

**DO YOU SMELL THAT?
2 Corinthians 2:14-16**

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Ahhh. No fragrance like it in the whole world.

What is your favorite smell – that chemical combination that dazzles your olfactory nerve?

Is it the salty sea smell of an ocean breeze? You smell it every summer. It means vacation time – no calls, no decisions, no stress. Do you savor the smell of the sea?

Is it the smell of your dad – leather chair, Old Spice, apple tobacco? Open his closet door, and the smell is there. Sit in his favorite chair, and the smell surrounds you as if he were wrapping his arms around you. The smell of dad – security, protection, help. Ahhh. And sometimes, money. The aroma of Dad.

Smells can have an odd effect on you. Amarillo has a smell. It's not that pungent chemical burn, that waste smell that many large cities have. No, it's not a factory smell. Our smell – when the wind is just right – is bovine in nature. To many Amarillo residents, however, this cow-smell is a smell of home, of their livelihood. A smell that would otherwise repulse them has been embraced as a welcomed aroma.

How about that special person in your life? No one else smells exactly like her. You're happy, overcome by a host of warm emotions every time you inhale her sweet aroma. Literally your body responds, is invigorated by her one-of-a-kind aroma. Any other woman can splash on the same sweet stuff. But her chemistry alone works in tandem with the perfume for that unique blend that represents all of who she is. Recognizing the power of your sweetie's smell is as old and wise as Solomon. He said, "How much better is your love than wine and the scent of your perfumes is better than all spices."

Would you believe the home fragrance market in the United States in 2016 brought in \$6.4 billion! As Americans, we're all about "smell good."

Marketers try to control olfactory environment. Apparently, it greatly influences our behavior. If you're at the Cineplex, what do they want you to smell? Fresh, hot popcorn. Walk into Lowe's. This one is a little more subtle, but you're hit with the scent of freshly cut wood. You may never see a single 2x4 cut in the store, but that smell is always there. It's an inspiration to renovate your house and dive into the DIY. Starbucks? That one's easy. They sell food, but they don't want you to smell it. They have designed it for you to smell fresh coffee permeating the room.

In fact, major retailers like Nike found that scent marketing in retail stores increased intent to purchase by 80%. In another real-world scent marketing experiment, the smell of freshly-brewed coffee at a gas station increased coffee sales by 300%. (Guinevere Orvis, “The Science of Smell: How Retailers Can Use Scent Marketing to Influence Shoppers,” www.shopify.com, 4/11/2016).

Researchers tell us that the sense of smell affects about 75% of our daily emotions and plays a significant role in memory. The sense of smell is different from the other senses because it is processed first by limbic system, the part of the brain responsible for memory, perceptions, and emotions. While the other senses – what we see and what we hear – are directed through the analytical part of the brain, what we smell has an immediate and powerful impact on our emotions.

I found one company called Aromatech that works with businesses to actually brand the company by the company having a unique smell. Like you have a logo for your company (hope you recognize ours with the little arches), you would also have a company smell. When people breathe in your branded smell, they think of your products, your services, your company. You’d be mistaken if you think the new car smell is simply the aroma of new leather. It’s sprayed in, lasts about six weeks, and makes you want to buy. (“What is scent marketing?” www.aromatechsystems.com)

If Aromatech came to your house and said, “We want to catch the essence of who you are by unique, fragrant aroma,” what smell would best capture you? Your family? Who you are?

Think that all those smells would run together? Not according to the University of New York. A study published in *Science Journal* says that we actually recognize more than a trillion separate odors. (Oliver Oullier, “It’s the season for the science of scent,” www.thenational.ae, 12/25/18)

Well, it’s just around the corner. March 31 is National Fragrance Day. I didn’t make that up.

Not everybody is happy about all the smells, however. As far back as the first century Roman writer, Pliny the Elder. He famously raged against perfumes a “the most superfluous of all forms of luxury; for pearls and jewels do nevertheless pass to the wearer ‘s heir, and clothes last for some time, but ingredients lose their scent at once, and die in the very hour when they are used.” (JR Thorpe, “The Science of Scent and Why It Brings Back Memories,” www.bustle.com, 3/21/17)

Thus, positions about the power of perfume are as old as the Romans.

