

Thought for the week

The common thread in our lives

An employee was feeling the pressure of work and said things to his boss that he immediately regretted. The boss's response had a profound effect on him. Instead of responding in kind, she simply said, 'That wasn't worthy of you.' She knew he wasn't acting in a way that represented the kind of person he wanted to be and the values he usually stood for.

When we read the Ten Commandments, we may wonder why 'taking the name of God in vain' is treated so seriously, particularly since such words are used so regularly by individuals and in public discourse, and usually without obvious ill intention.

Respect and honour for God, leading to honour and respect for those around us, runs through the Ten Commandments and the further instructions that follow. There is not necessarily a commandment to fit every particular situation, so we need to ask ourselves what actions or words would best represent the name and particularly the teachings and way of life of Jesus.

A thread running through both Old and New Testaments is one of people saying the right things and following the correct rules or rituals but acting in a way that contradicts what they represent. In the Old Testament, people are warned that their ritual sacrifices are not acceptable if they are ill-treating those they should be caring for. Jesus heals people on the sabbath, showing that healing and helping someone in need come before strict adherence to rules about keeping the sabbath. To Jesus, the rules are given by God to help in their dealings with one another and with God. We need to keep this in mind.

Consider for a moment, the effects of identity theft – someone steals your identity, probably your money as well. Then they act in a way that you would never act, even on a bad day! Quite apart from the hardship and inconvenience of finding it hard to obtain credit or insurance, there is something sinister and demeaning about being misrepresented and losing control of your reputation.

Translate that into a Christian context. How many people have rejected the Christian faith simply because they have been badly treated by people claiming to follow Christ? What a terrible disappointment to the one we serve. We who take the name of Christ need to be careful not to misuse the identity we have adopted.

So when we congratulate ourselves on not using God's name glibly or in the wrong context, or even for being people who keep all the rules, perhaps we need to look a little deeper. Honouring God runs like a thread through the Commandments: it is not only when we directly give God honour that we fulfil this command, but also through honouring our neighbours that we honour God, because they are made, like us, in God's image. This is a thread that runs through the commandments and should run through our lives also.