

## A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

“For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things? For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.” (2 Cor 2:15-17)

Lesson 1 of 34

### INTRODUCTION

Spiritual life is not simplistic, and it is disarming to the soul to think as though it is. This condition does not suggest that spiritual life is attended with such complexity that it is hopeless. Rather, it confirms the necessity of diligence (2 Pet 3:14), vigilance (1 Pet 5:8), perseverance (Heb 12:1), pressing toward the mark (Phil 3:14a), and reaching forward to the prize before us (Phil 3:14b). Casualness and a lackadaisical attitude have no place in the life of a believer. Candidly, there is too much of this in the modern church.

### WE ARE NOT THE CENTER OF ATTENTION

We ourselves are not the center of attention. The world does not revolve around us, and we cannot live as though it did. In regeneration we are brought to a place where we live for the glory of ANOTHER, obey the will of ANOTHER, and seek to please ANOTHER. In the word's of Scripture, “And that He died for all, that they which live should NOT henceforth live unto themselves, but UNTO HIM which died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor 5:15). To contradict this posture of life puts one in danger of “hell fire” (Matt 18:9).

### THE REALITIES OF SPIRITUAL LIFE

Ponder some of the realities related to spiritual life. These are factors that demand vigilance, perseverance, and consistency. They forbid lukewarmness and distraction by competitive interests. This is obvious to even the casual reader.

1. We have a treasure in an earthen vessel (2 Cor 4:7) – a personal liability.
2. There is “another law” in our members, warring against the law of our mind (Rom 7:23) – a personal liability.
3. In our “flesh” nothing good dwells (Rom 7:18) – a personal liability.
4. We are in a world that is passing away, together with its lusts (1 John 2:17) – an environmental liability.
5. We have an “old man” within, as well as a “new man”(Eph 4:22-24) – a personal liability.
6. There are “fleshly lusts” that are warring against our soul (1 Pet 2:11) – a personal liability.
7. We are wrestling against principalities, powers, the rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph 6:12) – an adversarial liability.
8. Our adversary, the devil, is walking about, seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet 5:7) – an adversarial liability.
9. The things of God are to be sought, and an affection developed for them (Col 3:1-2) – a

personal challenge.

10. We do not know what to pray for as we ought (Rom 8:26) – a personal liability.
11. Faith has constituted us strangers and pilgrims in this world (Heb 11:13; 1 Pet 2:11) – an environmental liability.
12. The flesh profits nothing (John 6:63) – a personal liability.
13. Spiritual life can only be lived by faith (Rom 1:17) – a personal challenge.
14. We must “walk in the Spirit” in order to avoid fulfilling the lusts of the flesh (Gal 5:16) – a personal challenge.
15. The flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh, producing a circumstance where we cannot do what we desire (Gal 5:17) – as personal liability.
16. While we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord (2 Cor 5:6) – an environmental liability.
17. In the world, because we are in Christ Jesus, we have tribulation (John 16:33) an adversarial liability.
18. We occupy a universe that is groaning in travail, waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God (Rom 8:19-21) – an environmental liability.
19. We are assaulted with fleshly lusts that war against the soul (1 Pet 2:11) – a personal liability.
20. The Holy Spirit that dwells within us “lusteth to envy,” desiring our affection and commitment (James 4:5) – a personal challenge.
21. We are in a situation that requires “striving against sin” (Heb 12:4) – a personal challenge.
22. One part of us – the “outward man” – is perishing, while the other part – the “inward man” – “is simultaneously renewed day by day” (2 Cor 4:16) – a personal liability.

Given these considerations, how can any professing “Christian” be casual toward God, inconsistent in their submission, tardy in their response, insensitive to Divine direction, enamored of pleasure, or immersed in the affairs of this world? What good can possibly come from such a posture?

This series of Lessons will confirm the antithesis of this kind of living.

## A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

Lesson 2 of 34

### AN ACTIVE ENVIRONMENT DEMANDS OUR OWN ACTIVITY

“For we are UNTO GOD a sweet savor of Christ, IN THEM THAT ARE SAVED AND IN THEM THAT PERISH: To the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things? For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ” (2 Cor 2:15-17).

