

WEY VALLEY – WEEKLY CIRCUIT LETTER – 17 July 2024
Barrie Tabraham

‘Anyone for tennis?’



I don't watch much tennis these days; baseline play, which can be rather monotonous, interests me less than when players used to serve and volley. Perhaps it's just me, but when I watched part of the ladies' final at Eastbourne the other day (because one of my grandsons was a ball-boy and I wanted to see him on TV!) I reflected on other changes that seem to have come about in the modern game.

For one thing, there is the ubiquitous 'fist-pump'. I appreciate the intensity that players feel in important matches, but I can't help feeling that – however much they may hug their opponents at the end of matches – it brings unnecessary aggression into the game, especially when the one shaking his or her fist is staring at the other player. Another somewhat darker side of the game has developed when players turn their backs on their opponents, skip up and down, only then to turn around to face them.

Am I really turning into a 'grumpy old man'? I played a lot of tennis in my youth and on one occasion got so excited at winning an unlikely match, that I leapt over the net . . . and succeeded in tripping, falling flat on my face and cracking my shoulder blade. Fortunately it was a grass court! I do believe, however, that there is a difference between competitive enthusiasm, as it were, and the aggression that seems to pervade so many aspects of modern life.

The recent **political debates** – on both sides of the Atlantic – have been characterised by bad-temperedness, vituperative personal attacks and a patent lack of courtesy. Now I know well that politicians in days of yore clashed verbally. A classic example from the 19th century was Disraeli and Gladstone. Gladstone once referred to Disraeli as being '*inebriated with the exuberance of his own verbosity*', whilst the latter said that Mr. G. was '*worse than any Bulgarian horror*'. And I could find many examples of verbal jousting in the political arena that have made us smile because they have been witty and not violent in the way they are so often today.



Perhaps we could all take a leaf out of **David** in the Old Testament. In **Psalms 18**, which is pretty graphic in its depiction of personal conflict, David reminds himself that God's strength is in *gentleness* e.g.

³⁵ Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation:
and thy right hand hath holden me up,
and thy gentleness hath made me great.

More modern translations have it slightly differently, but the essence is the same.

And the writer of **Proverbs** puts just as poetically in chapter 15:

¹⁵ ¹ A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

² The tongue of the wise adorns knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly.

³ The eyes of the LORD are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good.

⁴ The soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit. As Christians we know well that gentleness should never be mistaken for weakness, and that when we refrain from venting our impatience or anger – however justified we think we might be – we are exercising one of the fruits of the Spirit which Paul lists in his letter to the Galatians (5:22f), which he himself was taking from the example of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is the sensible way, and it is Christ's way.

A Prayer: Loving God, forgive us for those moments when we strive to win a point at another's expense, or refuse to concede a point when gentleness and forbearance are needed. Help us to learn from and follow the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, that your Spirit might guide our thoughts, words and actions. Amen.

Every blessing to you all,

Barrie Tabraham

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