

Catechetical Resources – The Second Commandment

You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.

By Harold E. Warnke

THE SECOND COMMANDMENT

You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God.

What does this mean?

We should fear and love God that we do not use his name to curse, swear; lie or deceive or turn from it to superstitions; but call upon God's name in every trouble, pray, praise and give thanks.

Dr. Luther stated the relationship between the First and the Second Commandments in his Large Catechism (50): "As the First Commandment has inwardly instructed the heart and taught faith, so this Commandment leads us outward and directs the lips and the tongue into the right relation to God. The first things that issue and emerge from the heart are words." (For source of quotations see the notes following the Table of Contents.)

If in our heart we truly fear, love and trust in God above all things (the First Commandment), then we shall surely seek to avoid any misuse of his holy name. On the contrary, remembering the words of the Psalmist ("O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!" Psalm 8:1, 9), we shall make every effort to praise, honor and glorify his name, as he wants it done. Those two sentences summarize the requirements of the Second Commandment.

However, in the pages to follow we shall delve more deeply into this unfathomably rich Commandment, defining what is meant by God's name, showing its misuse in detail, speaking about its correct use and then closing with the work of our Lord in keeping this Commandment.

I. WHAT IS MEANT BY "GOD'S NAME"?

In none of his voluminous writings does Dr. Luther ever answer the question, "What is God's name?" He makes no attempt to define it in either of his catechisms, nor did he (with one or two minor exceptions) ever expound on it anywhere else, so far as we know. That is the studied opinion of R. Pieper in his *Der Kleine Katechismus Luthers*; Vol. 1, p. 61 (see note following Table of Contents).

Dr. Luther probably took for granted that everyone knew the name of God meant his titles. When teaching little children, it is perhaps best to follow the example of the great Reformer and make only a limited attempt to define God's name. Yet, for more mature people much more can and should be said, something that we shall be doing in the following two sections of Part I of this paper. This is all the more necessary, since God's name means infinitely more than do others, which normally are only a convenient way of identifying ourselves.

A. God's name is every word or phrase by which he has revealed the glory of his person and his work.

1. Scripture lists hundreds of words and phrases as God's names.

If you are somewhat acquainted with the holy Bible, you will already know that God has dozens of different names. Does it, however, surprise you that the number runs into the hundreds? The following is a fairly complete listing, compiled from various sources, but only a few of the Bible references are cited for some of the names. You will note that the list is divided into names for each one of the three persons in the Godhead, although there may be doubts in a few cases as to whether the names apply to a different person in the Godhead or to all three persons. (The names are the ones as translated in the NIV.)

NAMES OF THE FATHER

Almighty (Genesis 17:1)	Hope of Israel (Jeremiah 14:8)
Blessed and only Ruler (I Timothy 5:15)	I AM (Exodus 3:14)
Deliverer (II Samuel 22:2)	Judge (Genesis 18:25)
Eternal God (Deuteronomy 33:27)	King of Israel (Isaiah 44:6)
Father of Lights (James 1:17)	King of Kings (I Timothy 6:15)
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ (II Corinthians 1:3)	Lamp (II Samuel 22:29)
Father of Compassion (II Corinthians 1:3)	Light (I John 1:5)
Fortress (II Samuel 22:2)	Living God (Joshua 3:10)
God (Jeremiah 23:23; Romans 16:27; Ephesians 2:4)	Lord (Deuteronomy 32:6; II Samuel 22:29; Psalm 18:3)
God Almighty (Genesis 35:11)	Lord Almighty (James 5:4)
God of Israel (Genesis 33:20; Isaiah 45:15)	Lord God (Genesis 2:4, 5, 7, 8, 9, etc.)
God of Abraham and Nahor (Genesis 31:53)	Lord God Almighty (Jeremiah 5:14)
God of all Comfort (II Corinthians 1:3)	Lord, God of Heaven and Earth (Genesis 24:3)
God of all Grace (I Peter 5:10)	Lord of Lords (Deuteronomy 10:17; I Timothy 6:15)
God of all Mankind (Jeremiah 32:27)	Lord your God (Exodus 15:25; 20:5; Deuteronomy 10:17)
God of gods (Deuteronomy 10:17)	(Deuteronomy 32:8; Genesis 14:18)
God of Hope (Romans 15:13)	Our Father (I Chronicles 29:10; Matthew 6:9)
God of the Spirits of all Flesh Most High (Numbers 16:22)	Our Strength (Exodus 15:2)
God who gives Endurance and Encouragement (Romans 15:5)	Redeemer of Israel (Isaiah 49:7)
God who judges the Earth (Psalm 58:11)	Rock (II Samuel 22:2)
Great God (Deuteronomy 10:17)	Rock Eternal (Isaiah 26:4)
Heavenly Father (Matthew 6:26)	Savior (Deuteronomy 32:15)
Hiding Place (Psalm 32:7)	Sovereign Lord (Genesis 15:2)
Holy One (Isaiah 40:25)	Spirit (John 4:24)
Holy One of Israel (Psalm 71:22)	

NAMES OF CHRIST

Adam (I Corinthians 15:45)	Apostle of our Profession (Hebrews 3:1)
Advocate (I John 2:1)	Arm of the Lord (Isaiah 53:1)

Almighty (Revelation 1:8)
 Alpha and Omega (Revelation 1:8; 22:13)
 Amen (Revelation 3:14)
 Angel (Exodus 23:20, 21)
 Angel of his Presence (Isaiah 63:9)
 Angel of the Lord (Exodus 3:2)
 Anointed One (Psalm 2:2; Daniel 9:25)
 Apostle and High Priest (Hebrews 3:1)
 Branch (Isaiah 4:2; Jeremiah 23:5;
 Zechariah 3:8)
 Bread of Life (John 6:32-35, 48-51, 58)
 Bridegroom (Matthew 9:15)
 Bright Morning Star (Revelation 22:16)
 Capstone (Psalm 118:22; Matthew 21:42)
 Carpenter (Mark 6:3)
 Carpenter's Son (Matthew 13:55)
 Chief Shepherd (I Peter 5:4)
 Child (Isaiah 9:6; Luke 2:27)
 Chosen and Precious Cornerstone
 (I Peter 2:6)
 Chosen by God (I Peter 2:4)
 Chosen One (Luke 23:35)
 Chosen one in whom I Delight
 (Isaiah 42:1)
 Christ (Matthew 1:16; Matthew 16:20 and
 Mark 14:61 (the Christ); I Peter 5:
 10,14
 13:20)
 Christ, a King (Luke 23:2)
 Christ Jesus (Romans 3:24; 8:1;
 I Corinthians 1:2; 1:30)
 Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:39;
 Colossians 1:18)
 I Timothy 1:12)
 Christ Jesus our Savior (Titus 1:4)
 Christ of God (Luke 9:20)
 Christ the Lord (Luke 2:11)
 Christ the Power of God (I Corinthians
 3:14)
 Christ the Son of God (Acts 9:20)
 Christ the Wisdom of God
 (I Corinthians 1:24)
 Christ, Son of the Blessed (Mark 14:61)
 Commander (Isaiah 55:4)
 Commander of the Lord's Army (Joshua 5:15)
 Consolation of Israel (Luke 2:25)

Atoning Sacrifice (I John 2:2)
 Author and Perfector of our with
 (Hebrews 12:2)
 Author of Life (Acts 3:15)
 Author of their Salvation (Hebrews 2:10)
 Banner (Isaiah 11:10)
 Beginning and End (Revelation 22:13)
 Blessed and only Ruler (I Timothy 6:15)
 Firstborn of the Dead (Revelation 1:5)
 Forever Praised (Romans 9:5)
 Fountain (Zechariah 13:1)
 Friend of Sinners (Matthew 11:19)
 Gate (John 10:7)
 Gift of God (John 4:10)
 Glory of Israel (Luke 2:32)
 Glory of the Lord (Isaiah 40:5)
 God (Isaiah 40:3; John 1:1; 20:28;
 only God—I Timothy 1:17)
 God and Savior of Israel (Isaiah 45:15)
 God of all the Earth (Isaiah 54:5)
 God our Savior (I Timothy 2:3)
 God over All (Romans 9:5)
 God with us (Matthew 1:23)
 Good Shepherd (John 10:11; see also
 Chief Shepherd)
 Great High Priest (Hebrews 4:14)
 Great Shepherd of the Sheep (Hebrews

Guarantee (Hebrews 7:22)
 Head (Ephesians 4:15)
 Head of Every Man (I Corinthians 11:3)
 Head of the Church (Ephesians 5:23;

Heir of all Things (Hebrews 1:2)
 High Priest (Hebrews 4:14; 8:1)
 Holiness (I Corinthians 1:30)
 Holy and Righteous One (Acts 3:14)
 Holy One (Psalm 16:10; Luke 1:35; Acts

Holy One of God (Mark 1:24)
 Holy One of Israel (Isaiah 41:14; 54:5)
 Holy Servant (Acts 4:27)
 Holy Servant Jesus (Acts 4:27, 30)
 Horn of Salvation (Luke 1:69)
 I AM (John 8:58)
 Image of God (II Corinthians 4:4)

Corner Stone (Ephesians 2:20, Chief Cornerstone; I Peter 2:6, Precious Cornerstone)
 Counselor (Isaiah 9:6)
 David their King (Jeremiah 30:9)
 Deliverer (Romans 11:26)
 Descendant of David (Romans 1:3)
 Desire of all Nations (Haggai 2:7)
 Doctor (Matthew 9:12)
 Eternal Life (I John 5:20)
 Everlasting Father (Isaiah 9:6)
 ians 1:19;
 Exact Representation of his Being 1:8;
 (Hebrews 1:3)
 Faithful and True (Revelation 19:11)
 Faithful Witness (Revelation 1:5; 3:14)
 Father's Son (II John 3)
 First and Last (Revelation 1:17; 2:8; 22:13)
 Firstborn (Psalm 89:27; Hebrews 1:6)

Jesus of Nazareth (Matthew 21:11; Mark 1:24; Luke 24:19)
 Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews (John 19:19)
 Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest (Hebrews 3:1)
 Jesus, his Son (I John 1:7)
 Jesus, the King of the Jews (Matthew 27:37)
 Jesus, the Son of God (Hebrews 4:14)
 Jesus, the Son of Joseph (John 6:42)
 Judge of the Living and the Dead (Acts 10:42)
 King (Zechariah 9:9; Matthew 21:5)
 King Eternal, Immortal, Invisible (I Timothy 1:17)
 King of the Ages (Revelation 15:3)
 King of Glory (Psalm 24:7-10)
 King of Israel (John 1:49)
 King of the Jews (Matthew 2:2)
 King of Kings (I Timothy 6:15; Revelation 17:14)
 King over the whole Earth (Zechariah 14:9)
 Lamb (Revelation 5:6, 8; 6:16; 7:9, 10, 17; 12:11; 13:8, 11; 14:1, 4; 15:3; 17:14; 19:7, 9; 21:9, 14, 22, 23, 27)

Immanuel (Isaiah 7:14; 8:8; Matthew 1:23)
 Indescribable Gift (II Corinthians 9:15)
 Innocent Man (Matthew 27:19)
 Israel (Isaiah 49:3)
 Israel's King and Redeemer (Isaiah 44:6)
 Israel's Ruler (Micah 5:1)
 Jesus (Matthew 1:21; 2:1; 3:13; 3:15; etc.)
 Jesus Christ (Matthew 1:1; John 1:17; 17:3; Acts 2:38; 4:10; 9:34; 10:36; 16:18; Romans 1:1, 6; 2:16; 5:15, 17; 6:3; I Corinthians 1:1, 4; 2:2; II Corinthians 4:6; 13:5; Galatians 2:16; Philippians 2:11; I Timothy 1:15; Hebrews 13:8; I John 1:3)
 Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 1:4; 6:23; I Corinthians 1:9)
 Jesus Christ our Savior (Titus 3:6)
 Jesus Christ, the Righteous One (I John 2:1)

Lord of the Dead and the Living (Romans 14:9)
 Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:28)
 Lord Our Righteousness (Jeremiah 23:6)
 Lord of All (Romans 10:12)
 Lord, Strong and Mighty (Psalm 24:8)
 Lord, your Holy One (Isaiah 43:15)
 Lord, your Redeemer (Isaiah 43:14)
 Lover (Song of Solomon 5:10)
 Man (Matthew 27:24)
 Man from Heaven (I Corinthians 15:47)
 Man Christ Jesus (I Timothy 2:5)
 Man of Sorrows (Isaiah 53:3)
 Man who is close to Me (Zechariah 13:7)
 Master (Matthew 23:8)
 Mediator (I Timothy 2:5)
 Messenger (Malachi 3:1)
 Messiah (John 1:41; 4:25)
 Mighty God (Isaiah 9:6)
 Mighty One (Psalm 45:3)
 Mighty One of Jacob (Isaiah 49:26; 60:16)
 Mighty to Save (Isaiah 63:1)
 Morning Star (II Peter 1:19; Revelation 22:16, Bright Morning Star)
 Most Holy (Daniel 9:24)

Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36)
 Lawgiver (Isaiah 33:22)
 Leader (Isaiah 55:4)
 Life (John 14:6)
 Light, Everlasting (Isaiah 60:20)
 Light of the World (John 8:12)
 Light for the Gentiles (Isaiah 42:6)
 Light, True (John 1:9)
 Lily of the Valleys (Song of Solomon 2:1)
 Lion of the Tribe of Judah (Revelation 5:5)
 Living Bread (John 6:51)
 Living Stone (I Peter 2:4)
 Lord (Isaiah 26:4; 41:14; 43:1; Romans 10:13; Revelation 15:3)
 Lord Almighty (Isaiah 44:6)
 Lord God Almighty (Revelation 15:3)
 Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (II Peter 1:11; 3:18)
 Lord Christ (Colossians 3:24)
 Lord's Christ (Luke 2:26)
 Lord Jesus (Acts 7:59; 16:31; 20:31; Colossians 3:17; I Thessalonians 4:2)
 Lord Jesus Christ (Acts 11:17; Romans 5:1, 11; 13:14; James 2:1, glorious Lord Jesus Christ)
 Lord, mighty in Battle (Psalm 24:8)
 Lord of All (Acts 10:36)
 Lord of Glory (I Corinthians 2:8)
 Lord of Lords (I Timothy 6:15; Revelation 17:14)

 Righteous Judge (II Timothy 4:8)
 Righteous One (Acts 7:52; 22:14 I John 2:2)
 Righteous Servant (Is. 53:11)
 Righteousness (I Cor. 1:30)
 Rising Son (Luke 1:78)
 Rock (Is. 26:4; I Cor. 10:4, Spiritual Rock)
 Rock of Israel (Is. 30:29)
 Rock that makes them Fall (I Pet. 2:8)
 Rock of David (Rev. 5:5; 22:16, Root and Offspring of David)
 Root of Jesse (Is. 11:10)
 Rose of Sharon (Song of Solomon 2:1)
 Ruler (Daniel 9:25; Matt. 2:6)

 Nazarene (Matthew 2:23)
 Offspring (Genesis 3:15; 22:18; 26:4; Acts 23:25)
 Offspring of David (Revelation 22:16)
 One and Only Son (John 1:14, Only Begotten Son)
 One He Loves (Ephesians 1:6)
 Only Son (John 1:18)
 Only God our Savior (Jude 25)
 Only Ruler (I Timothy 6:15)
 Our Hope (I Timothy 1:1)
 Outstanding among Ten Thousand (Song of Solomon 5:10)
 Overseer (I Peter 2:25)
 Passover Lamb (I Corinthians 5:7)
 Power of God (I Corinthians 1:24)
 Precious Cornerstone (Isaiah 28:16)
 Priest Forever (Hebrews 7:17)
 Prince (Acts 5:31)
 Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6)
 Prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18; Matthew 21:11; Luke 24:19)
 Rabbi (Matthew 26:49; John 1:49)
 Rabboni (John 20:16)
 Radiance of God's Glory (Hebrews 1:3)
 Ransom (I Timothy 2:6)
 Redeemer (Job 19:25; Isaiah 41:14; 59:20)
 Redemption (I Corinthians 1:30)
 Resurrection and Life (John 11:25)
 Righteous Branch (Jeremiah 23:5)

 Shiloh (Genesis 49:10, footnote)
 Son (Isaiah 9:6; John 5:19)
 Son he Loves (Col. 1:13; Matt. 3:17; 17:5, My Son, whom I love)
 Son of the Blessed One (Mark 14:61)
 Son of David (Matthew 1:1, 9:27)
 Son of God (Matthew 2:15; 14:33; 16:16 Son of the living God; John 10:36)
 Son of Man (Matthew 8:20; 9:6; 10:23; 12:32; etc.)
 Son whom I love (Matt. 3:17; 17:5)
 Son of the Highest (Luke 1:32, NIV, Son of the Most High)
 Source of Eternal Salvation (Hebrews 5:9)
 Star (Numbers 24:17)