“LIFE UNTO LIFE” is an aroma of life that leads to the revelation and promotion of life.

“DEATH UNTO DEATH” is the aroma of death that leads to the revelation and promotion of death – and both of those are a “sweet savor” unto God Himself. In other words, your life – “the

newness of life” – is either contributing to the life or the death of those to whom you are subjected. The godly life brings the present condition of those who see it to the surface. That kind of work is not for the army of counselors, but for those in whom Jesus is living. Obscure that life, or refuse to “let” your light shine (Matt 5:16), and you have taken away the influence God has given you in Christ Jesus. In that case you are NOT a “good and faithful servant” – and Jesus has made clear how those kind of people will be treated on the day of judgment (Matt 25:26-30).

It is arresting to consider. “We” – those in Christ – are “a sweet savor of Christ” . . . “UNTO GOD! That affectation is not upon men, but upon God. But here is the arresting consideration – in this case it does not emit from us personally, but from those we have influenced: “IN them that are saved, and IN them that perish.” That affectation confirms whether or not Christ is living in us! To me, there is too much talk about Jesus being in people, and too little evidence of such an indwelling.

It is abundantly apparent that we do not live in a spiritual vacuum. There are hostile forces around and within us. This is a circumstance in which lukewarmness and slothfulness are lethal! It is not possible to survive in such an environment without steadfastness and spiritual growth. While this may seem to be very obvious, it is equally apparent that the masses of American Christians do not entertain the faintest notion of this truth. The twins of shallowness and brevity are moving about within the professed church with no restraint whatsoever. In fact, they have been received with open arms. Modern Christianity is even being tailored to meet THEIR demands. This has produced new categories of “church people” – entertainers, motivators, professional musicians, counselors, youth ministers, family-life ministers, life coaches . . . etc, etc. All of this is especially tailored for those who do not have much time, and whose minds are nailed to the earth like Sisera’s head (Judges 4:21-22). I must admit that since passing four-score years of age, I am growing less and less tolerant of these conditions. They are robbing people, and nurturing them to be upbraided by King Jesus.

However, the surrounding of intense spiritual activity remains. In fact, the concessions of the modern church to rudimentary religion and momentary exposure to the truth confirm the nominal church has, in fact, been overcome – a state that can in no way be blended with God’s great salvation. To be overcome by the world from which Jesus has delivered us (Gal 1:4) reveals a condition that leads to condemnation. To be overcome by the world means that the means of overcoming it – faith – has been denied, rejected, and thrust to the side (1 John 5:4-5).

Notice how differently the Spirit speaks to us. In the midst of this remarkable activity, we are admonished “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12). In this kind of arena, we are exhorted, “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor 7:1). While we are in this world of teeming action, we must “fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life” (1 Tim 6:12). With all of the obstacles that are daily faced, believers are told to “run” to “obtain the prize,” and to not do so “uncertainly” (1 Cor 9:24-26). We are to engage hostile powers, wrestling “against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph 6:12).

There is need to be alert, “lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (Heb 3:12). Diligence must be exerted, “lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled” (Heb 12:15). Solemnly we are warned, “be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Heb 6:12).

Nothing in Scripture suggests that an “eternal inheritance” (Heb 9:15) can be obtained with a casual or cyclical effort. Eternal life is never held out to those unwilling to place their affection on things above, and seek them with all of their heart (Col 3:1-2). No one who is not ready will be admitted to “the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Rev 19:9). No one who is caught unawares by the returning Christ will hear a “Well done” from Him.

Therefore, whether or not we are a “sweet savor of Christ” to God is of critical importance. How people respond to us is a matter to be considered, for that response bounces back, so to speak, to God Himself. If the people influenced by you respond to you as they do to Christ Himself, an aroma is produced that is pleasant to God. Now, there is something to think about.

