**WE ARE THE AROMA OF CHRIST**

2 Corinthians 2:1-17

Key Verse 15

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

**Introduction**



In the previous lesson we learned that God is the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who can comfort us in any trouble whenever we come to him. In today's passage we learn Paul's shepherd heart and Paul's identity as the "aroma of Christ." We learn how he could have this identity even in the midst of difficult situations. Let's discover what it means to us to be the aroma of Christ.

1. Read verses 1-11. What was Paul’s decision and why? (1-2) How did Paul express his concern and great love for the Corinthian believers? (3-4) What did Paul advise them to do for the one who had grieved them? (5-11)

1-1, Read verses 1-11.

So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you. **2** For if I grieve you, who is left to make me glad but you whom I have grieved? **3** I wrote as I did, so that when I came I would not be distressed by those who should have made me rejoice. I had confidence in all of you, that you would all share my joy. **4** For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you. **5** If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you to some extent—not to put it too severely. **6** The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient. **7** Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. **8** I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him. **9** Another reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything. **10** Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, **11** in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.

1-2, What was Paul’s decision and why? (1-2)

***So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you. 2 For if I grieve you, who is left to make me glad but you whom I have grieved?***

* As a background of this beginning part, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to deal with divisions in the church. But his advice in his letter was not taken and their problems remained unsolved.
* Also after Paul left Corinth, some people arose who did not acknowledge Paul's spiritual authority as an apostle of Christ. So they planted doubt about Paul's integrity and confused the whole church (11:12-15).
* Paul made a visit to Corinth to deal with such problem. Yet he could not solve the problem and returned with sorrow and anxiety. He called it a "painful visit."

1-3, How did Paul express his concern and great love for the Corinthian believers? (3-4)

***I wrote as I did, so that when I came I would not be distressed by those who should have made me rejoice. I had confidence in all of you, that you would all share my joy.***

* Paul decided not to make another painful visit. Paul did not want to grieve the Corinthians by rebuking them again in person.
* Rather, instead of visiting them, he preferred to write a letter. He hoped that they would repent through the letter.
* Then, when they met in person, they could share joyful fellowship together and mutually encourage one another. Here we see that Paul shared both sorrow and joy together with the Corinthians. He cared for them from his heart as a shepherd.

***4 For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you.***

* Paul wrote a letter out of anguish of heart and with many tears. A shepherd's tears for God's flock are beautiful and precious to God.
* When we shed tears out of anguish and sorrow in the course of helping Bible students, it is beautiful in the sight of God. Paul was a man of such tears.

Acts 20:19a also reads,

"I served the Lord with great humility and with tears...."

* Here we learn that Paul's philosophy of shepherding was "humility and tears." Humility is to consider others better than oneself and to honor and respect and serve them like our Lord Jesus Christ (Php 2:3).
* Tears refers to a broken shepherd heart. Paul had a broken shepherd heart for God's flock.
* Before conversion Paul was merciless and cruel, very proud and abusive. He was there when wicked men stoned the righteous man Stephen. But he was changed when he met the Risen Jesus on the road to Damascus.
* Usually selfish and proud people are not easily changed. But Paul was really changed into a sacrificial and humble person who served God's flock with great humility and tears.
* This happened when Paul imitated Christ from his heart. May the Lord help us to see the same vision in ourselves and others!!

1-4, What did Paul advise them to do for the one who had grieved them? (5-11)

***If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you to some extent—not to put it too severely. 6 The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient.***

* It seems that someone in Corinth opposed Paul's apostolic authority by criticizing his integrity. This grieved not only Paul, but all of the Corinthian believers.
* Paul and a majority of Corinthian believers agreed to punish him. Then the man realized his sin and repented.
* But some people doubted if this man truly repented or not. They may have insisted that his punishment continue. They did not want to forgive him easily.

***7 Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. 8 I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him.***

* The purpose of punishment is not to destroy one, but to establish(build up) him. Therefore, if our brothers or sisters sin, we should help them to repent based on the truth.
* However, once they repent we have to forgive them without any conditions. We don’t have to doubt if they really repented or not.
* How many times do we have to forgive our brothers and sisters? Peter had this question, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" (Mt 18:21)
* To forgive one or two times is hard. Seven times seems to be really hard. But Jesus said, "Not seven times, but seventy-seven times" (Mt 18:22). Jesus wants us to forgive unconditionally, without limit.
* The parable of the unmerciful servant in Matthew 18 tells us how we can forgive others unconditionally. Our debt to God is like ten thousand talents, or millions and millions of dollars. On the contrary, the debt of our brothers against us is like one hundred denarii, or a few dollars. It is nothing compared to our debt to God.
* As God canceled our debt of sin out of compassion, we have to cancel the debt of others out of compassion. Otherwise, we will not be forgiven by God. In this way we learn how to forgive others and to grow in the image of Jesus.

***9 Another reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything.***

* Paul wanted the Corinthian Christians to be obedient in all things, especially toward Jesus’ teaching. Paul told the Corinthian Christians to take the lead in showing the man forgiveness and full restoration.

Luke 17:3 reads,

So watch yourselves. “If your brother or sister sins against you, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them. 4 Even if they sin against you seven times in a day and seven times come back to you saying ‘I repent,’ you must forgive them.” 5 The apostles said to the Lord, “Increase our faith!”

***10 Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, 11 in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.***

* Their failure to show love to the repentant man could be used as a strategy of Satan. To withhold forgiveness from the repentant is to play into the hands of Satan.
* Satan has specific strategies he uses against us, to take advantage of us. Satan's strategy against the church was first the toleration of evil, then of undue severity in punishment.
* Satan's strategy against Paul was also to simply make him so stressed and upset over the Corinthian Christians that he lost peace and was less effective in ministry!