I Timothy 6:15)
 Ruler over Israel (Micah 5:2)
 Ruler of God's Creation (Rev. 3:14)
 Ruler of the Kings (Rev. 1:5)
 Sacrifice, Atoning (I John 2:2)
 Salvation (Luke 2:30)
 Same Yesterday and Today and Forever
 (Heb. 13:8)
 Sanctuary (Is. 8:14)
 Savior (Luke 2:11; Eph. 5:23)
 Savior, Jesus Christ (II Tim. 1:10;
 Titus 2:13; II Peter 1:1)
 Savior of the World (I John 4:14)
 Scepter (Numbers 24:17)
 Second Man (I Cor. 15:47)
 Seed (Gen. 22:17; Gal. 3:16)
 Servant (Is. 42:1; Acts 3:13)
 Servant of Rulers (Is. 49:7)
 Shepherd (Ps. 23:1; Mark 14:27)
 Shepherd and Overseer of your Souls
 (I Pet. 2:25)
 Shepherd, Chief (I Peter 5:4)
 Shepherd, Good (John 10:11, 14)
 Shepherd, Great of the Sheep
 (Hebrews 13:20)
 Shepherd of Israel (Ps. 80:1)

Stone (Ps. 118:22, Matt. 21:42)
 Stone of Stumbling (I Peter 2:8;
 (Is. 8:14)
 Sure Foundation (Is. 28:16)
 Teacher (Matt. 19:16; John 3:2)
 True God (I John 5:20)
 True Light (John 1:9)
 Truth (John 14:6)
 Vine (John 15:1, True Vine; 15:5)
 Way (John 14:6)
 Who is, Who was, and Who is to Come
 (Revelation 1:4)
 Wisdom (Proverbs 8:12)
 Wisdom from God (I Cor. 1:24)
 Witness (Is. 55:4; Rev. 1:5,
 Faithful Witness)
 Wonderful (Is. 9:6, NIV Wonderful
 Counselor)
 Word (John 1:1,14)
 Word of God (Rev. 19:13)
 Word of Life (I John 1:1)

Names of the Holy Ghost

Counselor (Jn. 14:16, 26; 15:26)
 Eternal Spirit (Heb. 9:14)
 God's Spirit (I Cor. 2:10; 3:16)
 Holy Spirit (Ps. 51:11; Ephesians
 1:13; 4:30)
 Power of the Most High (Luke 1:35)
 Spirit of Christ (I Peter 1:11)
 Spirit of Counsel (Is. 11:2)
 Spirit of Fire (Is. 4:4)
 Spirit of Glory (I Peter 4:14)
 Spirit of God (Gen. 1:2)
 Spirit of Supplication (Zech. 12:10)
 Spirit of Truth (John 14:17)

Spirit of Grace (Zech. 12:10)
 Spirit of Holiness (Rom. 1:4)
 Spirit of Judgment (Is. 4:4)
 Spirit of Knowledge (Is. 11:2)
 Spirit of Life (Rom. 8:2)
 Spirit of Power (Is. 11:2)
 Spirit of Sonship (Rom. 8:15)
 Spirit of your Father (Matt. 10:20)
 Spirit of the Lord (Is. 11:2)
 Spirit of His Son (Gal. 4:6)
 Spirit of the Sovereign God (Is. 61:1)
 Spirit of Understanding (Is. 11:2)
 Spirit of Wisdom (Is. 11:2)

2. Every one of these words or phrases that are God's names help to reveal the glory of his person and his works.

All of the names listed above are completely different from ours in this respect: Every one of them reveals to us some of the glory of our great God. In contrast, our names are simply words by which we are called. When we call a son Leonard, we generally haven't the slightest thought that he may be lion-like, the original meaning of the word. Similarly, when we name our daughter Mary, who ever recalls that this name comes from a Hebrew word meaning "Rebellion"? All of us probably know a Mary who is sweet and lovable, not the slightest bit like the original meaning of the word.

But God's names are different. William Dallmann (*The Ten Commandments*; Pittsburgh: American Lutheran Publicity Board, 1900) wrote, page 44: "His name is not only an appellation, it is at the same time a definition, a description, so that when we know His name we at the same time know His essence, who He is and what He is, as far as He has revealed Himself." To this we might well add that his names also reveal to us his indescribably blessed works.

As we study those precious names of our God, we shall find in them an amazing amount of spiritual wealth. Consider, for example, the name "Father." What a priceless word! It tells us that God is indeed our loving Father in Jesus Christ; that he will do infinitely more for us than any earthly father ever would or could do; and that we can come to him at any hour of the day or night with any request, thanksgiving, prayer and praise, certain that he will hear us.

Or, how can anyone ever hear the name "Savior" without being eternally grateful to Jesus for his entrance into this wicked world, for his perfect life reckoned to our account, for his death in payment for our sins and for his mighty resurrection to give us the promise of a blessed eternal life?

Or, what shall we say about "Good Shepherd" and everything that lies in that wondrous name, as God explained it in Psalm 23 and as Jesus unfolded it in John 10:1-18?

In the same manner one could choose every other name of God and find in it precious comfort, divine wisdom, hearty encouragement, renewed strength and many another blessed truth. Inspiring sermons have been written and preached and printed on many of those individual words or phrases that represent our God. With a little thought, any number of Christians could write a paragraph, an essay or a sermon on such titles of Jesus as "Light of the World," "Bread of Life," "Gate for the Sheep," "Lamb of God" or a host of others.

Each of these words or phrases reveals something about God to us, and yet all of them together cannot tell us how utterly glorious and majestic our God really is. They tell us a little about his incomprehensible person.

They reveal his mighty deeds of creation, preservation, protection, redemption, sanctification, sovereignty and judgment. Robert Emory Golladay wrote in his *Sermons On The Catechism*, Vol. 1, p. 81, 82 (Lutheran Book Concern, 1915): "No one name, nor yet the combined names of God, can ever exhaust the riches of His being. As no space can confine God, so no name comprehensive to man is capable of containing Him. The heaven of heavens cannot contain God, how much less a word, however expressive. But from the sum of God's names as He has revealed them in His word, we gain all needed knowledge of His person and nature."

B. God's name is every statement by which he has revealed the glory of his person and his works to us.

In addition to the hundreds of words or phrases that are God's name, there are also many statements in Scripture that constitute his name. We shall mention some of them in the following paragraphs.

When God called Moses to lead his people to the Promised Land, Moses asked: "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' Then what shall I tell them?" God answered Moses by telling him: "I am who I am. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'" God also said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be remembered from generation to generation" (Exodus 3:13-15). The name "I AM" tells us that God is the unchangeable one, the eternal, the Alpha and Omega and, as someone said, the God of free and faithful grace.

Exodus 34:6, 7 is another one of the better known and loved passages that reveal God's glorious name to us. In that section we hear how the Lord came down in a cloud and stood with Moses and proclaimed his name as follows: "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished." That is the key to understanding God's name.

Isaiah 30:27, 28 tells us that God's name is an avenging power against all wickedness: "See, the Name of the Lord comes from afar, with burning anger and dense clouds of smoke; his lips are full of wrath, and his tongue is a consuming fire. His breath is like a rushing torrent, rising up to the neck. He shakes the nations in the sieve of destruction; he places in the jaws of the peoples a bit that leads them astray."

In John 17:6 and Acts 9:15 our God himself tells us that his name is every statement that reveals something about his nature, his works and his will. In the former Jesus characterized his work in this way: "I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word." In other words everything our Lord revealed of the Father is really his name. In the latter passage the Lord told Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. I will show him how much he must suffer for my name." In other words St. Paul was to reveal God's name, that is, his glory, his salvation, to the Gentiles. Everything that Paul preached about the Lord Jesus was really his name.

One more passage ought to be quoted in this connection: "Therefore God exalted him (Christ) to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:9-11).

One can then readily understand why King Solomon equated God's name with his mighty deeds (I Kings 3:41-43), why God's name is wonderful because of his creating the heavens (Psalm 8:1), why his name means protection for his people (Psalm 20:1), why his name increases and endures forever (Psalm 72:17), and why the various psalmists in no less than three dozen passages call upon us to bless and to praise that glorious name while we have life and breath. (Some of those passages are Psalms 7:17; 9:2; 18:49; 29:2; 34:8; 44:8; 45:17; 48:10; 54:6.)

So God's name is his revelation of himself, so utterly great, so glorious that he uses dozens of words and phrases to describe himself. Only in this way can we begin to understand a little of his glory.

And why did God reveal his person and his works to us in his names? There is finally just one main answer: He did it to bless us and to save us. That is the clear message of Exodus 20:24: “Wherever I cause my name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you.” Beck translates that verse as follows: “Every place where I have you confess my name....” Consider also Romans 10:13: “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

Yes, God revealed his name to bless us, no question about that, as we tried to show in part A, 2.

II. WHAT DOES GOD FORBID WITH HIS SECOND COMMANDMENT?

A. In general, God forbids misusing his holy name.

In the original Hebrew, the Second Commandment reads like this: “You shall not lift up the name of the Lord your God to vanity (emptiness).” The question then becomes this: Should the Second Commandment read, “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain,” or “You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God”? Some editions of the Small Catechism use one form; some, the other. R. Pieper (op. cit., p. 59) wrote that the original editions of the Small Catechism of 1529 and 1531 had “take in vain,” while the 1537 and 1539 editions had “misuse.” “But Luther himself again restored the original wording (take in vain) in the 1542 edition, because, on the one hand people had retained this form and he wanted to have only ‘one, sure, eternal form and manner’ of wording. On the other hand he probably retained this form, because the words ‘do not take in vain’ better reproduce the meaning of the original text.” For this reason the 1956 WELS edition of the Small Catechism, as well as the 1943 LC-MS edition, has “not take the name . . . in vain.”

However, in his Large Catechism Dr. Luther uses “take in vain” and “misuse” interchangeably, stating, for example, “What does it mean to misuse or take the name of God in vain?” (51). This suggests that Dr. Luther did not greatly distinguish between the two terms.

The 1977 suggested WELS edition of the Small Catechism has “misuse,” possibly because children will more readily understand this term. In using this wording one should, however, not forget that the original Hebrew forbids using God’s name in vain, that is, worthlessly, fruitlessly and needlessly. How this is done specifically will be discussed in the next parts of this section II.

B. Specifically, God forbids misusing his name in cursing.

1. This includes cursing people, creatures or things.

This type of cursing is calling upon God to send evil, injury or damnation upon some person, some creature or some thing. A Bible example would be that of Shimei, II Samuel 16:5-9. He “cursed (David) as he came out.” As he cursed, Shimei said, “Get out, get out, you man of blood, you scoundrel! The Lord has repaid you for all the blood you shed in the house of Saul.” Later Shimei prostrated himself before David, confessing his sin and saying, “May my lord not hold me guilty. Do not remember how your servant did wrong on the day my lord the king left Jerusalem. May the king put it out of his mind. For I your servant know that I have sinned, but today I have come here as the first of the whole house of Joseph to come down and meet my lord the king” (II Samuel 19:19, 20).

When Abishai asked, “Shouldn’t Shimei be put to death for this? He cursed the Lord’s anointed,” King David spared his life, promising with an oath, “You shall not die” (II Samuel 19:18-23). Later, however, Shimei was executed by Solomon for disobeying his orders (I Kings 2:36-46).

A second Old Testament example, this time of someone wanting to curse an entire people is written in Numbers 22. Balak, king of Moab called Balaam and said: “Now come and put a curse on these people (Israel), because they are too powerful for me. Perhaps then I will be able to defeat them and drive them out of the country. For I know that those you bless are blessed, and those you curse are cursed” (Numbers 22:6). But even though he was promised a rich reward, he could not go against God’s will and curse Israel (Numbers 22:8-20).

And what shall we say about cursing today? That is surely one of the most widespread sins of our age. People everywhere, non-Christians and Christians alike, misuse the indescribably holy name of our God with their violent curses.

Many writers have pointed out the prevalence and the heinousness of cursing. Among them are B. A. Maurer in his *The Ten Commandments Will Not Budge* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1951). He wrote, page 20, 21:

It must be confessed with shame that one of the commonest and most widespread national sins is our unthinking indulgence in the most sulphurous curse words. There is no shame about this practice, nor seemingly any feeling of guilt. In any moment of pique or anger the name of the blessed Savior is angrily ejaculated or the most smoking curses are thrown at someone’s head. One cannot venture into a public place, or be in a crowd more than a few minutes, without having one’s ears blistered by what one hears.

The Rev. John O. Schuring wrote in a similar vein in *Sermons On The Ten Commandments* (Henry J. Kuiper, ed.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1951) page 52; 53:

Many cannot utter a single sentence of commonplace conversation without cursing. Some swear (he means “curse”) when describing a fishing trip or a new car. Some curse to express surprise. Others curse to express courage or to hide fear. Some swear (he means “curse”) at their horse or dog or cat or child. Some curse when they are well, others curse when they are sick. I doubt if one can mention an occasion, place or thing which the depraved mind does not use as a provocation for cursing . . . how tragic that men so frivolously, lightheartedly and unthinkingly abuse the only name given for their eternal salvation.

A captain on a ship caught in a storm was damning everyone and everything with horrible curses. When the ship reached port, a seaman asked the captain, “What would have happened, if God had answered your curses?” The question made such a deep impression on the captain that he forsook his cursing.

A man cursed the hammer with which he hit his finger. A farmer cursed the cow that had overturned the milk pail. What earthly good did they accomplish by thus misusing the sacred name of our God? Such cursing is doing Satan’s wishes, not God’s.

When George Washington became aware of the cursing in the Continental Army, he issued his famous order forbidding it. Indeed, how can one expect God's blessing upon an army that continually profanes the holy name of our almighty God?

Cursing is surely an utterly horrible sin. What a preposterous; blasphemous act on the part of puny man to demand, "Now, God, I'm telling you what to do: You damn my fellow man to hell; you consign this cow or this hammer to eternal hellfire; I'm telling you what to do!"

How in the world can anyone ever presume to make such demands upon our all-holy God? How can anyone; even in a burst of white-hot anger or hatred, ever wish to send anyone to hell, where "their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark 9:49)? Even though natural man could wish his hated enemy to die a thousand deaths, is there really anyone anywhere who would want someone to endure the most excruciating pain forever? Then, how can anyone call upon God who wants all people to be saved (I Timothy 2:4) to be a partner with him in his wicked condemning of someone to eternal damnation?

You can be sure that God will not let such a dreadful misuse of his great name go unpunished, as he clearly stated, "The Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name" (Exodus 20:7). Specifically; Exodus 22: 28 forbids cursing a ruler; Leviticus 19:14 forbids cursing the deaf; Leviticus 20:9, a part of Israel's Civil Law, called for the death penalty for anyone who cursed his parents; and Psalm 10:7 says of the wicked man: "His mouth is full of curses and lies and threats; trouble and evil are under his tongue." In the New Testament (Romans 12:14) St. Paul writes that we are to "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse." And the famous passage, James 3:9, states that we dare not bless God and at another time curse men.

2. This includes cursing or blaspheming God.

Scripture speaks of a second kind of cursing, one that is directed against God. It is one that "uses profanely insolent language" against God; or one could also call it blaspheming or mocking God. A Scriptural example is the advice given to Job by his wife: "Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die" (Job 2:9). Poor Job; he had lost all of his possessions including his children, his flocks, his herds and finally the love of his wife. In her unbelief she felt that there was only one thing that Job could still do: Curse God, who, she thought, had caused it all, and then die. That is a kind of cursing which is also strictly forbidden by the Second Commandment.

A second Scriptural example of blaspheming is written in Leviticus 24:10-16. That passage tells the story of a man who, in a fight, "blasphemed the name of the Lord with a curse." The Lord subsequently told Moses, "Say to the Israelites: 'If anyone curses his God, he will be held responsible; anyone who blasphemes the name of the Lord must be put to death.'" "Then Moses spoke to the Israelites, and they took the blasphemer outside the camp and stoned him." However, we must remember that this punishment was one of God's civil laws; it is not applicable to us.

A New Testament example of blaspheming God is that of Paul, or Saul, as he was then known. We read the humble confession of this great apostle in I Timothy 1:13. There he called himself "a blasphemer, a persecuter, an insolent man." Of this blasphemy Dr. R. C. H. Lenski wrote in his commentary: "'A blasphemer' who blasphemed the Lord of the church by using the most wicked and hateful language against Him and tried to force others to do the same (Acts 26:11). A persecuter . . . who in his activity persecuted the Lord Himself (Acts 9:4, 5). 'An

insolent' who both outraged and insulted . . . each term is severer than the other . . . can you imagine a worse sinner? Should he not have been struck down and made an example of the Lord's justice? . . . but, wonder of wonders: 'I was mercied'. . . I was treated with compassion in my indescribably pitiful and wretched state." The blood of our Lord is such a powerful cleansing agent that it could actually cleanse Paul of such a foul sin as blaspheming the precious name of our God, even as it cleansed Peter after he had cursed and sworn on the night of Christ's betrayal.

Mockery of God and his word is also a form of cursing. A Bible example is Pharaoh who was told by Moses and Aaron, "This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'Let my people go . . .'" But Pharaoh replied, "Who is the Lord that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord and I will not let Israel go..." (Exodus 5:1, 2). Pharaoh despised and mocked the living God, a form of blasphemy or cursing our heavenly Father.

St. Peter wrote to tell us, "In the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, 'Where is the "coming" He promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation'" (II Peter 3:3, 4). That too is a mocking or cursing God.

In the nineteenth century the noted agnostic, Robert Ingersoll, in his talks against God was said to have given God three minutes to strike him dead, "if there is a God." All such defiance, blasphemy or mockery of God is properly called cursing God, a frightful sin against him who is our Creator and Redeemer.

3. Forbidden cursing does not include cursing evil.

Scripture has a number of examples of cursing that is not only allowed, but actually God-pleasing. For example, when one curses sins that are particularly vile, that is not only allowable, but commendable, as we learn from the following Bible examples.