## A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

Lesson 3 of 34

### WHY SAY THESE THINGS?

“For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.”(Verse 17, 2 Cor 2:15-17)

No one who is not “ready” will be admitted to “the marriage supper of the Lamb” (Matt 25:10; Lk 12:40; Rev 19:9). No one who is caught unawares by the returning Christ will hear a “Well done” from Him (Lk 21:34).

Admittedly, this may appear to have little to do with our text. It may even appear to be a sort of religious wrangling about things that are not all that important. However, we must not allow such subversive thoughts to occupy our thinking.

The text before us will make no sense to the person who does not see these things. It is a passage that reflects the proper response to the kind of environment that has been described – one in which a pleasing fragrance of Christ is rising from those who are saved, and those who are perishing. It is not possible for it to find a place in the meditations of the uninterested. The institutional mind-set will tend to look at this text academically, finding in it nothing of contemporary relevance.

The Apostle is writing truth from a two-fold perspective. First, He is being moved by God to write ultimate truth – truth that reflects God’s “eternal purpose,” and expounds the life that is in Christ Jesus. Second, he is writing within the context of his own spiritual life. He is writing from the battlefield, as it was, amidst the fiery darts of the wicked one as well as the ministry of the Holy Spirit and angelic hosts. In his writing he is wrestling against principalities and powers as well as being strengthened and illuminated by the Holy Spirit. He is not writing a religious

textbook, or something designed to be a “best seller.” This is a communication that is essential to the stability of the saints in Corinth. He is speaking unto “edification, and exhortation, and comfort” (1 Cor 14:3). Too much of what is being said and written within the professed Christian community has other objectives.

This passage will serve to assist the saints in adjusting their vision, so they can see things properly. This is essential, for spiritual life cannot be lived out in the dark, or in a state of spiritual ignorance. Neither, indeed, can one live “unto Him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Cor 5:15) in a casual or haphazard manner. This should be apparent to the discerning heart, for our text speaks of the impact of the godly upon God Himself, as well as those to whom He speaks.

Today there is a crying need for the testimony of legitimacy – lives that confirm claims of identity with God through Jesus Christ. When Barnabas went to Antioch, it is written, “when he came, and had SEEN THE GRACE OF GOD, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord” (Acts 11:23). Every true servant of the Lord longs to encourage people to “cleave unto the Lord” – but to do so, there has to be some kind of evidence that the people are presently abiding in Christ (1 John 2:2-28), “looking” to Him as the “Author and Finisher” of their faith (Heb 12:2), living by faith (Heb 10:38), being “separate” (2 Cor 6:17), setting their affection on things above (Col 3:1-2), walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:16,26), putting on the whole armor of God (Eph 6:10-17), and loving not the world or the things in it (1 John 2:15-17).

Does anyone imagine that people can live in such a manner – a manner that has been mandated from heaven – and there be no evidence of it. If the kingdom of God is “based on not talk but power” (1 Cor 4:20, Amplified), is there no evidence of that “power?” That is why Paul said of some pretentious teachers that has corrupted the church at Corinth, “But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power” (1 Cor 4:19).

This is precisely why so much is affirmed in apostolic doctrine that has to do with confirming the presence of real life and Divine acceptance. God once said of Israel, “They have corrupted themselves, THEIR SPOT IS NOT THE SPOT OF HIS CHILDREN: they are a perverse and crooked generation” (Deut 32:5).

Some of us are convinced this is also true of much of the modern church – but we know our judgment is not guaranteed to be Divine or sure in this matter. So, we are declaring the evidences of genuineness – things God expects to be found in His people. We expect them also – first in ourselves, then in others. We do not apologize for what the Almighty says about His requirements, and what is to be found in those professing to know Him. As the Spirit moved Paul to write, “And that, knowing the time, that NOW it is high time to awake out of sleep: for NOW is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night IS far spent, the day IS at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light” (Rom 13:11-12).

A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

## UNTO GOD

“For we are UNTO GOD a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish” (Verse 15, 2 Cor 2:15-17)

There is an overriding consideration that dominates our perception of spiritual life. It is this: It is God Himself with whom we have to do! As it is written, “For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of HIM WITH WHOM WE HAVE TO DO” (Heb 4:12-13). Other versions read, “Him to whom we must give account” (NKJV), “the One to whom we must render account” (NRSV), and “God to whom we must explain all that we have done” (NLT).

