

Christ Reformation Church

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God's Word to a Hesitating Church

Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God. (7:1)

“There are Only Two Kinds of People: Saved and Perishing”

July 27, 2014

Sermon Text: 2 Cor 2:12-17

Scripture Reading: Jeremiah 1

Introduction-

Last week in the Sunday School class we heard a lesson from J.C. Ryle taken from the following Scripture:

Matthew 3:12 His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his

threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn, but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

You will remember that Ryle emphasized the fact that among all the human beings in this world, there are only two categories in God's sight: the wheat and the chaff. Those who are saved and those who are perishing, to use the terms that Paul uses here in our text. Listen to him:

2 Corinthians 2:12-17 When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, (13) my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia. (14) 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. (15) For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are

perishing, (16) to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? (17) For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

Two kinds of people:

- In Christ, not in Christ
- Cain, Abel
- Children of the devil, children of God
- Believers, unbelievers

We have this theme here before us once again this morning as Paul continues in his second letter to the church at Corinth. Let's see what the Apostle tells us regarding how the Christian "smells" to each of these kinds of people.

Paul's Concern for the Corinthians 12-13

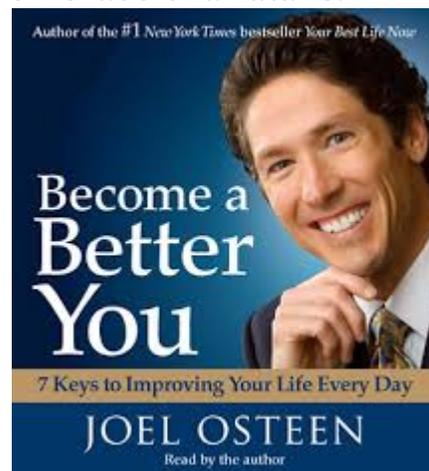
We know that these Corinthians caused Paul much grief and worry. They were on his heart and he is going all out to get them to open up to him, trust him, and fully embrace the gospel. He had written them, you remember, a "painful letter" and had made a previous "painful visit" to them. They were a pain, yet Paul loved

them and displayed remarkable patience toward them.

One of the chief problems at Corinth was this:

The Corinthians were listening to "peddlers" of God's Word who tampered with the gospel so as to make it pleasing to the natural man, to make it sound wise, and of course, to make themselves look good and gain followers for themselves. Because of this, the Corinthians were distancing themselves from Paul and from God's truth. They did not recognize the kingdom of God, the servant of God, nor the gospel of God.

It is my contention that this very same leaven is rampant in today's church. Many if not most professing Christians have a worldly concept of greatness. They therefore reject Christ's true servants, God's true Word, and embrace charlatans.



Joel Osteen is certainly an example, but the reality is that many smaller local churches foster a theology that does not recognize suffering and persecution (such as Paul experienced) as consistent with being a true servant of Christ. Where is the true church? Where are God's people? What do they look like? Well –

2 Corinthians 1:8-9 For we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of the affliction we experienced in Asia. For we were so utterly burdened beyond our strength that we despaired of life itself. (9) Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.

2 Corinthians 4:8-10 We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; (9) persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; (10) always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

Here then in vs 12-13 Paul continues to explain to them how much he was concerned for them. They were on his mind so heavily that when he arrived at Troas, even though there was much opportunity there for him to preach

Christ, he was so anxious about the Corinthians that he left and went on to Macedonia. Why? Because he wanted to find Titus and get a report about the church at Corinth and how they had responded to the painful letter. You may recall that we noted last week what Paul said in chapter 7 –

2 Corinthians 7:5-9 For even when we came into Macedonia, our bodies had no rest, but we were afflicted at every turn--fighting without and fear within. (6) But God, who comforts the downcast, comforted us by the coming of Titus, (7) and not only by his coming but also by the comfort with which he was comforted by you, as he told us of your longing, your mourning, your zeal for me, so that I rejoiced still more. (8) For even if I made you grieve with my letter, I do not regret it--though I did regret it, for I see that that letter grieved you, though only for a while. (9) As it is, I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting. For you felt a godly grief, so that you suffered no loss through us.

It is not easy for a minister to leave off from a “door opened in the Lord.” There must have been people at Troas who were ready to listen to the gospel, so for Paul to leave tells us just how

intense his “pain” was as to the Corinthians. His “spirit was not at rest.”

Open Doors

The phrase “a door was opened for me in the Lord” indicates that Paul realized that any openness to the gospel is due to the Lord. It is the picture of Paul taking the gospel to someone’s house, knocking on the door, and then seeing if the occupant would open the door or not. The same is true for us today. You see the same teaching elsewhere:

Acts 14:27 And when they arrived and gathered the church together, they declared all that God had done with them, and how he had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles.