Genesis 9:25 lists the "curse" that Noah spoke to one section of his son Ham's descendants, when Ham sinned against his father: "Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers." Noah foresaw the direction that this group of people would take, and he foretold their wickedness, a prophecy that was later fulfilled (see Deuteronomy 12:31; Joshua 9 and 11; Judges 1:28; I Kings 9:20, 21). Although Scripture thus speaks of Canaan's curse, it is really a prophecy of what would later happen.

Another Old Testament example of cursing wickedness is written in II Kings 2:23, 24. That is the account of the small boys who jeered Elisha, the man of God: "From there Elisha went up to Bethel. As he was walking along the road, some youths came out of the town and jeered at him. 'Go on up, you baldhead!' they said. 'Go on up, you baldhead!' He turned around, looked at them and called down a curse on them in the name of the Lord. Then two bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the youths."

A final Old Testament example of God-pleasing curses is written in Deuteronomy 27:15-26. In that section our God himself cursed twelve different forms of wickedness, and in each instance he commanded, "Then all the people shall say, 'Amen.'" Those curses upon wickedness of every form are continued in Deuteronomy 28:15-19. The horrible results of these curses are written in the rest of the chapter, Deuteronomy 28:20-68.

A familiar New Testament curse against wickedness is St. Paul's words against false doctrine, "But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preach to you, let him be eternally condemned! As we have already said, so now I say again: If

anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let him be eternally condemned!” (Galatians 1:8, 9).

Thus we have seen how God commands a curse upon various forms of wickedness and upon false doctrine. Let those sins be accursed, and if the perpetrators do not repent, they will be eternally cursed also, for they are doing the devil’s, not God’s, work.

In all other cases let no one ever misuse the holy name of our God to curse anyone or anything. That is strictly prohibited by the Second Commandment.

Rather, remember what King Solomon wrote long ago, “A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver” (Proverbs 25:11). St. Paul’s advice is this: “Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt so that you may know how to answer everyone” (Colossians 4:6). And finally a good prayer to remember is that written by the Psalmist (Psalm 19:14): “May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.”

C. Specifically, God forbids certain kinds of swearing.

1. What is a definition of swearing?

At times the word “swear” is used as a synonym for a curse. A child may, for example, come to the teacher with a revelation that Johnny “swore.”

However, the original meaning of swear is different from cursing. Dr. Luther had part of the definition when he wrote in his usual excellent manner: “Swearing is nothing else than calling upon God as a witness and as a means for reconciling people who disagree with one another” (III, 1779). In other words, swearing is taking an oath.

That definitely is Scriptural, as we know from several examples. For instance, when the elders of Gilead asked Jephthah to lead them in battle against the Ammonites, they promised that he would be their leader after he had defeated these enemies. When Jephthah wondered if they really meant it (they had previously hated him), they replied, “The Lord is our witness; we will certainly do as you say” (Judges 11:10). They took an oath, calling upon God to witness the truth of their promise.

Jonathan and David likewise swore that they and their descendants would always remain friends (I Samuel 20:17, 42). Their friendship was such an earnest matter that they actually called upon God to witness their sincerity. Thereafter “Jonathan said to David, ‘Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the Lord, saying, “The Lord is witness between you and me, add between your descendants and my descendants forever””’ (I Samuel 20:42).

However, another point must be added: If one does not speak the truth when he calls upon God as a witness, then the one taking the oath is also calling upon God to punish him for his false oath. Various Scripture examples point to that truth also. For example, when Ruth made that magnificent promise to her mother-in-law Naomi (Ruth 1:16, 17), she added this oath: “May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.” That, as Keil and Delitzsch remarked in their commentary, is “a frequently recurring formula in connection with an oath . . . by which the person swearing called down upon himself a severe punishment in case he should not keep his word or carry out his resolution.” See also I Samuel 3:17; 14:44; 20:13; II Samuel 3:35; 19:13 for a similar calling upon God to punish perjury.

Another Bible instance in which oath taking involves calling upon God for vengeance, if the person doing the swearing does not fulfill his oath, is written in Jeremiah 42. There we hear how armed officers had come to Jeremiah in their difficulty to ask him to pray for them. When Jeremiah promised to heed that request, they replied, verse 5: “May the Lord be a true and faithful witness against us if we do not act in accordance with everything the Lord your God sends you to tell us.” In other words, “May God punish us, if we do not keep our promise to obey his voice.”

On the basis of the various Bible passages cited above, we can then use this definition: Swearing is the taking of an oath with which one calls upon God to bear witness to the truth of what is said and to punish any untruth.

2. What kinds of swearing are allowed or commanded?

a. Some denominations maintain that all swearing is sinful.

Among the churches that consider all swearing forbidden by God are the Quakers, Mennonites and Dunkers. They base their belief on Matthew 5:33-37 and James 5:12. Those passages read as follows: “Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord.’ But I tell you, do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God’s throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your ‘yes’ be ‘yes,’ and your ‘no,’ ‘no’; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.” “Above all, my brothers, do not swear—not by heaven or by earth or by anything else. Let your ‘yes’ be yes, and your ‘no’ no, or you will be condemned.”

Yet, these words of Scripture cannot mean that all swearing is forbidden in every circumstance, for then they would contradict other parts of Scripture in which God clearly sanctions some oath taking. Scripture cannot contradict Scripture, for then God’s Word would no longer be true in all respects.

Some of the Scripture passages in which God not only sanctions, but even commands oath taking are the following: Deuteronomy 6:13: “Fear the Lord your God, serve him only and take your oath in his name.” That command is repeated in Deuteronomy 10:20 where God again told his people to swear by his name.

In Old Testament times God repeatedly swore by himself. See, for example, Genesis 22:1,6; 26:3; Exodus 32:13; Psalm 89:35-37; 110:4; Isaiah 45:23; 54:9, 10. Our Lord himself testified under oath: “The high priest said to him, ‘I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.’ ‘Yes, it is as you say’ Jesus replied” (Matthew 26:63, 64), something he would never have done, if all swearing were forbidden.

Besides we have the examples of various great heroes of faith who also took oaths at times, again something they probably never would have done, if it were a sin. For example, Abraham, the father of the faithful, solemnly swore before God that he would not take any of the spoils of war (Genesis 14:21-24). He also required an oath of his chief servant (Genesis 24:1-9). Boaz vowed to take Ruth as his wife, if a closer relative refused (Ruth 3:13). Obadiah swore before Elijah, and Elijah also swore (I Kings 18:10, 15). In view of all that has been written in Scripture, it is evident that the words of Jesus and James against oath taking cannot be explained in an absolute sense, as if it were a sin under every conceivable circumstance. It is not.

Jesus and James were undoubtedly thinking of the frivolous manner in which the scribes and Pharisees took their oaths. They claimed, for example, “If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath . . . if anyone swears by the altar, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gift on it, he is bound by his oath” (Matthew 23:16, 18). They thought that one type of oath was less binding than another.

This kind of frivolous oath taking and this kind of hypocrisy in general were denounced by our Lord in some of the strongest words he ever used (Matthew 23:16-22).

Consequently, what Christ was saying is something like this: “In your everyday talk, use a simple yes or no. That should be sufficient under all ordinary circumstances. Forget your thoughtless, frivolous oaths, like swearing by the temple or its gold; do not use such oaths at all. And remember one oath is just as binding as the other; don’t use an oath unless the government, the welfare of your neighbor or the glory of God require it. In these last-mentioned cases (they are usually rare) by all means take an oath, if necessary; thereby you will be honoring the precious name of our God. The people who condemn all oath taking simply do not understand Scripture.”

Dr. Luther wrote of Matthew 5:34 as follows: “All swearing and oaths that one does by his own volition are here forbidden; however, if love, command, necessity, welfare of the neighbor or God’s glory require it, then it (oath taking) is commendable. It is just like wrath that is forbidden and yet is praiseworthy, if it is required by love and for God’s glory” (64, 188; see p. ii for explanation of these numbers).

In his Large Catechism Dr. Luther summarized the matter as follows:

Here you have the substance of the entire commandment explained. If it is so understood, you have easily solved the question that has tormented so many teachers: why swearing is forbidden in the Gospel (Dr. Luther must mean Gospels), and yet Christ, St. Paul, and other saints took oaths. The explanation is briefly this: We are not to swear in support of evil (that is, falsehood) or unnecessarily; but in support of the good and for the advantage of our neighbor we are to swear. This is a truly good work by which God is praised, truth and justice are established, falsehood is refuted, people are reconciled, obedience is rendered, and quarrels settled. For here God himself intervenes and separates right from wrong, good from evil. If one party in a dispute swears falsely, he will not escape punishment. Though it may take a long time, nothing he does will in the end succeed; everything he may gain by the false oath will slip through his fingers and will never be enjoyed (65-67).

b. God allows or commands swearing that is required by the government.

The Apology of the Augsburg Confession (XVI, 1) states: “A Christian might legitimately . . . take an oath when the government requires it.” *The Epitome of the Formula of Concord* (XII, 15) lists among the Intolerable Articles in the Body Politic: “That a Christian cannot swear an oath with a good conscience nor pay oath-bound feudal homage to his territorial sovereign or liege-lord.”

Dr. Luther wrote in his Commentary to Matthew 5:34, “No one shall curse or swear of his own volition, except if he has God’s word that requires cursing or swearing.” Then he listed

an example: “If you were arrested and in the hands of the government and it required an oath for true peace; or if a prince required an oath to pledge allegiance to him; or a judge or a witness—then you are obligated to do it. In such cases the word applies: ‘You shall obey the government’” (43, 127).

Romans 13:12 and I Peter 2:17 are two of the Bible passages that require obedience to the government in these cases. Consequently when the President takes an oath to preserve the Constitution of the United States, when men and women in the Armed Forces take a similar oath, when a court requires an oath of a witness or when other similar requirements occur, one can well take an oath without any fear that he is taking God’s name in vain, unless, of course, he swears falsely. This is following the example of Jehoiada the priest who commanded the guards to take an oath to protect the newly crowned king of Israel (II Kings 11, especially verse 4).

c. God allows or commands swearing for the welfare of our neighbor.

Dr. Luther wrote about this matter as follows:

The other reason (for taking an oath) is love . . . if it benefit one’s neighbor. Accordingly, if I see someone in spiritual need or danger, weak in the faith, or despairing in conscience; or with an erring understanding and the like—in these cases I ought not only to comfort, but in addition to take an oath to strengthen his conscience and to tell him: As surely as God lives and Christ died, so certain is this truth and God’s Word. In this case the oath is so necessary that one cannot do without it; for thereby the correct doctrine is confirmed, the erring and stupid conscience instructed and comforted and delivered from the Devil. Therefore in this case you may swear as much as you can even as Christ and St. Paul swore and called upon God’s name as a witness (43, 127, 128; see note at Table of Contents for the significance of these numbers).

What Dr. Luther was saying is that the law of love toward one’s neighbor is paramount, exactly as our Lord stated in Matthew 22:36-40. If it is truly necessary and if we can thereby help our neighbor, then by all means use God’s holy name in an oath. The law of love requires us to stand up in court or outside of it at times to say, “Before God in heaven, you are accusing an innocent man falsely,” or words to that effect, all for the neighbor’s good. That is following the example of Abraham who swore to Ahimelech that he would show kindness to him and to his descendants (Genesis 21:22-24).

3. What kinds of swearing are forbidden?

a. God forbids false swearing.

Such false swearing may take several different forms. For example, one can take an oath that a lie is the truth. That was Peter’s abominable sin on the night our Lord died. Even though he had just spent the three most blessed years of his life in the company of the Master, he yet denied with an oath that he had ever known him (Matthew 26:71-74). That was a sin for which he repented bitterly (Matthew 26:75), was forgiven and reinstated into the circle of the apostles by our risen Lord (John 21:15-19).

A similar example is that of the two scoundrels who testified against Naboth (I Kings 21:8-14). They bore witness, no doubt under oath, that Naboth had cursed God and the king, something Naboth certainly never did. In other words they testified that a lie was the truth, a dreadful sin that probably happens hundreds of times every day in the courts of the world.

The two false witnesses who testified against Jesus when he was before the Sanhedrin did the same. They claimed that Jesus had said: "I will destroy this man-made temple and in three days will build another, not made by man." "Yet even then their testimony did not agree" (Mark 14:57-59). Actually our Lord had said something quite different: "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days" (John 2:19). "The temple he had spoken of was his body" (John 2:21).

A second form of false swearing is testifying under oath that the truth is a lie. That too was a part of Peter's false oath. When the bystanders came to him on Maundy Thursday evening to claim, "Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away" (Matthew 25: 73), they were telling the truth. Yet Peter in a moment of dreadful weakness swore that this truth was a lie. Similar sins are committed in the courts of our land every day.

A final form of false swearing is taking an oath that one has no idea of keeping or which one later breaks. An Old Testament example of this is Zedekiah. Of him II Chronicles 36:13 states: "He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, who had made him take an oath in God's name." A longer account of this matter is written in Ezekiel 17:12-21: "The king of Babylon went to Jerusalem and carried off her king and her nobles, bringing them back with him to Babylon. Then he took a member of the royal family and made a treaty with him, putting him under oath . . . But the king rebelled against him by sending his envoys to Egypt to get horses and a large army . . . 'As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign Lord, he shall die in Babylon, in the land of the king who put him on the throne, whose oath he despised and whose treaty he broke.'" (See also II Kings 24:18-25:7.)

All of these instances are called perjury, a serious crime in the eyes of the state and an abominable misuse of God's holy name. No wonder that the Lord condemns such wickedness in the strongest terms. For example, we read in Leviticus 19:12: "Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the Lord." Again, Proverbs 21:28: "A false witness will perish, and whoever listens to him will be destroyed forever." In Zechariah 8:16, 17, we read: "'These are the things you are to do: speak the truth to each other, and render true and sound judgment in your courts; do not plot evil against your neighbor, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this,' declares the Lord." Other Bible passages tell us the same thing. Perjury is a mockery of the living God; it calls upon him to be a partner with a lie; it is utterly revolting.

William Dallmann in his *The Ten Commandments* (*op. cit.*, p. 53) wrote:

A lie severs the tie that binds, a lie saps the confidence of the foundation of society. But perjury, swearing falsely, adds sacrilege to the lie, adds blasphemy to falsehood, and goes to the utmost limit of moral crimes, for it pledges the name and character of God to a lie, it is the sacrament of Satan. A false oath by witness or defendant or plaintiff or judge or jury tends to paralyze the whole machinery of justice, and rudely checks the peaceful progress of the people. It falls like a blight upon the community. It is a stab at the vitals of social life. It would put the government, which is the instrument of God, into the service of Satan.

We ought to note also what Psalm 24:3,4 has to say: “Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to an idol or swear by what is false.”

However, this must be added to what has just been said: One must not keep a sinful oath. We may consider here a horrible example from Scripture. It is Herod’s oath, taken at the time his stepdaughter Salome danced at his birthday party. After the dancing, “The king said to the girl, ‘Ask me for anything you want, and I’ll give it to you.’ And he promised her with an oath, ‘Whatever you ask I will give you, up to one-half of my kingdom.’” When she then consulted her mother and returned to ask for the head of John the Baptist on a platter, “The king was greatly distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he did not want to refuse her. So he immediately sent an executioner with orders to bring John’s head” (Mark 6:21-29). He compounded his wickedness by first of all taking an oath when it was not necessary and, secondly, by ordering the execution of an innocent man. He never should have kept his oath, for it was sinful. Instead he should have repented of his sin before God and before his guests.

Dr. Luther wrote of this matter: “One cannot deny that not all oaths are good and that one may err in oaths, as in other matters . . . Dear brother . . . I have vowed more to God in my baptism and am more obligated to keep that than all other oaths. And if my other oaths depart from the first vow by so much as a hair, I shall trample them underfoot in order that I may not deny my God or despise his grace” (40, 323).

In view of all that has been written about this point, several things must be said: If we are ever called upon to take an oath, we must be sure that God’s word justifies this action. Then by all means pray that our God may guide us rightly as we testify under oath. Finally, if we are convinced that our oath was sinful (may God keep us from such evil), then repent of that sin, ask for forgiveness and thank God that he has provided forgiveness in Jesus our Savior.

b. God forbids swearing in uncertain matters.

Several Bible examples show us clearly that one must never take an oath in uncertain matters. For example, Joshua 9 tells the story of the Gibeonites who deceived Israel into making a peace treaty with them, “And the leaders of the assembly ratified it with an oath” (Joshua 9:15). At that time the Israelite leaders did not know that the Gibeonites were living nearby and were among the people whom the Lord had commanded Israel to destroy (Deuteronomy 20:16-18). Israel was to destroy those people so that they would not influence the Chosen Nation to serve idols. Imagine the leaders’ astonishment, when they learned that the Gibeonites actually lived nearby, not far away, as they had claimed.

When the nation grumbled against its leaders for making such a treaty, they answered, “We have given them our oath by the Lord, the God of Israel, and we cannot touch them now” (Joshua 9:19). Consequently, Israel was exposed to much idolatry, in part because of an oath in an uncertain matter, an oath the leaders should never have taken.

A second Old Testament example that impressively shows how no one may take an oath in an uncertain matter is the story of Jephthah (Judges 11). He “made a vow unto the Lord: ‘If you give the Ammonites into my hands, whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the Lord’s, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering’” (Judges 11:30, 31). How could he possibly take such an oath when he had no idea what would come out of his house? Well, the Lord did give him the victory. But imagine how Jephthah must have felt when he “returned to his home in Mizpah, who should come out to meet

him but his daughter, dancing to the sound of tambourines! She was an only child” (Judges 11:34).