From this precisely stated perspective, life in Christ Jesus is preparing us to give a satisfactory account to God. Ultimately, every person will confront the Living God, and the exalted Lord Jesus Christ – both of them in all of their glory. Then there will be no time allotted for the correction of our lives. The “day of salvation,” the time during which men could be saved, shall have ended. There will no longer be longsuffering, enduring vessels that are suited for destruction, or the initiative of mercy and grace. The “flesh” will be forever gone, and the moral and spiritual state of all men will be fixed. As it is written, “He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be” (Rev 22:11-12). At that time there will be an exceedingly large number of men confess, “The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved” (Jer 8:20) – and there will be no provision to do anything about that lamentable condition.

This is a confrontation that cannot be avoided. At that time, the wrath of God will be fully revealed against “all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men” (Rom 1:18). Then, God will be “justified in all” of His “sayings” (Rom 3:4), and every single soul who did not believe Him, ignored Him, contradicted Him, and sought to justify themselves, will be publicly, before an assembled universe, declared, and proved to be, “liars” (Rom 3:4). At that time, the righteous will receive “praise” from Him (1 Cor 4:5), and “enter into the joy” of their Lord (Matt 25:21,23).

Whatever men may choose to think about their life in this world, there will be a direct correlation of that life with the eternal destiny to which they are assigned. After all of the philosophical discussions have been held about the grace of God and the works of men, everyone will be judged “according to their works” (Rev 20:12-13). Every man shall “receive his own reward according to his own labor” (1 Cor 3:8). To state it even more succinctly, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad” (2 Cor 5:10).

It is not possible for any teaching, any perspective, or any view, to be right that does not take this ultimate circumstance into consideration. Wherever this is thrust into the background, error is brought into the foreground. Further, if men do not consider that they will give an account of themselves to God, and that this accounting will bear directly upon their eternal destiny, they will not be prepared for that time. Candidly, I must say that I do not believe there is a satisfactory interest in this within the professed church. For the most part, its programs do not require this kind of thinking. They are centered more in this world, than in the time and world that is to come.

There is an enormous amount of philanthropic and relief work being done by the church that does not apprise the people they are helping of these facts. A lot of “church members” rarely hear anything about what happens to men after they leave this world. A staggering investment of mental and financial resources are being poured into assisting people to live in this world, while withholding from them what living is really all about.

I am by no means suggesting that coming to the aid of the poor, supporting the weak, etc., is out of order. Of course, we are directed to “especially” consider the saints in such works, and then all others. As it is written, “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal 6:10).

If the church is, in fact, “the pillar and ground of the truth,” it must be apprising all men of what is coming: death, the end of the world, and the day of judgment. There is no acceptable excuse for failing to do this. As Paul told the supposed wise men of Athens, “Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: Because He hath appointed a day, in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom He hath ordained; whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised him from the dead” (Acts 17:29-31).

In all of this, the church – which Jesus likened to ten virgins – must be constantly aware of the appointed return of the Lord Jesus, the conclusion of time, and the shutting of the door of entrance into salvation (Matt 25:1-13).

## A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

Lesson 5 of 34

“WE”

“For WE are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish . . .” (2 Cor 2:15-17)

“For WE . . .”

The collective expression – “we” – is common throughout the epistles. It denotes a body of people who share the same characteristics, and are involved in the same kind of living. While

individualism is found in Christ Jesus, it is more toward the bottom than the top. When there is a legitimate connection with the Lord Jesus Christ, there is also one with everyone else who is in Him. That connection is personally profitable, and glorifying to both God and Christ.

Here, this phrase is a continuation of the thoughts expressed in the preceding verses.

