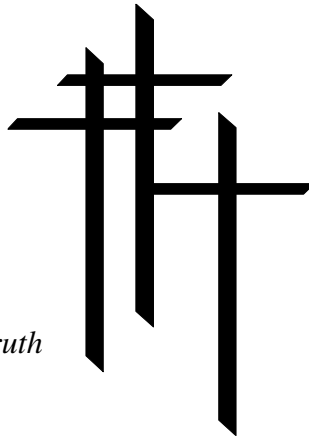


Timely Messenger

*Rightly Dividing the Word of Truth
Speaking the Truth in Love*



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THE FRAGRANCE OF CHRIST

by Gregg Bing

The sense of smell, which is sometimes taken for granted, affects several different areas of our lives, sometimes positively, sometimes negatively. The difference is often indicated by the word that is used to describe the smell. For instance, the words “odor,” “stench,” and sometimes even the word “smell” itself, have a negative connotation. On the other hand, the words “aroma,” “fragrance,” and “scent” are almost always used in a positive way.

One thing affected by the sense of smell is our

sense of taste. For instance, the smell of freshly baked bread can almost make one’s mouth water for the taste, while a person who has a stuffy nose and cannot smell a thing, will often say that most foods seem to have no taste at all.

Another thing that smell can affect is mood or attitude. The perfume industry depends on this, for their aim is to design, market, and sell fragrances that can evoke feelings of romance or attraction.

Smells can even affect our actions. For example, some odors are so strong

and so disgusting that they can make people sick to their stomach.

In 2 Corinthians 2, the apostle Paul is led of the Holy Spirit to use the concept of smell or fragrance to illustrate how the testimony of believers can affect the lives of others.

“Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ’s gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia.” (2 Cor. 2:12-13)

Paul first makes reference to a time of stress in his life. He had come to Troas to preach the gospel and, though the Lord provided an opportunity for ministry, Paul found no rest in his spirit. He had hoped to see Titus there, but the young man, whom Paul described as “a true son in our common faith,” never arrived. Though Paul was disappointed and somewhat distressed about

this situation, he emphasized that there is always triumph in our Lord Jesus Christ.

“Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.” (2 Cor. 2:14)

The illustration Paul uses here is that of a Roman triumphal procession; a parade to honor Roman generals who won great victories in battle. The victorious general, when he returned home, led a procession through the city streets, riding in his golden chariot. The procession was followed by the conquered captives, most of whom were destined to die in the arena. During the parade the Roman priests would burn incense. The aroma of the incense paid tribute to the victorious general and his army.

Paul thanks God for the triumph that we have in Christ; the victory that He won over sin, over death, and over Satan through His sacrificial death and His

powerful resurrection from the grave (1 Cor. 15:57). Because of His finished work on the cross of Calvary, the Lord Jesus Christ always leads us in triumph at all times, even in times of distress or disappointment. Not only that, but we can thank God that “through us” He “diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.”

It is truly amazing to realize that God chooses to work through us, mere sinners saved by His grace. Even though we live in earthen vessels (2 Cor. 4:7), God can fill and use these vessels as instruments for His service (Rom. 6:13).

Paul speaks of God using us to “diffuse the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.” The word “diffuse” literally means to make manifest or known. Like the aroma of the incense burned by the Roman priests bore testimony to and honored the triumph of the victorious general, so our lives are to bring glory and honor to our victorious Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. The fragrance we are to diffuse is that of His

knowledge, or, more literally, “the knowledge of Him.” This knowledge is found in God’s Word. This is why, as God’s children, we are told to: “Preach the Word!” (2 Tim. 4:2).

“For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.” (2 Cor. 2:15)

Believers are, to God, “the fragrance of Christ.” The word “fragrance” means a good smell or “a sweet smell.” The idea is seen in Leviticus chapter 1, where we read of the burnt offerings the children of Israel were to bring to the Lord. As the sacrifice was burned on the altar, the smoke that rose up from the fire carried a “sweet aroma to the Lord” (Lev. 1:9). As the burnt offering was “a sweet aroma” to the Lord, so Christ’s death on the cross for our sins was “an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma” (Eph. 5:2). God was propitiated (satisfied) through Christ’s finished work on the cross

for our sins (Rom. 3:25-26). His holy and righteous requirements being satisfied, we can now be “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph. 1:6). When we trust Christ as Savior, God places us “in Christ” by the baptism of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:13). When God sees us, He sees us “in His Son,” and, we are, to Him, “the fragrance of Christ”—a sweet smell of satisfaction.

