

BEARING THE NAME OF THE LORD WITH HONOR

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THE DECALOGUE'S COMMAND concerning the name of the Lord has been variously interpreted. I grew up thinking that the command "You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain" (Exod. 20:7, KJV) was concerned primarily with the flippant use of epithets for God in profanities and swear words. And so to this day I am appalled when Christians use expletives like "Oh, my Lord!" and "Oh, my God!" for surely this is taking the name of the Lord in vain.

Traditional Jewish understanding of the second command of the Decalogue¹ is reflected in the *Tanakh* translation, "You shall not swear falsely by the name of the LORD your God; for the LORD will not clear one who swears falsely by His name." By this interpretation this command bans the use of the divine name in false oaths to back up assertions in court or otherwise.² But another

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¹ Following the Roman Catholic and Lutheran traditions of numbering the commands, this reflects the discourse structure of the document better than the Reformed numbering, which views this command as third, not second. See Daniel I. Block, "'You Shall Not Covet Your Neighbor's Wife': A Study in Deuteronomistic Ideology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53 (2010): 472–74.

² Possibly "to swear falsely" in Jeremiah 7:9 provides early evidence for interpreting the second command of the Decalogue as a prohibition on false oaths. See Alfred Jepsen, "Beiträge zur Auslegung und Geschichte des Dekalogs," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 149 (1967): 291–92. However, it uses different terms than Exodus 20:7 and Deuteronomy 5:11, and in any case it says nothing about the name. Where the name is significant in false oaths, "in my name" is added to the idiom (Lev. 19:12; Zech. 5:4). It is not difficult to see how the present expression could have been interpreted this way. If one bears the name of Yahweh as a brand borne by a vassal, then it is natural in oaths to invoke one's suzerain as guarantor of the oath. In Deuteronomy 6:13 and 10:20 swearing by the name of Yahweh (alone) is one dimension of exclusive covenant commitment (cf. 1 Kings 22:16; 2

Jewish tradition dating to the Second-Temple period based the avoidance of pronouncing the name of YHWH on this command. “You shall not take the name of the LORD in vain” then means either “You shall not mispronounce it” or “You shall not pronounce it in a wrong context (outside the temple),”³ thereby bringing on a person the curse of God.⁴ The fact that יהוה continued to be used in names found in extrabiblical texts until the Exile⁵ and in biblical texts well after the Exile⁶ suggests that the name was regularly pronounced with its vowels well into the fifth century B.C. However, by the time the Septuagint was translated in the third century B.C., Jews had developed such fear of misusing God’s name that they stopped speaking the name aloud, for fear of death should they mispronounce it (cf. Lev. 24:16).⁷ Therefore they replaced it with יה־וָה־יְהוָה. This meant that when the translators encountered the tetragrammaton (YHWH) they rendered it as Κύριος,⁸ which carries over into New Testament citations of Old Testament texts involving the divine name,⁹ and into English translations of the name as “LORD.”

Chron. 18:15; Isa. 48:1; Jer. 12:16). To swear falsely by the name of Yahweh is one application of falsely bearing the name of Yahweh. The same would be true of blessing people in the name of Yahweh (Ps. 129:8; cf. Deut. 10:8; 21:5), or coming in the name of Yahweh (Ps. 118:26), or prophesying in His name without having been authorized to do so. So swearing falsely involves the fraudulent use of the name, but it should not be limited to this.

³ Cf. *m. Tamid* 7:2, “In the sanctuary one says the Name as it is written, but in the provinces, with a euphemism.” See also Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews* 2.12.4; 1QS 6:27b–7:2a; *m. Sotah* 7:6; *b. Sotah* 38b; *m. Tamid* 7:2; *m. Sanhedrin* 10:1; *m. Berakhot* 9:5; *b. Pesahim* 50a.

⁴ Cf. L. F. Hartman and S. D. Sperling, “God, Names of,” in *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, ed. F. Skolnik, 2nd ed. (Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson Gale, 2007), 7:675.

⁵ For example see Lachish 2:2 in the Lachish Letters.

⁶ Many Yahwistic names occur in the list of returnees in Nehemiah 12:1–37.

⁷ The *Tanakh* reads, “If he also pronounces the name LORD, he shall be put to death.”