1 Corinthians 16:8-9 But I will stay in Ephesus until Pentecost, (9) for a wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.

Colossians 4:2-3 Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving. (3) At the same time, pray also for us, that God may open to us a door for the word, to declare the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am in prison--

Revelation 3:7-8 "And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: 'The words of the holy one, the true one, who has the key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens. (8) "I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut. I know that you have but little power, and yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name.

I hope that you find this doctrine of the “open door” encouraging. You do not need to be the “salesman” who forces his way and sticks his foot in the door. We represent Christ, we speak for Him and where He provides an opening – an invitation to come in and keep speaking, we take it. Where the door is closed, we move on. These things are important for us to understand:

Luke 9:4-5 And whatever house you enter, stay there, and from there depart. (5) And wherever they do not receive you, when you leave that town shake off the dust from your feet as a testimony against them."

Acts 13:48-52 And when the Gentiles heard this, they began rejoicing and glorifying the word of the Lord, and as many as were appointed to eternal life believed. (49) And the word of the Lord was

spreading throughout the whole region. (50) But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. (51) But they shook off the dust from their feet against them and went to Iconium. (52) And the disciples were filled with joy and with the Holy Spirit.

through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.

There are some differing ideas regarding the specific image Paul has in mind here. We know that he is referring to the common practice of a triumphant general leading his army and their captives through the streets of the hometown where the captives are humiliated and the citizens praise and cheer the conquerors. The question is, how does Paul see himself-

“Its meaning is, that an opportunity of promoting the gospel had presented itself. For as an opportunity of entering is furnished when the door is opened, so the servants of the Lord make advances when an opportunity is presented. The door is shut, when no prospect of usefulness is held out. Now as, on the door being shut, it becomes us to enter upon a new course, rather than by farther efforts to weary ourselves to no purpose by useless labor, so where an opportunity presents itself of edifying, let us consider that by the hand of God a door is opened to us for introducing Christ there, and let us not withhold compliance with so kind an indication from God.” (Calvin)

- As a captive, taken prisoner by Christ, led by Christ, or
- As one of Christ’s officers effecting victory and taking captives by the preaching of the gospel.

There is truth in both views, and certainly Paul does speak of himself elsewhere as a captive, a slave, a prisoner of Christ. But the important point is that Paul sees his ministry as TRIUMPH! Christ is leading him wherever he goes, be it in Troas or in Macedonia. In every place as he proclaims the gospel of Christ, *the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ is being spread.* This “fragrance” imagery may have as its background the practice of incense and flowers being used in these triumphant military parades. As we will see, it may also allude to the Old Testament “pleasing

A Triumphant Parade 14

2 Corinthians 2:14 But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and

aroma” of sacrifices and incense in the temple.

The central point in verse 14 though is this matter of *triumph*. No matter if the gospel is received or rejected, Christ is triumphant. This is vital for all of us to remember. Christ has triumphed over the enemy, and we share in that triumph. Right now, through His church, Christ is leading us in triumphant procession as we share the knowledge of Christ through our words and our lives – through the gospel. Notice the word – *everywhere*. Even when stones are thrown.

A Fragrant Aroma 15-16

2 Corinthians 2:15-16 For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, (16) to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things?

And here then we come to this matter of *two kinds of people*. Those who are *being saved*, and those who are perishing. And you can tell which kind they are. How? By seeing how Christ and His people “smell” to them.

Here again are some vital truths for each of us to get hold of. Paul said that “we” (he and his fellow-workers, and I

think it is correct to include ourselves here)...he said that “we” are the ‘aroma’ of Christ *to God*. I think that Paul has in mind here the OT “fragrant aroma” to God. For example:

Exodus 29:17-18 Then you shall cut the ram into pieces, and wash its entrails and its legs, and put them with its pieces and its head, (18) and burn the whole ram on the altar. It is a burnt offering to the LORD. It is a pleasing aroma, a food offering to the LORD.

Leviticus 1:5-9 Then he shall kill the bull before the LORD, and Aaron's sons the priests shall bring the blood and throw the blood against the sides of the altar that is at the entrance of the tent of meeting. (6) Then he shall flay the burnt offering and cut it into pieces, (7) and the sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar and arrange wood on the fire. (8) And Aaron's sons the priests shall arrange the pieces, the head, and the fat, on the wood that is on the fire on the altar; (9) but its entrails and its legs he shall wash with water. And the priest shall burn all of it on the altar, as a burnt offering, a food offering with a pleasing aroma to the LORD.

