

The First Commandment: You shall have no other gods.

Read Exodus 20:4-6 and John 14:6-7.

Being commanded to have no other gods does not simply mean avoiding other religions and their teachings. What it really means is that God is to come first in every aspect of our lives. Nothing else in all creation is as important as God's presence and God's will in our lives.

Since every breath that we breathe and every heart beat that we have is because of God's of God's gracious will, we are to know every day that we utterly need God for our existence. So God is always the first one whom we consult and seek guidance from in prayer in every decision we make for our family, our careers, our households, our nation, and our communities. Every good thing in our lives and every good decision we make is an act of God's gracious will in our lives.

Nothing is more important than God.

An old children's sermon to demonstrate this is to take a jar and fill the jar with sand first, and then try to put a walnut into the jar. The walnut won't go in because of all of the sand in the jar. But if you empty the sand from the jar and put the walnut in first, then refill the exact amount of sand you had in the jar before, there is room for both the sand and the walnut. The point is if you put the big things in first, then the small stuff fills in around the big stuff. The same is true with God. God is the 'biggest' and most important thing in existence. If God comes first in our lives, then there is enough room for everyone and everything else in our lives.

And Jesus Christ is the one who amplifies God's presence and love in our lives. Through Jesus we love God all the more and we love our neighbors all the more.

The Second Commandment: You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God.

Read Exodus 3:13-15 and John 20:11-18.

In the Bible, a name is more than just a label or a title that we are given. A name is one's identity. If you truly know someone's name, then you know that person personally. So in this commandment we are not called to give God the wrong name, but we are called to be true to God's identity in all that we say about God.

The problem with using God's name as a curse word is that we are not naming God truly. Saying "God damn..." isn't witnessing to God's love that sent his Son to die on the cross for our salvation and saying "Jesus Christ!" or "Oh my God!" out of disgust doesn't help others to know that God is to be praised for God's grace.

The actual name of God was never pronounced in the Hebrew language that the Old Testament was written in. Some attempts to pronounce the name as 'Jehovah' or 'Yahweh' have been made, but we really don't know for certain how it would've been pronounced. People in Old Testament times didn't pronounce God's name because it was too holy for humans to say. After all, God had given humans the authority to name our children, all creatures, and all places. But God never gave us the authority to name God. It is God who names us and not the other way around.

The actual name of God means 'I am who I am.' There is a tradition in English translations of the Bible to say 'LORD' every time God's actual name is referred to in the Old Testament. So we capitalize all four of the letters for the title 'lord' to mask God's four-lettered name in the original Hebrew language. The terms 'God,' 'Lord,' 'Almighty,' and 'Holy One' are not really names of God, but they are either descriptions or titles that we use in place of God's name.

But the name of God is the loving identity of God revealed to us through Jesus Christ.

In the Gospel of John, no one recognizes the identity of Jesus until Jesus reveals himself to them by naming them. In fact, this is how Mary Magdalene recognized the identity of the risen Jesus in the garden. And Jesus' identity was revealed to us when we were named as children of God in our baptisms in Christ Jesus.

And so we are called to be true to God's loving identity in how we talk about God and make our faith known to the world around us.

Close with this prayer:

Dear God, help us to fear, love, and trust you above anything else. And help us fear and love you so much that we do not use your name to curse others, or swear against others, or deceive others. Help us to no use your name as if it is some magical token to give us what we want. Let your Holy Spirit guide us to use your name all the more in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. Amen.