

SERMON

Transformed by Glory (2 Corinthians 3)

Letters, letters, letters. Will letters ever be a thing of the past? Will it be that one day we will dispense with letters and only use email, although of course banks do not use emails, but letters to communicate with us still – but maybe the security of emails will get better!

In the chapter we have just read the word letter or letters occurs some five times and that is only in the first seven verses. We find the word some nine times in the whole of this second correspondence of Paul's to the church of God in Corinth.

He first begins to speak about letters of commendation – a reference. When we go for a job or position you are often asked to produce referees who are then written to and ask for a reference on you. Or you may carry with you some sort of written statement from some employers that can be given as references. This is what Paul talks of as letters of recommendation.

There were those who were saying that Paul was not proper because he did not have letters of recommendation from other places. Paul's response was to say, "I do not need a letter of recommendation, you are my letter. Look at yourselves and read yourselves."

This got me to thinking. Would we commend Jesus to others as a letter? A letter is something that is read, that people see and how do people see us? Do we recommend God by our behaviour and words – is their integrity in our lives between what we say and what we do?

Recently we have all been amazed at some the expenses that MPs have claimed for:

- Moats to be cleaned
- Duck houses to be put up
- Etc, etc

And now the suggestion has been put forward to double their pay plus reasonable expenses! Integrity between what is said and what is lived out does not seem to be there.

Do we live as Christians first everywhere we go, or is it just in church on Sundays? This does not mean that we have to be singing hymns or quoting the Bible every five minutes but we do need to make sure that our lives match our words, that we walk the talk, that the whole week, work, leisure, family, church are all for God. This may mean acts of kindness done for others and to others, like

- getting someone that cup of coffee at work
- giving a colleague a smile when you see them

Small acts of kindness can go a long way and may lead to a conversation about why you live the way you live.

We also know that some letters bring joy, whilst others bring sadness. This last week for some this happened

SHOW YOUTUBE CLIP

They never to seem to find those that have failed do they? Of course this coming week the GCSE results come out. Do prayer for our young people here at ADBC as they make decisions about the future based upon their exam results.

Some letters seem to bring death, a disastrous set of results, while others bring life, a great set of results. Paul goes on to talk about the two types of agreements, which the passage calls covenants, both of which are written down. We need to look at both deciding which we are or have.

There are differences between the two covenants. The obvious one seen in the statements from Exodus 31:18

“When the LORD finished speaking to Moses on Mount Sinai, he gave him the two tablets of the Testimony, the tablets of stone inscribed by the finger of God.”
(Exodus 31:18 NIV)

The Testimony is another way of saying Covenant. This is contrasted with Jeremiah 31:31

““The time is coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD.

"This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”"
(Jeremiah 31:31-34 NIV)

So we have the tablets of stone versus the heart of flesh. This means

STONE	HEART
External – what was written down was external and although good it is not as good as if internal.	Internal – these are inside and so there is no external control but the Spirit living with us.
Letter – this was written down, to be read, to be followed	Spirit - the guiding force and works from within and is a person the Holy Spirit
Death - the words on the tablets were good, but they brought death with them because no-one could live up to them and so they condemned people, even though they were good	Life – the Spirit brings, not condemnation and death, but life and life in all its fullness. It brings righteousness – the right way to live with each other, which the Tablets were suppose to do, but never really could achieve it.
Law – this was the law that had to be obeyed, but it was external to the people and so never really sunk in.	Freedom – the Spirit brings freedom, a freedom to follow God and live the way he designed to.
Fading – When Moses came down from the mountain after receiving the stones, the glory faded – he put on a veil until the glory wore off.	Everlasting – the glory lasts forever. There is no fading, but there should be an increase in glory.

Think about yourself for a minute. Are you a rules person, rules that are external to you? Do you go to things for a fix that then fades? Some of us have been to Leading Edge, had a great week of fellowship and some great teaching and worship with others from the Baptist family. But the highs and lows from that week will fade, but if we have to wait until next year for our next ‘fix’ then something is wrong. With the Spirit within, we can have an everlasting glory, not a fading one that needs to be topped up.

Do you bring God's glory where you go? But I do not feel very glorious

“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” (2 Corinthians 3:18 NIV)

When we allow the Spirit of God to work within us, then he transformed us with ever increasing glory – we more and more reflect God to others. The danger is that we can slip so easily into the stone tablets, fading, dead type of life which does not reflect God. However with the Spirit within we can reflect what God has done and is doing because he keeps on working on the heart and making that glory within increase, so that we shine for God.