⁸ However, some early Septuagintal manuscripts render the name with the tetragrammaton in archaic script or as Greek Ἰαω. See Martin Rösel, “Names of God,” in *Encyclopaedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, ed. L. H. Schiffman and J. C. VanderKam (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 2:600–602. This practice of rendering יהוה as κύριος creates an interesting problem in Ezekiel, where יהוה יה־וָה־יְהוָה “the Lord Yahweh,” occurs more than two hundred times. Usually one word is dropped, but in more than fifty instances the Greek reads κύριος κύριος (e.g., Ezek. 12:10).

⁹ This is often un signaled in English translations of New Testament citations of Old Testament texts (e.g., Rom. 10:13, “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved,” NRSV).

To this day orthodox Jews refer to YHWH by saying, “*Ha-Shem*” or “the [Ineffable] Name.”¹⁰

Based on extrabiblical analogues some scholars today understand this command as a taboo on the magical use of the name to manipulate deity and to exploit divine power in self-interested pursuits.¹¹

These interpretations are all very interesting—certainly more interesting than the bland renderings in the New International Version (“You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name”), the New-Revised Standard Version (“You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name”), or the misleading traditional rendering of the King James Version (“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”).

Given the prominence of “name theology” in the Scriptures, all these interpretations may actually miss the central issue, namely, that of wearing the name of Yahweh as a badge or a brand of ownership. The key to this injunction may well be the verb נָשָׂא, which does not mean “to take,” “to misuse,” or “to pronounce,”¹² all of which call for different idioms.¹³ Here it bears its normal sense of “to bear, to carry.” The present collocation of “bearing a name” occurs elsewhere only in Exodus 28:12 and 29, the first of which speaks of the names of the sons of Israel inscribed on the two onyx stones of remembrance on the shoulder pieces of the ephod. The high priest thus “bears” (נָשָׂא) these names on the breastpiece of judgment on his heart (v. 29), whenever he goes into the holy place

¹⁰ Joel M. Hoffman argues that the tetragrammaton (which is made up entirely of consonants that are often used as vowel letters) was never pronounced (*In the Beginning: A Short History of the Hebrew Language* [New York: New York University Press, 2004], 44–47).

¹¹ See John H. Walton, “Interpreting the Bible as an Ancient Near Eastern Document,” in *Israel: Ancient Kingdom or Late Invention*, ed. Daniel I. Block (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2008), 313–18.

¹² Contra Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, trans. and ed. M. E. J. Richardson (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 1:725–26.

¹³ In addition, “they carry in vain” is elliptical for “they carry your name in vain.” So also C. A. Briggs, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: Clark, 1907), 499. “To lift on one’s lips” (Ps. 50:16), or “to lift [the names of the gods] on my lips” (16:4; author’s translation), means “to pronounce.” This sense is reflected in Exodus 23:13, “and make no mention of the names of other gods, nor let it be heard on your lips” (author’s translation).

representing the Israelites before God. Aaron literally and physically bore the names of the Israelite tribes on his body, reminding Yahweh of His covenant with them. Also on the front of the high priest's turban was a medallion engraved with קָדֵשׁ לַיהוָה, "holy belonging to Yahweh" (28:36, lit. translation). According to Numbers 6:27 in the future the Aaronic priests would "put" Yahweh's name on the Israelites by declaring for them what came to be known as "the Aaronic blessing." And because they bore the stamp of His name they were objects of His blessing. In Deuteronomy the expression קָדֵשׁ לַיהוָה, "holy belonging to Yahweh," is applied to Israel as a whole (Deut. 26:19; cf. 7:6; 14:2, 21). Like the Shema', which was to be inscribed on houses and gates and on phylacteries on the forehead, to bear the name of God means to have His name branded on one's person as a mark of divine ownership.

Others carried or bore the name of Yahweh in a slightly different sense. When Yahweh commissioned prophets, He authorized them to use professional formulas like the citation formula, "Thus has the Lord Yahweh declared" (Ezek. 2:4), or the summons formula, "Hear the word of the LORD" (Amos. 3:1). The prophetic expression "the declaration of the Lord Yahweh" (נְאֻם אֲדֹנָי יְהוָה) functioned as an oral signatory formula. It is like the stamp of a king's official bearing the name of the king. With such a stamp, authorized personnel would mark official documents on the king's behalf (e.g., "Belonging to Shama, servant of Jeroboam" [Megiddo Seal]; "Belonging to Jaazaniah servant of the King" [Tel-en-Nasbeh Seal]; or more directly, "Belonging to Hezekiah [son of] Ahaz King of Judah"). In Ezekiel 13:3-9 Yahweh complained about false prophets.

