

WHO AM I?

P.F. JENSEN

"THE CHRISTIAN FAITH"

'Dear Mr. Jensen', (this is a slightly altered version of a letter I received a few months ago).

'May I extend to you a most cordial invitation to join me and many hundreds of thousands of other city and country people who carry (our credit card). (Our) members are identified as people of substance, holding authoritative positions, with high income and high credit rating.

And if I have described accurately your own position in life, then I am also correct in extending to you this personal invitation to apply for your (credit card).'

Getting a letter like that made me think. What is my 'position in life'? Who am I? 'Position in life' - It's a funny phrase, isn't it? Perhaps they think we are all on a gigantic ladder. Some of us occupy the bottom rungs - immigrant labourers, for example, or black women. Then you get tradesmen earning less than a certain amount. Then you get small business people. If you go high enough you get to 'people of substance, holding authoritative positions, with high income and high credit rating'. People like that can look out with a feeling of suave confidence on the rest of the world. The company supplies the car and the house; it is no trouble to charter an aeroplane if an interstate trip is called for; the swimming pool is heated, and the club is just a little exclusive. People like this count for something.

Are you a person of substance? It's lucky if you are, apparently, because as the letter goes on to explain, if you use these credit cards you 'get immediate identity, credit and respect among travellers everywhere ...' But, then, you must already be used to

other people bowing before you, and flattering you. After all that's what the letter is all about: It shows that a leading credit-card firm has found it useful to approach people on the basis of flattery; to appeal to their inflated self-image in order to get them to do business.

I say this because it's hard to think that there really are 'people of substance' in the world. Oh, I know there are wealthy people; I know there are powerful people; I know there are learned people; I know that such men impress others. But I also observe that these great ones give themselves grandiose titles and cover themselves with special clothes and privileges. Such titles and clothes are meant to hide the fact that they are merely ordinary men. Reverend, very Reverend, Doctor, Managing Director, General, Mr. Justice, Honourable, My Lord; Chancellor; Assistant to the Sales Manager; Data Processing Consultant ... the list is endless. The titles and perks of office inflate the ordinary person into one of these 'men of substance'; but they are all a pretence, they all hide as much truth as they reveal. For if you hold one of these man-made titles, you know as well as I do that money, rank and position don't change you for the better; they don't add years to your life; they don't bring happiness or domestic peace; and that in your pajamas you look the same as everybody else. They simply deceive you into thinking that you are a somebody when you are a nobody. Who cares about the General Manager when he's been retired for 2 years?

The Bible tells us that we are but empty wind and nothing apart from God. A man takes on his true worth simply because he is in the image of God. Rich or poor, very young or very old, well or sick, man or woman, each is valuable because he is the creature and image of God. It's a humbling thought, but it's meant to be. Until

we recognise how empty we are, we cannot begin the chief business of life, which is not becoming wealthy, or gaining human honour, or decking ourselves with glory and titles, but is becoming a child of God.

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