One company in California, called Cyrano Sciences, is building a “Cyrano 320,” a \$10,000 hand-held electronic odor detector which can digitally analyze and identify a wide range of smells – all within 10 seconds. It’s something of an engineered human nose. It tries to pick up the same odors and categorize them like a flesh-and-blood snout.

You might ask why would anybody want an electronic nose? Think of the applications. A large refrigerated warehouse could have these electronic noses sniffing out food spoilage. Or detecting hazardous chemicals in the air and water in a factory. Maybe even testing perfumes for quality – an objective nose, for once. Even diagnosing certain odorific diseases

in patients – diabetes or lung cancer, for instance. In the future, they hope that a small nose chip could be manufactured cheaply enough to be embedded in smoke detectors. Not only would the fire alarm go off with the presence of smoke, but even with the smell of smoke. Pretty soon the nose chip will be able to sense danger long before your own nose is able to do so.

If you don't believe in the power of smell, contemplate the research and work of Joel Lloyd Bellenson and Dexter Smith. They are a couple of biotech entrepreneurs. If you haven't heard of them, you'll probably catch a whiff of them soon. They have a company called DigiScents. They hope to be able to produce the smells that you want through the wonders of high technology. They produce a device called an "iSmell," a portable scent synthesizer that's something of a cross between a printer and a speaker. (*Homiletics*, May 2000, p. 36-40)

For example, imagine being able to try a new cologne by going to a web page and downloading the smell. You press a button, and then you'll be whiffing away at that new perfume. "You've got smell." Or maybe drop online to a cooking show and literally smell what they're cooking for dinner.

Or, imagine a Lexus commercial on television. Not only do you hear the purr of the motor, but you smell the leather seats. Imagine the power that Wendy's would have if, when the commercial comes on, you smell the french fries.

Advertisers may be seeing this as the new threshold, a new way to cause us to want to buy. Scents are incredibly powerful. They are able to attract or repulse, entice or disgust.

Then there is the Proust effect, named after the famous novelist who was plunged back into his childhood by the scent of a cookie dipped in tea. For example, you wash the dishes at a friend's house and find yourself tearing up because the smell of the soapy water is the smell of your grandmother's kitchen.

Why all this about smell, and what is Paul talking about when he calls us "a fragrance of Christ?"

Deeply embedded in Paul's mind, of course, is his Jewish ancestry. As we read the Old Testament scriptures, where is the nose? The nose is on the face of God as He inhales the sweet savor of the sacrifice of His people.

In Genesis 8, after the flood, Noah builds an altar to the Lord and offers burnt offerings on the altar. It says in Genesis 8:21, "And the Lord smelled the soothing aroma; and the Lord said to Himself, 'I will never again curse the ground on account of man, for the intent of man's heart is evil from his youth; and I will never again destroy every living thing, as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.'"

There is a description of the sacrifices that are pleasing to God in Exodus 29. Speaking of the sacrifice, "You shall take them from their hands, and offer them up in smoke on the altar on the

burnt offering for a soothing aroma before the Lord; it is an offering by fire to the Lord” (Exodus 29:25).

The same thing is found again in Numbers 15:3.

God breathes in, God inhales the sweet smell of the sacrifices of His people. It is a pleasing odor to Him – His people living in covenant with Him. They are sorry for their sins. They are offering a sacrifice to Him.

In Revelation, the prayers of the saints are so sweet smelling to God that he assigns angels to gather them in bowls.

“Thanks be to God,” Paul begins in 2 Corinthians 2:14. His tone changes. It is characteristic for the Apostle Paul to break forth in a hymn of gratitude. Christ always, he says, leads us in a triumphal parade. It is a picture of the victorious Roman general who leads the armies into the capital of the empire. The prisoners of war are paraded through the streets. He exhibits them to all the spectators. As part of the parade, the sweet smell of burning spices fills the air. At the conclusion of the procession, the captives are usually executed as a tribute to the conqueror. For the victors, the fragrance of the spice is sweet. For the captives, it is the smell of death itself.