Did Jephthah then carry out his oath and actually sacrifice his daughter? Scripture does not give us the answer. Dr. Luther thought that he did, writing, “Thus one can see in both judges and kings that after great deeds they also had to commit great foolishness to avert abominable pride” (64, 45). Dr. Luther undoubtedly based his thinking on Judges 11:35 where we hear that Jephthah cried in anguish, “Oh! My daughter! You have made me miserable and wretched, because I have made a vow to the Lord that I cannot break.”

Yet, R. Pieper concludes that the daughter was not sacrificed, arguing in this way, “If Jephthah had really physically offered his only daughter, he would have, according to Deuteronomy 12:31, committed a heathen abomination such as was thus far unheard of among the people of God” (*op. cit.*, p. 73).

Of course Jephthah was sincere in wanting to praise God for the victory with a burnt offering. Yet, the promise given under oath was surely sinful, since it was in an uncertain matter. He could just as well have praised God with a burnt offering of a lamb or a dozen of them, for that matter.

The classic New Testament example of someone taking an oath in an uncertain thing is Herod at his birthday party, mentioned in section 3, a. This account is written in Matthew 14:6-12 and Mark 6:14-29. When Herod promised Salome anything up to one-half of his kingdom, he had no way of knowing what she would ask. When she actually did request the head of John the Baptist, he compounded his sin with the murder of that great man of God. What a tragedy! Had he been a Christian, he would probably have repented of his sinful oath, confessed his sin before God and the assembled guests and said that he would under no circumstances commit murder in addition to his sin of swearing wrongfully. (A Sunday School child, when asked what Herod should have done, replied, “He should have said that John the Baptist was worth more than one-half of the kingdom.”)

Oaths in uncertain matters occur today also. Every time that someone joins the Masonic Lodge, he swears an oath that he will live according to its teachings and reveal none of its secrets before he even knows what they are. A former Mason said that one enters the lodge blindly, because he not only does not know its teachings, but he is actually blindfolded. Fortunately, various people have understood the wickedness of such an oath. They have revealed the lodge’s secrets so that others may be forewarned and thus kept from such an abominable use of God’s holy name.

c. God forbids swearing to commit a sin.

The Bible has several examples of this kind of sin also. King Saul asked the witch at Endor the outcome of the battle against the Philistines. When the witch hesitated, because Saul had “cut off the mediums and the spiritists from the land . . . Saul swore to her by the Lord, ‘As surely as the Lord lives, you will not be punished for this’” (I Samuel 28:9, 10). That was an oath to commit a sin, for God had expressly forbidden witchcraft of any kind (Exodus 22:18; Deuteronomy 18:10-12).

Another example of an oath to commit a sin is written in II Kings 6:31. It tells how the King of Israel was so furious that he vowed, “May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat remains on his shoulders today.” The king held Elisha responsible for the prevailing famine and therefore resolved with an oath to kill him, a clear

violation of the Second Commandment against swearing to commit a sin. It was, of course, also a violation of the Fifth Commandment, “You shall not murder.”

A New Testament example of this kind of sin is written in Acts 23:12-15. There we read: “The Jews formed a conspiracy and bound themselves with an oath not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul.” Fortunately, their wicked plot was discovered, and Paul’s life was spared.

Today criminals at times bind themselves together with an oath to commit sins. If someone then breaks the oath, he is frequently killed. Yet, the Second Commandment clearly forbids any oath to commit a sin.

d. God forbids all swearing in needless, thoughtless or insignificant matters.

R. Pieper (*op. cit.*, pages 72, 73) quotes Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), one of the Apocrypha, to show how God’s people must scrupulously avoid this kind of swearing: “A man who often swears heaps up obligations; the scourge will never be far from his house. If he swears in error, he incurs guilt; if he neglects his obligation, his sin is doubly great. If he swears without reason, he cannot be found just, and all his house will suffer affliction. There are words which merit death; may they never be heard among Jacob’s heirs. For all such words are foreign to the devout, who do not wallow in sin” (Ecclesiasticus 23:11, 12; The New American Bible).

Dr. Luther wrote about this type of swearing as follows: “The first (misuse of God’s name) is swearing and cursing by God’s name unnecessarily and thus misusing God’s name . . . Such swearing by God’s name, etc., is now very common and in daily use. For among all our members we have none more frivolous than the tongue, which snaps away and considers it simply a trifle that it frivolously uses God’s name in frivolous matters, when it should hold that name in high honor” (36, 77). Again, “Accordingly, it is also a misuse (of God’s name) that one so frivolously swears, as is common nowadays, that one adds God’s name to almost every word. That is simply forbidden . . . God never wants anywhere what you yourself undertake without his word, let it be what it will, even if one could instantly awaken the dead. Much less will he allow us to misuse his name, to call upon it when it is neither necessary nor profitable . . .” (43, 126 and 129).

That is the kind of swearing which our Lord had in mind, when he commanded, “Do not swear at all” (Matthew 5:34). It is the kind of swearing that the Jews of Christ’s time practiced regularly (Matthew 23:16-22).

King Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived (I Kings 3:12), understood this very well. Even though he did take an oath at times (see I Kings 2:23, 24), he refused to swear needlessly. For example, when Adonijah, contrary to God’s will, declared himself king even before his father David had died, David repeated his previous decision: Solomon was to be successor. Then Adonijah, in fear for his life, asked: “Let King Solomon swear to me today that he will not put his servant to death with the sword.” But Solomon wisely refused to take an oath. He simply said, “If he shows himself to be a worthy man, not a hair of his head will fall to the ground; but if evil is found in him, he will die” (I Kings 1:51, 52). In this case Solomon’s word was sufficient; an oath was not necessary.

Let that example be our guide. Of our own volition we ought never to take an oath; our simple “yes” or “no” is sufficient. Only when God’s word requires or sanctions it should we use his holy name in an oath.

The same rule holds true for the thoughtless use of God's name. Many people seek to punctuate their conversation with expressions like these: "Oh Lord, oh my God, good Lord, Lord no, Lord help us if . . ." Yet, that surely is a careless, thoughtless misuse of God's name. It's similar to the story of the boy who in jest called out, "Wolf, wolf." He did it so often that people no longer paid any attention to his cries, not even when the wolf did come and attack him.

Somewhere this writer heard the story of someone's housekeeper (was it Dr. Luther's?). She often used the expression, "Oh, my God." One day the master of the house called her. When she asked him what he wanted, he replied that he did not want anything. After being called several times without being wanted, she naturally became angry. But the master said, "You become angry when you are called without being wanted; how do you suppose that God feels when you call him without wanting him?"

e. God forbids the use of minced oaths.

Mince means to cut into small pieces, in this case "to weaken the force of." A minced oath is then an oath whose force has apparently been weakened.

This is a list of a few such minced oaths with the real meaning in parentheses: By Jove (calling upon Jupiter, the major Roman god), Cripes (Christ), darn it (God damn it), egad (oh, God), for heaven's sake (calling on heaven), gee whiz (Jesus Christ), golly (God), goodness gracious (an attribute of God), gosh (God), holy cow (Holy Christ), holy smoke (Holy Ghost), jeeppers creepers (Jesus Christ), man upstairs (God), mercy me (God have mercy on me).

Granted most people who use these or similar expressions probably never have God in mind at that time. Neither do the people who frequently ask God to damn someone. Yet, these words are synonyms or at least euphemisms for the precious name of our God. A Christian will avoid them.

f. God will punish those who misuse his name in swearing.

Immediately after speaking the words of the Second Commandment, our God threatened, "For the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name" (Exodus 20:7). It is the only one of the Ten Commandments to which God added such a threat. (The warning of Exodus 20: 5, 6 rightly applies to all the Commandments, as Dr. Luther has it in his Small Catechism.) From that threat one can immediately understand how vile the sin of misusing God's name really is. R. Pieper (*op. cit.*, p. 75) cites Jeremiah 10:6 ("No one is like you, O Lord; you are great, and your name is mighty in power"), Psalm 111:9 ("Holy and awesome is his name"), Psalm 113:3 ("The name of the Lord is to be praised") and Psalm 99:3 ("Let them praise your great and awesome name—he is holy"). Then he continued with "To use this great and exalted, praiseworthy, singular and holy name for lying and deceiving is as much greater a sin, as he who has this name is 'your God,' who renders to you many a great blessing. Whoever calls upon his name will be rescued (Joel 3:5; in KJ and NIV, the reference is Joel 2:32); whoever profanes it will not remain unpunished . . . Luther wrote in his Explanation of the Ten Commandments, 'If we cannot stand having one person scold and slander another, how much less will God permit one to take his name in vain with his tongue and consider him an idol? . . . He is the true God; therefore he will rescue his honor . . . so this commandment is naturally written in our hearts, telling us that it is not right to so disgrace God's name'" (36, 82).

R. Pieper also cites the example of Saul (II Samuel 21:1 ff.) who broke the oath that Israel had made with the Gibeonites (Joshua 9:3-15). The result was a severe three-year famine and the execution of seven of Saul's sons and grandsons. This was a powerful warning to all Israel never to break an oath, unless it be a sinful one. Another example mentioned by R. Pieper is the case of Shimei who broke his oath and was killed because of it (I Kings 2:36-46).

There are other Bible passages which tell us how much God hates false swearing. For example, Zechariah 8:17: "'Do not love to swear falsely, I hate all this,' declares the Lord." Malachi 3:5 tells us that God will be quick to testify against perjurers. In Matthew 12:36 Jesus said, "I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken."

In view of all that has been said, what better action can we take to counteract our natural tendency to misuse God's holy name than to pray with the Psalmist: "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer" (Psalm 19:14)?

D. Specifically, God forbids turning from his name to superstitions.

1. What is a definition of superstition?

In his Small Catechism Dr. Luther used the word *zaubern*, which has been variously translated. The 1956 WELS edition of the Small Catechism translated that word with "use witchcraft," as did the 1943 LC-MS edition. Theodore Tappert translated it with "practice magic" (*Book of Concord*, p. 342). The 1977 proposed translation of the WELS edition of the Small Catechism has "turn from his name to superstitions."

Actually, Dr. Luther never really defined what he meant with "*zaubern*." In his Large Catechism as in his other writings he seldom even mentioned the word.

However, Scripture uses this term or its synonyms repeatedly, as we shall see in a moment. From those Bible passages one can then readily form a definition of "*zaubern*" (practice witchcraft, magic or superstition): It is seeking help by means neither natural nor divinely approved. From a somewhat different angle one could say that it is the belief in a cause and effect relationship that cannot be proved to exist.

Let's illustrate: When we are ill, we consult a doctor to obtain medications—that is natural, since certain medications have been proved helpful for certain illnesses, like insulin for diabetes or quinidine for an irregular heart. At the same time a Christian will also pray for help and healing—that is a divine command and promise, shown to be effective in countless cases. Undoubtedly, each one of us has repeatedly experienced what the psalmist wrote centuries ago: "This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles" (Psalm 34:6).

On the other hand, if we take the advice of an astrologer regarding any future plans, that is both unnatural and contrary to God's will. It is unnatural, since no one has ever demonstrated that the planets have any effect whatsoever on our lives, and it is surely contrary to God's will, who holds us personally responsible for our actions. The Christian will therefore carefully avoid any reliance upon the influence of the planets; he will rather say with the psalmist: "I trust in you, O Lord; I say, 'You are my God.' My times are in your hands" (Psalm 31:14, 15).

Since “superstition” is the broader term that includes many sins, we shall use it in this paper, instead of the narrower term “witchcraft.” That is all the more necessary, since God specifically forbids many more forms of superstition than witchcraft, as we shall see.

2. What are the two major kinds of superstition?

If we read the many different Bible passages that refer to superstition, we shall find that some of the terms are synonymous. For example, when Moses wrote about mediums, spiritists and consulters of the dead in Deuteronomy 18:11, he must have been using those three terms as synonyms to describe the people who claim that they can talk with the dead. We do the same, even adding a fourth term: necromancer.

Scripture also at times closely connects several kinds of superstition, like sorcery (practicing magic) with fortune-telling (divination). For example, Numbers 23:23 reads as follows: “There is no sorcery against Jacob, no divination against Israel.” We also recall the story of the “witch of Endor” (I Samuel 28), as she is commonly called. This woman was both a medium (a consulter of the dead) and a fortune-teller (who claimed ability to foretell the future through the spirits of the dead).

Yet, even though Scripture does at times closely connect the various kinds of superstition, there is a decided difference between foretelling the future and practicing magic or witchcraft, as R. Pieper pointed out (*op. cit.*, pp. 76, 77). He stated that fortune-tellers seek a higher knowledge, one that is not attainable through natural means. They claim to do it through interpreting certain signs or through using superhuman powers. They maintain they have a knowledge of the present and of the future that is a mystery to the rest of us.

Those who practice magic or witchcraft, on the other hand, claim that they can, with the help of secret or superhuman powers, produce unnatural effects or results, generally by means of certain formulas. They seek some result, some effect with their so-called superhuman powers.

In our discussion of superstition we shall then divide its various forms, and there are many of them, into these two classifications: Foretelling the future and practicing magic.

3. What are some forms of foretelling the future (divination)?

Non-Christians have always been interested in knowing what the future holds. The *Encyclopedia Americana* states: “All known peoples of the world have practiced divination.” Therefore both Scripture and secular history have many examples of such seeking to know the future. People have devised various means whereby they claim they can foresee someone’s destiny. Often such practitioners go into a trance or are “possessed” by a divine or supernatural power, coming from some god. We shall discuss some of their methods in the paragraphs to follow.

a. Fortune-telling is one means whereby some claim they can foretell the future.

One method of fortune-telling that must have been common among the Egyptians at Joseph’s time (about 1700 B.C.) is mentioned in Genesis 44:7: “Isn’t this the cup my master (Joseph) drinks from and also uses for divination?” Of that custom Dr. H. C. Leupold wrote in his Exposition of Genesis, page 1081 (Columbus: Wartburg Press, 1942), that cup divination was supposedly used in several ways: “Some poured clear water into a bowl or cup and then strewed

into the water small pieces or particles of gold and of silver or even of precious stones. Some poured oil into the water. Still others observed the manner in which light rays broke on the surface. Usually the resulting designs to be observed in the water, whether from the particles thrown into it or from the oil, were construed after certain rules in order to draw conclusions as to the future.” If Joseph actually practiced such fortune-telling, that was contrary to God’s will; if he did not, then the statement was a part of the deception in this entire matter. However, using such cups of water or examining tea leaves in the cup and the like is still a common custom in our day.

Another method of fortune-telling practiced extensively by the ancients was the examination of a bird’s entrails or inner organs. That is mentioned in Ezekiel 21:21 where the Lord told Ezekiel that the king of Babylon “will cast lots with arrows, he will consult his idols, he will examine the liver.” Of these customs Dr. Keil wrote in his *Commentary on Ezekiel*, Vol. 1, page 297, quoting Jerome, “He consults the oracle according to the custom of his nation, putting his arrows into a quiver, and mixing them together with the names of individuals inscribed or stamped upon them, to see which arrow will come out, and which state shall be first attacked . . . The practice (consulting the liver) in which signs of good or bad luck, of success or failure of any enterprise, were obtained from the peculiar condition of the liver of the sacrificial animals, was a species of divination to which great importance was attached by both the Babylonians . . . and the Romans . . . and of which traces were found as late as the 8th century of the Christian era.” This type of divination was authorized by Rome. The practitioners of the art interpreted the condition of the entrails according to an established formula.

The apocryphal book of Tobit has a strange account of another superstition. Tobiah, the son of Tobit, supposedly was told: “As regards the fish’s heart and liver, if you burn them so that the smoke surrounds a man or woman who is afflicted by a demon or evil spirit, the affliction will leave him completely, and no demons will ever return to him again. And as for the gall, if you rub it on the eyes of a man who has cataracts, blowing into his eyes right on the cataracts, his sight will be restored” (*The New American Bible*, page 579). The use of these superstitions is mentioned in chapter 8 and chapter 10 of the Book of Tobit.

Few people today would consult the inner organs of a bird or a fish to determine the best course of action, but we do things just as silly, as will become apparent shortly. Incidentally, the superstitions mentioned in the Book of Tobit are one of the reasons why this is considered an apocryphal book, not at all in the same category with the books of the Bible.

Idols were also commonly regarded in Old Testament times as deities who could foretell the future, something for which Hosea, the prophet, soundly condemned Israel (4:12): “They consult a wooden idol and are answered by a stick of wood.” Such evils were practiced even by some of Israel’s kings. Ahaz, for example, “sent messengers, saying to them, ‘Go and consult Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, to see if I will recover from this injury’” (II Kings 1:2). Elijah the prophet answered Ahaz: “This is what the Lord says: Is it because there is no God in Israel for you to consult that you have sent messengers to consult Baalzebub, the god of Ekron? Because you have done this, you will never leave the bed you are lying on. You will certainly die!” (II Kings 1:16).

Acts 16:16 mentions another form of fortune-telling: At Philippi there was “a slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling.” Dr. Lenski wrote of this matter in his *Commentary on Acts*, page 657, as follows: “The masters charged a price for answers people desired of this girl. The world has not changed in this respect . . . divining of all sorts still brings in good money, for men will not

believe God, but they will believe the charlatans who profess to be able to pry into the future. Here, of course, was no charlatan, but a demon speaking from the girl . . . no devil or demon is able to perform even one genuine miracle—all are ‘pseudo,’ lying, spurious and intended only to deceive, II Thessalonians 2:9.... Why, this spirit could not and did not know what was awaiting him, namely that in a few days he would be driven out of the girl by the power of Jesus!”

