



S E R M O N C L X V .

Q U E S T I O N L V .

HAT is forbidden in the Third Commandment ?

A N S W E R .

THE Third Commandment forbiddeth, the profaning or abusing of any thing, whereby GOD maketh Himself known.

THOUGH it be sufficient in itself for our knowing what is Sin, to lay open the *Duty* before us distinctly, yet such is our dulness and inadvertency, that we have need also to be particularly instructed about *Sins* which are a breach of the Command. And tho' it be a comprehensive Rule, that every Aberration from the Precept, either by Omission or Transgression, is a sinful breach of it, yet we are too apt either to forget or mistake; and for that reason God hath done both of these in his Word, and made it the Duty of his Ministers, not only to lay down the Command, but also to shew his People the Transgressions of it, *Isai. 58. 1. Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sin.* Yea; this Command, as the most of the Decalogue, is laid down Negatively, pointing us nextly what we are to avoid. Let us then take a brief view of the *Negative* part of it.

WE observed under the *Positive* part of this Command, that the comprehensive Duty required in it, is *holy reverence of God, in respect of all those Discoveries which he maketh of himself to us.* The contrary to this, or the *Sin forbidden*, is in the Command called, a *taking of his Name in vain*: This our Catechism expresseth in two words, viz. Profaning or Abusing this Name of his. In which Words there is a gradation contained. Profaning a thing according to the usage of it, is as much as making it Common, and is opposed to sanctifying it; which is done by a separation of it from all common use, and consecrating it to that which is Sacred. When therefore Men do, either in Thought, Word, or Deed, put a common, mean, or low account upon God's precious Name, they then profane it. Abusing of it hath a respect to something that is higher and more grievous, and it intends the casting disparagement or reproach on a thing, to abuse it to fordid and base ends, to cast active indignity upon it. And this is done, when we subordinate it to our Lusts and Corruptions, and these *Two* are comprehensive of the meaning of taking it in *Vain*.

NOW the several ways in which this Command is broken, and are for that reason forbidden in it, are too many here to be enumerated. I shall endeavour to give some touch upon the principal, as they come under the diverse Heads mentioned in the former Answer,

by which the Name of God is to be understood by us, according to the Scriptures. Here then,

First, *IN respect of God's Names, Titles and Attributes*, this Command is many ways violated: More especially and comprehensively by such things as these,

I. *BY a light and frothy using of them in common Discourse.* It is true, we ought to be often speaking of God, but it should always be with greatest Reverence, so as to make it appear that we have an awful Fear of him in our Hearts: but when rashly and indeliberately, we mention his Names or Perfections, and so make them common, we profane them; for herein we make it to appear, that we have a low Opinion of them, and that we have not that awe of God upon our hearts; contrary to *Mal. 1. 6.* Thus when Persons at every turn cry out, Oh Lord, Oh God, God Almighty, and the like; as if the Names and Perfections of God were for nothing else but for Men to play withal. How much more, when Men speak or express themselves passionately, unbecomingly, and cry, God forgive me, &c. Which is to entitle him to our Sins. How do such forget that duty, *Deut. 28. 58. That thou mayest fear this glorious and fearful Name, THE LORD THY GOD.*

II. *BY sinful Swearing.* That Swearing doth of its own nature belong to Religious Worship, we have before observed; for God's Name and Attributes are concerned in it; it being an Appeal to his Judgment, who is all-knowing, and able to take Vengeance; who is no other but God. That it is sometimes lawful and a duty to Swear, hath also been evidenced. But there are several ways in which his Name may be abused on this account; and more particularly,

1. *BY common Swearing.* When persons mix Oaths with their ordinary Discourses, and possibly can scarce utter a few Sentences without Swearing; which is too much the custom of the Age we live in. They therein horribly profane God's Name, and contradict the Precept which hath bounded our ordinary Converse to bare Affirmations and Negations, *Mat. 5. 34, 37. But I say unto you, Swear not at all. But let your conversation be, Yea, yea: Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these, cometh of evil.* Whereas how many think no Oratory so graceful as that which is lined with Oaths.

