

You Are Our Letter from Christ

△ **Written by God's Spirit on your heart (vv.1-3)**

△ **Made alive in the New Covenant of pure grace (vv.4-6)**

In the name of Jesus, God's love letter to every human soul, dear friends and especially you, Adam:

Pick a sport, any sport. If you show up asking for a position on the team, you won't get in the front door. Tryout for any professional team and they'll shake their heads, "Don't waste my time." But let's say you and I showed up together. They look at me and laugh. "He's a grandpa! What can he do?" They start in on you, but you just smile and hand them a letter. It's signed by their star athlete. He writes, "You gotta give Adam a shot. The kid can vertical jump eight feet and hang there. He's got reflexes and instincts like a tiger. Test his speed. You won't be sorry." They take you in. You had the letter.

"Endorsements," right? Still today in business or sports there's nothing like a letter that says, "This guy is good. He's all you need." Endorsements aren't always written on paper. In the case of our congregation and your parents, **You Are Our Letter from Christ**. As Paul told the Corinthians...

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You can tell things are tense as Paul begins this Second Letter to the Corinthians. His first one was a painful letter. They were a talented, but divided congregation with many members stuck on themselves. If they weren't trying to get their own way, they were dividing up against their leaders. In Corinth the Christian congregation was giving people lots of reasons to stay away. They kept acting like public sin was okay, even when pagans knew it was wrong. And they didn't forgive people either. Then when things were falling apart, they blamed Pastor Paul and his ministry for their problems.

Most leaders would get mad and walk away. "I don't need this!" is all you'd hear on their way out the door. But Paul deals with this totally opposite of what you'd expect. He points to the Corinthians as his endorsement letter. Paul writes, "*Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or 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 everybody. 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.*" That's not apostolic genius; that's inspiration by God the Holy Spirit!

If you're the Corinthians, how do you argue with that? Some might be mad at Paul, but he was right. In spite of all their weaknesses, Christ was living in them through Word and sacrament. People could feel and experience the love of God in what they did and said. Paul points to their Christian conduct as proof that he was a certified faithful apostle of Jesus Christ. Their Christian character was all the proof he needed. And that was plenty of reason for critical members to stop looking for flaws in his Gospel ministry. They could praise God the Holy Spirit for His power in Word and sacrament.

You might ask, "How can I be an endorsement of my parents and this ministry?" We could look at your high test scores, but you're right; they weren't perfect. We could look at how you answered nearly all the questions and recited all the memory work this year, but usually you were the only student. It's like my son saying to me, "You've my favorite Dad!" then give that big smile that said, "Cause you're my only dad." But, Adam, the fact is that you're a walking miracle. The Triune God adopted you into His family by the Word-powered water of Baptism as Paul wrote in today's Second Lesson: "*The Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are God's children.*" (Romans 8:14-17) He had you "*born again by*

water and the Spirit” (John 3:3-5) as Jesus told Nicodemus in our Gospel Lesson. He kept growing your faith through lessons like Isaiah. When he confessed his sin, the angel took a live coal from God’s altar, touched his mouth and said, **“See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.”** (6:7) Today you can confess that this is your personal faith for which you would rather die than yield. It’s not stubborn religiosity. It’s personal conviction that God has spoken, and by His grace you believe. God has fulfilled His promise through Ezekiel the prophet: **“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”** (36:26) **You Are Our Letter from Christ.** By His forgiveness you’ve been...

△ **Made alive in the New Covenant of pure grace (vv.4-6)**

This week I ran across an old story of a young man in his thirties walking along the beach very depressed. Lots of money. Very well educated in the best schools of his day, but he felt so empty inside. He sounded like ancient King Solomon who got everything his heart desired: wisdom, riches, successful building projects and worldwide fame. Solomon even spoke about the physical, personal pleasure of his harem. Everything the human heart desires, he tried. But in the end, Solomon said: **“Meaningless! Meaningless! Everything is meaningless!”** (Ecclesiastes 1:2) That’s how the young man felt: *Nothing makes sense! Everything is nonsense. I have seen it all—nothing makes sense!* He had pursued every philosophy, but his heart still felt empty. Then by the ocean that day he met an old man who gave him a message of profound simplicity: Jesus Christ is Lord. Justin’s life was never the same.

Justin came from Palestine, not long after the apostle John died. Wealthy, pagan parents gave him a great education, and Justin was brilliant. But even when his mind filled with philosophy, nothing filled his heart – until that old man by the sea shared the Good News that God sent His Son to be the Savior of us all. Justin was so excited he kept telling everyone how Jesus alone can satisfy both your mind and heart. He defended the faith so skillfully that someone finally reported Justin to the Roman authorities. He was hauled into court on charges of atheism. Isn’t that strange? A Christian accused of atheism? But that’s what they called not believing in the gods of Rome. Justin and several others were condemned, flogged, and beheaded. He became known as Justin Martyr, and his life is remembered every year by the church in both East and West on his feast day, June 1. ¹ Christ meant everything to Justin Martyr.

And to the Apostle Paul: **“Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”** Chiseled in stone with the finger of God, the Ten Commandments condemn us all, proving God is holy, but we are not. God’s New Covenant of pure grace He wrote on your heart: **“God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them.”** (2 Corinthians 5:19) God took the record of the entire world from creation to Judgment Day – of every individual who has lived or will live, computed their sin against Christ’s sacrifice, and totaled the bottom line: **“FORGIVEN.”** He **Made us alive in the New Covenant of pure grace.**

This week I found a key that made me shake my head and wonder. Whenever I walk or ride, I put this lanyard around my neck in case the garage door won’t open when I get home. Trouble was, the key was on the counter. The lanyard only gave me a false sense of security. Without the key I couldn’t open the door. Many confirmed students end up that way. Everything looks good on the outside. But Jesus says, **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”** (John 14:6 NIV84) The key to heaven is faith in Jesus. Cities and civilizations crumble into dust. But the mountain of God’s Word and promise stands firm forever. Forget Jesus; lose everything. Keep Him close in heart; you have it all. Jesus has promised to always be with you. In your Confirmation Passage (Isaiah 41:10) God promises to help you. Christ is the key. Don’t leave home without it. Amen.

¹ Morgan, Robert J. *On This Day*. © 1997 by Robert J. Morgan. (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.) www.Laridian.com
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