

Letters of Recommendation

Letters of recommendation are still required in our day to gain admission into some schools & organizations, earn certain jobs, be assigned to various leadership positions and even to become the patient of certain medical specialists. Paul presents his unique letters of recommendation to the Corinthian church in today's Templates of Truth.

In Paul's day, many travelling preachers, teachers and evangelists carried letters of recommendation from prestigious churches and church leaders that served as endorsements of them to other people. In various marketing ways, that is still done today. We invite various guest speakers, evangelists and music worship artists into our churches based in part on the endorsements made in their behalf by other churches, pastors and organizations that we do know about and whose credibility we respect and trust.

Paul's apostolic authority was being challenged at Corinth and his credibility under assault by allegations that were simply unfounded. Unfortunately, some in the Corinthian church were being influenced by these questions. He was responding to these challenges when he asked – *Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need as some, letters of commendation to you or from you?* (II Corinthians 3:1). Don't miss the important point that Paul was addressing the very church he established and the very people he had won to faith in Christ! Paul answered his own question by presenting a unique proof – *You are our letter, written in our hearts, known and read by all men; being manifested that you are a letter of Christ, cared for by us...* (3:2-3). Essentially, Paul was declaring, "We don't need letters of recommendation; you ARE our letters of recommendation! Your transformed lives are proof of our preaching and the effectiveness of our ministry."

This text challenges us to consider what or who serves as our letters of commendation. What is in your life that manifests your faithfulness and effectiveness in the work & ministry of God's Kingdom? Is there any proof that anyone can point to that bears evidence of your faithfulness in serving God?

I would hope there are family members whose faith & trust in Jesus Christ as their personal Savior & Lord bear such testimony because of the time you have invested in their knowledge & understanding of God's love and plan of redemption. I would hope there are life-long friends whose lives have been impacted, not just by the relationship they have enjoyed with you but also because of the indelible difference God has made in your life. They claim faith in Jesus because your life has shown them how. I would hope there are co-workers & associates whose conduct, standard of living and measure of success have been divinely transformed into Godly & Biblical values as a result of the influence you have made on their lives. I would hope there is a church whose ministry has been enhanced, whose spiritual effectiveness has been broadened & deepened, and whose love & compassion has touched multitudes because you have faithfully & obediently joined others in the investment of your service & sacrifice. I would hope there are causes that

have been advanced, projects that have been accomplished, services that have been established and goals & objectives that have been reached in the name of Jesus because of your personal contribution of gifts, talents, resources and abilities. Are there? Have there been?

The Corinthians were Paul's letters of commendation because of his deep conviction that, *knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men* (II Corinthians 5:11). Nothing was more important to Paul than doing what God gifted & called him to do. It consumed his passions and occupied his time. It exalted his values and prioritized his activities. All one had to do was look around and see the tangible evidence of redeemed Gentiles, converted Jews, new churches, and letters that would eventually become inspired Scripture, to acknowledge the proof of Paul's life & ministry. What about you? Is there any tangible evidence anyone could point to that proves you even exist in the Kingdom? Do you have any letters to present?

That's today's Templates of Truth. This is your Bible teacher, Rick Smith, reminding you to attend church this Sunday for Bible study and worship, pray for one another, and always strive to abide in Christ. Until next time, have a blessed and glorious day in the Lord Jesus.

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