God also sees us as “the fragrance of Christ” in our testimony to others, “among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.” Just as certain smells can affect people, “the fragrance of Christ” can affect people in an even more powerful way. We are to manifest the “fragrance of His knowledge” to other people. The fragrance we manifest is the same to everyone, the knowledge of Christ and His finished work of redemption, but the response is not always the same.

“To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the

other the aroma of life leading to life.” (2 Cor. 2:16a)

Some respond to the “fragrance of Christ” like the crowds who welcomed and cheered the Roman general as he led the victory procession. To them the aroma of the incense burned by the priests was a wonderful smell, a smell of great triumph, not just for the general, but for them as well. Likewise, to those who hear the Word of God and believe it, trusting in Christ as their Savior, the “fragrance of Christ” is truly a sweet smell. It is an aroma of life to them, and embracing it as such, it leads them to life eternal and to great triumph in Christ.

Others respond to the “fragrance of Christ” like the conquered captives, the slaves who were on their way to die in the arena. To them the smell of the burned incense was not a sweet smell at all, but an odor of impending death. Thus, to those who hear the Word of God, but reject

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(Continued from page 3)

Christ as Savior and Lord, the “fragrance of Christ” has no attraction for them. It is nothing more than a smell of death, and they remain in their sinful state, perishing.

As believers, we must realize that we cannot control a person’s response to the Word of God. As much as we want people to believe and be saved, we cannot force them. We can only “diffuse the fragrance of His knowledge in every place” we go. We can proclaim the truth of Christ and Him crucified. We can share with people the wonderful gospel of God’s saving grace. We can show people the joy and the great triumph we have in our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. What a tremendous service and responsibility this is! This leads us to question, as Paul did:

“And who is sufficient for these things?” (2 Cor. 2:16b)

The answer to this question is given in 2 Corinthians 3:5: “Not that we

are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God.” We must not make the mistake of thinking that we are sufficient, in ourselves, to do anything for the Lord. Our ability to serve the Lord comes from Him, and from Him alone.

“For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.” (2 Cor. 2:17)

Many in Paul’s day (and in our day too) were “peddling” the Word of God, not preaching for the glory of God, but for their own dishonest gain (1 Tim. 6:5). Men like this have no concern for the truth and accuracy of God’s Word and will often twist and corrupt the Word if they feel it will be more profitable for them.

Paul emphasizes that true ministry stands in stark contrast to these “peddlers.” We are to speak in sincerity, not for our own selfish gain, but for the

glory of the Lord. We are to speak as from God, or literally “out of” God. We must remember that the message we have been entrusted with is the Word of God. It is not to be corrupted or handled deceitfully, but presented for what it is—the Word of truth (2 Cor. 4:2). It is also vital that we realize our dependence upon the power of God in our lives, yielding to His Holy Spirit to work in and through us. Finally, when we speak, we are to speak “in the sight of God,” being concerned with pleasing Him and not with pleasing men (Gal. 1:10).

What about you? Are you manifesting “the fragrance of Christ” among the people you come in contact with each day? Or, is your life diffusing a different kind of smell — an indistinct smell, maybe even a foul odor? God desires to diffuse the fragrance of His knowledge through you, a fragrance that will certainly have an impact on the lives of those around you. What type of impact will your life have?

**I beseech you
therefore, brethren,
by the mercies of
God, that ye present
your bodies a living
sacrifice, holy,
acceptable unto God,
which is your
reasonable service.**

**And be not
conformed to this
world: but be ye
transformed by the
renewing of your
mind, that ye may
prove what is that
good, and acceptable,
and perfect, will
of God.**

—Romans 12:1-2

**I am crucified with
Christ: nevertheless
I live; yet not I, but
Christ liveth in me:
and the life which I
now live in the flesh
I live by the faith of
the Son of God, who
loved me, and gave
himself for me.**

—Galatians 2:20

NO ORDINARY MAN

“Why, oh Lord, do you make me wait
When I want to run and lengthen my gait?
I know what I need and I have a plan.
You know, oh Lord, I’m no ordinary man.

I’ve been to school and I’ve done quite well,
I’m ready to act at the sound of the bell.
There’s work to be done — so what’s my fate,
Why, oh Lord, do you make me wait?”

“Precious child, you’ve a lot to learn,
My leading hand — don’t start to spurn,
Of My disciplines here you shan’t be free,
All lasting work must start with Me.