Thus has the Lord Yahweh declared:

Woe to the foolish prophets, who follow their own impulse, even though they have not seen a thing. Your prophets, O Israel, have lived like jackals among ruins. You have not gone up into the breaches, nor repaired the wall around the house of Israel, that it might stand in the battle, on the day of Yahweh.

Those who say, "The declaration of Yahweh" have envisioned emptiness and deceptive divination. Even though Yahweh has not commissioned them, they expect him to fulfill the pronouncement! Surely you have envisioned an empty vision and declared a deceptive divination—you, who say, "The declaration of Yahweh," when I have not even spoken.

Therefore thus has the Lord Yahweh declared: "Because you have made empty pronouncements, and have envisioned lies—therefore, I am challenging you!"—the declaration of the Lord Yahweh. My hand will come upon those prophets who envision emptiness and who divine lies.

In the company of my people, they will not be found, and in the register of the house of Israel, they will not be recorded; and to the

land of Israel, they will not come back. Then you will know that I am the Lord Yahweh.¹⁴

Everything about these prophets was false: their message, their tone, their claim to speak for the Lord, their use of the signatory formula when they were never authorized to do so.¹⁵

Strictly speaking, however, the metaphor involved in the Decalogue command derives from the practice of branding or marking slaves like animals with the name of their owner. This custom was widespread in the ancient world, being attested in Egypt from the New Kingdom (sixteenth to eleventh centuries) to the fifth century B.C., as well as in Assyria and Babylonia.¹⁶ Especially interesting is the marking of temple slaves in ancient Mesopotamia. Slaves of the Eanna temple in Uruk were branded on the wrist with the star of Ishtar; in Borsippa slaves belonging to Marduk and Nabu were branded on the wrists with images of the spade and reed stylus, the symbols of these gods respectively.¹⁷

Some such practice seems to underlie Isaiah 44:5: “This one will say, ‘I am Yahweh’s, another will be called by the name of Jacob, still another will inscribe his hand, ‘belonging to Yahweh [לִיהוָה],’ and claim the name of Israel” (author’s translation). The custom of inscribing *lamed* + a name is well known from Israelite and Judahite stamp seal inscriptions on bullae and pottery sherds identifying the owners of vessels or documents.¹⁸ In Isaiah 44:5 the five letters לִיהוָה function as a brand on the hand identifying the bearer as the property of Yahweh.¹⁹ This is what Israel had become at Mount Sinai. Through the covenant ratification proceedings, the beneficiaries of Yahweh’s great acts of deliverance—the people who

¹⁴ As translated by Daniel I. Block, *Ezekiel Chapters 1–24*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 396–97.

¹⁵ See also the reference to swearing and blessing falsely in the name of Yahweh in note 2 above.

¹⁶ See Muhammad A. Dandamaev, *Slavery in Babylonia: From Nabopolassar to Alexander the Great (626–331 B.C.)*, ed. M. A. Powell and D. B. Weisberg, trans. V. A. Powell (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1984), 229–35.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 488–89.

¹⁸ See also “Belonging to Berekiah son of Neriah the scribe” (N. Avigad, “Jerahmeel and Baruch,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 42 [1979]: 114–18).

¹⁹ For a related notion see Jeremiah 15:16, where, in the context of being totally under the control and protection of Yahweh, Jeremiah declared that Yahweh’s name “was read/called” on him, that is, he bore it as a brand.

had only recently been the enslaved property of Pharaoh but had been freed to become the vassals of Yahweh—were stamped with His name. But in this case the stamp not only claimed Israel as the people belonging to Yahweh; it also meant that everywhere the people went they represented Him and declared to the world the privilege of being His. As Christopher Wright has often noted, Israel is hereby identified as the agent chosen to declare to the world Yahweh's glory and grace.²⁰ Her missional function as God's covenant people is declared in Deuteronomy 26:16–19, where Moses announced that Yahweh had set Israel, His covenant people, high above all the nations for praise, fame, and glory. Speaking of advertising the Lord's gracious generosity, in Deuteronomy 28:9–10 Moses was even more direct. "The LORD will establish you as his holy people, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in his ways. All the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they shall be afraid of you" (NRSV).