Those of the city of Corinth had said that Paul, because of his suffering, because of his lack of success, because he was without power, could not really be an apostle. In 1 Corinthians 4:9-13, he confronts their disapproving attitude toward him.

“For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena, we have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men. We are fools for Christ, but you are wise in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are honored but we are dishonored. To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless, we work hard with our own hands; when we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly; up to this moment we have become the scum of the earth, the refuse of the world.”

Paul insists that his suffering does not nullify his power as an apostle, but it reveals more clearly the power of God. God’s glory is manifest through Paul’s suffering, Paul is saying.

The knowledge of God emits a distinctive aroma that spreads everywhere. To some, it’s the smell of life. To others, it’s the smell of death.

“For,” he says in 2 Corinthians 2:15, “we are a fragrance of Christ to God.” It is Christ offering Himself on the cross that replaces all the old sacrifices of the Old Text. “Christ loved us and gave Himself up for a fragrant offering and a sacrifice to God” (Ephesians 5:2).

Paul is saying we are the aroma that belongs to Christ. Paul and his fellow workers are the agents who spread the fragrant odor that emanates from Christ. You and I should be so Christ-like in our lives, in our demeanor, in our tone and in our spirit, that people actually get a fragrance of Christ when we walk by.

Ever open that refrigerator door and say, “Man, something is spoiled in here. Something stinks! Something isn’t as it ought to be. We’ve got to clean out the refrigerator.”

A bad smell can really turn your stomach. I had a friend one time who found that after his honeymoon his car kept stinking. It just stunk and stunk and stunk. He couldn’t figure out what it was. He vacuumed it out. He wiped it down and he cleaned it out, but he couldn’t get rid of this terrible odor. And the odor was getting worse by the day. Finally, in a moment of desperation, he took out the front seat and discovered that some of his groomsmen had put dead fish under his front seat. Wow! If fresh fish stink, think about the ones who have been boiling in the hot sun in the car for a week, decomposing. Pheww!

According to a nationwide survey, skunks top the list as the worst odor. Rotten eggs came in second, and dirty diaper smells were a close third. Pam Dalton and her team at Monell Chemical Sense Center in Philadelphia are looking for the one odor in the world that everyone finds offensive. Once discovered, this painfully awful smell will be used in stink bombs to break up rowdy crowds or flush out criminals from hiding places. (A. T. McPhee, “Stink bomb,” *Current Science*, January 17, 2003

Sometimes as Christians we can be pretty smelly. Maybe we don’t show the compassion we ought to show. People who smell us get turned off to Christ and His church. Maybe it’s our blasting quick temper – our failure at expressing self-control. Maybe it’s our ingratitude. Maybe it’s our language. Maybe it’s our pride – we just kind of hold our chin too high around others. Jealously, lust, materialism, prejudice...

If it smells, you won’t buy it. And neither will anybody else. You can’t sell a car that doesn’t smell right, so people have scents sprayed into the fabric of the upholstery and the carpet of the car to make it smell like a new car. If a house stinks, nobody will purchase it. It’s just got to smell right – no pet odors, no smoke odors. It needs to smell right.

House-a-tosis. Scientists have discovered that our houses have signature smells. Craig Warren, Ph.D., has spent 30 years in the smell business. He says our own body odors, the foods we cook, our pets, etc., all combine to form a unique “occupancy odor” found in every house. The makers of the fabric odor remover Febreze recently did a study showing that, on average, Americans don’t clean up to 75% of the surfaces in their homes on a regular basis – the three-quarters that are soft and porous, namely couches, curtains, and pillows. According to the study, odors such as sizzling fish or frying bacon may gradually air out and not be as noticeable, the but smell is caught in the cloth, subtly adding to your house’s aroma. (“Occupancy Odor Affects Emotions,” *Emotional Wellness*, www.content.nealth.msn.com/content/article/57/66023.htm)

But before you cook those collard greens, realize they will be around for a while.

To God, when the people are obedient to Him in the Old Testament, there is a sweet smell. It is obedience that God desires, the psalmist tells us, not sacrifice. And disobedience came before God as a stench of His people. In Amos 5:21, God says to His people, “I hate, I reject your festivals. I

do not like the smell of your solemn assemblies.” Because of the disobedience of His people, God did not savor their sacrifices. They stunk to Him. Neither did He soak up their praises. Their music was noise to God. Sometimes church smells like a stench to God. How does our worship smell to God?

