

The Sweet Fragrance of Christ

2 Corinthians 2:14-16 NKJV

14 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.

15 For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.

16 To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things?

The Twentieth Century New Testament translates 2 Corinthians 2:14-16 this way:

14 All thanks to God, who, through our union with the Christ, leads us in one continual triumph, and uses us to spread the sweet odor of the knowledge of Him in every place.

15 For we are the fragrance of Christ ascending to God--both among those who are in the path of Salvation and among those who are in the path to Ruin.

16 To the latter we are an odor which arises from death and tells of Death; to the former an odor which arises from life and tells of Life. But who is equal to such a task?

- *The central theme of 2 Corinthians 2:14-16 is that Believers are to be a fragrance of Christ.*
- *Three things about odors:*
- *The odor that an object emits identifies something about its intrinsic nature.*
- *People respond differently to odors; for example where one person may enjoy a certain fragrance another person may find it too strong.*
- *Since odors permeate the air, many times the source of the odor is “experienced” before the actual object is found or seen.*
- *The Bible uses the analogy of smell from the natural world to give us insights into how we as believers are to operate in the spiritual realm.*
- *Just like in the natural world the air is always filled with different types of fragrances and smells, some which are delightful and pleasant and some which are unpleasant and some which are even down right repugnant, so it is in the spiritual realm.*
- *God “uses us to spread the sweet odor of the knowledge of Him in every place” even as Jesus commissioned His Church in Acts 1:8 “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”*
- *The Church is to spread the sweet fragrance of Christ by being His witnesses in every place and even to the ends earth.*

- *Just as the scent of perfume can permeate the air and fills the entire room with a sweet fragrance, we as believers, are sent out to permeate this entire world with the sweet fragrance of Jesus.*
- *We are to emit the sweet fragrance of Christ so that people everywhere will encounter Christ and “the knowledge of Him.”*
- *We emit the fragrance of Christ not only by our words but much more by our actions and our attitudes even as it says in John 13:35, “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”*
- *The world is filled with many distorted views of God the Father and of Jesus Christ and through us God wants everyone in every place to encounter the true knowledge of who He is.*
- *Through the fragrance of Christ emitting from us and permeating all those that come into contact with us, they will encounter God’s unconditional love.*
- *Through our hearts of thanksgiving they will witness true godly contentment independent of circumstances.*
- *Through our purity in our words, actions and attitudes they will understand God’s holiness and the blessing it is to walk in freedom from sin.*
- *Paul clearly states in 2 Corinthians 5:20 “we are ambassadors for Christ.” An ambassador is a diplomatic official of the highest rank, sent by one sovereign or state to another as its resident representative.*
- *This is one of the reasons Jesus says in Matthew 5:48 “Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” because when we act contrary to the new nature we have received through Jesus Christ we, as His ambassadors, are misrepresenting Him to this world.*
- *For this reason Paul says in Romans 2:24, “For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.”*
- *When we, as Believers, act unrighteously and selfishly, we misrepresent who Christ is to the world.*
- *Jesus Christ gave us His Divine Nature so that He could live through us and the world could witness and experience His love, grace, mercy, and holiness.*
- *We, as followers of Christ, are to produce all the nine fruit of the Spirit which are “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness, self-control” for this is the fragrance of Jesus Christ. (Galatians 5:22-23)*

- *After quickly reviewing what it means to be ambassadors for Christ and a sweet fragrance of Christ to this world we may have one of three responses:*
 1. *We are overwhelmed and feeling thoroughly defeated by thinking how can I even live up to a fraction of this.*
 2. *We are determined to renovate our lives through self-effort to be what God has called us to be. We mistakenly believe that through strength of will and our resolve we are going to live up to God's standard. We are in danger of becoming religious.*
 3. *We have a heart of joy, thanksgiving and expectation as we contemplate God's faithfulness to work in us to produce that sweet fragrance of Christ. We have understood what it means to live a life of faith and which allows the grace of God to do the work in us.*

Mark 4:26–29 (NKJV)

²⁶And He said, "The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground,
²⁷and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how.

