

¹²Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me, ¹³I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said good-by to them and went on to Macedonia.

¹⁴But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. ¹⁵For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. ¹⁶To the one we are the smell of death; to the other, the fragrance of life. And who is equal to such a task? ¹⁷Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, like men sent from God.

^{3:1} Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you? ²You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everybody. ³You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.

⁴Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. ⁵Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God. ⁶He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (NIV84)

Theme: You are a Fragrant Aroma to God

1. Through your faith in the gospel
2. Through living your life in the gospel.

There are certain aromas that smell good to one person but not to another. For instance, some people are allergic to perfumes or colognes. Others can't stand the smell of heavily scented candles. Some people hate the smell of cheese. The smell of eggs makes me a little queasy.

What one person thinks smells good may not always be the case for someone else. Or there may be times when you think something smells good but at other times it doesn't.

So I ask you today, how do you smell? No, I'm not asking you if you took a shower this morning or if you brushed your teeth. I'm standing far enough away from you right now, that I don't really care about that. But, how do you smell? How do you smell to God?

Are you a pleasant scent or a foul stench? Do you believe God's Word and obey his will—thus serving as a witness to the gospel, or do doubt God's Word or fail to live your life as a Christian and thus omit a foul odor in the nostrils of God?

Well, today you see that you are a fragrant aroma to God through Christ. You are a fragrant aroma through your faith in the gospel and through living your life in the gospel.

When Kings, generals, and others won a battle in ancient times they often held victory parades. They would take all the rulers, soldiers, and others they defeated and captured. Slaves and exotic animals were also taken. As well as all the silver and gold they could find. Then they would put all of these things on display and parade around the town for everyone to see. It was a joyful occasion for the winning country. And to make the time even more enjoyable, they included the sense of smell. Incense was burned as a sacrifice to their gods.

Garlands of flowers hung around their necks. So when this victory parade took place they not only saw things which caused them to celebrate, but they were also smelling pleasant aromas that made their time even more enjoyable.

In verse 14 Paul draws a picture of a victory parade. **Thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him.** In Christ, Christians are led in a victorious parade. Of course, it doesn't always seem like that. At times, it seems as if Christians are the ones who are defeated. Paul himself was beaten, flogged, imprisoned, and so on because of the gospel. And yet he can still call himself victorious. That is because Paul knew the power of the gospel. He knew that wherever the gospel was spread people were brought to faith. Whenever the gospel was spread people grew in their knowledge of Christ. And as they grew in knowledge they enjoyed the fragrance of Christ.

The gospel is always a pleasing aroma to God. God is also pleased with those who spread the gospel. Paul says so in verse 15, **For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.** Those who spread the gospel are a pleasant aroma to God not because they smell good, but because of their message. They tell everyone about the message of the Savior. How Christ died to take away the sins of the whole world. How he rose from the dead so that all believers could live with him in heaven forever. The fragrant gospel of Christ is what makes them fragrant before God.

And they were fragrant to God no matter who they were preaching too—whether it be believers or unbelievers. Not everyone thinks the gospel is a pleasant smell. Some think it's the greatest smell ever. Others think its repugnant. **To some we are an aroma of death leading to death, but to others, an aroma of life leading to life.** To believers those who spread the gospel are the fragrance of life. That's because their message is one of life. Through the gospel they were brought to faith and kept in the one true faith. Through the gospel that was preached they were rescued from the eternal damnation. For through their faith they were saved and given the gift of eternal life in heaven.

The opposite stands true for the unbeliever. The unbeliever hates those who spread the gospel. That is because they hate the gospel. They want nothing to do with it. They think its foolishness. To unbelievers those who spread the gospel are an aroma of death because when they reject it they will die. For anyone who doesn't believe the gospel will get what his sins deserve. He will rot in hell forever. The more they hear the gospel the more foul the smell becomes—because their hearts become hard. And it will only get worse for unbelievers for they will smell their decaying bodies forever

Where do you stand? Now I'm not saying that any of you here have rejected the gospel. I'm not saying that you might be an unbeliever. But how does the gospel smell to you? Those who love the smell of the gospel want to smell it all the time. It is not a fragrance they get sick of. But far too often we act as if we don't like the smell. We fail to study God's Word at home—very few of us attend a Bible Class. We go to worship when and where it pleases us—only if it fits into our schedule. How do those who spread the gospel smell to you? Do you

treasure them as those who share the gospel's fragrance with you? Or do you complain that they are too boring? Or that they don't do what you want them to do—or be like you want them to be.