Verse 10 reads literally, "All the peoples of the earth will see that Yahweh's name is read/called on you" (cf. *Tanakh*). The New Jerusalem Bible interprets the clause correctly, "The peoples of the earth, seeing that you bear Yahweh's name, will all be afraid of you." Wherever they went, the Israelites represented Him, and like baseball caps and football jerseys with the logos of one's favorite school or sports team they advertised His name.

In the prohibition in the Decalogue, "You shall not bear the name of the LORD your God in vain," the expression "in vain" (אֵינֶנּוּ) means "for nothing, worthlessly, futilely," that is, being branded by Yahweh's name and claiming to belong to Him, while doing homage to and serving other gods and so acting as if one belongs to some other god.

If the Israelites would claim Yahweh as their God and claim to be His people, then they must live according to His revealed will, which is variously expressed as "walking in the ways of Yahweh," "serving Him," "observing His commands and the stipulations of the covenant." If the Israelites would do this, the nations would see how blessed they were to have such righteous laws by which to live (Deut. 4:6–8), and Yahweh's fame would spread to all the earth (26:19). But if, having been stamped by Yahweh's name, they behaved like the nations, as if they belonged to Baal or some other god, and committed abominable crimes, then His name would be

²⁰ Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006), 224–25, 329–33.

profaned (Lev. 18:21), defiled (Ezek. 43:8), and blasphemed (Lev. 24:11, 16). Instead of advertising Yahweh's glory and grace, those He chose to be His handpicked treasure to declare His praises among the nations misrepresented Him and brought shame to His name. And then when judgment came, God's reputation would be further smudged, because the nations would not see in this the divine response to human infidelity. On the contrary they would draw all the wrong conclusions about God: either He had changed His mind about Israel as His people and had abandoned them, or He was unable to stand up for them in the face of challenges by other gods (Exod. 32:12; Num. 14:13–16). Since both conclusions are wrong, Israel's infidelity soiled God's reputation on two counts. First, when the Israelites behaved like the nations, they misrepresented the character of their God who called them to be holy as He is holy (Lev. 19:2) and to be compassionate as He is compassionate (Deut. 10:17–18). Second, when they went into exile they not only spread this poison to the lands of their captivity, but they also caused people to draw the wrong conclusions about God. Ezekiel captured this issue perfectly in 36:17–23.

Human, concerning the house of Israel, at the time they were occupying their land, they defiled it with their conduct and their unrestrained behavior. So I poured out my fury upon them, on account of the blood they had poured out on the land and for their pellets of dung with which they had defiled it. I scattered them among the nations, and they were dispersed among the countries. I punished them in accordance with their conduct and their unrestrained behavior. But when they arrived among those nations, they caused *my holy name to be desecrated*, inasmuch as it was said of them, "These are the people of Yahweh? How is it then that they have had to leave his land?" Then I was concerned about *my holy name which the house of Israel had desecrated* among the nations to which they had come.

Therefore, say to the house of Israel, "Thus has the Lord Yahweh declared: It is not for your sake that I will act, O house of Israel, but *for the sake of my holy name, which you have desecrated* among the nations wherever you have gone. I will sanctify my great name, which has been desecrated among the nations—which you have desecrated in their midst. And the nations will know that I am Yahweh—the declaration of Yahweh—when I manifest my holiness through you before their very eyes."²¹

This is followed by the fabulous declaration of Israel's transformation and renewal for the sake of God's name. This sheds light on Daniel's prayer in Daniel 9, particularly verses 16–19.

²¹ As translated by Block, *Ezekiel Chapters 25–48*, 343–44, 349 (italics added).

O Lord, in view of all your righteous acts, let your anger and wrath, we pray, turn away from your city Jerusalem, your holy mountain; because of our sins and the iniquities of our ancestors, Jerusalem and your people have become a disgrace among all our neighbors. Now therefore, O our God, listen to the prayer of your servant and to his supplication, and for your own sake, Lord, let your face shine upon your desolated sanctuary.

Incline your ear, O my God, and hear. Open your eyes and look at our desolation *and the city that bears your name*. We do not present our supplication before you on the ground of our righteousness, but on the ground of your great mercies.

