

DOES YOUR LIFE ADVERTISE CHRIST?



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OPENING COMMENTS/GREETING

I. Text: 2 Corinthians 2:12–3:3.

Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord. ¹³I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia. ¹⁴Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. ¹⁵For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. 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? ¹⁷For 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. ^{3:1}Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you? ²You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; ³clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart (NKJV).

II. Introduction:

A. As I read these words, I can't help but get the feeling that our lives should advertise Christ.

B. I have never met a believer who was saved by simply watching someone's life. You can't catch a good case of salvation—it's not like catching a cold. It's like trying to catch algebra! In order to learn algebra, there are facts have to be explained and understood.

- *The facts of the Bible must be explained.* To be saved, people must hear and believe the verbal testimony about Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches that "Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17).

C. I have always been intrigued with the book of Acts, which shows the life of Christ lived out in His followers.

- *The way we live before others matters.* That's what this text is all about.

D. In this passage Paul uses three beautiful metaphors to describe a believer's life. He tells us that *we are trophies, we are fragrances, and we are letters.*

- *Figures of speech in the Bible:*
 - Simile—"like a tree"

- Hyperbole—"water my couch with my tears"
- Personification—"rocks will cry out"
- Metaphor
 - In a *metaphor*, one thing is used to represent another. The Bible tells us that we are the *Body, Bride, and Temple of Christ*. All of these are metaphors.

There are many people who now serve the Lord that did not grow up feeling like a trophy, a sweet fragrance, or a living letter. They grew up in difficult times and circumstances. This passage of scripture gives us all hope for the future!

III. Message

A. *Recognize that sometimes diversions can be divine, and setbacks can become set-ups for the future.*

1. In verse twelve, during the height of his ministry, Paul discovered an open door to preach the gospel in Troas. He immediately sought to help from his friend, Titus, but could not find him. Paul had to change his plans, walk away from what seemed to him a great opportunity, and continue his journey to Macedonia (2:13).
 - God's mysterious providence created anguish in Paul's soul (2:12).
 - We need to know that *God can use reverses to move us forward*.
 - Look at how Paul dealt with this sudden change of events in his life.
 - He didn't pout! He didn't get mad at Titus for not being there for him.
 - He didn't get angry with God. Instead, Paul used this unusual turn of events to teach the Corinthians and us some important principles concerning the impact and influence of our nonverbal witness on the world.

B. *There is always hope for the future with Christ.*

There is a "Peanuts" cartoon where Lucy is really letting Charlie Brown have it after losing another baseball season. She said:

“You, Charlie Brown, are a foul ball in the line drive of life! You're in the shadow of your own goal posts; you're a miscue; you are three putts on the eighteenth green; you are a seven-ten split in the tenth frame; a love set! You have dropped a rod and reel in the lake of life; you are missed free throw, a shanked nine iron and a called third strike! Do you understand? Have I made myself clear?”

Charlie Brown replied, “Just wait until next year!”

C. *We are Christ's trophy.*

- I got interested in this passage of scripture when I tried to find out the meaning of the word, *triumph*, used here. It literally means “a procession.”
- In Paul's day there were magnificent parades given for Roman generals who won victories on foreign soil.
- The general rode into Rome in a dazzling chariot; behind him, in order, followed by his officers and soldiers with the spoils of battle (prisoners, beasts, weapons, and treasures).
- He would enter the city to celebrate; to give thanks; and to proclaim victory. Everything you *saw*, everything you *heard* and everything you *smelled* communicated victory, supremacy, and strength. (This is the Biblical meaning of living in triumph).
- Paul is describing a victory parade but there is no ordinary general being celebrated—we have been captured by and are now following General Jesus!

The spiritual application is clear and succinct: God is leading His people through this world in the wake of Christ's triumph over sin and death. Christ, the captain of our salvation, has come to this earth and defeated the archenemy, Satan.

1. Two things about a parade:

- **First: you and I are on display.**
 - Do you realize that He is presenting us every day to the watching world?
 - Do your conversations, your business dealings, and your relationships with others make known the triumph of Jesus Christ in your life?

- Does your life reflect joy and gratefulness for the victory that Christ has won for you and done in you? We are a trophy of His grace! The purpose of a trophy is to show it for all to see.
- Nothing speaks for the gospel more clearly than showing by your life that Christ has conquered you by His grace.
- **Second: we must keep moving forward. A parade is always in forward motion.**
 - We are walking in a vast parade with King Jesus and the reality of Him in our lives is flowing through us to our community.

D. *We are Christ's fragrance.*

The second metaphor introduced by Paul is a fragrance or an aroma (2:14-16). In the Roman culture, the triumphal procession was accompanied by the smell of sweet odors released from the burning of spices along the parade route. To a Roman citizen, the sweet smell symbolized *security* and *stability*.