Today there are fortune-tellers by the hundreds all over the world. In Florida, where this writer lives, one does not have to drive very far to see signs like these: “Palmistry,” “Madam . . . foretells the future.”

These people use many different methods in their work. Arithmomancy, for example, is fortune-telling by means of numbers; bibliomancy, consists in opening a book at random, with the first passage to meet the eyes supposedly giving a clue to the future; chartomancy foretells by using cards, usually Tarot; crystal-gazers use a crystal ball; extrasensory perceptionists (ESP) claim they can perceive things that are beyond one’s normal senses; palmists study the contours of the hands. A good encyclopedia will list many more varieties of fortune-telling. Amazingly, so many people believe these charlatans that they can hardly make an important move without consulting their fortune-teller. In some southeast Asian countries no king ever sets a marriage or a coronation date without the advice of such people. Nor is such consultation unknown in our country, where literally millions of people repeatedly consult their fortune-tellers.

All of this is completely contrary to God’s word and will, as we shall see. Therefore let every child of God be forewarned: Never consult people of this type; do not even do it in jest, for you may subconsciously believe something of what you have heard, and that could weaken your faith in our God.

b. Astrology is a second means whereby some claim they can foretell the future.

Astrologers claim that they can foretell the future by observing the fixed stars, the sun, moon and some of the planets. Today they make much use of the zodiac, that imaginary belt in the heavens that includes the paths of the moon and the major planets. They divide the zodiac into twelve parts, each named for a different constellation like Aquarius, Scorpio and Libra; each one supposedly regulates a certain period of time. If you were born any time between January 21 and February 21, then you are an Aquarius and automatically under its influence, so the astrologers falsely claim.

Astrology is an ancient and lucrative bit of fakery. It is first mentioned in Scripture, derisively, by Isaiah (47:13, 14), some seven hundred years before Christ: “Let your astrologers come forward, those star-gazers who make predictions month by month, let them save you from what is coming upon you. Surely they are like stubble; the fire will burn them up. They cannot even save themselves from the power of the flame.”

Astrology must have been extensively practiced in Babylon during Daniel’s time (about 600 B.C.). The king must have had many who practiced this type of fakery, since Daniel 2:2 tells us that he summoned “magicians, enchanters, sorcerers and astrologers.” In Daniel 2:10 those astrologers confessed that they could not tell Nebuchadnezzar his dream: “There is not a man on earth who can do what the king asks.” “This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon” (Daniel 2: 12), but Daniel intervened, told the dream and its interpretation as God had revealed it to him, and thus spared the lives of the astronomers (Daniel 2). Something similar happened later (Daniel 4). It happened a third time, when Belshazzar was king (Daniel 5).

The Magi of New Testament fame (Matthew 2:1-12) may have been astrologers and astronomers in the good sense of the word—both practices may have been closely connected, as possibly was the case through the Middle Ages.

In our day astrology is one of the most widespread of all superstitions. Of some 1500 daily United States newspapers, fully 1200 carry horoscopes. As far back as March 21, 1969, *Time Magazine* reported that the United States had 10,000 full-time and 175,000 part-time astrologers. Some colleges and universities actually have courses in this pseudo-science. Book stores and newspaper stands carry dozens of books and magazines devoted to astrology. A Lutheran high school received an offer of a Personal Computerized Horoscope, cost \$25.00, two for \$35.00. One of the “World’s Most Acclaimed Astrologers! Has found a way to give you a comprehensive fifteen-to-twenty page personal horoscope at low cost” via “harnessing the electronic IBM30 computer.” And “Is Your Dog Doing Nutty Things? Don’t Cast Him Out-Cast His Horoscope,” so stated the title of a newspaper article.

People, frequently the insecure, consult astrologers by the millions, asking, “What do the stars advise?” And many astrologers are good enough students of human nature to sense what a client wants to hear. They can always find something in their charts to make their clients feel good. The result: repeated customers and excellent income for these fakers.

Yet astrology is certainly not a science. A 1975 newspaper account told of a statement endorsed by 186 prominent scientists, stating among other things: “We are disturbed by the continued uncritical dissemination of astrological charges, forecasts and horoscopes . . . We believe the time has come to challenge directly, and forcefully, the pretentious claims of astrological charlatans.”

For Christians the word of our God is much more decisive than any statements by scientists, and the word clearly forbids us to have anything to do with astrologers and their paraphernalia. One passage which condemns astrology is Isaiah 47:13, 14, previously cited in this section. And Daniel 2:27 as well as Daniel 4:7 clearly reveal the inability of astrologers to interpret dreams or to foretell the future.

Purchasing any astrological material or paying to consult them is supporting deceivers; it can harm or destroy one’s faith in the true God; it can lead to death. (Ann Landers’ column of Aug. 27, 1975, carried the account of a 30-year-old man who was told by a “professional” that he would live to be 72. He believed it and lived dangerously, driving a motorcycle without a helmet at frightening speeds, swimming too far into the Pacific Ocean and the like. He drowned in the ocean at age 30, because he had depended on the word of a charlatan who told him that he would live to be 72.

When our Lord was met by a similar Satanic temptation (Matthew 4:5-7), he overcame the temptation with God’s Word. We are to do likewise.

c. A third means of foretelling the future is done by those who claim to be able to interpret dreams.

True, God at various times revealed truths by means of dreams. We may think of Jacob seeing the ladder reaching up to heaven (Genesis 28:12), of Joseph concerning the sheaves and the heavenly bodies (Genesis 37: 5-11), of Solomon’s extraordinary offer from God (I Kings 3:5-15), of Daniel’s four beasts (Daniel 7), of Joseph’s dream concerning Mary’s innocence (Matthew 1:20, 21), of the Magi’s word to return to their own country (Matthew 2:12) and others. Yet, in every one of these cases God was bringing a message; every one of them was an

extraordinary event; and in every case the people knew beyond any doubt that God was talking to them.

All of this is definitely not the case with most of our dreams, as we know from various Bible passages. For example, as far back as the time of Moses (about 1500 B.C.) false prophets claimed that they could foretell the future by interpreting dreams. God condemned them and their practice in no uncertain terms: “If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, ‘Let us follow other gods’ (gods which you have not known) ‘and let us worship them,’ you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The Lord your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. It is the Lord your God whom you must follow, and him you must revere. Keep his commandments and obey him; serve him and hold fast to him. That prophet or dreamer must be put to death, because he preached rebellion against the Lord your God . . . he has tried to turn you from the way the Lord your God commanded you to follow. You must purge the evil from among you” (Deuteronomy 13:1-5). (We must remember, of course, that this was one of Israel’s civil laws. The prohibition, but not the punishment, applies in our day.)

God also spoke against such people through Jeremiah on at least two occasions: “I have heard what the prophets say who prophesy lies in my name. They say, ‘I had a dream! I had a dream!’ How long will this continue in the hearts of these lying prophets, who prophesy the delusions of their own mind? They think the dreams they tell one another will make my people forget my name, just as their fathers forgot my name through Baal worship. Let the prophet who has a dream tell his dream, but let the one who has my word speak it faithfully” (Jeremiah 23:25-28). Jeremiah 27:9, 10 has a similar message: “So do not listen to your prophets, your diviners, your interpreters of dreams, your mediums or your sorcerers who tell you; ‘You will not serve the king of Babylon.’ They prophesy lies to you that will only serve to remove you from your land; I will banish you and you will perish.”

Zechariah denounces the interpreters of dreams no less vehemently (Zechariah 10:2).

True, coincidences sometimes arise that are difficult to explain. Yet, the Christian’s course is plain: Don’t try to interpret dreams; don’t patronize anyone who claims to interpret them, since this is opposed to God’s will.

d. A fourth means of predicting the future is claimed by psychics.

A psychic is a person who claims to be sensitive to forces beyond the physical world. For example, he claims long before it happened that a president (or whatever) will be assassinated, or that the Middle East will erupt in a war or that an earthquake will destroy Southern California.

One of the better know psychics in the 1970’s was Jeanne Dixon, always good copy for those newspapers which deal in the sensational. Supermarket publications like The National Enquirer and The National Star regularly feature such predictions.

Don’t you believe them for one moment. The Deuteronomy 13:1-5 passage cited above; Deuteronomy 18:21, 22 and other Bible passages forbid consulting these people or listening to them. The Deuteronomy 18:21, 22 passage is noteworthy. It states: “You may say to yourselves, ‘How can we know when a message has not been spoken by the Lord?’ If what a prophet proclaims in the name of the Lord does not take place or come true, that is a message the Lord has not spoken. That prophet has spoken presumptuously. Do not be afraid of him.” The

predictions of psychics have often been wrong, as we shall see in 5 b, and the word of God is clear, therefore pay no attention to them.

e. Another means of fortune-telling is reliance upon signs, omens and charms.

Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953) lists a number of such signs or omens that supposedly tell whether one's future is bright or bleak: "Salt, bread and butter, tea and coffee, plants and fruit; fire, lightning, rainbow, the moon, the stars; babies, birds, owls, peacocks and their feathers, chickens, cats, dogs, cows; sheep, swine, horses, rabbits, rats, frogs and toads, fish, crickets, spiders, snakes, lizards, turtles, wolves; bees, dragon flies; chairs and tables, clocks, mirrors, spoons, knives and forks, pointed instruments, pins, hairpins, combs, umbrellas (mostly unlucky), candles, matches, tea-kettle, brooms, dishcloths, handkerchiefs, gardening tools, ladders, horseshoes, hay; days of the week and various festivals or fasts, especially Halloween, birthdays; various numbers, counting, laughing, singing, crying; starting on a journey and turning back, two persons simultaneously saying the same thing, passing in at one door and out at another, walking on opposite sides of a post, stepping on cracks, sneezing, crossing hands while shaking hands, use of windows as exits, stumbling; itching of palm, eye, nose, ear, or foot; warts, moles; various articles of dress, shoes, precious stones, amulets and charms, rings, money; wish bones; death and funerals, dreams, spiritisms, weddings and initials. Of course, even this long list is most incomplete and might be expanded indefinitely. The practical significance of the beliefs registered in connection with these various beliefs or actions is that activities and procedure are supposed to be governed by them—action is indicated or inhibited according as the 'sign' is favorable or unfavorable."

The Roman Catholic church has done much to foster a belief in such superstition. In Dr. Luther's early day, for example, the Castle Church at Wittenberg had 19,013 relics. If one viewed all of them on All Saints Day and made the necessary contribution, the indulgence for remission of time spent in purgatory would supposedly have been 1,902,202 years and 270 days!

Yet, how can one possibly reconcile a custom like this with the many Bible passages that command us to trust in the Lord and in no one or nothing else? See, for example, Psalm 40:4: "Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust"; Psalm 118:8: "It is better to take refuge in the Lord than to trust in man"; Psalm 125:1: "They who trust in the Lord are like Mount Zion, which cannot be shaken but endures forever."

Despite the de-emphasis upon some such superstitions, the Roman Catholic church still builds no churches without a relic in its altar. It also emphasizes the use and promotion of scapulars, holy water, veneration of the Host, chrisms (consecrated oil), and shrines (like Lourdes: where many go for "healing"). That too is nothing but crass superstition.

Dr. Luther wrote of this matter: "The pope deludes and practices witchcraft with his chrism, holy water and salt. But in this case one ought to look and to ask . . . 'Dear friend, where is the founder who has commanded this? If you have just one word and command of God that tells you to do this, then you should consecrate salt and water and speak such words over them. But where there is no such word, then they have no value whatsoever . . .'" (19, 79). Again, he wrote, "The Devil also helps along to this end, for he delights in dishing up such idiotic works in connection with God's name thereby to deceive the people so that they believe it is all a purely pious matter, because they speak nothing but good words. But here one must ask... did God command and order . . . you to consecrate or bless palms and spices and thereby accomplish what you will? If you can do that (find a command from God in this matter), then we too will

consider it a divine work. But that you want to undertake this at your own discretion and yet state: It is surely a good creature of God and the correct, holy word and name of God which I am using, that has no value anywhere. For this is not God's command for us to obey, but your own impertinence, yes, a scandalous disobedience and a work, a service of the devil" (16, 56, 57).

Instead of the disgraceful use of such "props," the child of God will follow the fine example of Dr. Luther who chose as one of his favorite Bible passages Psalm 46, especially verses 1, 7 and 11: "God is our refuge and our strength, an ever-present help in trouble. The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress." Trusting anything or anyone else for protection and help is pure idolatry and a clear violation not only of the First Commandment, but of the Second also, for they tell us, "Our help is in the name of the Lord" (Psalm 124:8), not in charms and the like.

(Note: This entire section could well have been placed into the next section 4, since it to some extent treats of results or effects of superstition. See D, 2.)

f. A final means of foretelling the future (or revealing the present) is spiritualism.

People who practice this art are called spiritists, spiritualists, mediums, conjurers, consultants with the dead or necromancers. A definition for this type of superstition is "the belief that the dead survive as spirits which can communicate with the living, especially with the help of a third party, the medium."

This practice too is an ancient one. Moses wrote about it some 1500 years B.C. (Deuteronomy 18:11). Such sins were sternly forbidden by God on more than one occasion. For example, Leviticus 19:31 states: "Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the Lord your God."

Despite this clear command, spiritists remained in the Holy Land for centuries. King Saul (about 1050 B.C.) attempted to rid the land of them (I Samuel 28:9), yet at least one of them remained at Endor (I Samuel 28). Also at the time of Isaiah (about 700 B.C.) people were being advised by the unbelievers to consult mediums (Isaiah 8:19).

The best known example of spiritualism in Old Testament times is written in I Samuel 28. In this chapter we hear how King Saul, terrified at the sight of the enemy Philistines, first consulted the Lord regarding the outcome of the battle. When the Lord did not answer him (King Saul had long ago turned from God), he determined to consult a spiritist. He disguised himself, met the "witch of Endor," assured her with an oath that she would not be punished for her conjuring and then asked her to "bring up Samuel," who had died some time before this. The woman recognized Saul, yet he again reassured her that she would not be punished. The witch thereupon brought up Samuel, and Saul cried to him, "I am in great distress. The Philistines are fighting against me, and God has turned away from me. He no longer answers me . . . so I have called on you to tell me what to do." The essence of Samuel's reply was that the Israelite army would be defeated and King Saul with his sons would die. That actually happened as we know from I Samuel 31.

Did this medium actually succeed in bringing back Samuel's spirit? Bible commentators differ in their answers. Dr. Luther, for example, firmly believed that she did not. He wrote, "The fortune-telling woman brings an apparition out of the grave that was like Samuel both in appearance and in his dress by means of the Devil's delusion and deceit. For this reason St. Paul also calls the Devil's signs and wonders counterfeit powers and seduction (II Thessalonians 2:9). For King Saul was really fooled by the Devil's deceit so that he knew nothing else, except that it

was Samuel who had died; even though it certainly was not Samuel who was resting in the Lord; but it was an apparition of the Devil concealed from Saul by God as a punishment, since he in his former life had despised Samuel's teaching and cast it into the wind" (35, 143). The result of this opinion is that "Many Lutheran commentators following Luther, simply assume that it could not have been Samuel" (Siegbert W. Becker, *Wizards That Peep*; Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House; 1978; p. 58)

Dr. Becker continued with, "It should be noted, however, that the arguments presented for this view are often not based on solid Biblical ground . . . There is not one word in the text to indicate that this was an evil spirit. The spirit is simply called Samuel throughout. If we read the text without preconceived notions of what is possible, and not possible, the conclusion seems to be forced upon us that God in his wise government of all things permitted the spirit of Samuel to be brought into contact with Saul by this wicked woman." Various other commentators agree. However, all of us should also concur with Dr. Becker, when he wrote, "We must not make an issue of this . . . it is not necessary to debate such questions."

The evil practice of consulting the dead probably always continued in some form since King Saul's day. The modern revival undoubtedly started about the middle 1800's with Margaret and Katherine Fox. These two young sisters claimed that the spirit of a man murdered in their house at Hydesville, New York, had returned and would answer questions with a certain number of "rappings" for yes and others for no. Later, when they went to Rochester, the spirit supposedly followed them. Amazingly, a number of otherwise intelligent people believed this. The news spread quickly. Soon others claimed that they also were mediums, and that is the way in which spiritualism was shortly revived all over the world. Various books and articles in encyclopedias will give one much additional information on past and present practices of spiritualism, its claims, its methods, its props and the like.

As far as Christians are concerned, these things must be said: 1) Mary Fox confessed that the rappings were fakes produced by snapping the joints of their toes (a confession later repudiated, but undoubtedly true). 2) Various people have exposed mediums showing that the effects supposedly provided by spirits (rappings, apparitions, voices, levitations, etc.) can be explained and undoubtedly accomplished by natural means. For example, Harry Houdini (1874-1926), the great magician, offered a reward of thousands of dollars to any medium who could produce effects that he could not duplicate and explain. No one ever accepted his offer. (It is interesting to note that Harry Houdini had made an agreement with his wife that whoever died first would try to communicate with the one remaining. They gave each other messages that they would try to send back. However, nothing happened. Ten years after her husband's death and after repeated attempts by various people to consult his spirit, she said that communion between the living and the dead is "impossible.")