O Lord, hear; O Lord, forgive; O Lord, listen and act and do not delay! For your own sake, O my God, *because your city and your people bear your name!* (author's translation).²²

The sentences in verses 18 and 19 involve variations of a clause meaning literally, "For your name is read/proclaimed on your city and on your people." Daniel pleaded with God to restore His people and His city, not for their sakes but for the honor of His name. The Lord's reputation is linked directly to the people who bear the brand of His name.

Of course this is not a distinctly Old Testament notion; it carries over into the New Testament, beginning with the Sermon on the Mount. Like Israel, Jesus' disciples are to let their lights shine through their good works, which will cause observers to glorify their Father in heaven (Matt. 5:16). The same concept is reflected in the opening to the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father in heaven; hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" (6:9–10). In contrast to the Gentiles, Jesus' followers are to avoid empty repetitions. Having set the agenda, Jesus then elaborated in verses 11–13, "Give us today the bread that we need—because your reputation is at stake; and forgive us our transgressions as we forgive those who transgress against us—because your reputation is at stake, and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil—because your reputation is at stake; For yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen" (author's translation).

Paul expressed keen awareness of what this means, for in Romans 2:17–29 he referred to some who hypocritically claimed the name "Jew." As declared in Isaiah 44:5, to be a true Israelite is to be branded by the name of Yahweh. So here Paul declared that to

²² Isaiah 43:7 speaks of "everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory" (NRSV). See also Isaiah 63:19; Jeremiah 14:9; 15:16; 25:29; and Amos 9:12. In the temple Yahweh's name was inscribed over the entrance or on the foundation stone (1 Kings 8:43; 2 Chron. 6:33; Jer. 7:10–11, 14, 30), and on the ark of the covenant (2 Sam. 6:2; 1 Chron. 13:6).

“bear the name” (ἐπονομάζει, Rom. 2:17) and to behave immorally, that is, to violate the Torah, is to dishonor God and cause His name to be blasphemed (vv. 23–24). Physical circumcision is not the distinguishing brand of a true Jew; rather the “brand” is the inward circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit not the letter (γράμματι, v. 29). This may not win the praise of people, but it is guaranteed to bring praise from God. While γράμμα/γράμματος is generally understood as the literally correct form of the Law, it might actually mean the brand, the very letters of God’s name. In any case those who are circumcised inwardly receive the praise of God and are affirmed, for they represent Him with honor. Elsewhere Paul seemed to allude more directly to the practice of branding slaves: “From now on, let no one make trouble for me; for I carry the marks [στίγματα] of Jesus branded on my body” (Gal. 6:17, NRSV).²³

First Peter 4:14–19 records the fullest adaptation of this idea. “If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the spirit of glory, which is the Spirit of God, is resting on you. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, a criminal, or even as a mischief maker. Yet if any of you suffers as a Christian, do not consider it a disgrace, but glorify God because you bear this name [ἐν τῷ ὀνομάτι τούτῳ, lit., “in that name”]. For the time has come for judgment to begin with the household of God; if it begins with us, what will be the end for those who do not obey the gospel of God? And ‘If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinners?’ Therefore, let those suffering in accordance with God’s will entrust themselves to a faithful Creator, while continuing to do good” (NRSV).

To suffer for the name of Christ is the highest honor imaginable. Those who bear His name share in His suffering. However, Peter distinguished between suffering caused by bearing His name and suffering caused by being morally reprehensible. Those who are immoral (murderers, thieves, criminals, and meddlers), and those who do not obey the gospel deserve the suffering they get, for they have not only violated the standards of righteousness of the One whose name they claim to bear, but they have also brought shame on the name itself. But those who suffer in accord with God’s will—rather than their own—trust in their faithful Creator for vindication.

²³ On στίγμα or στίγματος as a “tattoo-mark” or mark of a slave, including a person devoted to temple service, see H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, rev. ed., ed. H. S. Jones and R. McKenzie (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), 1645; and O. Betz, “στίγμα,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, vol. 7 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 657–64.

