



A THOUGHT FOR THE WEEKEND

17th February 2023

"You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone."
2 Corinthians 3:2

Do you feel we have become obsessed with form-filling, paper qualifications, bureaucracy, certificates, record-keeping, and so on? When applying or volunteering for a role, there's a whole battery of boxes to be ticked, as protection from possible misadventures and abuses, - or from litigation!

When Paul wrote his letters to the Christians in Corinth there was concern about travelling 'apostle-speakers', perhaps even rivalry (2 Corinthians 10:10, 12:11); and there was an understandable fear of 'false truth' and corruption (2 Corinthians 2:17; Philippians 1:17). And of course, Paul himself had a background in Pharisaism (Philippians 3:5), the ultimate box-ticking (Matthew 23)! For us, even within the Christian world, there are parallels.

The 'new' Paul takes another line. He writes: *"...do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone. You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts."* (2 Corinthians 3:1-3). So imagine, instead of paper qualifications, boxes ticked or references written, we were able to produce all those who had been blessed by our life, work and words. Most, of course, we would not even be aware of... until they showed up!

I had an email recently from someone who described their life as *'an autobiography full of little else but wasted gifts'*. Such a person would be surprised by the queue of those showing the 'result of their ministry'. The value of people we have known and respected is not in their 'CV', but in their example and transforming effect in our lives. Can you think of such a person? We might say of them (paraphrasing Paul), *"We ourselves are their letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone; a letter from Christ, the result of their ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on certificates or references but on our hearts."*

Those we have admired, loved, and perhaps now lost, are the ones who showed the character of Christ. They have *"written on our hearts"* by *"the Spirit of the living God"* letters which are *"known and read by everyone"* in our lives and conduct. We thank God for those whose lasting legacy of Godly example is indelibly written on our hearts and worked out in our lives. Thus the work of the Holy Spirit continues. As the Psalm puts it, *"...surely I have a delightful inheritance"* (Psalm 16:6).

So of course, our longing is that we in our turn will write such 'letters' on the hearts of those we love, live with and serve; -the Psalmist again: *"...till I declare your power to the next generation"* (Psalm 71:18). This is the 'ministry' we all have in our daily lives; it is not from us, but *"from Christ"*.

God bless you in your ongoing letter-writing!