No. 58

On taking the name of God in vain.

April 23, 1820
Exodus xx. 17. "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."

This is among those commands, wh. were delivered amidst the terrors of Mt. Sinai, to the children of Israel. These commandments were intended to operate at once as preservatives of religious worship, as strong incentives, as preservatives from the paganism & idolatry of surrounding nations, as incentives to the practice of piety to God, & of justice to man. They are evidently framed with a peculiar view to the condition of the Jewish people at that time: & they were accompanied with such a mighty
array of solemn circumstances, as were well adapted to give them a deep impression on the minds of the children of Israel. And Mt. Sinai, says the historian, was altogether in a smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire, and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, of the whole mount quaked greatly. And the Lord came down upon Mt. Sinai, in the top of the mount. Then the voice of heaven proclaimed the ten commandments. The first of these was designed to enforce the unity of God. That great, primary principle of all religion, to secure from all rivalship of competition, the unapproachable rights of this supreme sovereignty; the second was intended very particularly, in strong testimony, the worship of Jehovah, to preserve it pure amidst the idolatry, which was everywhere around, to settle the altar, where the E. G. was to be offered, from being polluted by unholy fires, so that the people of God might be secured from those gross and filthy errors, in which would carry its profaneness even unto the day of holiness.

It is to this commandment, that I would now call your attention. There has been some difference among interpreters, with respect to the precise mode of explaining it. But some, it is translated thus: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." I.e., they shall not make use of it, in any way of appealing to him, as an ava

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for the same reason that false gods are idolized, varieties of vain gods, vain oaths may be considered as false oaths. Perhaps, our Lord, after having referred to the other precepts of the decalogue, had an immediate regard to the third commandment, when he said: we have heard it hath been said, thou shalt not take the Lord's name in vain, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths. Considered in this light, the commandment forms the subject of our discourse, may be viewed as intended to forbid perjury, a crime so heinous to every idea, that existing in society, is that binds our hearts to man. That in every age, in every country, it has been branded with the mark of infamy. We can hardly imagine that there should be a man, whose heart could be so hardened, that it would not tremble at the thought of calling God Almighty to witness on what he knew to be false. He who stands up and says—so help me God—stands without his hearers, what does he but challenge omnipotence to wreak its vengeance on his head?—But though the crime of perjury is doubtless included among the crimes prohibited in the text, yet there are other forms of transgressing the third commandment, which are much more common, and against which there is more pardon. His need of guarding the sanctity of the life. It is not necessary to take a false oath, in order to commit that sin, for oft the Lord will not hold us guiltless. The profane man labours under the law of God, as well as the perjurer, many a blasphemer as well as the oath-breaker. It is to these more common crimes—crimes which are everyday staring us in the face—that I wish to draw attention.

1. We may consider the third commandment, as intended to forbid all erroneous expressions of property whatever concerning the Deity. And this prohibition is of much wider extent, than we may at first imagine. Without uttering a single speech that may properly be called profane, we may still be guilty.
of reverence to God. Our habits of thinking and feeling may be such that the name of the Most High does not come to our minds, bringing with it such a train of solemn and elevating thoughts as it ought. There is a difference between being decent, being decent in our hearts may be full of irreverence in the right of God, while in the right of man we may appear not irreligious. - Pride, deceit, &c., the blindness of tender may lead us to delegate the perfection of the Almighty & to measure his providence by this taking his name in vain. Sometimes, although plans have been defeated. Good be as baffled, if often some of the enemies of our felicity have been dried up their channels are left bare to our eyes, when we look around and find only dreariness & vacancy where we expected light and bloom, when it has pleased God to send clouds across the sunshine that was streaming upon us, tempests & thunders in the oxen on which we must drink, - of course, we are told to think of these, severe, we must pray against the providence of the Almighty, & complain that his ways towards us are unjust, do we not manifest a friend's reverence towards Him who has placed us in this state of discipline? do we not take the name of the Lord in vain? And we may likewise show irreverence towards God, when we speak lightly of His name, pruners, &c., &c., without in the deepest religious subjects in general. We may not đứng by of these preferences, & yet we may, in expressions concerning God, divine things very differently from those who are at all. - There is a want of liberty, a want of light, perhaps indulged without any apprehension of guilt or condemnation, yet in time brings in the manner of indulgence, & then gradually spreads a hardened insensibility over the soul. The man who allows himself to speak lightly with men of the doctrine of God, and who has brought himself thus to think & thus to speak, he has but a short way to pass, before he enters into the guilt of flagitious professions. And & religion are no objects for jesting. - No, whatsoever we make them so, whenever we treat divine topics as the common
the Almighty with reverence: then in no case
we take the name of the God in vain.