1. Read verses 12-14. Why did Paul go on to Macedonia despite opportunity in Troas? (12-13) For what did Paul thank God? (14) What did he mean when he referred to ‘spreading the aroma of the knowledge of Christ’?

2-1, Read verses 12-14.

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

**14** But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ’s triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere.

2-2, Why did Paul go on to Macedonia despite opportunity in Troas? (12-13)

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

* When Paul went to Troas to preach the gospel he found that the Lord had opened the door for him. Usually Paul went through an open door and did great work.
* But this time he could not do the work of God well, because his heart was too troubled by the problems of the Corinthian church.
* When he could not meet Titus in Troas and hear a report about the Corinthian church, Paul left for Macedonia, hoping to meet Titus there.

2-3, For what did Paul thank God? (14)

***But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ’s triumphal procession***

* Usually people lose spirit and give up when things don't go well. Then they lose spiritual desire and withdraw to live a self-centered or family-centered life. Some even run away from their mission life with all excuses.
* But Paul was different. In spite of his hard situation Paul was filled with triumphant spirit in his heart.
* Paul thanked God who always led him in triumphal procession in Christ. Here we need to know how a Roman general made his triumphal entry.
* The general was in the lead. Following him were his junior generals and other high officials, and following them were soldiers in high mood. At the end of the procession were the captured enemies in chains.
* The pagan priests would swing their censers with the sweet-smelling incense burning in them. Also the joyful soldiers carried burning incense to spread the smell of victory throughout the city.
* This triumphal procession was victorious and glorious for the Roman general. This honor was given to the one who won a great victory over enemies through battle.
* The Roman army was usually victorious, but not always. Yet God always leads us to victory in Christ. So Paul always had victory. Paul thanked God for his victory.
* Sin and death defeat every person without exception. No matter how successful or strong we may be, we are defeated by sin and death.
* Only Jesus Christ won the victory over the power of sin and death through his death and resurrection. Jesus told his disciples, (Jn 16:33b)
* No one can say, "I have overcome the world" except Jesus Christ. Only Jesus Christ is the Victor. Jesus shares this victory with those who believe in him.

John 16:33 reads,

"In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

1 Corinthians 15:57 reads,

But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 John 5:4,5 says,

"...for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God."

* Apostle Paul went through many hardships in order to preach the gospel. However, he was not crushed. He was filled with a spirit of triumph.

***and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere.***

* Paul also thanked God who used him to spread the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ everywhere. Worldly knowledge cannot give us salvation and eternal life. Only the knowledge of Christ gives us salvation and eternal life.
* God wants to spread the knowledge of Christ to the world so that people may be saved from eternal destruction.
* Without spreading the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ there is no salvation. That is why God wants us to preach the gospel in season and out of season.

John 20:21-23 reads,

Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” **22** And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. **23** If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”

2-4, What did he mean when he referred to ‘spreading the aroma of the knowledge of Christ’?

* Again fragrance, in the form of incense, was common at the Roman triumph parade. In Paul's mind, this fragrance is like the knowledge of God, which people can smell when the triumph parade winds by.
* Nothing is more strongly reminded than pleasant smells. Thus the apostle Paul wished that his life might be a sweet perfume, floating on the air, reminding them of Christ always.

1. Read verses 15-17. Why are we the pleasing aroma of Christ to all the people? (15-16) How was Paul different from so many others when he preached the word of God? (17)

3-1, Read verses 15-17.

For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. **16** To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task? **17** Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God.

3-2, Why are we the pleasing aroma of Christ to all the people? (15-16)

***15 For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. 16 To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task?***

* Paul here continues the analogy of the triumphal procession. Christ is the King of kings who leads the triumphal procession.
* And Paul is like the burning incense which signals Christ's victory over the enemies of sin and death. Here Paul identified himself as the aroma of Christ.
* This aroma has two different effects. It is the fragrance of life to those who are in Christ. When they smell the fragrance of Christ in Paul they have a sense of Christ's victory. They sing and rejoice and give praise to God.
* But to those who reject Christ, Paul is the smell of death. In a Roman procession, those who became captives were killed when the procession ended. When they smelled incense, they realized that death was near.
* When people reject Christ, they smell impending judgment through Christ's servants. As we preach the gospel, to those who accept we become the fragrance of life.
* But to those who reject, we become the smell of death. Here we learn that receiving the gospel is not a small matter. It is a matter of life and death. We have a great task before God!

3-3, How was Paul different from so many others when he preached the word of God? (17)

***17 Unlike so many, we do not peddle the word of God for profit. On the contrary, in Christ we speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God.***

* The word peddling has the idea of "watering down" for gain, and was especially used of a wine seller who would water down the wine for more profit. Paul was not like the others who might water down the gospel for gain!
* Also, those who preach the gospel are not ordinary people; they are instruments of life and death. God wants to save people through us.
* We are very important people before God. We are God's fellow workers. We are the aroma of Christ to God. Wherever we go, there is the work of life and death through us.
* That is why we speak before God with sincerity, as those sent from God like the ambassadors of Christ. Praise Jesus!

**Conclusion**

Christ our King is in triumphal procession throughout the whole world to fulfill God's salvation plan. He shares his victory over sin and death with all who believe in him, and we become the aroma of Christ. We are the aroma of Christ! God wants to save the world through us who the aroma of Christ.

**One word: We are the aroma of Christ!**