Your achievements here have little to do
With the work of grace I’ve begun in you,
For you can offer nothing to Me
But a yielded heart of a man set free.

I have the power, and I know what to do,
Oh, won’t you let Me work through you,
For you really can do nothing for Me,
But, in My Son, I’ve done all for thee.

So give Me your heart and give Me your hand,
Only then you’ll be no ordinary man,
For in your life My Son will grow,
And to the world you’ll be something to show.

Surrender your will and give Me your fate,
And resting in Me, learn to wait,
For I do all things to glorify Me,
And you’ll find My will is best for thee.”

— Dennis Blankship, Brighton, IL

SEATED IN THE HEAVENLY PLACES

By Jim Roberts

In Ephesians, Chapter 2, the Apostle Paul reminds us that we were at one time dead in trespasses and sins as we walked according to the course of this world system. But God, because of His great love, intervened and saved us by His mercy and through His grace. Then God did something that was totally unexpected when He raised us up to sit in the heavenly places. Verse 6 says:

“(God) raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.”

Of course, this sounds rather odd to us at first. How can we stand on this earth while being seated in the heavenly places? In this statement Paul is actually teaching a very important doctrine. There is a difference between the way we are in the natural world and the way God sees us in

Christ. If we are honest with ourselves, we will admit that we are far from perfect, but God does not see our imperfections when He sees us in Christ. Notice that we are not seated in the heavenly places with Christ, but we are seated in the heavenly places in Christ.

God could never accept or fellowship with that which has even a spot of sin. The Old Testament sacrifices had to be without spot and without blemish. The Lord Jesus, Himself, was the spotless lamb of God. Peter said that we were not redeemed with corruptible things such as silver and gold but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without spot or blemish.

God requires absolute righteousness. Part of the good news for us is that when we put our faith in Christ, we are baptized into Christ and His righteousness. From that moment of

faith, we are added to the Church which is the Body of Christ, and God sees us in the heavenly places and in the righteousness of Christ. Ephesians 5 says that Christ loved the Church and gave Himself for the Church, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish.

Paul put it this way in Colossians 1:

“And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight.” (Col. 1:21-22)

Some have said that Paul was simply building upon the doctrines of the Lord Jesus when he emphasized the heavenly realms. They point out that

Jesus taught His followers to lay up treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust can corrupt. They refer to the fact that Jesus told Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world. They also cite Jesus' conversation with Nicodemus where Jesus told Nicodemus that he had to be born again, or more literally, that he had to be born from above.

However, when Jesus told his disciples to lay up treasures in heaven, He went on to say that they should not worry about earthly provisions because God was going to give all of these things to those who seek first the kingdom of God. Their hope was clearly based in a future earthly kingdom.

When the Lord Jesus told Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world, He was saying that the world system of His earthly kingdom would not be anything like our present world system. Satan directs the affairs of our present world system as the prince of the power of the air (Ephesians 2:2). Satan is the god of our present age (2 Corin-

thians 4:4), and Satan is the head of the rulers of the darkness of our present age (Ephesians 6:12). The Lord Jesus was telling Pilate that His kingdom would bring in a new age with a new world system which will be free from Satan's influence. Again, we see that Jesus consistently taught the hope of a future earthly kingdom.

When the Lord Jesus told Nicodemus that he needed to be born from above, He was telling Nicodemus that he needed to be born spiritually into the kingdom in heaven before he could hope to be part of the kingdom from heaven. The Lord knew and encouraged the fact that Nicodemus was looking for the earthly kingdom of God.

In comparison, as the Apostle Paul wrote to the saints at Ephesus, he was writing to members of the Church which is the Body of Christ (Ephesians 1:22-23), and he never mentioned Christ's earthly kingdom at all. In fact, he taught that the Church will be blessed in the heavenly places throughout the ages

to come.

“(God has) raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” (Eph. 2:6-7)

ONLY THE BEGINNING

Your life is a book, and salvation is but the title page. The book itself remains to be written. It may be a volume of larger or smaller size, but it is written for eternity; see that it is written well. It is a book for the inspection of enemies as well as friends; be careful of every word. It is a book written under the eye of God; let it be done reverently, seriously, and fearlessly.

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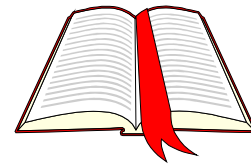
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