“Why Did the Jews Not Say God’s Name Aloud When He Never Said Not To?”

Today I read an article on your website where a question was asked, “If Jehovah Isn’t the Real Name of God, What Is?” Jimmy Williams explained that even prior to Christ, it was Jewish tradition to substitute Adonai for the Tetragrammaton due to their ancient practice of not uttering the sacred name of God. However, this tradition was man’s tradition, the Jews’ tradition. Am I correct in saying that it was not God’s tradition? Did God ever command man not to vocalize his name? If He didn’t want us to call on him by his name, why did He even mention His name to Moses? Why did he tell Moses what to say when inquired of who sent him if He didn’t want people to know His name and use it? The Bible reveals to us that the Pharisees were corrupt even before Christ, so why do we carry on their tradition if we are followers of Christ? If He gave us His name in the ancient texts, what right does man have in taking it away?

You ask a very good question! On the one hand, you are quite correct in noting that God never explicitly commanded man not to vocalize His name. This was, as you observe, part of Jewish tradition—and not the commandment of God.

So why did this tradition arise? Largely because of one of God’s commandments! In Exodus 20:7 (one of the Ten Commandments) we read the following: “You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.”

It was because the Jews were so concerned not to misuse the name of God that this tradition arose. The Jews wanted to be absolutely certain that they did not misuse the name of the

Lord and so they read Adonai in place of YHWH. Thus, there was a good motive behind the tradition, even though the practice was never explicitly commanded by God. God's command was not to misuse His name—and clearly one can reverently speak (or pray) the name of the Lord in a way that does not constitute misuse. However, as we readily discern even in our own day, many people are only all too ready to misuse the name of the Lord. And this, I think, is partly why this Jewish tradition arose. It provides a "fence around the Law," which keeps people from violating God's commandment. But constructing the fence itself was never actually commanded by God.

I hope this is helpful.

Shalom in Christ,

Michael Gleghorn

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- "If Jehovah Isn't the Real Name of God, What Is?"
- "Is It Wrong to Speak of God as Jehovah?"
- "Jehovah Is the Only Name of God!"