Ezekiel 20:40-41 "For on my holy mountain, the mountain height of

Israel, declares the Lord GOD, there all the house of Israel, all of them, shall serve me in the land. There I will accept them, and there I will require your contributions and the choicest of your gifts, with all your sacred offerings. (41) As a pleasing aroma I will accept you, when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered. And I will manifest my holiness among you in the sight of the nations.

Those are just a few of the many, many examples of this in the Old Testament in which a sacrifice is said to be a *pleasing aroma* to God. Well, here – look at it again –

“For WE are the aroma of Christ to God...”

That is to say, Paul and his fellow workers were a sacrifice, a pleasing sacrifice, a living sacrifice, a pleasing aroma to God. Approved by God. The Christian is a pleasing aroma to God. At the same time, this aroma reaches the nostrils of people in this world, with a dual effect:

- Among those who are being saved
- Among those who are perishing

And that aroma or fragrance ascending before God and which is pleasing to Him, is-

- The stench of death to those who are perishing,
- The fragrance of life to those who are being saved.

Paul gives a kind of amazed exclamation – *“Who is sufficient for these things?”* That is to say, this is all God’s doing, not Paul’s.

If someone is an enemy of Christ, the announcement of Christ’s triumph – this triumphant procession – over the world is NOT good news. It does not smell good. For those who receive Christ by believing the gospel, it is a fragrant aroma.

Specifically, consider what “fragrance” the gospel announces:

- Death
- Life

John 3:14-21 And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, (15) that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. (16) "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (17) For God did not send his Son into the world

to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. (18) Whoever believes in him is not condemned, **but whoever does not believe is condemned already**, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. (19) And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. (20) For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed. (21) But whoever does what is true comes to the light, so that it may be clearly seen that his works have been carried out in God."

That is what the gospel declares. Life for all who receive Christ, death and judgment for those who remain His enemies. Because He has triumphed and He is Lord and Judge.

1 Corinthians 1:18 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Two kinds of people. And it is the gospel, it is Christ, the word of the cross, that distinguishes them.

Notice the dynamic power of the gospel that is evidenced by the terms:

- Those who are being saved
- Those who are perishing

See it? Ongoing, present tense. The gospel is going through the world. Christ leads His church today and the gospel is preached. As it is, some are being saved and others are perishing. But **WHEREVER** the gospel goes, it powerfully does its work. It **DIVIDES** human beings into two groups, and we need to think about this carefully.

DIVISION. Separation. This is as much the work of the gospel as is the unity it produces among believers. Christ separates. Christ divides. The gospel comes and to some it is a stench, to others it is a fragrance. Now, Christian, **YOU** are going to be accused of being *divisive*, merely because of who you are in Christ and because of the truth you profess. We have this over and over in Scripture:

Matthew 10:34-38 "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. (35) For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. (36) And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. (37) Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me,

and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (38) And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

Christian, YOU are going to be accused of being divisive. Of causing trouble. And its true, though your accusers don't understand that the real source of the division is Christ, and their hatred for Him. But as Christ leads you in triumph and through you preaches the gospel, as you are a living sacrifice to God, the aroma is going to reach the nostrils of those around you. Many, most, will say you are a stench of death. And you are (to them) because they are reminded by the gospel that in their rejection of Christ they are perishing. They hate the idea that Christ is the only Way and that they must bow to Him. To add to the "trouble" (in the eyes of those who are perishing) the message of the cross is fragrant to those who are being saved and now THEY start following Christ, adding to the division even more!

Now, we must be wise in this regard. Enemies of Christ will most often say that WE are the problem. You will be scorned and ridiculed and rejected, even by your family. And if you are not careful, you might start believing that you really are the problem. That you are wrong in stirring up division. That you need to stop talking about

Christ. But quite the opposite is true. In fact, Christ's consistent instruction to His disciples *is that they move on*. I am convinced that many Christians need to do more of this "moving on" especially when it comes to unbelieving family. Christ calls us to watch for the open doors and invest our time there. When a door is closed, we move on. We don't stand there pounding and pounding on it, trying to make ourselves smell better to the occupants! In fact, the last verse of this chapter addresses this very issue.

Gospel Peddlers vs 17

2 Corinthians 2:17 For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

The truth of the gospel divides. It is a fragrance or a stench, UNLESS it is modified! Listen –

2 Corinthians 4:2-5 But we have renounced _____ disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God. (3) And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. (4) In their case the god

of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (5) For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake.