²⁸For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head.

²⁹But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come."

- *The parable in Mark 4:26-29 gives us some very important principles for us to correctly understand how to live fruitful lives and become that sweet fragrance of Christ to this world.*
- *"The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground" – We have been born again of incorruptible seed that in itself contains the very source and essence of life.*
- *"and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how" – As we just live before the Lord in His presence day by day, the life of Christ will grow and develop within us naturally, just like a seed that is planted in the ground.*
- *"For the earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head." - Just like a seed that begins to grow once it is planted in the ground, this new life of Christ develops in our soul gradually and continually.*
- *"But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come." – The ultimate result of a fruitful life is a fruitful harvest where we will stand before our God, our Saviour and our King and hear the glorious words, "well done good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord." (Matthew 25:21)*

- *If the growing in the grace of God is so natural what hinders us from being that sweet fragrance of Christ?*
- *Resistance*
- *Sin*
- *Self-effort.*

Deuteronomy 28:2 (NKJV)

²And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God:

- *Resistance is a refusal to do the things that the Word of God's tells us to do. These simple steps of obedience are meant to be a source of blessings.*

1 John 3:4 (NKJV)

⁴Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness.

- *Sin is choosing to do things that the Word of God tells us not to do. These are things that are meant to protect us from harm and loss.*

Galatians 3:3 NKJV

[3] Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?

- *Self-effort is choosing to rely upon our own strength instead of the grace of God in Christ. Self-effort opposes the life of faith because a person looks within himself or herself instead of Christ for the strength to live a victorious and fruitful life.*

Romans 7:16–17 (NKJV)

¹⁶If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good.

¹⁷But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

- *Resistance, sin and self-effort are really defined by our attitude not just by our actions.*
- *A Christian may be struggling with sin but if their hearts are really seeking God and repentant, God will lead them through the process of sanctification to the place of total victory.*

2 Corinthians 2

14 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.

- *The three verses in 2 Corinthians 2:14-16, that deal with us being a fragrance, begin with the words, “thanks be to God” thus defining one of the essential ingredients that make up this fragrance – thanksgiving and praise.*
- *Without a thankful heart to God we will fail to be that fragrance that God has called us to be as followers of Jesus Christ.*
- *One of the authentic characteristics of salvation that the world is looking for are Christian that are truly thankful, joyful and peaceful even in the midst of difficult or painful situations.*

Ephesians 4:31 (NKJV)

³¹Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.

- *If the words we speak are filled with bitterness, wrath, clamor and unthankfulness it could be said that instead of the sweet fragrance of Christ being emitted, we have a severe case of spiritual bad breath.*
- *“God who always leads us in triumph in Christ” – The key for us to be that fragrance of Christ is to be “in Christ” who always leads us in triumph or as the Twentieth Century New Testament translation puts it, “All thanks to God, who, through our union with the Christ, leads us in one continual triumph, and uses us to spread the sweet odor of the knowledge of him in every place.”*

John 15:4–5 (NKJV)

⁴Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

⁵“I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.

- *Our primary purpose as Christians, is above all else, to abide in Christ since that is the key to living triumphant, satisfying and fruitful lives.*

2 Corinthians 2:15 (NKJV)

¹⁵For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.

- *Verse 15 tells us a number of interesting things about us being a fragrance of Christ. It says that we are not only a fragrance to people but we are a fragrance to God – in other words when our lives emit the sweet fragrance of Christ it brings great joy and pleasure to God.*

15 “For we are the fragrance of Christ ascending to God--both among those who are in the path of Salvation and among those who are in the path to Ruin” (TCNT)

- *Verse 15 also tells us we are to be a fragrance to both those who are being saved and those who are perishing so that our lives are to be an encouragement to one and a warning to the other.*

2 Corinthians 2:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things?

- *2 Corinthians 2:14-16 not only speak about what kind of fragrance we are to be and the purpose of us being that fragrance but it also indicates that people will respond to that fragrance in quite different ways.*
- *As we abide in Christ the fragrance of Heaven will fill us and permeate the spiritual atmosphere around us.*

2 Corinthians 2:16 (TCNT)

16 To the latter we are an odor which arises from death and tells of Death; to the former an odor which arises from life and tells of Life. But who is equal to such a task?