2. But a more direct & more common violation of
the 2d commandment is the habit of taking both
& indeliberate oaths, & more especially of oaths
swearing in conversation. This is a crime akin to the
disgrace of religion, & the shame of mankind.
It has become so fashionable, so epidemic,
that it deserves to be particularly pointed
out & most particularly condemned. Would to
God, my friends, that we were all of the opined that
wrong this most flagrant violation of all
that is sacred, & all that is decent & would have
that we were not called upon to defend the
name of the Almighty from so gross pollution.
& to blot the mark of infamy upon a vice, in more
perhaps than any other instance. God is innocent
But it is a crying sin, everywhere amongst us. If
it be not to be shrouded in the mist of
clouds, it will cry the heavier for vengeance upon our
heads. If there be a crime, he should peculiarly execute
the indignation of every one, who has a regard for the
purity of religion, & for the welfare of society, it is
the crime of profane oaths.

1. It is a gross & wanton act of simplicity. The all that
believe in the being of God, neither believe in the existence of
one great First Cause, who hath created worlds on worlds, & systems on systems, with whom time has
no divisions, & duration no bounds, who has arranged all
that is, as it was, or shall be, of the temple of nature, & the
most it arranged. He created thoughts can but just
reach the vast & vast in the height of sublimity can
proceed me further: whose dominion is without
end, whose power uncontrollable, whose wisdom
beyond, whose aim supports all nature, & without whose
influence it would be but becoming to the empire
of darkness, who hath created man & given him
all the faculties, who make him a member of the
various & accountable being, who is the present
witness of every thought, or think, or every matter, & who will hereafter be the judge of
lives, & the controller of our everlasting destinies; in exalted beings with such a character, & with such attributes, we all believe & profess to believe, with this belief, how is it possible for man rashly, proudly, 

y madly to appeal to the sacred name of Jehovah in the most trivial or most licentious conversation? let us with the titles of the Most High, in the midst of his anger or his holiness, to introduce that name at the sound of such angels hoi, & the pillars of heaven tremble, to add force to a curse, or to give effect to a jest? it seems to me, that it is impossible to think of this crime in its proper light without shuddering to know that man can be found who has the heart bold to indulge in it. if a being acquainted with earth with mankind were introduced among us, y mere to hear these impious, these rash invocations, y mad eloquence of the Almighty, 

altho' he may be so often heard, could you persuade him, that these persons, who say so rashly, unless they speak profoundly, believe in reality that there is a power on high, wherein at any moment even 
them to the dust; that far beyond the highest heavens, there is an eye, the beam of which is constantly going through his heart. if holy, holy, 

more; think, that if they in truth believed thus, they could defy that power by forswearing, or profaning, or their blasphemies of all that age was passing on them. The habitual sinner, may be a practise al, if not a professed atheist. If we believe that there is a Being, whose name gives us life, whose word sends us death, shall we introduce that Being 

if I may so say, in the midst of our follies, is the true 

\ if your prayers, y shall we use that name, holy, holy, holy, before the face of the Lord, to give an air of colour, a smartness, vigorous to our unimportance, our folly? are the words of impurity & wickedness the best place to appeal to God of immediate witness? yf, it is not unseemly to think, that the breath of man should be spent in praising him, who at 

first breathed into us the breath of life, without
when it would instantly cease? - to think that
the lips and feet that formed for his pleasure should
be employed in cursing and blasphemy? - Perhaps the pro-
fane man will say, that he offend only for his own
amusement at heaven, & that he does not intend
any serious impiety against God; - but let him
remember that the name of the Lord of hosts is
subject for amusement; - that it is no light
thing to make a jest of the Almighty; - no inno-
cent thing to treat the divinities of Him who
can in a moment end as the darkness of dust, as
if it could be swept off with in unwhitiness. And
let him who indulges in the habit of profane
scarcery, reflect too for amusement, with how
much reverence he treats the name & character of
the Almighty, than he does the name & character
of an earthly friend whom he respects. For
there is a man, to whom we are accustomed to look up
with reverence & profound regard, - yea and in whom
de all our feelings of admiration, gratitude, reverence
really & associate - of that man, even in our most
enquiries, we do not speak with
honor is with rashness. - You scarcely approach human
without an almost involuntary tribute of respect.
Yet, and we are our strange inconsistencies, - the regard
of which we pay to others, passing man, we refuse to pay
to the everlasting God; - we are afraid to speak even
to the divinity of human dignity, - but rush in heedless
of profaneness, blasphemy, the name of Him, who is the
darkest of all glory & perfection. If there be any
even the most faint, & lingering, sentiment of God,
in ou mind; - if there be in our heart a thought
of a feeling, that loves heavenward, & refers to
an alliance with our Maker, - if the truth, that
God himself first breathed upon purity within
our souls, be not utterly extinguished, - if what
we have not forgotten, what we are & what relation
we stand to Him, who hath created, & who
thath redeemed us; - then must such mean
out, but look upon the habit of profane
scarcery, as a most gross & wanton habit of ingratitude
towards God & of indecency towards man. - And me.
would think, it were enough to make the heart of the most hardened to tremble, if he is conscious of having abused such an intimate to the name of that Being, who stands at the head of the universe, a name to which He is under infinite obligations—

