

REFORMED CHURCH BELLVILLE: SUNDAY 6 NOVEMBER 2011: EVENING SERVICE

Sing before: Psalm 135:1+2.

Let us commence this meeting with God by declaring openly to one another and to God:

Our help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.

Amen

Beloved, grace and peace be with you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ through the powerful working of God the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

Song of praise: Psalm 96:1+5.

Prayer:

- **Doxology**
- **Worship**
- **Confession of sins**
- **Forgiveness**
- **Gratitude**
- **Prayer for the need of the congregation for the church, the authorities and the sinful world and appeal to God's promises.**
- **General prayer**
- **Enlightenment from the Holy Spirit for the sake of the ministry of the Word.**

Amen

Psalm: 145:1+2.

Scripture reading: Leviticus 24:10-23, Heidelberg Catechism Lord's Day 36.

Scripture text: Leviticus 24: 15-16:

Then you shall speak to the children of Israel saying: "Whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. And whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him who is born in the land. When he blasphemes the name of the LORD, he shall be put to death."

Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 36.

Question 99: What is required in the third commandment?

Answer: *That we must not by cursing (a), or by false swearing (b), nor yet by unnecessary oaths (c), profane or abuse the name of God, nor even by our silence (d) and connivance be partakers of these horrible sins in others; and in sum, that we use the holy name of God no otherwise than with fear and reverence (e) so that He may be rightly confessed (f) and worshipped by us (g), and be glorified in all our words and works (h).*

(a) Lev 24:15-16 (b) Lev 19:12 (c) Matt 5:37; James 5:12 (d) Lev 5:1; Prov 29:24 (e) Jer 4:2; Is 45:23; Ps 99:1-5 (f) Matt 10:32-33; Rom 10:9-10 (g) Ps 50:15; 1 Tim 2:8 (h) Col 3:17; Rom 2:24; Tim 6:1.

Question 100: Is then the profaning of God's name by swearing and cursing so grievous a sin that His wrath is kindled against those also who seek not, as much as in them lies, to hinder and forbid the same?

Answer: *Yes truly (a), for no sin is greater, or more provoking to God than the profaning of His name. Wherefore He even commanded it to be punished with death (b).*
(a) Lev 5:1; Prov 29:24 (b) Lev 24:16.

Theme: A grateful believer uses the name of the LORD with respect and reverence.

Beloved in our Lord Jesus Christ, the LORD gave us his Law so that the true believer could live as a child of God. We, who have been redeemed from sin and the rule of the devil by the precious blood of Christ, have God's Law as guide for our life of gratitude to God. Following the Third Commandment the grateful believers resolve to use the name of God only with the greatest respect and reverence. We want to extol and praise the Name of the Lord eternally. But why do we praise only the Name of the Lord? Why do we not praise the Lord Himself? Is He not our almighty God and loving Father? Surely it is God who saved us from the eternal death and the rule of Satan? We must, then, extol and praise the Lord our God.

Indeed, we must extol and praise God. But, we must bear in mind – the Name of God cannot be separated from Himself. In Psalm 145 we sing – *I will extol you, my God, O King; and I will bless Your Name for ever and ever.* So there are many Psalms in which we praise the Name of the Lord. In these Psalms God is not wronged. God's Name is not just a sound or a word in the mouths of men. God's Name and God Himself are so intertwined and united that one can say that where God's Name is, He Himself is present. Hence David could say to Goliath: *"I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied."* (1 Samuel 17:45) By that David meant that God was with him in his battle with Goliath and the Philistines. Therefore, where the Name of God is mentioned in the Bible, God Himself is intended.

To clarify the matter more, we could put it as follows: when we say that someone has a bad name, it means in reality that that person is bad in himself. Between a person and his name there is a close tie. That is even more the case with God. For, there is only one Divine Being whom we can invoke with the Name of God or Lord. Hence, when we speak of the Name of God, we speak of God Himself. His Name is as holy as is God Himself.

