (**2 Samuel 3:35**; **1 Kings 2:23** (KJV), **2 Kings 6:31**, etc). Does one really mean to bind himself with such an oath and specify the punishment he should receive if he breaks his promise?

Today profanity generally connotes vulgarity or swearing/cursing (the colloquial vernacular is "cussing") and of course that fits the word, in part (see **Ephesians 4:29**). "Taking God's name in vain" usually means today attaching God's name to some expletive, or "cuss word" (such as God damn this or that). Again, that fits the word, in part, whether it be the name of God or of Christ or the Holy Spirit. "For Christ's sake" can be used properly (as in **Ephesians 4:32**), but can also be profanity when uttered in a certain context or tone of voice. Some believe that Peter so lost his composure when pressed about his knowledge of and relationship with Jesus that he ended up cursing and swearing – using vulgarities and "cuss words" (**Matthew 26:74**). That is probably a serious and unwarranted denigration of Peter's character. More likely he said something like, "I swear to God" or "I swear on my own life," or maybe even, "I swear by the Holy Torah," etc – yes, profane and vain and maybe approaching blasphemy, but not vulgar cussing.

Something not generally considered or accepted as true is the use of euphemistic or slang oaths that misuse the name of God, but in obscure or less than obvious ways. Golly, gee, gee whiz, jeez, doggone, dadgum, dern, dang, darn, heck, dadblast it, and other such things are examples of slang involving God, Jesus, Christ, damnation, hell, etc. If you choose not to believe it, look in your own dictionary for any of these words or expressions, and others like them. Many who use these and other similar expressions will excuse themselves by saying they do not intend anything disrespectful to God and do not consider it "swearing." Perhaps to some it is simply a mild way of being emphatic or somewhat dramatic. For some it is simply careless and thoughtless – idle words. Then **Matthew 12:36-37** will apply. One is accountable for every idle word one utters, and will be judged and justified or condemned by the words he uses. Even such mild expressions as the Man upstairs, the Big Guy in the sky, Daddy, Dad, or Daddy-O can be disrespectful and egregiously over-familiar when applied to God. God or Christ can be a Friend, but never a buddy. I heard one say, a long time ago when it was considered "hip" or "cool" to speak condescendingly of God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit, that, "God's a fair guy who'll cut you some slack when you need it." Another, a denizen of the drug culture, talked about being "stoned on the Holy Spirit." All such things are vain, profanation of God and His relationship with us.

The consequences of profaning or taking the name of the Lord God in vain are serious. The Lord will not hold him guiltless or clean. If one is not guiltless he is guilty. If one is not clean he is unclean. All who are guilty and not forgiven, unclean and not cleansed (**1 John 1:7-9**) – all who are judged guilty and unclean by God – will not enter God's heaven (**Revelation 21:27**). The consequence for profaning God's name or taking it in vain is the same as for any other sin. It is spiritual death (**Romans 6:23**). If unrepented and uncorrected it will lead to eternal spiritual death in hell.

One last thought: taking God's name in vain or profaning it means applying the name where it does not belong and making claims or promises in or by His name which are not true and valid according to His word. Some persons and churches identified as Christian profane and misapply the name of the Lord. He will not approve, accept, or even acknowledge them, and they will probably be surprised when they learn it from him (**Matthew 7:21-23**). Churches that promise blessings and salvation but do not follow the way of the Lord are counterfeiters, taking the name of the Lord in vain, profaning his name in the way they present and represent him.

<><> - Gerald Cowan, *Personal Periodicals* Number 627, April 7, 2021