Paul affirms that God “. . . manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Christ in every place” (v. 14).

In verse 15, he declares that Christians are the *vessels* from whom God releases “the fragrance of Christ.”

The word, *fragrance*, literally means “odor or aroma.” Fragrances normally dominate or influence their environment. As I read this scripture a question arose in my mind. I asked myself: *How do we smell?!*

I googled the word, *smell*, ago and discovered that there is a real research organization—Sense of Smell Institute. This is not a joke—it really exists, and their front page boasted of a researcher who had won a Nobel Prize for smell research.

One of the links on their website was *Fun Facts About the Sense of Smell with Professor Nosetradamus*. It led to several fun facts about our sense of smell:

1. The average human being is able to recognize approximately 10,000 different odors. Dogs can recognize about 200,000 different odors.

I think children can make about 300,000 different odors!

2. A woman's sense of smell is keener than a man's.

This answered one of the great mysteries of life for me. It explained why my wife changed most of the diapers when our children were infants.

3. Everyone has his or her own unique odor-identity or "smell fingerprint."

I don't think that needs further explanation.

4. Our sense of taste is greatly influenced by our sense of smell. Our sense of smell is responsible for about 80% of what we taste.

This reminds me of what Psalm writer David said in Psalm 34:8, "*Taste and see that the Lord is good.*"

So, when we think about the community that is all around us, I believe we need to think about how we *smell* to them. Our lives should be so saturated with the person of Jesus Christ that our "aroma" causes people to want to discover for themselves how good the Lord is.

- Christians must remember that everywhere they go they are emitting a "spiritual" odor that others can sense. Paul asserts that life and death issues are at stake in this aspect of our nonverbal witness before others (v. 16).
- In *Be Encouraged*, Warren Wiersbe reminds us that "the way we live and work can mean life or death to a lost world around us."
- Is your lifestyle a sweet perfume to other Christians?
- Does your witness encourage or impede the quest for godliness in other believers?

E. We are Christ's letter

The third metaphor introduced by Paul is a letter or an epistle (3:1-3).

In 2 Corinthians 3:1, Paul mentions the word, *letters*, and in verse two, he says we are “known and read of all men.”

- The issue of privacy is huge today. People have lost their jobs because someone read their e-mails or their computer blogs. The truth is *people are reading our mail everyday of our lives*. What do we say to them?
- In the early church, a number of false preachers and prophets peddled an erroneous gospel.
 - These counterfeit clergymen penetrated congregations by bringing so-called “letters of commendation” on behalf of other people or churches.
 - In verse two, Paul insisted that he had a letter of commendation that could not be disputed—*the Corinthian believers themselves* (3:2).

People knew that Paul was a genuine Christian because the Gospel he preached brought transformation in the lives of those who heard it. The people converted under his preaching were living and moving monuments to the authenticity of the Gospel.
- God’s law had been written in their hearts by the Holy Spirit, who in turn gave them the power and ability to be godly people (3:3).

The implications are many. *The only place where some people will see the glory of God is in the behavior of His people*. You may be the only epistle, the only copy of God’s law, the only Gospel that some will ever read! Does your life confuse people about the Good News or clarify it?

Dwight L. Moody once said, “Christians are the world’s Bible.” He was not demeaning the authority and inspiration of Scripture. He was simply reminding Christians that most unbelievers never read the Bible. Consequently, a large majority will see its truths only when they are being “fleshed out” in the lives of those who believe in Jesus Christ.

- You are Christ’s letter! The purpose of a letter is to convey the message of its author. will give you grace to be a trophy of grace, a fragrance of Christ

CLOSING REMARKS

We are being watched! We *are* the world's Bible. In fact, we are "PDF" (Public Document Format/Portable Document Format) kind of people. We may come from many different backgrounds, languages, and ethnicities, but we are on display as "public documents." We must model Christ and learn to sacrifice ourselves for others.

Ephesians 5:1-2 says, "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

What does it mean to imitate Christ? It means to love people and be willing to sacrifice ourselves for them just as He did.

What happens when we sacrifice for others? When we sacrifice ourselves for people in our community, the aroma of Christ spreads among them—and some of them are going to want to taste and see that God is good.

May we be there to witness that moment!

Mary Ann Evans, known by her pen name George Eliot, was an English novelist, poet, and journalist. She wrote under a male pseudonym because women writers were not well received in the 1800's. She said,

"It's never too late to be who you might have been."

**The above paragraph and quote was moved from the very end of III,C,1. Could this be placed elsewhere to improve flow of sermon?*