2. *BY false Swearing.* The use of an Oath is for the confirmation of the *Truth* of what one asserts, and it is by calling on God to be a Witness thereto. Now God is a God of Truth, and he hates all falsehood. There can therefore be no greater dishonour put upon him, than to make him the Parron of a lye; to put his Name down for a Witness to that which is not so. Nor can there any greater

contempt be cast upon God, than is done by this. For by Swearing we invoke God to punish us, if what we say be not true: Which how could we dare to do, if the fear of God had any impression upon our Hearts? It saith that Men regard not that Curse, *Zech. 5. 4.*

3. *By rash & indeliberate Swearing.* Possibly they do think the thing is true, but do not first ponder it in all the Circumstances of it, to see that they are not mistaken, but that they know it to be so, and not by hear-say only, but of their own knowledge and distinct memory. Precipitancy in it is a sign that we do not consider that God is a jealous God for his great Name, but that we practically believe that he little regards what we say, and will not call us to an account. And what is this but to despise him?

4. *By needless Swearing.* Nothing can be more solemn than an Oath; and therefore in nothing do Men shew more, either of their reverence or contempt of God. For Men therefore to call God a Witness against their own Souls, which is implied in every Oath, *2 Cor. 1. 23.* when the thing it self is not of weight or moment, is an Argument of an irreligious frame of Spirit. And this is done, either when neither the thing nor circumstances are of weight, so as to make it needful, or when the thing is sufficiently clear without our Affidavit; and therefore it is superfluous, and the Controversy may well enough be ended without it.

5. *By fallacious Swearing.* Tho' there is no difference in God's account between this and false Swearing. Hence he is charged with lying, *Psal. 52. 3. Thou lovest evil more than good: and lying rather than to speak righteousness.* Yet in the thing among Men there is this difference, in that the thing it self is false, but in this it may in some sense be true, but under a cloak of deceit: either by suppressing part of the Truth, or expressing of it in ambiguous Terms, so as to impose on Men by it; and therewith a design to pervert Judgment, and to wrong the Innocent. And such was *Doeg's* testimony. Now this is to becloud the Truth, and not to give light to it, which is an abuse offered to God's Holy Name. That therefore is a note of one who shall ascend into God's Hill, *Psal. 24. 4.*—*Not sworn deceitfully.*

6. *By Swearing by any other Name but that of the true God.* The Name by which we Swear, is a Scripture test, to prove of what Religion Men are; for he by whose Name Men Swear, is the God whom they pretend to Worship. Thus, *Gen. 31. 53. And Jacob swore by the fear of his father Isaac.* For the very nature of an Oath implies, that in it we address him to whom we ascribe the Divine Perfections. If then it be not the true God, it is an Idol. And to put any other in the room of God, is highly derogatory to his Name and Glory. Hence that is an Article against Men, *Jer. 5. 7. Thy children have forsaken me, and sworn by them that are no gods.* God is also

despised, when Men Swear by things which they know to be unable to Judge them: when instead of Swearing by God, they Swear by the Bible, by the Evangelists, by their Faith, Troth, by their Head, by the Temple; all of which are comprehended, *Mat. 5. 34, 35, 36.*

7. *By violating of their Promissory Oaths.* When Men do not only make Promises, but call God to witness to them, and yet they neither regard their own Truth, nor God's Glory, which is now concerned peculiarly in it, they certainly break this Command; and therefore there is much aggravation of Sin by this. *2 Chron. 36. 13. And he also rebelled against king Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him swear by God.* Because herein Men invite God himself to be their Security, for their faithful performance of their Promises; whom they hereby dishonour.

III. *By sinful Carriage about Vows.* We formerly ranked these under promissory Swearing; tho' some suppose some nice distinctions between them. A Vow is a solemn binding our selves to perform something to God or for his Glory, and so hath God for the immediate Object to whom it is devoted. The Lawfulness and Usefulness of such Vows, we have already taken notice of. But as God is honoured by them when they are rightly attended, so his Name is reproached by them when it is otherwise. And this is done more especially,

1. *By unlawful Vows.* And this more peculiarly respects the thing Vowed. The end of a Vow is to bind our selves to something by which God is honoured; and therefore to Vow that which the doing of will dishonour him, is an abuse to his Name. To oblige our selves to do that which is itself sinful, is such. And hither belongs *Jephtha's* Vow, if it devoted his Daughter to Death. Hither belong the Popish Vows of Chastity, Poverty, and Monastical Obedience, which are Superstitious, and therefore unlawful: For hereby they presume that God will be pleased with such things, which is an high reflection upon his Name.