and when he remembers, that by all this God, as he most solemnly proclaims from Mt. Sinai, will not hold him guiltless, that there is a day coming when he must answer to that Being against whom he has uttered this bold and rash profanity...

2. But the habit of profane swearing is not only impious to the God, it is to be condemned likewise on account of its pernicious effects. These lamentable effects are seen both on the individual, in society, and in the individual, because it weakens finally destroys that moral sensibility and that reverence of God which are the foundation of religion, and virtue. What can more surely and fatally blast every pure and religious feeling, that might have taken root in the heart? Whatever tends to diminish that profound and humble reverence with the creature owes to the Great, the infinite, to the Infinite, must in itself be highly criminal and pernicious. By what, let me ask, can more directly assert the malignity of influence, than the use of taking the name of the Lord in vain?

We know that even the most contemptible objects, by being made too common and familiar, soon gradually be regarded as with less and less reverence. If such objects, however high and venerable, by being associated with low and obscure images, are rendered debased and despised. If, therefore, we wish to turn our appeal to the name of God on every frivolous or light occasion, or in the midst of our impious or our faculties—what can we expect, but that it should soon lose its solemn and venerable character, and that the tenderness and charity of tender hearts should at length settle into habitual disregard? How can the profane man feel an emotion of reverence for the holy name, and daily and hourly be arrogantly mocked.
in the midst of this moment of idle conversation. How can he worship God in spirit & in truth, when he remembers, perhaps, that the name of that God passed his lips but a few hours ago? He is mourning in the accounts of his ancestors. The heart of the blasphemous can boisterously become an altar for devotion; for the vice of profanity, more than any other vice, brings down the high and holy image of the Almighty, to speak, to mingle with all the grandeur's impure objects of earth. How can he who has thus debased it look upon its consecration? It cannot be; for he uses the name of God profanely can hardly be expected ever to deify it. But this vice not only exerts a pernicious influence in the individual; its effects on society are likewise most deplorable. Indeed, it is essential regard to the economy of his supreme & sovereign grandeur, for it enforces the observance of human laws; consequently, whatever tends to diminish this respect, augments the strength of laws, and thereby the floundering state of society, by taking away that effect & security with loses the very foundation of the rights of mankind. Prone overweening seeks the very life of the interests of society, because it destroys that religious feeling, and often in some form or other must be the savor of society, because it diminishes the sacredness of human laws, where one of the main securities of property & safety of the blessings of social life. And considers too the pernicious influence of this vice on the mass of the people, especially in the young. Consider how it pass from the youthful heart, from its nature & course to all these social consequences of these feelings at an age, when those consequences are most keen, might especially be turned in all their force & all their severity to the account of religious prudence. Indeed it is like infusing venom into the life blood of society & it goes soaring with it to appear to every part of the body. The estimation influence no one can estimate, for it is constantly operating in a thousand unseen ways on moral feelings & moral habits. By breaking down these, moral & moral habits, behind all that is for in religion or valuable in society might stand & be defended.
have a motive doubly strong for abstaining from this hateful vice. Have a regard to their young lives, sons of promise. And remember that while you take the name of God in vain you are training them up in the school of profanity. I know not a sight more black and sadder a child uttering with its earliest breath, "There, accent of blasphemy, it learns from afar." Oh, do not let your children bear the name of God profaned by:bgz. oh, they have been taught to love! Oh, do not let that voice which is the voice of an oracle, bear to their ears the deadly and cursed of impiety, possession. Have mercy upon them. Have mercy, oh, yourselves. Consuming the soul, God must save stand at the door of God's hear to reverence God, for at this house, open, if the yolk of us must come stand? if there have shall the tongue, oh, has been profane as earth, answer for its profanity, before Him whose wrath blest?... 

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