And when you act like this you fail to be a pleasing aroma to God. For you fail to show your faith. And through your faith you are a fragrant aroma to God. Not because of anything you have done. Rather you are a fragrant aroma because the Holy Spirit has worked faith in you through the gospel of Christ. Through him alone your sins have been removed. So you are no longer a foul stench in his nostrils. Like one that deserves eternal damnation. For God no longer smells your decaying selfish nature. Rather, he perceives you as someone who has been washed clean by the blood of his Son. For it is through him that your sins are forgiven and you are given a new life. It is through him that you are pure as snow.

So through your faith in Christ you are a fragrant aroma to God. But it is not just your faith that makes you a pleasant scent—but also your actions.

Nowadays when someone applies for a job, he will have to sight some sources. Or when you are thinking of hiring someone or buying something, you are often going to check on the internet for reviews. People want recommendations of some sort. You want some assurance that who you are hiring is going to do a proper job. Things worked in a similar way 2000 years ago. When someone would travel from a distant land he often carried with him letters of commendation. Take missionaries for example. How would a congregation know that this missionary was legit—that he spoke the truth, was sincere, and so on? Often someone the congregation knew would write a letter and vouch for the missionary. Paul himself wrote such letters for others as he sent them to a different part of the world to spread the gospel. But Paul didn't need any such letter to give the Corinthians. He started the congregation. He spent a year and a half there spreading the gospel. And through the gospel that Paul shared many of those Corinthians were brought to faith. Their faith was proof that Paul spoke the truth and that the gospel is true. The same stands for your faith. As Paul says, **It is clear that you are Christ's letter.** Your faith in the gospel proves that whoever taught you the gospel taught

you the truth. It is proof that the Holy Spirit works through it. You and your faith are letters of commendation for the gospel. And so is your life. And so you are either a stench or a fragrance to God.

How do you smell? People around you know you are a Christian. Your relatives, neighbors, friends, associates at work—they all know you claim to believe in Jesus. As Paul says, **You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, recognized and read by everyone.** Those who share the gospel are a pleasing aroma to God. Are you? Or do you keep your mouth shut? Are you too afraid to tell others about their Savior? Do you let them live their life in unbelief—thus on their way to eternal damnation? Or do you share the message of Christ? Like the disciples in our gospel for this morning, do you share the message of his resurrection with those you come in contact with? If so, then you are a fragrant aroma to God.

What about your actions? Sometimes your actions indicate more than your words. Do you live a God pleasing life? Do you show by the way you live that you take God's Word seriously? Or do you do what you want to do? Those around you are watching. Do you show them your faith by your actions? Can they tell you are a Christian? Do you live your life like the rest of the world—just trying to fit in. Does it seem to others that you are only a Christian on Sundays—well, just the Sundays you happen to go to Church? Your life—words and actions are what you use to spread the gospel. It's hard to share the message of Christ with someone who doesn't see you living your life as a Christian. How can they take you seriously when you share your faith, if they see you not taking your faith seriously as you live your life? If you fail to live your life as a Christian then you are a stench to God. For living a life contrary to God's Word prohibits the spread of the gospel. So how do you smell? A fragrant aroma, or a nasty stench?

I'm confident where you stand. I'm confident you smell good to God. Sure, at times you may fail to share your faith as you should. You may fall into temptation. From time to time your actions don't always indicate who you are and who your Savior is. But I am still confident—because of Christ. He has removed your stench on the cross. Through his blood you are fragrant to God. He rose from the dead to prove that his ransom price was accepted. I'm confident

because you have the gospel of Christ. It is powerful and effective. It brings to faith and strengthens that faith. And it is through the gospel that the Holy Spirit helps you lead a holy life. It is through him that you are able to live your life as a pleasing aroma to God.

It is through Christ that God leads us in a triumphal procession. Triumphal because the aroma of the gospel makes sinners fragrant to God. We are the victors not because of our own doing, but through the work of the Holy Spirit. He is the one who makes us competent spreaders of his Word. When you were brought to faith, it wasn't because of the person who shared God's word with you, or applied water to your head. When your faith is strengthened it's not because of the one who speaks or gives you Christ's body and blood. When you share God's Word with someone and they believe, the credit doesn't belong to you. It is all because of Christ. **It is not that we are competent in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our competence is from God.**

Some people like certain smells, while others do not. Some people see the gospel and those who believe and share it as a rotten stench. But to others—an aroma of life. To God—the gospel and those who believe it, share it, and live it are a fragrant aroma. They are a letter of commendation of God. All this is through the one who rose from the dead—Jesus Christ. For through him you are a fragrant aroma to God. Amen.