2. *By the performance of such Vows under a pretence of Conscience.* It is true, Men Sin by making such Vows, and ought therefore to be humbled before God for it, and repent of it: but to resolve that they must do it because of the Vow, is superstitious and erroneous; and so to do, is to offer a farther affront to God. It therefore added to *Jephtha's* Sin, if in Conscience of his Vow, he sacrificed or slew his Daughter. And his duty to do it is in vain pleaded from *Lev. 27. 29. None devoted, which shall be devoted of men, shall be redeemed: but shall surely be put to death.* In the Hebrew it is every *Cherom* or *Anathema*; which is *Anathemiz'd out of Men*: it is not said by *Man*, noting the Subject. Now it was not lawful for Men to devote their Children to Death, nor Sacrifice, but utterly forbidden by the Law. It therefore intends such as God hath devoted, and probably intends the *Canaanites*, whom they were not to spare, 2a

3. *BY their not regarding to perform their lawful Vows.* That is a duty, Psal. 76. 11. *Vow, and pay unto the Lord your God.* And not to do it, is to disregard God's Name, to which we have obliged our selves. And this neglect evermore manifests either falseness and hypocrisy in our Vowing; or disregard to God, as if it were no matter whether we were true to him or no. We are therefore told, Eccl. 5. 5. *Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, then that thou shouldest vow and not pay.*

IV. *BY Imprecations or Curses.* It is true, there is an implicit imprecation in every Oath that is made by Men, because in it they invoke God to be a Judge, and if they Swear falsely to punish them. But there are more immediate and direct imprecations, which are called Cursing, distinct from Swearing. And that is, when Men do call for some mischief to befall themselves or others, which is usually occasioned by some disgust they take, or some Passion they are thrown into: in which God is either *explicitly*, or at least *implicitly* invoked, to execute our ill wishes: Not only when Men express God's Name, as when they say, God damn them; or when they Petition God to destroy or blast, whether themselves or others; but also when they wish any evil to befall Men, that they may die, or some plague may overtake them; or devote them to the Devil, and many like; because here is a tacit address to God's Providence which governs all Affairs, and so to God himself, who is the Governour. And yet how much of this Sin is practised among Men that call themselves Christians. Men by thus doing, make a daring trespass upon this Command, contrary to the Precept, in Rom. 12. 14. *Bless them which persecute you, bless and curse not.* It may here be alledged, that there are instances in the Word of God, of such as have imprecated against themselves or others, who were godly Men, and that very frequently; surely then it is lawful. A little to clear this matter, let us observe,

1. *THAT some Imprecations of Good Men were sinful, and flowed from their sinful Infirmity.* Such as *Job's* & *Jeremiah's* cursing their Birth, and many Persons, as *Job* 3. *Fer.* 20. 14. Such are not written for our learning, but avoidance.

2. *THERE are some Imprecations on Scripture record, which are Prophetical:* And were the extraordinary impressions of the Spirit of God on those that declared them; wherein they uttered the Judgments of God which he had purposed against such. Such are many in the Psalms, divers whereof are also *Typical*; for the Spirit of God was the dictator of them, and therefore are not to be drawn into imitation by any who do not speak by Divine Inspiration.

3. *THAT no Man may Imprecate against himself absolutely.* There is indeed an hypothetical imprecation in every Oath; but positively to wish or pray for mischief to our selves, is directly contrary to that love which every Man owes to himself by the light of Nature,

and law of God. We express hatred to our selves by such a thing, which is unnatural, and therefore unlawful, Eph. 5. 29. *No man ever yet hated his own flesh.*

4. *THAT it is our duty to love and pray for our personal Enemies.* Mat. 5. 44. *But I say unto you, love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.* When they curse, we ought to bless them, and to desire that God would bless them. Certainly then, we ought not to imprecate God's Curse upon them, for any injury they have done to us.

5. *THERE are some who openly set themselves against God's Cause, whose Conversion we ought to desire and pray for.* There are some indeed for whom we ought not to Pray, 1 *Job* 5. 16. But for others we are bound to Pray, that God would turn their Hearts, and cause them to favour his Interest and People, 1 *Tim.* 2. *begin.* Some withstand through ignorance, others in malice.

