

## The Sweet Scent of Life

2 Corinthians 2:12-17

In 2 Corinthians 2:14-17, the Apostle Paul presents a powerful image of Christians as a victory procession, spreading the "fragrance" of the knowledge of God everywhere they go. This passage teaches us that our lives are a testament to God's triumph, a fragrant offering that has different effects on a world in need of both salvation and judgment.

### I. The Scent of Salvation (v.14) We Are the Fragrance of Christ

Have you ever walked past a bakery, or a coffee shop and been drawn in by the irresistible smell of fresh bread, cake, or hot coffee? For me it's the smell of racing fuel. I love smelling race fuel all the way from the racetrack parking lot.

The Apostle Paul uses a similar, yet far more deeper, image to describe the Christian life. In 2 Corinthians 2:14, he writes, **"But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere"** (2 Corinthians 2:14). To truly grasp this image, we must understand its cultural context. In the Roman Empire, when a general returned victorious from battle, a huge parade was held: the triumphal procession. At the head of the parade walked the general, followed by his soldiers, and behind them, the captives and the spoils of war. Incense was burned along the route, a thick cloud of perfume filling the air. For the victorious country, that aroma was the sweet smell of triumph, life, and freedom. But for the captives, it was the smell of defeat, bondage, and impending death. Paul is declaring that in Christ, we are part of God's eternal victory march. God is the general, Christ is the conqueror, and we are not merely participants, but the very carriers of His victory scent. Through us, God spreads the "fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere."

### II. The Source of the Scent (v. 14)

The first point is essential: the fragrance is not our own. Paul says, **"thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us."** The scent we carry comes from God Himself. It is the aroma of His presence, His character, and His saving power. Our role is simply to be led by Him.

This reminds us of the *source* of our strength and the *nature* of our mission. Our lives, when lived in submission to Christ, naturally radiate this victorious aroma. It's not about us striving to produce a pleasant scent through our own good works or moral efforts. It's about staying close to Jesus, allowing His life to fill ours. A life lived in relationship with Christ is a naturally fragrant life.

### III. The Significance of the Scent (vv. 15-16a)

This is where the image becomes stark and challenging. Paul continues: **"For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are**

**perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life” (2 Corinthians 2:15-16a).**

The same scent has two radically different effects.

- a. **The sweet smell of life to those who are being saved.** The fragrance is an invitation to **life**. They realize the beauty, hope, and truth of the Gospel. It draws them to God.
- b. **The stench of death to those who are perishing.** The fragrance is a reminder of **death**. They reject the message, find it offensive, and it solidifies their separation from God.

This is a sobering reality check for our evangelism. We wish everyone would find our faith appealing. But the truth is, the Gospel is inherently divisive. The cross is a stumbling block to many and salvation to others. When people reject you sharing the gospel, reject your kindness, are offended by your moral stance, remember this passage. It’s not necessarily that *you* are doing something wrong; you are simply carrying the aroma of Christ, and their reaction reveals their spiritual condition, not your effectiveness.

#### **IV. The Sincerity of the Scent (vv. 16b-17)**

This weighty responsibility leads Paul to ask a crucial question: **“Who is sufficient for these things?”** (2 Corinthians 2:16b). The task of carrying life and death on our shoulders is overwhelming. Paul answers with a contrast between false teachers (whom he calls "peddlers of God’s word for profit") and himself and his colleagues. He says, **“For we are not peddlers of God’s word for profit, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ”** (2 Corinthians 2:17).

This is a warning to us: it’s easy to dilute the fragrance. It’s tempting to "cut" the Gospel with cultural adaptation to make it more palatable or popular. Paul warns against those who exploit the message for personal gain (money, fame, or even just social acceptance).

We are called to sincerity. To be genuine. To not compromise the purity of the message. We speak "as commissioned by God, in the sight of God." Our audience is God first, people second. When we live with this sincerity, the aroma remains pure and potent.

Who are we, then? We are the carriers of an eternal scent, a sweet aroma that God uses to lead a lost world to either life or judgment. Our calling is simple yet profound:

1. **Stay close to the Source:** Live in daily relationship with Christ. Listen to John 15
2. **Share the saving truth of the gospel with love:** Understand that our sincerity may lead to rejection by some, but will be life to others. Speak the truth of God’s Word with sincerity, uncompromised by personal agenda. Romans 10:14-15

May your life be a sweet-smelling savor to the Lord, an unmistakable fragrance of Christ in a world that desperately needs the scent of salvation.