As no distinction can be made between God and His Name, we can now consider what the LORD reveals to us in the third commandment. The third commandment is well-known – **"You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain, for the LORD will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain."** (Ex 20:7)

When one takes the name of the LORD in vain, one speaks frivolously. Someone who uses the Name of the Lord in this way acts as if the Name of the Lord is worthless. To him it is only a word to be used as any other word. Or it is to him a word with no meaning at all.

Brothers, sisters and children, the worst form of taking the Name of the Lord in vain is blasphemy. The Holy Spirit teaches us in Leviticus 24 that it was this form of taking the Name of the Lord in vain

that the son of Shelomith was guilty of. He became embroiled in a fight with another Israelite in the camp. And we know what happens when two people fight about something. Matters run out of hand and in the heat of the moment you say something without thinking. Then it is too late. The damage is done and the road of repair is very difficult.

One can only imagine what occurred in the camp of the Israelites. Shelomith's son and the other man were fighting in the presence of all the people. And suddenly, in the heat of the moment, he says it. He blasphemed the Name of the LORD. Exactly what he said we do not know. Perhaps he took it in vain as many people do nowadays or as we hear it being done in the films and on TV. Or he might even have cursed the Lord. It does not matter what he said -

All we need to know is that he blasphemed. And then a silence fell. One could hear a pin drop, because this man had used the Lord's Name in a way nobody else had ever done before. He had used the Lord's Name to add force to his poor and sinful words. What now? We must go to Moses because he will know what is to be done. The LORD has commanded that nobody may use His Name in vain and that someone who does so would be punished by the Lord Himself. But how, nobody knows. And so – off they went to Moses.

Moses then prayed to the LORD to guide them through His Spirit to the correct solution. Listen again to the Lord's decision in the matter: **“Take outside the camp him who has cursed; then let all who heard him lay their hands on his head, and let all the congregation stone him. Then you shall speak to the children of Israel, saying: ‘whoever curses his God shall bear his sin. And whoever blasphemes the name of the Lord shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall certainly stone him, the stranger as well as him born in the land. When he blasphemes the name of the LORD he shall be put to death.’”** (Lev 24:14-16)

In this judgment the Lord explains the connection between His Name and Himself. Shelomith's son blasphemed the Name of God. And the Lord commanded that everyone who curses his God is to be put to death. That is to say that someone who abuses God's Name, in fact abuses God. Shelomith's son dishonoured God by not respecting Him for Who He is.

With this judgement of God our Catechism aligns itself in the answer to question 100: **No sin is greater, or more provoking to God than the profaning of His name. Wherefore He even commanded it to be punished with death.**

Beloved, what Shelomith's son did is not unknown to us. Today there still are people who, especially when they curse and are abusive, but also in other circumstances, use the Name of the Lord to impress people. A curser actually is a weakling who by his cursing shows his weakness and impotence. If he does not curse and blaspheme the Lord's Name, his words have no power. His yes is not yes and his no is not no. And now he tries to add credence to his powerless words by abusing the Name of God. But actually he is recklessly vilifying the Name of God and rendering himself guilty before the holy God who does not permit any trifling with Him.

The Lord's Name is blasphemed not only so blatantly. And God's judgment is not aimed only at such blatant blasphemy. In the Ten Commandments the Lord says much more than appears at first glance. One could ask, “How is it that more is written than what we read?” Jesus is an example to us of the understanding of the Ten Commandments. When, for example, He explains the sixth commandment. He tells us that it deals not with murder only. Also when you curse or abuse another, the sixth commandment is transgressed.

That is why we confess that God does not only forbid the blaspheming of His Name but also any frivolous use of His Name. Someone who uses the Name of God frivolously uses the Name disrespectfully and irreverently. Not only outside the church-building but also inside it can the Lord's Name be taken in vain. When we pray our thoughts should be directed at the prayer. Prayer during worship is not the minister's prayer but the prayer of the entire congregation by mouth of the minister or whoever leads in prayer. If we think of all sorts of things during prayer we use the Lord's Name as if it were just another word. Even when we sing without thinking about what we are singing, we would be taking the Lord's Name in vain. We must therefore examine ourselves and see how we use the Name of the Lord. Do we use it with the required respect and reverence?