All of this is interesting enough, but for a Christian the word of our God is decisive. His word states that we must not consult the dead. Deuteronomy 18:10-13, a passage previously quoted, states this, as does Isaiah 8:19, 20: "When men tempt you to consult mediums and spiritists, who whisper and mutter, should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, they have no light of dawn."

4. What are some forms of practicing magic?

The reader may remember that we divided our discussion of practicing superstition into two classes: Those who claim to foretell the future and those who produce some kinds of results by unnatural means or by a command of God (see D, 2). In this section 4 we shall restrict ourselves to a discussion of those who claim that they can produce results supernaturally and in some cases actually do produce them.

a. Sorcery (practicing magic) is one form of practicing magic.

Several Bible examples come to mind. For example, when Moses and Aaron confronted Pharaoh with the request to let their people go, the Lord promised to work miracles through them to move Pharaoh to do his will (Exodus 4). Later “Aaron threw his staff down in front of Pharaoh and his officers, and it became a snake” (Exodus 7:10). Exodus 7:11-13 tells us: “Pharaoh then summoned wise men and sorcerers, and the Egyptian magicians also did the same things by their secret arts: Each one threw down his staff and it became a snake. But Aaron’s staff swallowed up their staffs. Yet Pharaoh’s heart became hard and he would not listen to them, just as the Lord had said.” Since Pharaoh would not yield, God then through Moses turned all of Egypt’s water into blood (Exodus 7:14-21). Exodus 7:22 tells us: “But the Egyptian magicians did the same things by their secret arts, and Pharaoh’s heart became hard; he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said.” Again, Exodus 8:6, 7, tells us “So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt, and the frogs came up and covered the land. But the magicians did the same things by their secret arts; they also made frogs come up on the land of Egypt.”

However that was as far as the Egyptian magicians could go; they could not duplicate any of the remaining seven plagues (Exodus 8:11). In fact, when the Lord through Aaron brought gnats upon men and animals, “the magicians tried to produce gnats by their secret arts, (but) they could not . . . The magicians said to Pharaoh, ‘This is the finger of God’” (Exodus 8:18, 19).

Another Old Testament example of people who supposedly could produce some kind of an effect with their sorcery was Balaam, who was called by Balak, king of the Moabites, to curse Israel: “A people has come out of Egypt; they cover the face of the land and have settled next to me. Now come and put a curse on these people, because they are too powerful for me. Perhaps then I will be able to defeat them and drive them out of the country. For I know that those you bless are blessed, and those you curse are cursed” (Numbers 22:5, 6).

“But God said to Balaam, ‘Do not go with them. You must not put a curse on those people, because they are blessed.’” So Balaam refused to curse God’s people, even when he was urged a second time and promised a handsome reward, as we know from Numbers 22:18.

The Babylonians practiced sorcery also, as becomes evident from Isaiah 47:9-15 where God prophesied the destruction of Babylon, despite everything that the sorcerers and magicians could do. Disaster will come “in spite of your many sorcerers and all your potent spells . . . disaster will come upon you and you will not know how to conjure it away . . . keep on, then, with your magic spells and your many sorceries . . . there is no one that can save you.” Daniel 2:2 also tells us that the Babylonians had magicians and sorcerers, while Nahum 3:4 calls Nineveh “the mistress of sorceries.”

In New Testament times there was Simon Magus, the mighty, renowned sorcerer: “Now for some time a man named Simon had practiced sorcery in the city and amazed all the people of Samaria. He boasted that he was someone great, and all the people both high and low, gave him their attention and exclaimed, ‘This man is the divine power known as the Great Power.’ They

followed him because he had amazed them for a long time with his magic” (Acts 8:9-11). Later, however, we read that, renouncing his sorcery, Simon “himself believed and was baptized,” (Acts 8:13).

Acts 13:6-12 tells about Elymas (also called Bar-Jesus) the sorcerer who “opposed them (Paul and Barnabas) and tried to turn the proconsul from the faith. Then Saul, who was also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, ‘You are a child of the devil and an enemy of everything that is right! You are full of all kinds of deceit and trickery. Will you never stop perverting the right ways of the Lord? Now the hand of the Lord is against you. You are going to be blind, and for a time you will be unable to see the light of the sun.’ Immediately mist and darkness came over him, and he groped about, seeking someone to lead him by the hand. When the proconsul saw what had happened, he believed, for he was amazed at the teaching about the Lord.”

Exactly how Simon and Elymas did their work and what effects they produced are not further stated. Dr. R. C. H. Lenski in his *Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* states of Simon (Elymas’s work must have been similar): “This Simon belonged to a class of charlatans, rather frequent at this period, who practiced occult arts to impress the people and gain a following. Much was plain sorcery, at times mixed with shrewd use of natural laws otherwise unknown. The range of their arts extended from the conjuring of demons, dealing with the dead, among pagans influencing the gods, to charms for healing, to divination, to star-gazing, and the like. The more pretentious employed formulae and ideas derived from Oriental theosophy and mystic cults, these mingled with Greek notions: The line Simon followed must be deduced from what Luke himself states. He was certainly successful, for he astonished not only the city, but, as Luke says, ‘the nation of Samaria’” (pp. 313, 314).

Carl Gerok in his *Die Apostelgeschichte In Bibelstunden* (Stuttgart: S. G. Liesching, 1868) wrote in the same connection, p. 250: “In that time of religious change, when the old faith and superstition had lost their strength and the new light of Christianity had not yet shined (everywhere), there was a mass of such sorcerers among both the heathen and the Jews. Partly they were fanatics and partly deceivers who traveled and attracted attention as fortune-tellers, astrologers, interpreters of dreams, prophets, faith-healers and conjurers. On the one hand this is a sorrowful proof how there is only one step from proud unbelief to general superstition, as one often observes it in our day among those who deny God. On the other hand, it is also a stirring witness how precisely mankind has an indestructible impulse toward something higher, an ineradicable longing for divine revelation. Blessed is he then who does not remain hanging in the elusive net of superstition, but presses through to a blissful faith in the light of the divine truth.” (All translations from the German are by the author of these notes.)

Sorcery exists today, practiced by medicine men who claim that certain substances have magic healing powers, by practitioners of black magic who claim they can harm someone or something with their incantations, by users of hexes (signs or formulas) that supposedly bring bad luck, by people who cast spells to harm someone and by those who claim powers to find hidden or lost items.

b. Witchcraft is a second form of practicing magic.

Witchcraft is closely related to sorcery. In fact, at times the two words are used interchangeably. What one calls sorcery another may call witchcraft.

We spoke about the great Bible example of witchcraft (the witch at Endor) in a previous section (3, f).

Another example is that of King Manasseh, who ruled over Judah for 55 years. He “sacrificed his own son in the fire, practiced sorcery and divination, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the Lord, provoking him to anger” (II Kings 21:6).

During the course of time the witchcraft mentioned in Scripture was intermixed with superstitions and folklore from various tribes. The church before the days of the Reformation, filled with superstition as it was, finally produced a comprehensive set of rules to deal with these matters. Aldous Huxley in his *Time Reading Program Introduction to The Devil in Massachusetts* by Marion L. Starkey (Time, 1963) summarized the developments as follows: “The lore of witchcraft was given its definitive forms by two learned Dominicans, Father Kramer and Father Schwenger, whose masterpiece, *Malleus Maleficarum (The Hammer of the Witches)* was first published in 1486. On the basis of their personal observation, the good Fathers were able to affirm categorically that ‘there is not even the smallest farm where women do not injure each other’s cows by drying up their milk (through the use of spells), and very often killing them.’ Needless to say, these witches did not confine their attention to cows.

“When they are not causing their neighbors to sicken, the witches amuse themselves by inducing sexual impotence in married men. And when that palls, they conspire with devils to produce bad weather. At this point the writers quote St. Thomas Aquinas to the effect that ‘devils can disturb the air, raise up winds and make the fire fall from heaven.’

“How should witches and sorcerers be treated? The writers return an unequivocal and emphatic answer. ‘Witchcraft is high treason against God’s majesty’; therefore suspected sorcerers and those who have been accused of witchcraft should be ‘put to the torture to make them confess. Any person, whatever his rank or position, upon such an accusation may be put to the torture. And he who is found guilty, even if he confess his crime . . . let him suffer all other tortures prescribed by law, in order that he may be punished in proportion to his offense’” (page XVIII).

Marion L. Starkey’s book (*The Devil in Massachusetts*) is the story of the 1692 Salem Witchcraft Trials, a true horror story. That great movement against “witches” in Salem was begun by 9-year-old Betty Parris and her 11-year-old cousin Abigail Williams, both of whom lived in the parsonage of Betty’s father, Samuel Parris. The household had a slave woman named Tituba. She often regaled the two girls with tales of voodoo and spells from her home island of Barbados, without, apparently, either Pastor or Mrs. Parris being aware of it. The girls decided to try a little “witchcraft” by themselves. They supposedly went into trances and convulsions and agony. They shrieked at home and at the church service. A number of other young girls and a mother joined them and soon the entire village gave them the attention they were seeking. What finally happened was a sort of mass hysteria that often grips people (we need only remind ourselves of the preposterous Children’s Crusade, A.D. 1212; the mass hysteria at the Hitler harangues of the 1930’s or the unbelievable behavior at the rock concerts of the 1970’s). One person after another, especially those the girls did not like, was accused of witchcraft and imprisoned. Twenty persons were finally executed and many more imprisoned. Today one is amazed how otherwise sensible, hardworking people, pastors, judges and laymen, could take the word of some hysterical girls who thrived on notoriety, instead of the word of stable, sometimes honorable citizens. Eventually the mass hysteria died out, especially after various confessions of delusion by those involved, not, however, without leaving scars in the community for years.

Yet, this must be remembered also: The Salem witchcraft episode did not involve real witches, as far as anyone knows, just accusations that certain people were witches. And that is quite different from the witchcraft mentioned in Scripture and still practiced in various parts of the world, including the United States.

c. Faith-healing is a third form of practicing magic.

Faith healers always seem to be with us. In the 1970's and before, Oral Roberts gained his world-wide reputation and his multi-million dollar establishment to a great extent by his professed ability to heal people. Kathryn Kuhlmann also gained a world-wide reputation for healing during the 1970's. Many another faith healer does what General Naaman the leper expected when he visited the prophet Elisha: "I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy" (II Kings 5:11). Instead, God cured him in an entirely different and unexpected manner (II Kings 5:10-14), but he was the only leper cleansed at that time (Luke 4:27). Many so-called faith healers will repeat a formula like, "In the name of Christ be healed!" And people flock to them by the thousands, just as people flocked to Jesus after he had miraculously fed the five thousand with a tiny bit of food. But they did not come because they wanted to hear his word, as Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me . . . because you ate the loaves and had your fill" (John 6:26).

To all of this we must apply the test mentioned by Dr. Luther (D, 3, e): If God in his word ever says that one is to practice faith-healing in this manner, then by all means do it. Since he never did say this anywhere, then only one course remains for us: Leave it alone.

True, James 5:15 states: "The prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well: the Lord will raise him up." But faith healing is as different from James 5:15 as magic is from a miracle of God. A Christian naturally prays for healing from God who usually does it through natural means (medicines or one's own antibodies). Sometimes God may heal through an unexplainable miracle, but not in response to the faith healers' rantings.

5. Can people who practice superstition actually produce supernatural results?

a. Many people only believe something supernatural has occurred.

For example, a faith healer had some sessions in a large chapel in Appleton, Wisconsin. A high school girl with hearing problems attended and was "cured," or so she claimed when she later talked with her principal. It so happened that a city nurse had given her a hearing test a short time before that. When the nurse gave her another test some time after the "healing," the results were exactly the same as before the "healing," even though the girl was convinced, she could hear better.

It is also a well-known fact that much illness is psychosomatic, that is, as much or more in the mind as in the body. A doctor once told a pastor something like this: "Here are the files of my patients. Over half of them have nothing wrong with them physically; it is all in their heads." In cases like that a faith healer could undoubtedly produce some results, simply by persuading the patient that he really had been healed, even though nothing but a change of the mind had occurred. Then the patient would be able to walk without a cane; then his stomach trouble

disappears; then his other health problems are solved, simply because there was nothing physically wrong in the first place; the trouble was in the person's mind.

This may have been the explanation for the fantastic number of Kathryn Kuhlmann's followers in the 1970's. This woman supposedly healed many, yet Dr. William Nolen who thoroughly investigated a number of her "cures" could not find a single authentic one. Someone once said, "Tell these people to cut off their little finger and then restore it. If they can do that, I'll believe them." Someone else innocently asked, "If faith healers can do what they claim, why don't they go to our hospitals and cure everyone there?" That question is akin to the one Dr. Luther asked, "If the pope can release people from purgatory, why doesn't he release every one now suffering there?"

b. Often these practitioners are dead wrong in their predictions.

Astrologers claim that people born at certain times of the year are influenced in one direction by a certain constellation. If that were true, then how does it happen that musicians, statesmen, authors, scientists and a host of other people in other occupations were born in every month of the year without any apparent predilection for any one type of career? Year after year Religious News Service has catalogued the absolute failure of various psychics' predictions. In 1977, for example, one or more psychics predicted among various other falsehoods, that Pope Paul would negotiate a peace settlement in Ireland, that geologists would discover the world's greatest oil reserves under the Great Lakes and that a rush hour commuter train would collide with a chemical-laden freight train and hundreds would be killed in America's worst train disaster. Nothing even remotely resembling these events ever happened.

Of the 1978 predictions the Religious News Service said that Jeanne Dixon made "so many predictions that they were carried in two successive issues of *The National Star*. Most of her 'predictions' were general and vague, open to many interpretations. But she was dead wrong when she got specific, as on the Pope (she had predicted no new Pope in 1978, but that Pope Paul would surprise the world with his vigor and determination; unfortunately for Jeanne, he died). Of the Panama Canal Treaty, she predicted, 'President Carter's Panama Canal Treaties will never go into effect'—but they did.

The National Enquirer used ten different leading psychics to predict events of 1978. "They, too, missed the mark." Some of their predictions: "Egyptian President Anwar Sadat will be assassinated"; "a revolution will topple Russia's government"; "Mohammed Ali will suffer a heart attack during a boxing match." Again, nothing remotely resembling these predictions happened.

So, you see, many, probably most, cases of predicted events never occur, but people have a tendency to forget the fifty that did not happen and to remember the one that did. Yet, the batting average of the psychics is abysmally low.

c. However, sometimes these practitioners accomplish things that cannot be explained naturally.

The Egyptian sorcerers and magicians (Exodus 7, 8), who on three different occasions duplicated the startling miracles which God worked through Moses and Aaron, are an example. Their staffs too were turned into snakes, they too changed the water into blood "by their secret

arts,” and they also “by their secret arts . . . made frogs come upon the land of Egypt” (Exodus 8:7).

As we read these startling accomplishments, we must surely regard them (with the possible exception of the first miracle) as much more than ordinary trickery or deception. No trickster or stage magician could suddenly produce “blood . . . everywhere in Egypt” (Exodus 7:21). Nor could he possibly make frogs to come up and cover “the land” (Exodus 8:6).

Then there was Simon, the sorcerer, who “amazed all the people of Samaria.” “And all the people . . . exclaimed, ‘This man is the divine power known as the Great Power.’”

Today too we are sometimes confronted with predictions or types of conjuring that cannot be explained by natural means.

d. How can these practitioners accomplish seemingly supernatural things?

When we hear about these supernatural occurrences, we naturally wonder, how can they be accomplished? How, for example, could Pharaoh’s magicians turn water into blood or produce frogs upon the land? Well, this much is certain: Their “miracles” could not possibly have come with the help of God, for they were God’s enemies. They had helped Pharaoh to harden his heart so that “He would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the Lord had said” (Exodus 8:15).

Leviticus 20:27 gives us a clue. It is generally translated, as does the NIV, “A man or a woman who is a medium or a spiritist . . .” However, the Hebrew actually reads, “A man or a woman who has a spirit of conjuring or fortune-telling . . .” That passage then tells us that these people have an evil spirit or they are possessed by an evil spirit which moves them to say and to do certain things that cannot be done naturally.

That same thought is expressed still more clearly in Acts 16:16-18, the story of the “slave girl who had a spirit by which she predicted the future.” This unfortunate girl followed St. Paul and his co-workers, yelling so loudly for a number of days that St. Paul finally “turned around and said to the spirit, ‘In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her.’ At that moment the spirit left her.”

There remains, then, just one explanation for these mystifying events: Those people accomplished their sorcery with the help of the devil. That is not told us in Exodus 7 and 8, nor is it specifically stated anywhere else in Scripture. But it is a conclusion that we reach on the basis of other Bible passages. For example, our Lord, in describing the last days, said, “False Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if this were possible” (Matthew 24:24). St. Paul’s description of the antichrist reads in part like this: “The coming of the lawless one (antichrist) will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders, and in every sort of evil that deceives those who are perishing” (II Thessalonians 2:9, 10). Also, when Elymas the sorcerer opposed Paul and Barnabas, “Paul, filled with the holy spirit, looked straight at Elymas and said, ‘You are a child of the devil . . .’” (Acts 13:9, 10).