- *The Tabernacle of Moses in the Old Testament provides us with an analogy to help us understand why some smell the odor of death while others smell the fragrance of life.*

Picture of the Tabernacle with a cut away showing both the golden altar and the brass altar.

Picture of the Tabernacle showing smoke ascending from the Brass Altar.

Picture of an aerial view showing the Holy Place and the Golden Altar right before the curtain.

Picture of the priests burning the incense in the Holy Place.

Exodus 29:18 (NKJV)

¹⁸And you shall burn the whole ram on the altar. It is a burnt offering to the LORD; it is a sweet aroma, an offering made by fire to the LORD.

- *The animal sacrifices were burned at the Brass Altar in the Outer Court. One offering in particular, the “Burnt Offering” or as it may be better translated, the “Whole Offering”, will provide us insights in how we are to be that fragrance to God.*
- *The Whole Offering is unique from all the other offerings that were made at the Brass Altar because it is the only one where the entire sacrifice was burned up before the Lord and nothing was retained to be eaten either by the offerer or the priest.*

Romans 12:1 (NKJV)

¹I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

- *The Burnt Offering or the Whole Offering is a picture of a totally consecrated life for the glory of God and thus a life that is described as “a living sacrifice.”*
- *The Bible speaks about the burning of the sacrifices at the Brass Altar as a sweet aroma unto God but that is not how it would have smelled to the people.*
- *The burnt offering didn’t smell like BBQ but an acrid smell of fat and meat being burnt to ashes. It would have smelled like burning garbage.*

1 Corinthians 2:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

- *An unbeliever only can observe the Brass Altar for their eyes are not open to the Golden Altar. They misinterpret our life with Christ as boring and austere when in fact it is the door to a true and rich life that never ends.*
- *A surrendered life to God is a sweet smelling fragrance to God but to a carnal man it smells like death and that is why it the Scriptures say, “to the one we are the aroma leading to death.”*

Galatians 2:20 (NKJV)

²⁰I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Philippians 1:21 (NKJV)

²¹For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Romans 14:7–8 (NKJV)

⁷For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself.

⁸For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord’s.

1 Corinthians 6:19–20 (NKJV)

¹⁹Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?

²⁰For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.

- *When we understand that we have been bought at a price and we now belong to God, then we will joyfully become those living sacrifices to bring glory to Him.*
- *If we don’t consecrate our lives at the Brass Altar then the flesh just hangs around and rots.*

- *Before the priests could enter into the Holy Place and burn incense in the presence of God they had to pass the Brass Altar where they had to make the sacrifices of the burnt offerings.*
- *The Holy Place and the Golden Altar picture sweet fellowship with Christ but that only can occur if we first of all go to the Brass Altar and consecrate our lives for His glory.*

Exodus 40:26–27 (NKJV)

²⁶He put the gold altar in the tabernacle of meeting in front of the veil;

²⁷and he burned sweet incense on it, as the LORD had commanded Moses.

- *It is at the Golden Altar in the Holy Place we are able to enjoy that sweet intimate fellowship with God.*

Revelation 8:3–4 (NKJV)

³Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne.

⁴And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand.

- *For those who are being saved we are the fragrance of life leading to life because they are able to smell the sweet incense of Christ on us as we spend time in the Holy Place at the Golden Altar.*
- *The Brass Altar is the place of judgment where we judge ourselves so we can consecrate our lives unto God. The Golden Altar is the place of fellowship where we can enjoy God's presence and abide in His love.*
- *The theme of abiding in Christ and being dead to ourselves and alive to God through Jesus Christ permeates the entire Bible.*
- *We are not to be a fleeting whiff of Jesus but the strong and persistent fragrance of His love to this world that does not know the love of Christ.*