1. God “comforteth US in all of our tribulation” 1:4a).
2. “WE ourselves are comforted of God” (1:4b).
3. Both the sufferings of Christ and the consolation of God “abound in US” (1:5).
4. Past, present, and future deliverance (1:10).
5. By the grace of God WE have lived in this world (1:12).
6. All the promises of God are “Yea and Amen” to the glory of God by US (1:20).
7. God “establishes US with YOU in Christ” (1:21a).
8. God has “anointed US” (1:21b).
9. God has “sealed US” (1:22a).
10. God has “given US the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts” (1:22b).
11. God always causes “US to triumph in Christ” (2:14).
12. God makes manifest the “Savor of His knowledge by US in every place” (2:14).

The particular reference is to Paul and Timothy. As the epistle begins, “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth” (2 Cor 1:1). However, as addressed in our text, the experiences of Paul and Timothy were not, and were not intended to be, unique to them. These are common experiences for all members of the “household of faith” (Gal 6:10), or “the household of God” (Eph 2:19).

In the epistles alone (Romans thru Jude), the pronoun “we” is used five hundred and eighty-six times, and “us” is used two hundred and sixty times. These speak of the commonality that is found among the saved. There may be different offices, but there are not differences of character. There may be diversities of gifts, but there is not diversity in the reason for, and focus of, living. In politics, careers, and the likes, individuality may be seen as primary. But in the Kingdom of God, the primary Individual is Jesus Christ, and the all important focus of life is living for, or “unto,” Him (2 Cor 5:15).

In our text, the general application is to all who are in Christ Jesus. Sufferings, comfort, establishment, anointing, sealing, the earnest of the Spirit, triumph, and the savor of the knowledge of God are NOT unique to Paul and Timothy, or to the Apostles. These are all common experiences within the “household of faith.”

Now, read the text again: “For WE are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one WE are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things? For WE are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak WE in Christ.”

A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

## Lesson 6 of 34

### “UNTO GOD”

“For we are UNTO GOD a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish”  
(Verse 15, 2 Cor 2:15-17)

The affects to be discussed in this text are directed toward God – “unto,” or “to God.” By Divine purpose, they are intended for Him – “for God” (New American Bible). This fragrance emits from us, and rises to God from those whom we have influenced (who are being saved, and those who are perishing). God is the ultimate One for whom this fragrances rises – not us, nor those we have influenced.

### THE CENTRALITY OF GOD

In redemption, the role of God the Father Himself is critical and absolutely central. This cannot be overstated. It is a great tragedy that God is not prominent in much of the preaching and teaching of our day. A brief perusal of the inspired doctrine on this point will confirm the unquestionable centrality of God in salvation.

1. A strong faith gives “glory TO GOD” (Rom 4:20).
2. In Christ we are “reconciled TO GOD” (Rom 5:10).
3. Having been raised with Christ, we are alive “UNTO GOD”(Rom 6:11).
4. We are to yield ourselves “UNTO GOD” (Rom 6:13).
5. We have become “servants TO GOD” (Rom 6:22).
6. We “bring forth fruit UNTO GOD” (Rom 7:4).
7. Our bodies are to be presented “a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable UNTO GOD” (Rom 12:1).
8. Every tongue “shall confess TO GOD” (Rom 14:11).
9. Every one of us will “give account of himself TO GOD” (Rom 14:12).
10. The one who serves Christ “is acceptable TO GOD” (Rom 14:18).
11. Through Jesus Christ, glory is given “TO GOD” (Rom 16:27).
12. In “the end,” Jesus will deliver “up the kingdom TO GOD, even the Father” (1 Cor 15:24).
13. Our trust is “through Christ TO GODWARD” (2 Cor 3:4).
14. We give thanks “UNTO GOD” for “His unspeakable gift” (2 Cor 9:15).
15. We have become dead to the Law that we “might live UNTO GOD” (Gal 2:19).
16. Jesus gave Himself as “an offering and sacrifice TO GOD” (Eph 5:2).
17. Those in Christ have turned from idols “TO GOD” (1 Thess 1:9).
18. We are to give diligence to present ourselves “approved UNTO GOD” (2 Tim 2:15).
19. Jesus is a “merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining TO GOD” (Heb 2:17).
20. Within the framework of the New and better covenant, we “draw nigh UNTO GOD” (Heb 7:19).
21. We are coming “UNTO GOD” through Jesus Christ. Who is making intercession for us (Heb 7:25).
22. We are to submit ourselves “UNTO GOD” (James 4:7).
23. Spiritual sacrifices are made “acceptable TO GOD by Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2:5).