Yes, indeed, Satan has devilish powers, no question about that, and he can impart some of them to his followers. Dr. Luther wrote about the Egyptian magicians (Exodus 7, 8) as follows: “Here we see how the Devil can also work miracles through his servants and tools or false prophets. For the conjurers could also turn their staffs into snakes; also turn the Egyptian streams into blood and bring frogs out of the water. Holy Scripture also reminds and warns us about that. For example, Deuteronomy 13 (:1-5) mentions that false prophets can work miracles

and our Lord Christ states in Matthew 24: Many false prophets will arise and perform great signs and miracles . . . these are the Devil's miracles, for the conjurers work such miracles with God's permission through the Devil's power and effort in order to hinder Moses' miracles, which were divine. Thus they both blinded and hardened Pharaoh, so that he would not accept God's truth, but remained bound fast in error. He also opposed God and his people with his blustering and raging" (35, 143; for an explanation of these numbers see the note after Table of Contents).

At the same time we ought also to remember what Dr. W. Arndt wrote in his *Bible Difficulties* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1932, 8th printing, 1971 p. 144), "If this story makes the power of the devil appear very formidable, the child of God will find comfort in that part of the narrative which says that Aaron's rod swallowed the rods of the sorcerers, Ex. 7:12, God manifesting on the spot His superiority to Satan. And the following narrative not only tells of the inability of the magicians to bring forth lice, which compelled them to confess, 'This is the finger of God,' Ex. 8:19, but when the plague of boils struck the Egyptians, the magicians likewise were among the victims and could not stand before Moses, Ex. 9:11. We are thus shown that, while Satan can do marvelous things, he cannot do all things and cannot successfully contend against God."

e. What does God say about turning from his name to superstition?

To a great extent we have already answered this question by quoting the various Bible passages that apply to each section. From them we learned that every form of superstition is an abomination to the Lord. The following passages summarize God's attitude toward superstition: "Do not practice divination or sorcery" (Leviticus 19:26). "Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them" (Leviticus 19:31). "I (God) will set my face against the person who turns to mediums and spiritists to prostitute himself by following them, and I will cut him off from his people" (Leviticus 20:6). "Anyone who does these things (the various kinds of superstition mentioned in the previous, verses) is detestable to the Lord" (Deuteronomy 18:12). "When men tell you to consult mediums and spiritists . . . should not a people inquire of their God? Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony" (Isaiah 8:19, 20). That command was reinforced by our God, when the rich man begged Abraham, "Send Lazarus to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment" (Luke 16:27). In other words, he asked for someone to be raised from the dead in order to speak to the brothers about their salvation. But Abraham, exactly in keeping with God's word, replied, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them" (Luke 16:29). In this and in the Isaiah 8:19, 20 passage God states why superstition is such a grave sin: It is a turning away from the true word of God and placing one's trust in other things rather than in God.

This is the point mentioned by R. Pieper (*op. cit.*, p. 83): "All who practice witchcraft and let it be practiced do not seek the desired help from God, but from the creatures; from empty, reprehensible things, yes, from the Devil. Those are the things in which they trust, rather than in God."

Dr. Luther wrote in a similar vein: "Here the name of God and the first two Commandments are greatly dishonored, that one seeks something from the Devil, from people or from creatures what should be sought and found alone from God by means of a genuine, pure faith, a dependence and a happy consideration and calling upon his holy name. Now just ask yourself if this is not a great, absurd perversion: They must believe the Devil, people and

creatures, and without such (false faith and confidence nothing will stand firm or help. What will our just, faithful God repay to those who do not believe and trust him as much as or more than they trust in the Devil or in a person . . . ?” (20, 222).

All of these various kinds of superstition that we have considered in part D of this paper are pure idolatry, grave sins against the First Commandment, a dreadful misuse of God’s name and a fearful sin against the Second Commandment. The child of God must avoid these sins at all cost.

E. God forbids lying by his name.

1. What is meant by using God’s name to lie?

This is not the type of lying that one meets in ordinary conversation when one either denies the truth or claims that something false is really true. That type of lying is forbidden by the Eighth Commandment. To some extent it is also forbidden by the Seventh Commandment (it forbids getting our neighbor’s property by dishonest dealing).

The clue to the type of lying that is forbidden by the Second Commandment lies in the words “God’s name.” This sin consists in using God’s name to tell a lie. Dr. Luther explained it that way in his Large Catechism (51): “What this commandment forbids is appealing to God’s name falsely or taking his name upon our lips when our heart knows that the facts are otherwise.” Then, after telling how people misuse God’s name in church or elsewhere, he continued: “The greatest abuse however occurs in spiritual matters . . . when false prophets arise and peddle their lying nonsense as the word of God” (54).

Since we treated perjury in a previous section (II, C, 3, a), we shall follow Dr. Luther’s thinking and restrict ourselves in this part E to that lying which is false doctrine.

A familiar, highly successful tactic of the Devil in the twentieth century is to persuade pastors, teachers and laymen that large portions of the Scripture are myths, accommodations to the thinking of ancient times, nothing that needs to be taken literally or just plain falsehoods. Examples abound, since today there is hardly a doctrine of Scripture that has not been attacked. A claim has even been made by a theologian that God as we knew him is dead.

We shall list a few examples of false doctrine, prevalent almost everywhere in the 1970’s and 1980’s: Genesis 1 and various other Bible passages tell us clearly enough that God created the universe through his word, yet people by the millions, people within the Christian church, say in effect: “No, that is not the way it happened at all. I’ll tell you how it happened,” and then they proceed with their silly speculations. Again, God thunders against fornication in many Bible passages, telling us, for example, in I Corinthians 6:13-20, “The body is not for fornication,” and that unrepentant fornicators will not inherit heaven (I Corinthians 6:7, 8). Yet, a typical attitude is the one expressed by a head of Yale University’s Counseling Service, who stated, “It’s just as O.K. not to have it (fornication) as it is to have it.” John 1:14, I Timothy 3:16 and various other Bible passages tell us clearly enough that Christ, the eternal God, took upon himself the flesh of a human being. Yet, incredibly, in the late 1970’s a group of Britain’s clergymen published a book entitled *The Myth of God Incarnate*, actually calling this major Scriptural doctrine a myth. In the 1970’s and 1980’s there is also a widespread belief that the Bible never claims inspiration for all of itself, despite such well-known, unmistakably-worded Bible passages like II Timothy 3:16 (“All Scripture is Godbreathed”) and I Peter 1:21 (“Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit”). And what shall we say of the approximately 3000 “Thus saith

the Lord” (or its equivalent) written in the Old Testament? Can God lie? That’s exactly what those people claim who deny certain parts of Scripture. One pastor even said, “It’s really not necessary for you to believe that Jonah was swallowed by the great fish or that God created the world in exactly six twenty-four-hour days, or that some of the other Old Testament miracles actually happened.” All of these examples are sins against the Second Commandment. They are examples of using God’s name to tell a lie; those people are doing what Jeremiah said long ago: “The prophets are prophesying lies in my name (Jeremiah 14:14).

The amazing fact is that countless people willingly swallow these “lies by God’s name” instead of following the godly example of the Bereans who “examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11). It all reminds us of another passage from the great prophet Jeremiah: “A horrible and shocking thing has happened in the land: the prophets prophesy lies, the priests rule by their own authority, and my people love it this way” (Jeremiah 5:30, 31). That passage tells us clearly enough that anyone who listens to the false prophets and believes their falsehoods also makes himself guilty of sinning against the Second Commandment.

Isn’t it amazing that ten or twelve million Baptists deny the Sacrament of Baptism to little children, that several hundred million Roman Catholics subscribe to the doctrine that a man is not justified by faith alone or that many hundred thousand Jehovah’s Witnesses refuse to believe in the Holy Trinity? Then, if you think that this is bad, consider the proliferation of cults in the 1970’s, many of whom claim to be Christians, but yet frequently have beliefs that can only be described as weird and anti-Christian.

Yet, one should not be greatly surprised at the multiplying of false doctrine in our day. God told us about that long ago, when he said, “The time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear” (II Timothy 4:3).

2. What does God say about lying by his name?

Our God does indeed have much to say about false prophets or teachers in both the Old and the New Testament. For example, Deuteronomy 4:2, Matthew 5:19 and Revelation 22:18, 19 all tell us that one must never add or subtract anything from God’s written and inspired word. If one does add or subtract anything from it, God’s condemnation will surely follow. That doctrine will then instantly rule out our joining or approving the teachings of the Mormon Church, since it places Joseph Smith’s writings on a level with Scripture. Nor could we ever approve of the Roman Catholic doctrine which places certain decisions of its councils and of the Pope on the same level with Bible teachings (for example, the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception or the Assumption of Mary of which the Scripture says nary a word). These and similar teachings are clearly lying by God’s name, a grave sin against the Second Commandment.

False prophets or false teachers can and often do harm their flocks spiritually. In some cases, if one believes all that they say, he cannot be saved, as is the case, for example, with the Jehovah’s Witnesses. They deny the Holy Trinity and the Athanasian Creed summarizes what Scripture says about this matter: “The catholic faith is this, that we worship one God in Trinity and Trinity in Unity. Which faith except everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly.”

Jeremiah wrote of the havoc that false prophets can cause: “Many shepherds will ruin my vineyard and trample down my field; they will turn my pleasant field into a desolate wasteland”

(Jeremiah 12:10). Again, the Lord says, “My people have been lost sheep; their shepherds have led them astray” (Jeremiah 50:6).

Since it is true that false prophets can weaken or destroy one’s faith, it is not at all surprising that our Lord repeatedly warned us against them. For example, “Watch out for false prophets” (Matthew 7:15); “Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, ‘I am Christ,’” (Matthew 24:4, 5); and “false Christs and false prophets will appear” (Mark 13:22).

There is also St. Paul’s most earnest plea at the close of that great epistle to the Romans: “I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them” (Romans 16:17). The same apostle repeated that warning in Galatians 1:8: “Even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preach to you, let him be eternally condemned.” St. John has a similar word, “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work” (II John 10, 11). In I John 4:1 the apostle summarizes what our attitude should be: “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.”

Therefore do not be deceived by the fair words of false prophets. Typically, they have a very kind, disarming way of talking. Beware! False doctrine is worse than poison. Poison only harms the body, but poisonous teachings can weaken, harm or destroy one’s soul. The pastor of the church to which you belong must be able to say on the pulpit, “Thus saith the Lord.” If he cannot say that, then he is lying by God’s name, and you have no business being in that congregation.

Let false prophets also be warned. In Old Testament times Israel’s civil law required the death penalty for such persons: “That prophet or dreamer must be put to death” (Deuteronomy 13:5) a law which no longer applies to us, but it does show us how God feels about this earnest matter. Isaiah 9:14, 15, tells us, “The Lord will cut off . . . the prophets who tell lies,” while Ezekiel 13:3 says, “Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit.” False prophets will be punished for their grave sin against the Second Commandment.

F. God forbids deceiving by his name.

1. What does deceiving by God’s name mean?

Neither in his Large Catechism nor, apparently, in his other writings did Dr. Luther state the difference between lying and deceiving by God’s name. At the most he wrote in his Large Catechism (56): “For to lie and deceive is in itself a gross sin, but it is greatly aggravated when we attempt to justify and confirm it by involving God’s name and using it as a cloak to cover our shame. So from a single lie a double one results—indeed manifold lies.”

There is certainly a close relationship between lying and deceiving by God’s name. Yet, if we examine Scripture, we shall soon learn that we may separate the two. Lying by God’s name, as we showed in the previous section, refers primarily to false doctrine. The deceiving forbidden by the Second Commandment, however, is using God’s name in an attempt to make someone believe what is not true. Various editions of the catechism call it hypocrisy.

A well-known Bible example of deceiving and also of lying by God’s name is the story of Jacob and his mother Rebekah when they sought Isaac’s blessing for Jacob (Genesis 27). The

story is well known.. Therefore we wish to point out just one part: When Isaac asked Jacob, “How did you find it (the wild game) so quickly?” Jacob answered, “The Lord your God gave me success” (Genesis 27:20). That was a plain case of using God’s name to lie and to deceive.

Another Old Testament example of deceiving by God’s name is the excuse that Absalom gave his father David when he wanted to raise an army in Hebron against his father: “Let me go to Hebron and fulfill a vow I made to the Lord” (I Samuel 15:7). That was using God’s name to deceive his father.

2. How do we deceive by God’s name?

We can readily learn the answer to this question by referring to several Bible passages and Bible stories. Through his Prophet Isaiah our God spoke some of his sharpest words against worship by evildoers. He said, for example, “The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to me?” “Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New moons, Sabbaths and convocations—I cannot bear your evil assemblies. Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood” (Isaiah 1: 11a, 13-15). Why would our God not accept their worship? Because “your hands are full of blood . . . take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow” (Isaiah 1: 15-17).

A similar case of deceiving by God’s name is referred to in John 4:24: “God is a spirit and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.” If we worship God outwardly only, without having our hearts in it; if we regularly pray our prayers and sing our hymns with our lips only; if we continually think of something else during the sermon, then we surely are deceiving by God’s name. The prophet Isaiah referred to such false worship with his “These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me” (Isaiah 29:13). Our Lord repeated those words in Matthew 15:7, 8. Is our worship only lip service? That too is a grave sin against the Second Commandment. (Note: All of us at times have our thoughts wander during our worship—those are not deliberate sins of deception by God’s name, but they are sins of weakness. This part of the Second Commandment, while it does show our sins, is directed particularly against those who join the church for the wrong reasons. Those people deceive others by God’s name, something like the people of whom Christ spoke in Matthew 6:5: “When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites; for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen of men.” They were wicked, but pretended to be pious, using God’s name to deceive others.)

Caiaphas’ action on Maundy Thursday evening (Matthew 26:57-66) was no less reprehensible than that of Judas. He pretended to have a great zeal for God and his word, but all his words and acts showed only that he was intent on the death sentence for Christ. He was supposed to be a man of God, but in this case he was a murderer.

The prophet Jeremiah had a similar experience with his listeners, who also went through the motions of honoring God with their sacrifices, but they would not listen to God’s word (Jeremiah 6:16-21). Like Caiaphas and the Israelites of Jeremiah’s time, all others who hear the word and pretend to worship, but live in open sin are guilty of deception by God’s name. Their worship is simply a mechanical form, utterly useless, yet, an abomination in the sight of our God.

The most striking Scriptural form of hypocrisy or deception by God's name is the conduct of the Pharisees (Matthew 23 and various other passages). They pretended to be pious with their wide phylacteries, their long tassels on their prayer shawls and their prayers on the street corners where people could see them; they loved the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues (Matthew 23:5, 6); but their hearts were so evil that Jesus could only call them, "You snakes! You brood of vipers!" (Matthew 23:33) They scrupulously gave tithes even of their spices, but neglected the weightier matters of the law, like justice, mercy and faithfulness (Matthew 23:23). Phariseeism was, of course, by no means restricted to Jesus' day. There are still more than enough Pharisees around. In fact, all of us have by nature somewhat of the Pharisee residing in us.

3. What does God say about deceiving by his name?

God's word about this particular sin is unmistakably clear, as is evident from various Bible passages. For example, I Samuel 15 tells us how God commanded Saul totally to destroy the Amalekites and everything they owned. Yet; Saul spared Agag, the Amalekite king, "and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs—everything that was good" (I Samuel 15:9). When the prophet Samuel reproached Saul for his failure to carry out God's command; the king tried to excuse his conduct by saying that the soldiers wanted to sacrifice those animals to God. "But Samuel replied: 'Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, an arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king'" (I Samuel 15:22 , 23).

The Isaiah 1 passage, previously cited (see II, F, 2), condemns such deceptive worship in still stronger terms: "I cannot bear your evil assemblies . . . even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen" (Isaiah 1: 13, 15). Amos 5:21-23 similarly condemns deceptive worship.

Then consider Matthew 23 with our Lord's sevenfold, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites!" Those are some of the sharpest words ever to come from our Lord's lips. They were directed against hypocrisy, the deceit of those people who pretended to be pious, but "you are like white-washed tombs, which look beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of dead men's bones and everything unclean. In the same way you appear to people as righteous but on the inside you are full of hypocrisy and wickedness" (Matthew 23:27, 28).

The epistle of James (1:22; 2:14) likewise condemns sham Christianity: "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." "What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such a faith save him?" Indeed not, for that is not a true faith at all, no matter how much one pretends. Examples of what St. James had in mind are listed by St. Peter and by St. John: "If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith, and is worse than an unbeliever" (I Timothy 5:8). "If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen" (I John 5:20).

* * * * *

Thus one can see what a gigantic number of evils are both revealed and forbidden by this great Second Commandment. Our study of them should surely show us our sins and move us to repentance. At the same time the child of God ought always to pray: “Dear God, keep me from such blasphemous misuse of your holy name; guide me and help me always to use it correctly.”

How do we use God’s holy name rightly? That is the point we shall discuss in the next part of this paper.

III. WHAT DOES GOD ASK OF US WITH HIS SECOND COMMANDMENT?

Our God’s name is so great, high and holy, as we have heard repeatedly, that we must surely use it only devoutly and reverently. This correct use of our Lord’s name, although not directly stated, is certainly implied in the Second Commandment, as Dr. Luther wrote:

With the words, “You shall not take the name of God in vain,” God at the same time gives us to understand that we are to use his name properly, for it has been revealed and given to us precisely for our use and benefit. Since we are forbidden here to use the holy name in support of falsehood or wickedness, it follows, conversely, that we are commanded to use it in the service of truth and all that is good—for example, when we swear properly where it is necessary and required. So, also, when we teach properly; again, when we call on his name in time of need, or praise and thank him in time of prosperity, etc. All of this is summarized in the command in Psalm 50:15, “Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver you and you shall glorify me.” All this is what we mean by calling upon his name in service of truth and using it devoutly. Thus his name is hallowed, as we pray in the Lord’s Prayer (Large Catechism, 63, 64).