James 2:7 is an equally striking reference, with even clearer echoes of Leviticus 24:11 and 16 on the one hand and Deuteronomy 28:10 and Daniel 9:18–19 on the other. “Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called [lit., ‘the honorable name that is called/read on you’]?” (author’s translation). Some such custom may also underlie the expression “to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 2:38; 10:48), because after baptism new believers were recognized as bearers of the Name.²⁴

CONCLUSION

What relevance has all this for believers today? At academic conferences attendees wear name tags, and most name tags have more than a person’s name on them. They also have the names of the institutions being represented. The public draws conclusions about a school from the way its representatives do their work and the way they conduct themselves. Through their conduct, they can be either a credit or a liability to the institutions that sent them.

Believers have an identity marker that is far more important than temporal institutional labels. They bear the brand of Christ, which means that everywhere they go they represent Him. Outsiders draw conclusions about the Savior from the way believers conduct themselves and the way they perform their professional responsibilities. To borrow from the words of the Lord Himself, those who are “branded” with His name are characterized as poor in spirit; they grieve with those who grieve; they are meek; they hunger and thirst after righteousness; they are pure in heart; they are peacemakers; they accept persecution and ridicule for righteousness’ sake. Will those who bear the brand of Christ be salt and light in a dark world, and when others view their lives, will they glorify God in heaven, whose name they bear (Matt. 5:1–16)? Or will they be like parasites sucking glory for themselves?

Biblical scholars can be as insensitive toward cabdrivers and as impatient with hotel management and staff as those in the general population. And they can also be as ruthless with their detractors, as arrogant and egotistical in their demeanor, as jealous of personal accomplishments, as unkind and cutting toward others even within their own discipline, as people in other branches of ministry. These temptations are not foreign to those who bear the brand of Christ.

²⁴ James P. Martin, *James*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word, 1988), 67.

Some time ago at a scholarly conference a panel of seasoned scholars was asked by a young student in the audience what advice they would give him and others as they entered the competitive world. One of the panelists, who was retired at the time, gave terse, wise counsel when he said, “Be good at what you do, and be good, period.”

This counsel touches on two critical dimensions of bearing the name of Christ with honor. First, those who bear the brand of Christ must pursue good scholarship. There is no place for shoddy and irresponsible work. If any are careless with the data, if they misrepresent the opposition in a debate, or if their style of communication is insensitive to the issues that characterize public discourse, no matter how polished their work, those inside and outside will not take such scholars and teachers seriously, and they should not. A cue may be taken from the noble woman of Proverbs 31:31: may an individual’s good works praise him or her “in the city gates” (NRSV).

And this leads to the other dimension of responsible Christian scholarship: being good people. Some scholars, it is true, are rejected simply because of the institution whose name they bear on their name tags. Some, however, are superb scholars, but others have difficulty respecting their work because they are known personally. Some individuals complain that their work is not taken seriously because they are conservative, or evangelical. They may even wear this kind of rejection as a badge of honor, thinking they are suffering for the name of Christ, when in fact they are rejected because they are unpleasant people: they are closed-minded in their thinking; they are dismissive of people who think differently; their arguments are often *ad hominem* rather than addressing the issues; they are overly impressed with their own work; they are more focused on defending their own understanding of truth than in engaging in the search for truth; they are more concerned about making a name for themselves than about healthy conversation, let alone making a name for Christ.

These are temptations for people in every field of work: school-teachers, medical doctors, building contractors, bus drivers, farmers, flight attendants, salespersons, dock workers, engineers, lawyers, professional athletes, students. No one is exempt, either by task or by time. Wherever believers go, they bear the name of Christ. While engaging with colleagues, business associates, and friends, it is well to remember the words of Hebrews 10:24, “Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds” (NRSV). Paul’s advice to young Titus is perpetually and universally relevant: “Show yourself in all respects a model of good works, and

in your teaching [or whatever else your calling] show integrity, gravity, and sound speech that cannot be censured; then any opponent will be put to shame, having nothing evil to say of us" (Titus 2:7–8, NRSV).

Believers are branded with the name of the King of kings, the Lord of lords, the great, mighty, and awesome God! But with this high honor comes a high challenge: to do one's work and to conduct one's life in ways that bring honor to the Lord. As Paul wrote to the Colossian Christians, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col. 3:16–17, NRSV). May every Christian worker determine to build others up in the faith and in the work to which they have been called, to give radiant testimony to the grace of Christ, for the advance of truth, the health of the church, and the honor of the One whose name believers humbly but boldly bear.



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