How do we smell to people? How do you smell to people? How do I smell to people?

When church leaders are involved in financial fraud, it stinks. When we worship money rather than God, it stinks. When people inhale what we smell like, do we smell like Christ? Are we so much like Him that people can inhale the fragrance of the Savior?

The aroma of the gospel penetrates everywhere. The Roman general, during his procession, would have to, because of religious decorum, burn the spices. As the fragrance filled the air, it was a triumphant aroma for the victorious army. But it was the smell of execution for the defeated prisoner.

The gospel aroma penetrates everywhere so that both the people who are being saved and those who are perishing take notice. The gospel is a sword that divides. To some it brings life. To some it brings death. To some it brings release. To others it brings captivity.

The effects are twofold: either life or death. For those who refuse to receive the message of the good news of God’s love through Christ Jesus, the smell of the gospel is death. But to those who believe, it is life.

In 1 Corinthians 1:18, Paul makes a similar appraisal. “For the word of the cross is to those who are perishing foolishness, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.” How we respond to the preaching of the gospel determines our final fate – life or death, one being saved or one perishing.

Paul is saying something like this: “I don’t smell sweet to everyone. But don’t dismiss me.” The Apostle says he carries around the death of Jesus. And only those who are perishing are repelled by the message and by the messenger. To God, however, his ministry emits a sweet aroma of Christ’s loving sacrifice. To those who are being saved it is a reminder of the life assured to them by God. If anybody in Corinth is set back by Paul’s suffering or weakness, they have not fully understood the gospel or the significance of Christ’s death.

He concludes this section by saying in 2 Corinthians 2:17 that he doesn’t peddle the word of God. He doesn’t sell it, like one selling wares. He does not market the gospel with an eye to the bottom line. To survive in the marketplace, a peddler must adapt to the market either by making sure that he has what people want to buy or by tricking them into thinking that they want to buy what he has to sell.

Not so with the apostle Paul. He preaches the gospel as it is.

I am convinced that we, the modern church, as palatable as we want to make the message will never succeed completely in winning souls to Christ as long as we want to sugarcoat the gospel.

The gospel is a message of life, but it is also a message of death. There is no way around it. There is eternal life, if you accept the gospel of Christ Jesus as he preached and as He lived it in His death and resurrection. Or there is eternal death.

It's the same gospel, Paul says. But to some, it's the smell of life to life. And to others, it's the stench of death to death. Just like the incense in the Roman parade – the incense that meant victory to some and defeat to others.

So how does the gospel smell to you? Have you embraced the gospel with its story of life and hope, its story of victory in Christ Jesus? Or have you rejected the gospel, rejected the Christ of the good news story, rejected the church, the Bride of Christ? Does it all stink to you? Is it the smell of death to death?

It's one of the other. The gospel definitely divides all of humanity into one camp or the other.

Not only how does the gospel smell to you, but how do you smell to others? How do we, as a church, smell to God as we worship this morning? Does He say, "I can't stand the smell of your worship because of your sins?" Or does God accept our worship as pleasing and acceptable to Him?

When people are surrounded by the presence of your life, do they breathe in and say, "Wow! He or she is so Christ-like. I think I've got a fragrance of his Master. I think I smell the touch of her Savior." Or do we conduct our lives in such a way that people say, "Because of the way he behaved on the basketball court, his competitive, cutthroat attitude that included an elbow to my face, I really am repulsed by the church basketball league." "Because of the way he treated me in the business deal last week, I can't stand to sit in his Sunday School class anymore."

How do we smell, how do you smell, how do I smell to God? And how do we smell to others around us? Remember, if it smells bad, people won't buy it. Is someone embracing the gospel because you carry the fragrance of Christ? Is someone rejecting the gospel because you bear the stench of death?

The scent of Christ. Or the stench of darkness and death.

What do you smell like to God? What do you smell like to those around you? Be the fragrance of Christ.

Ahh. The fragrance of Christ. There is no smell like it.