24. Jesus “suffered for sins,” that He might “bring us TO GOD” (1 Pet 3:18).

In view of these plain affirmations, our text makes perfect sense. By objective, and by result, the impact of a godly life registers WITH GOD Himself. The Apostle is writing truth from a two-fold perspective. First, He is being moved by GOD to write ultimate truth – truth that reflects GOD’S “eternal purpose,” and expounds the life that is in Christ Jesus. Second, he is writing within the context of spiritual life itself. Christ in us will have an impact upon men – it will have an even greater impact upon GOD Himself.

Religious institutions framed by men tend to obscure God. Methods and techniques created by men that are designed for behavioral correction hide God. The traditions of men upstage God. The doctrines of men have no central place for God. Nevertheless, it is God “with whom we have to do” (Heb 4:13). Before we exit from this world, we must learn to live to God, through Christ, by faith, and in the Spirit. If that does not take place, it will not go well with us on the day of judgment.

The whole reason for Jesus Christ is God (Mk 1:1; Lk 9:20)! God sent Christ (Gal 4:4). God delivered up Jesus (Rom 8:32). God raised Christ from the dead (Acts 10:40). God exalted Christ (Phil 2:9). God gave all judgment to Christ (John 5:22). The reason behind salvation has to do with God. The ultimate choice is made by God (Psa 65:4; Eph 1:4; 2 Thess 2:13; 2 Tim 2:4; James 2:5; 1 Pet 2:4,9). The superior purpose belongs to God (Acts 26:16; Rom 8:28; 9:11; Eph 1:9,11; 3:11; 2 Tim 1:9; 1 John 3:8). The fundamental will is that of God (Mk 3:35; Acts 13:36; Rom 12:2; Gal 1:4; Eph 1:1; 1 Thess 5:18; Heb 10:36; 1 Pet 4:2). Eternal life is defined as knowing God, and Jesus Christ whom He has sent (John 17:3; 1 John 5:20).

May more be said about the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

## A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

Lesson 7 of 34

### A RELATIONSHIP THAT CANNOT BE EXPLOITED

“For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life.” (Verse 1, 2 Cor 2:15-17)

Our relationship to God is something that cannot be exploited by men. That is, it cannot be the means of personal worldly advantage. This is not so of human relationships. In this world, it is possible to develop expertise in various interpersonal relationships among our peers. Thus, within the professing Christian community there are purported specialists in marriage, raising children, maintaining good credit, the time of youth, business associations, miracles, dreams, gaining wealth, etc. There are even a number of “Christian” social empires that are built around these areas of self-professed expertise.

However, there is no system of worldly thought, training, or expertise that can cause one to be an expert in leading others to please God – or be a sweet fragrance to Him. That is something you cannot be “trained” to do. There is no “how-to” course of academic learning that can improve this aspect of your life – being a sweet aroma of Christ to God – all contrary claims notwithstanding. Furthermore, this is something that must be realized if men are to pass safely through the day of judgment. No one who has failed to be pleasing to God will hear the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matt 25:21,23).

To “walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing” is something men cannot teach. This is something for which men can pray (Col 1:10), but it is NOT something they can cause to happen. To be “followers of God as dear children” cannot be accomplished through carnal regimen or a list of rules. Men may be vainly admonished to do this, but there is no form of worldly expertise that can make it happen (Eph 5:2).

God has provided for effective instruction in this matter, and He will not allow any other approach to it to be successful.