6. *WE ought to distinguish between the Person and the Cause.* Doubtless we are to Pray that God would disappoint all the Counsels and Attempts of ungodly Men against his Gospel and People: yea, and that he would vindicate our personal righteous Cause, against those that injuriously oppress us; but still we must observe that Charity for them which the Precept calls for. *In sum then;* To Imprecate any mischief upon our selves is wickedness: To Imprecate upon any Man's Person, his Ruine and Eternal Destruction, except we know him guilty of the Unpardonable Sin, is Unlawful; because we know not but God may give him Repentance; which we should desire and Pray for. To Imprecate God's Judgments upon our personal Enemies, for wrongs which they have done to us, is a revenge forbidden. To imprecate to that Cause which sets itself against the Kingdom of Christ in this World *absolutely*, and against them who are violently set against it, *hypothetically*, is our Duty: for when we Pray that God's Kingdom may come, we implicitly Pray, that Satans Kingdom may be ruined.

V. *BY Blasphemy.* Blasphemy is any reproachful reflection upon God, in regard of any of his glorious Perfections. Of which there are divers degrees. All of which are so far violations of this Precept. Any thing that is spoken against God, which casts dishonour upon him, is certainly a taking of *his Name in vain.* And this is done, partly by calling in Question any of his Attributes, as his Holiness, Justice, Mercy, Truth, &c. Such as that of *Senecherib*, *Isai.* 37. 10 *with* 23. Partly, by ascribing any thing to God which is unworthy of him. Such is that, Psal. 50. 21. *Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thy self.* And that, *Jam.* 1. 13. Thus when Men make God no better than an Idol, and speak of him as if he were no greater than a Creature, when they charge him either with Impotency, or Falshood, or Ignorance, they do therein Blaspheme his Name. And

when they reproach Christ, who hath God's Name upon him, by denying his Deity, and making him a meer Creature, or not acknowledging him to be the Eternal Son of God, they dishonour him by Blasphemy. On which account *Paul* acknowledgeth, 1 Tim. 1. 13. *Who was before a blasphemer.*

VI. *By ascribing any of the Divine Titles or Attributes to any meer Creature.* That these do belong to the Person of Christ is certain, for he is God, Phil. 2. 6. *Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God.* The Perfections or Attributes of God are vulgarly distinguished into Incommunicable, and Communicable: By which we are only to understand, that the words used to express them, are some, proper to be ascribed to God; others are used, both of God and the Creature, by a kind of *Analogy*. But in these there is an infinite disproportion. Now the vanity of Men doth herein wofully discover it self, and their profaneness horribly appears, when they give that honour to the Creature, which belongs to God only. And herein the vile Adulation of sinful Men, discovers it self, in giving flattering Titles to such as they would insinuate themselves into: And how easily doth this profaneness steal into Men's *Penegyrics*. God challengeth the Glory of his Name unto himself, with jealousy, *Isai. 42. 8. I am the Lord, that is my Name, and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.* When therefore Men ascribe to their fellow Creatures, Infinity, Eternity, Omnipotence, or Omniscience, they reflect dishonour upon God, by making a Second Being equal to him, in any of these Perfections: And yet, how hath the vain Oratory of Men, soothed up Princes in this respect. And to ascribe Wisdom, Justice, Bounty &c. to any in the *abstract*, to call such an one Wisdom itself, Justice itself, &c. comes under the same Crime. And for Men to accept of such flattery, is highly provoking to God, *Act. 12. 21, &c.*

VII. *By an Hypocritical Profession.* An Hypocrite in Religion, is one that professeth himself to be a Servant of God, and pretends to his Worship, to trust in him, to submit to him, and he takes God's Name into his mouth, but mean while, he doth it with a false Heart, and is insincere in all that he doth; he hath an Idol in his Heart all the while. Now, though God is not mocked, because he knows, and will call such to an account, yet there are none in the World that do offer at a greater Mockery than this is. The Hypocrite in Heart doth despise God, else he could not be an Hypocrite. And for this reason God is so frequently in his Word denouncing his severe Menaces against Hypocrites as the worst of Men, and such as do most grievously provoke him.