In his Small Catechism Dr. Luther beautifully summarized the proper use of God’s name by stating that we should “call upon God’s name in every trouble, pray, praise and give thanks.” (We plan on treating some parts of prayer more extensively in the treatise on the Lord’s Prayer; therefore we shall in the following sections restrict ourselves to the four points mentioned by Dr. Luther in his Small Catechism: “Call upon God’s name in every trouble, pray, praise and give thanks.)

A. God asks that we call upon his name in every trouble.

Dr. Luther defined what he meant with these words by writing: “Call upon me in trouble is the same as saying, ‘Dear friend, if you are in trouble, if you are in great want or misery, and if you lack something here and there, then pray, call and scream to me (God) for advice, help and comfort; I shall surely hear you gladly’” (52, 307 -- see after Table of Contents for significance of these numbers).

That is exactly what Scripture commands and admonishes. For example, in Psalm 50:15 God said, “Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me.” The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews (4:16) encouraged his readers with, “Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.”

Nehemiah wrote (1:6): “Let your ear be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer your servant is praying before you day and night . . .”

Both the Old and the New Testament have various examples of people who called upon our Lord’s name in their troubles. For instance, when the Israelites fashioned their golden calf and worshiped it, God actually threatened to destroy the entire nation and to begin anew with Moses. But Moses, great leader and mediator that he was, prayed earnestly, “Oh, what a great sin these people have committed! They have made themselves gods of gold. But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written” (Exodus 32:31, 32). Then think of Hannah who “in bitterness of soul wept much” (I Samuel 1:10), because she had no son. But “she kept on praying to the Lord” (I Samuel 1:12), a fine example for all of us when we have trouble.

You may also remember the prayer of King Hezekiah, who was told that his illness was incurable, and that he would die. Then “Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed to the Lord” (II Kings 20:2), again a good example for us when illness strikes us or our loved ones. Consider also Jonah’s seemingly helpless position within the body of the great fish and his earnest prayer (Jonah 2). Remember the disciples’ prayer when that sudden, fierce storm threatened their lives (Matthew 8:25); and Jesus’ own prayer on the night before he died, a prayer so fervent that “His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground” (Luke 22:44)—again encouraging examples for us to call upon God’s name in every trouble.

Does God answer such calling upon his name in trouble? Oh, indeed, that is his promise, given in various Bible passages like Psalms 3:4; 6:9; 18:6; 34:4; Matthew 7:7-11; and many more.

As examples, ask Jacob who prayed for deliverance from his brother Esau (Genesis 32:9-11); ask the Israelites who “groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help . . . went up to God” (Exodus 2:23); ask Gideon who sought signs from God (Judges 6); ask David who prayed for forgiveness after his great sins (II Samuel 12:1-13; Psalm 51); ask the congregation at Jerusalem which “was earnestly praying to God for him (Peter)”, when he was in prison (Acts 12:1-11). Ask many other people in Bible times whose prayers were wonderfully answered; ask countless Christians today, if God has not answered their call for help. In every case, you will surely receive the answer given by the psalmist centuries ago: “This poor man called, and the Lord heard him; he saved him out of all his troubles” (Psalm 34:6).

Dr. Luther with his usual keen understanding of the word, wrote about this part of the Second Commandment as follows: “For this reason God lets us suffer many troubles . . . in order that he might through such circumstances compel us and give us a reason to run to him, to cry and to call upon his holy name, as Psalm 50 (:15) says . . . For through such attacks one perceives and experiences what God’s name is and how powerful he is to help all who call upon him. Thereby our faith and trust in God grows greatly” (36, 84, 85). And, we might add, thereby God’s name is rightly honored.

B. God asks that we pray to him.

Prayer is talking to God, not talking with God, since God talks to us only through his word. Prayer is a comprehensive term; it includes calling upon his name in every trouble, praising him, thanking him and every other form of talking to God, audibly or silently, personally or with others, on behalf of ourselves or for others.

R. Pieper (*op. cit.*, p. 92) wrote: “To distinguish (prayer) from calling upon (God) in every need he (Dr. Luther) understands that the Christian asks for all manner of earthly and heavenly blessings for himself and for others, without necessarily being in any particular need. The Christian who has in his times of need experienced the gracious help of his God can really do nothing else than to remain in constant prayer communication with his heavenly Father. Prayer is the breath of faith. Through such praying one honors and sanctifies the name of God, uses it advantageously, fulfills the Second Commandment.”

Scripture tells us often enough that we who are children of God by faith in Christ will want to talk to our heavenly Father. Just as it is unthinkable for a child to go day after day without talking with his loving earthly father, even so it should be much more unthinkable for us to spend even one day without pouring our heart out to God. For examples, read Bible passages like the following: “Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near” (Isaiah 55:6). “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you” (Matthew 7:7). “Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up” (Luke 18:1).

These prayers may be either formal ones that have been written or informal ones with which we tell our God whatever is on our hearts. An example of the former is the Lord’s Prayer, taught us twice in Scripture (Matthew 6:9-13; Luke 11:2-4). Many of the prayers read in our churches are also formal ones, well written to express the universal thanks and petitions of all church members.

An informal prayer is simply talking to God, thanking him for blessings received (like protection during the night and guidance during the day), praising him for his goodness (like giving us a safe journey or helping us to reach some goal) and asking him for needed gifts (like daily bread, forgiveness of sins, help to overcome some problem). This is a type of praying that we should practice, since it expresses our personal thanks and our needs in a way that no formal prayer possibly could.

These prayers may be for ourselves, the way David prayed for forgiveness with his familiar 51 Psalm or the way Hezekiah prayed for health (II Kings 20:1-6). These prayers may be for others, the way Abraham prayed earnestly and repeatedly for Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 18:16-33), or the way our crucified Savior prayed for his enemies (Luke 23:34). (Colossians 4:2 and James 5:16 also ask us to pray for others.) These prayers may and should be for the government (I Timothy 2:1, 2); for church workers, as St. Paul asked the Thessalonians to pray for him (I Thessalonians 5:25); for a strengthening of our faith, as did the father of the child that had been healed (Mark 9:24); for wisdom, as did Solomon (I Kings 3:1-13); for our wicked country, as Daniel prayed for the evil Israelites (Daniel 9); and many, many more.

Rest assured that every prayer made in true faith will be heard and answered in keeping with God’s will for us, as he promised repeatedly (Luke 11:5-13; Psalm 77:1; Psalm 118:5, 21; etc.).

Dr. Luther wisely wrote about prayer as follows:

For this purpose it also helps to form the habit of commending ourselves each day to God—our soul and body, wife, children, servants, and all that we have—for his protection against every conceivable need. Thus has originated and continued among us the custom of saying grace and returning thanks at meals and saying other prayers for both morning and evening. From the same source came the custom of children who cross themselves when they see or hear anything

monstrous or fearful and exclaim, “Lord God, save us!” “Help, dear Lord Christ!” etc. (Large Catechism 73, 74)

C. God asks that we praise him.

Dr. Luther wrote an excellent definition of praising God, as follows:

Now praise is nothing else than confessing the benefit received from God and attributing it not to us, but give credit to him alone.

Such praising and confessing occurs in two different ways: In the one case it is before God alone, in the other it is before people. It is really a work and fruit of faith, as St. Paul teaches in Romans 10:9, 10: “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.” It is just as if St. Paul had said, “This is not the correct faith that you secretly believe in Christ in your heart and praise him in the corner; you must confess him freely before everyone, in keeping with what you believe in your heart . . .” If I do praise and confess God, they (God’s enemies) will on that account afflict and alarm me with a martyr’s cup. All right, I will accept it in God’s name and will not on that account cease to praise God (10, 445).

To this R. Pieper added (*op. cit.*, p. 94): “Dr. Luther correctly adds confession before people as a part of public praise. For what does confessing Christ mean except to glorify and praise him, his attributes and his works before men? Praising God means to extol and laud his glory, his holiness and righteousness, his grace and mercy, or as I Peter 2:9 expresses it, to declare his praises.”

And one more quotation from Dr. Luther:

Tell me, does a moment ever pass in which we do not ceaselessly receive God’s blessings, or, alas, evil worries? But what else are God’s blessings and those worries except a constant admonition and inducement to praise, honor and glorify God, to call upon him and his name? Now if you have nothing else to do, wouldn’t you have enough to do in this Commandment to glorify, sing, praise and honor God’s name ceaselessly? For what other purpose have your tongue, voice, speech and mouth been created? That is what Psalm 51:17 (v. 15 in NIV) says: “O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.” Likewise v. 16 (v. 14 in NIV): “My tongue will sing of your righteousness.” What else is done in heaven except this Commandment, as Psalm 84:5 (v. 4 in NIV) states: “Blessed are those who dwell in your house; they are ever praising you.” . . . If we would give attention to this work, we should have a kingdom of heaven on earth, and always have enough to do, like the saints in heaven (20:214).

Yes, indeed, if we but look around us at the glories of creation, at the wonders of the human body, at our protection and preservation and, above all, at the incomparable spiritual blessings our God has given us, what else can we do but praise, laud and honor his attributes, his

mercy and his grace? That is exactly what dozens of Psalm and other Bible passages encourage and admonish us to do. Consider, for example, Psalm 66:1, 2: “Shout with joy to God, all the earth! Sing to the glory of his name; offer him glory and praise!” Psalm 103 ends this way: “Praise the Lord, you his angels, you mighty ones who do his bidding, who obey his word. Praise the Lord, all his heavenly hosts, you his servants who do his will. Praise the Lord, all his works everywhere in his dominion. Praise the Lord, O my soul.” The last seven Psalms all call upon us to praise our God, while Psalm 150 asks us to praise God with instruments and voices, yes, “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.”

The New Testament is no less emphatic, asking us to praise our God everywhere and for everything he gives or sends us. We need look, for example, only at passages like Romans 11:33-36; Romans 16:25-27; Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16,17; and Jude 24, 25 to see how the New Testament writers also encourage us to praise our God for his goodness to us undeserving ones.

Therefore, join the hymn writer in singing God’s praises wholeheartedly with hymns like the following:

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation!
 O my soul, praise Him, for He is thy Health and Salvation!
 Join the full throng; Wake, harp and psalter and song;
 Sound forth in glad adoration!

Spread his praise far and wide by telling others of his creation, preservation, justification and sanctification; support mission work wholeheartedly with your words, your prayers and your offerings. Finally, let the light of your lives shine so that others may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven also. You cannot serve God in any better way.

D. God asks that we thank him.

The word “thank” is derived from words that mean to think or to remember. Thinking is what thanking, is all about. It is a grateful remembrance of blessings received. In this case it means to remember gratefully all of the undeserved blessings that we have received from our heavenly Father.

We paid nothing for his gifts; we did not earn them in any way; nor have we with our sinful conduct deserved even the tiniest of blessings. Dr. Luther put it this way in his explanation of the First Article in his Small Catechism: “All this (that is, my creation, preservation and protection) God did only because he is my good and merciful Father in heaven, and not because I have earned or deserved it. For all this I ought to thank and praise, to serve and obey him.”

St. Paul emphasized the same thought in I Corinthians 4:7: “What do you have that you did not receive?” A good question. Did we have anything to do with creating our life? Did we make the crops grow so that we might have daily bread? Did we give ourselves feet to walk to the fields or to the store to get our daily bread? Did we make our own hands with which to earn daily bread and to prepare our food? Didn’t God command his angels to guard us in all our ways (Psalm 91:11)? Who made forgiveness of sins and life in heaven possible? Did we contribute anything at all to our salvation? Indeed, God did it all out of love for us undeserving ones.

Is it any wonder that the Scriptures repeatedly admonish us not to forget the giving of thanks? “Enter his gates with thanksgiving . . . give thanks to him” is the call of Psalm 100:5, a

thought that is repeated in Psalm 106:1: “Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever.” Psalm 105:1; 107:1; 118:1; 136:1-3, 26 repeat the admonition. Then there are passages like Colossians 1:12: “Giving thanks to the Father”; Colossians 3:15: “Be thankful”; and I Timothy 2:1: “I urge, then, that . . . thanksgiving be made for everyone”; and various others.

In addition to these passages there are many examples of Bible men and women who thanked God heartily for his abundant blessings. Jacob humbly confessed that he was not worthy of his large family and his great flocks (Genesis 32:10); Moses and the children of Israel thanked God for deliverance from Pharaoh (Exodus 15); King Solomon thanked God at the dedication of the Temple (I Kings 8); the psalmist included thanksgiving with his worship (100:4); Daniel thanked God for giving him the interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (Daniel 2:23); and Jesus gave thanks for daily bread before he fed the five thousand (John 6:11).

Then consider this also: St. Paul began every one of his New Testament letters (excepting Titus, and there it is implied) with words of thanksgiving or praise to God. See Romans 1:8; I Corinthians 1:4; II Corinthians 1:3; Galatians 1:5; Ephesians 1:3, 16; Philippians 1:3; Colossians 1:3; I Thessalonians 1:2; II Thessalonians 1:3; I Timothy 1:12; II Timothy 1:3; Philemon 4.

In view of all of God’s grace and goodness to us undeserving ones, one would certainly expect that Christians everywhere would spend at least some time each day in thanking our God for his goodness. Yet, ask the average child of God questions like the following, and you may receive a blank stare: Did you thank God this morning for another day of grace? How often have you thanked him for giving you a thumb and fingers to do your work? (Your work would be most difficult without a thumb.) Have you ever thanked God for your heart that beats 100,000 times a day, 36,500,000 times a year without your normally being greatly aware of that wonderful muscle? Do you generally thank God for a good night’s sleep? Do you frequently thank God for your ability to walk? How about your eyesight—when did you last thank God for that incomparable blessing? Have you ever been truly hungry like perhaps one half billion people in the world who seldom know what it means to have a full stomach from one year to the next? Does that make you more grateful for your plentiful supply of food? Have you really thanked God for misfortune, illness, poverty and trouble, knowing that even such experiences work together for good to them that love God (Romans 8:28)?

And what shall we say about spiritual blessings? Are you better than the two billion and more people who do not know the way to heaven through faith in Christ our Lord? Have you thanked God for keeping you in the true faith? How often do you thank him for the sure promise of eternal life in heaven? Is your heart overflowing with gratitude to Christ who rescued you from sin, death and damnation and made you a saint, an heir of heaven?

In other words, most of us for much of the time are probably like the ten lepers who were healed of their dreadful disease, but then forgot to return thanks. Their ingratitude caused our Lord to sigh: “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was not one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” (Luke 17:17-19)

Oh, pray God that we may in all circumstances follow the excellent example of the one Samaritan leper who had been healed. “He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him” (Luke 17:16). That is the will of our God, who said, “Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus” (I Thessalonians 5:18).

IV. WHAT IS THE ROLE OF OUR LORD IN THE SECOND COMMANDMENT?

A. Jesus kept the Second Commandment perfects for us.

There is not a person on earth who hasn't at some time in his life misused God's holy name knowingly or unknowingly, purposely or unintentionally. There is no one on earth who has not at some time or another practiced superstition or been influenced by it, even as there is no one who can claim that he has never in his life let his mind wander during his worship.

If we have sinned by doing things that we ought not to do according to the Second Commandment, what shall we say about failure to do things that we must do? We frequently fail to pray fervently, to thank God regularly or to praise him wholeheartedly.

Yes, our sins of commission and omission against the Second Commandment are great indeed and even one of these sins is enough to shut us out of heaven forever, as James 2:10 states: "Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it."

Humanly speaking, then, no one in all the world can possibly be saved, for no one can enter heaven with sins clinging to him.

But thanks be to our God with hearts and hands and voices, he sent his Son into the world to keep the Second Commandment perfectly. So perfect was his use of God's name that his worst enemies, always on the lookout for some flaw in his character, could not find a single sin in him (John 8:46). And, miracle of all miracles, this righteousness of our Lord has been reckoned to our account, as Romans 3:21, 22 tell us: "But now a righteousness from God, apart from the law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe."

How can we ever thank God sufficiently that the righteousness of Christ has been reckoned to our account? He is the Lord our Righteousness (Jeremiah 23:6). In him and through him we have that perfect righteousness which we need to stand before our God on Judgment Day.

B. Jesus gave us the perfect example for keeping the Second Commandment.

Jesus never misused God's holy name, never cursed and never swore unnecessarily or falsely, never lied or deceived by God's name; on the contrary, he repeatedly called upon his heavenly Father in days of trouble, as he prayed on the night when he was betrayed (John 17; Luke 22:41-44; Hebrews 5:7); he often went by himself to pray (Matthew 14:23; Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16; etc.); he praised God by doing his Father's will (John 17:4: "I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do"); and he repeatedly thanked God (Matthew 11:25; 26; 27; John 6:11; etc.).

As in all other Commandments so in his keeping of this Commandment, too, Jesus is our example. In this matter we cannot have a greater or better aim in life than to imitate Jesus as best we can with the powers of the Holy Spirit that God has given us. We do that out of love toward him who loved us. He is the vine; we are the branches (John 15), and the branches of the grapevine have just one purpose: to bear fruit. That is our work. Therefore let your light shine also in avoiding the sins forbidden by the Second Commandment and doing the good works that are commanded by it out of gratitude to him who lived and died for us.