Another question presents itself in connection with Leviticus 24. Those people who heard the son of Shelomith abusing God's Name, were they not only tell-tales? Were they not just like children who wanted to see this man being punished?

Beloved, no, listen again to what we profess: **"We must not ...even by our silence and connivance be partakers of these horrible sins in others."** Should we remain silent, we would be guilty of this sin. It is so serious that we profess further that it is **so grievous a sin that God's wrath is kindled against those also who seek not, as much as in them lies, to hinder and forbid this sin.** Yes, even he who remains silent about such a sin is guilty of that sin.

Hence we cannot say: "Let those swearers and cursers carry on." God demands of us that to be His witnesses in those circumstances and to protect the honour of His Name. We are God's children and often the curser knows this. If we do not admonish him or her it is as if we agree with what he does to the Lord's Name.

We know that it is not always easy to do this. The believer who admonishes a curser often is cursed by the curser. Believers are even pushed out of the community. The question then is: "Is my name and my position within the community more important than God's Name?" Jesus Christ said: **"A servant is not above his master. As I was persecuted, so you will be persecuted too."** And the following words of Christ spring to mind as well: **"Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven."** (Matthew 10:32-33)

Therefore, come what may, we must oppose and admonish cursers and blasphemers. God demands it of us. He uses His children to stop people who commit this sin and to call them to repentance. If He had not given us this task He would be compelled to descend on the curser with all His might. Who would be able to stay alive before the eternal God whose Name is holy? No-one would be able to survive before God because the whole world is guilty before God.

But, beloved, we people think that we are clever. If it is so great a sin to blaspheme God's Name, is it then not better never to use His Name? If we wish to do that, we play straight into Satan's hands. He would like us to suppress God's Name and never mention it anywhere. But if we never mention God's Name we would be ignoring God Himself and act as if He did not exist. The impression would then be created that God is a factor to be ignored and we can do without Him. Is that not also blasphemy?

In this respect we who have children and grandchildren in school should ask ourselves how far we are prepared to go in order to see to it that God's Name is not crowded out of our schools and other educational institutions. The tendency to remove all religion from the school is nothing new in our country. We have a history of so-called neutral schools. By neutral schools is meant that education

should have nothing to do with religion. In reality that is nothing else but suppressing the Name of God. Shall we support this or meekly accept it or shall we openly stand up for God and His Name?

With our confession we exhort ourselves **to use the holy name of God no otherwise than with fear and reverence, so that He may be rightly confessed and worshipped by us, and be glorified in all our words and works.** We must praise God with every word and deed for the sake of the glory of His Name. Then we use His Name with fear and reverence.

Beloved, if the Lord had not instructed us to oppose and admonish cursers and blasphemers, He would have struck the curser with all His might. For this blasphemy Christ was nailed to the cross in our stead. It was for alleged blasphemy that Christ was condemned to death. Caiaphas, the high priest, said to Jesus: **“I put you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God!”** Jesus said to him: **“It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven.”** Then the high priest tore his clothes, saying: **“He has spoken blasphemy! What further need do we have of witnesses? Look, now you have heard His blasphemy! What do you think?”** They answered and said: **“He is deserving of death.”** (Matthew 26:63-66)

With this false accusation Christ was condemned to death. He who remained silent when He had to remain silent and spoke when He had to speak, died to pay for us, who often remain silent when we should speak and speak when we should be silent or must speak of God with fear and reverence. Beloved, by faith we are tied to Christ. The Holy Spirit also washed from us our sins concerning the third commandment. Therefore we shall, out of gratitude, not abuse the Name of the Lord but always praise His Name with our words and works.

Amen!

Closing prayer.

Closing song: Hymn 9-1:1+5+11.

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

Amen

Rev CCA Vrey
Reformed Church Bellville
6 November 2011
Scripture: New King James Bible