Secondly, *IN respect of God's Ordinances.* Which are an appointed *Medium*, for our Communion with him in this World. This Command is violated,

1. *By a Neglect or Contempt of these Ordinances.* God imparts himself to his People by his Institutions, and for Persons either to reject them with Contempt, to reproach them as things of no value, to speak against them as things that are needless; or to take no heed to attend upon them, according to God's Command, is to despise God. They who under a pretence of lifting up Spiritual Communion with God, do throw dirt upon all the outward Means appointed in the Gospel, do certainly *take God's Name in vain.* For to reflect upon them, is to reflect upon the Author and Institutor of them, who is God himself. And for such as live where the Means of Grace are to be enjoyed, and regard not to wait upon them, but frame all excuses, to absent themselves from them, do thereby depreciate the Wisdom and Sovereignty of God: Contrary to *Lev. 26. 2. Ye shall keep my sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary: I am the Lord.*

2. *By careless and unsuitable attending the Ordinances.* There is Contempt as well in this, as in the other. There is an irreverend management of our selves about the Ordinances, which shews the Contempt of them as really as the rejecting them. Ordinances may be abused as well as neglected. And whatsoever is contrary unto, or defective in, that due respect which is called for in the observance of these Duties, is here forbidden. And this is done in three respects.

1. *By rushing upon Ordinances without due Preparation.* It is indeed the duty of Christians to maintain holy frames, by which they may be disposed for any Solemn Service, when called to it. Hence to turn their backs upon any occasion for it under such a pretence, is vain & unjustifiable. But on the other hand, for Christians to take no time to call themselves up to Meditation on the things they are setting about, and to get in a readiness to meet with God in the ways of his Appointment; but to go the House of God, and hear the Word, and sit at the Lord's Table, with a common frame of Spirit, is a neglect of this Command. I am sure the Psalmist could make such a Profession, *Psal. 57. 7. My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise.* And the neglect of this, argues that we have not that venerable esteem of God, that is his due.

2. *By all manner of Irreverence in our attending upon the Ordinances.* And that either in our *Hearts* or *Gestures*. If we carry our Bodies, and leave our Hearts behind us, we break this Command. *Ezek. 33. 31. And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.* If we come to an Ordinance, and do not carry in our minds the Presence of God with his Appointments, and accordingly regard it not; when we reckon that we have only to do with Men, and not with the Great GOD, and hence are not awed with

with this Thought; when we suffer our Eyes to rove, and Thoughts to go out with them to other Objects; when we use irreverend Gestures in the House of God, or at any Religious Duty; when we Sleep at an Ordinance; when we Whisper together and Laugh, and divert thus from the Duty in hand: When we receive the Warnings, Counsels, Reproofs offered, with Prejudice: When we are weary of, and wish the Ordinance were over, by reason of a low esteem we have for the Truth offered in it: We hereby shew a want of the Fear of God.

3. *ET a neglect to improve the Ordinances to the Ends or Purposes of them.* God comes in these to instruct and corroborate us in our Duty. There is therefore an after-use to be made of these, by which only we can glorify God by them. When therefore all our Zeal and Religion terminates in the bare formal attendance on the Ordinances, and though we seem to be a little raised and engaged in the time, yet we go away, and leave all our Zeal and Affection behind us. If we do not receive God's Counsels for our after Practice, and accordingly endeavour to live the Truths which we have been taught; if we do not take his Warnings so as to be awed by them, to be more watchful to our selves afterwards in our Conversation: If we are not allured by the precious Promises to more diligent and delightful serving of God; we are as vain, as foolish and lewd as before, and regard not how we live, but possibly are more bold to Sin; we therein do abuse the Appointments of God, and pervert them from their right use; and because his Name is on them, he is thereby dishonoured, and his Name profaned. In a Word, when Men make the Ordinances, instead of an help to New Obedience, an encouragement to a vain Conversation, and a cover to any manner of Wickedness, they grievously transgress the Third Command. As they, Mat. 23. 14. *Ye devour widows houses, and for a pretence make long prayers.*

AND let us be very heedful to our selves on this account: For as there is a grievous pronitude in our corrupt Nature to this Sin, so there is no little hazzard in our thus doing. And if thus we take God's Name in vain, we thereby not only hinder our selves of the profit, which otherwise we might get by the Means of Grace, but we shall incur the Divine Displeasure, and stir up the holy Indignation of that God against us, who will not bear that his Name should be thus trampled upon by those that pretend to a Veneration of it.

[M. A. Y 5. 1702.]

SERMON CLXVI.

Thirdly, **I**N respect of God's Word: In which he hath recorded his Name, and made discovery to us of his holy Pleasure, and given it to us for our directory to guide