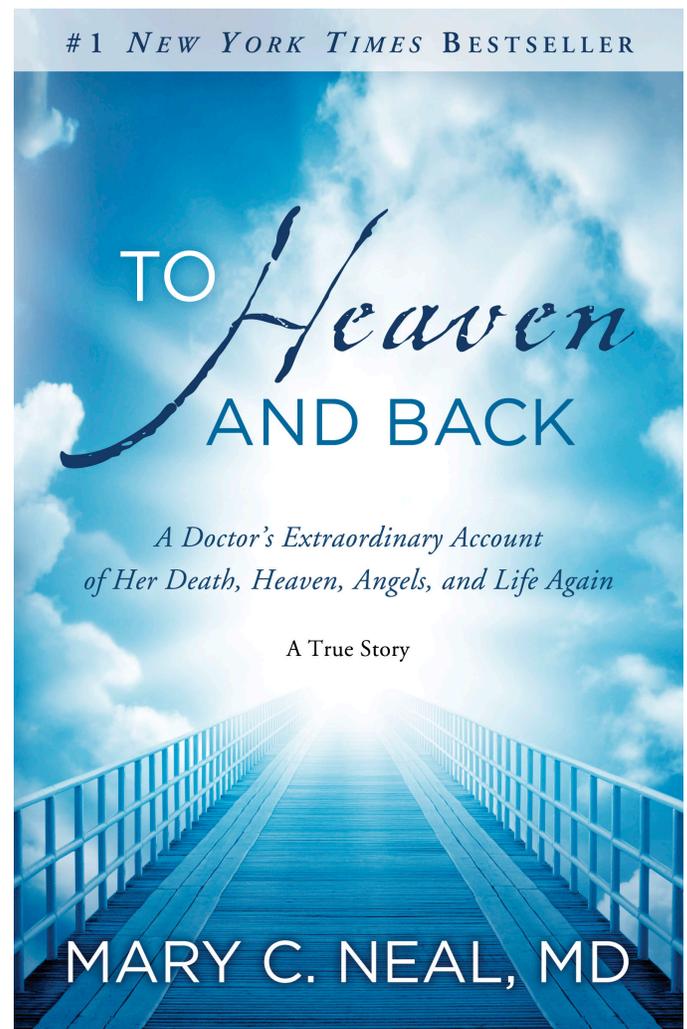
Paul says that “like so many” – which is to say “many” – there are false teachers who, for their own personal gain, “peddle” God’s Word. They sell it. They use disgraceful, underhanded means to tamper with God’s Word so that it will smell good to those who are perishing! The real gospel is “veiled” to the lost. They are blind to the truth that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Paul rejects all of these deceptive methods, and so must we. If we are going to follow Christ in truth and share His Word in truth, then we must accept the fact (and even glory in it) that we are a stench to those who are perishing. If you are a Christian and if you are following Jesus Christ in the truth of His Word, living in His light and sharing His truth with others, then even your own family is going to reject you unless they know Christ as well. You are going to be a stench of death to them. Not because of YOU, but because they “smell” Christ in you.

Never, never, never yield to the temptation to become a “peddler of

God’s Word” by tampering with His truth to make it palatable to people you don’t want to be rejected by.

The church today is guilty of this. There are, today, many peddlers of God’s Word. They change the gospel at funerals. They change the gospel in their pulpits on Sundays. All with the intent of not wanting to “create a stink.” But when the gospel no longer stinks in the nostrils of the wicked, it necessarily is no longer the gospel.



And then one final note. The gospel is a fragrant aroma to those who are

being saved. That means that while the majority will reject Christ, those whom Christ is calling to Himself WILL be drawn to Him and to the gospel like a starving man to a barbeque! To the elect, the aroma of the gospel smells good, and such a person MUST have Christ!

is a sweet odor to God and angels.”
[Calvin]

“Here we have a remarkable passage, by which we are taught, that, whatever may be the results of our preaching, it is, notwithstanding, well-pleasing to God, if the Gospel is preached, and our service will be acceptable to him; and also, that it does not detract in any degree from the dignity of the Gospel, that it does not do good to all; for God is glorified even in this, that the Gospel becomes an occasion of ruin to the wicked, nay, it must turn out so. If, however, this is a sweet odor to God, it ought to be so to us also, or in other words, it does not become us to be offended, if the preaching of the Gospel is not agreeable to all; but on the contrary, let us reckon, that it is quite enough, if it advance the glory of God by bringing just condemnation upon the wicked. If, however, the heralds of the Gospel are in bad odor in the world, because their success does not in all respects come up to their desires, they have this choice consolation, that they waft to God the perfume of a sweet fragrance, and what is to the world an offensive smell,