## THE GRACE OF GOD

First, there is the grace of God, which not only “brings salvation,” but instructs us as well. As stated in Scripture, “For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, TEACHING US that, denying [rejecting] ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (Tit 2:11-13). Does any person of sound mind really think that men can come up with an effective way to otherwise accomplish these things? –i.e. 40 days of purpose, making oneself accountable to their peers, a daily regimen, a multi-stepped plan . . . etc, etc. It seems to me that such approaches can only be justified if the grace of God is proved to be deficient. I challenge any person anywhere to prove the grace of God does not effectively teach the children of God.

## THE GIFT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

God has given the Holy Spirit to those who have been baptized into Christ (Acts 2:38). This is chronicled to believers many times: “Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts” (2 Cor 1:22); “God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit” (2 Cor 5:5); “God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit” (1 Thess 4:8); “And hereby we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us” (1 John 3:24); “Hereby know we that we dwell in Him, and He in us, because He hath given us of his Spirit” (1 John 4:13).

The Holy Spirit has not come to merely be a silent and inactive Guest. He leads the believer in the subduing of fleshly lusts that war against the soul. Therefore it is written, “For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: but if ye THROUGH THE SPIRIT do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live. For as many as are LED by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Rom 8:13-14).

John also takes up this line of reasoning, informing us that the Holy Spirit teaches us in all

things, and that we have no need that any man teach what He teaches us. “But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things . . . But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing TEACHETH YOU of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as It hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him” (1 John 2:20,27).

Again, to develop and implement a plan or regimen that is said to aid the believer in successfully controlling life, maintaining morality, and growing in holy aptitude, is nothing more than an encroachment. The developer of such programs is “intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, and not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God” (Col 2:18-19). The phrase “not holding the Head” signifies that Jesus does not assist anyone in authoring such plans. To develop them, the person has to cease holding on to Christ!

As you might suppose, the view provided in our text is in sharp contrast with professional religion, which makes a place for men that is too large, and even unlawful. However, the text precisely reflects both the reality and nature of God’s “great salvation” (Heb 2:3). Read our text again. It is marvelous: “For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?” (2 Cor 2:15-16).

## A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

Lesson 8 of 34

### A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

“For we are unto God A SWEET SAVOR of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish.” (Verse 1, 2 Cor 2:15-17)

#### “A SWEET SAVOR”

Other versions read, “the fragrance” (NKJV), “the aroma” (NIV), “a sweet perfume” (BBE), “a sweet odor” (DARBY), “a good odor” (DOUAY), and “sweet fragrance” (YLT). Some versions accent the uniqueness of this aroma by using the article “the,” as though stressing the singularity of the word.

The words “sweet savor” are translated from a single word – (eu-od-ia). Lexically the word means “a sweet smell, fragrance, a fragrant or sweet-smelling thing, incense, an odor of acquiescence, satisfaction . . . a thing well pleasing to God” (THAYER), and “a pleasant or sweet-smelling aroma . . . acceptable to God” (LOUW-NIDA).

There is a lot in the word “savor.” It is like a spiritual prism reflecting a variety of rays. Divine approval is inherent in the word. There is also the concept of being pleasing to God, and being accepted by Him. To God Himself, the individual is a pleasant “savor”– delightful and satisfying.

The allusion here is to the interior of the Tabernacle, where there was a sweet and pleasant odor at all times. This was generated at the “altar of incense” on which a specially compounded incense was burned daily (Ex 30:1,8; 40:5). On the Day of Atonement, some of that incense was to be brought into the Most Holy Place so that a cloud of that odor would envelop the Mercy Seat (Lev 16:12-13). Thus we get the picture of the service of God being conducted in a fragrant and pleasing environment.

The concept of being pleasing to the Lord is found in Apostolic doctrine, and it is refreshing to consider. These references provide a contrast with the world of Noah’s day, that brought a termination to God’s longsuffering and striving. They contrast sharply with the effect the builders of Babel had upon God, as well as the citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah. The nation of Israel also provides an example of effects that were not savory. Instead, they provoked the Lord to anger, and moved Him to even abhor His own inheritance (Psa 106:40). In Christ, this whole circumstance is changed for the better.

1. **DEAR CHILDREN.** The idea of a “sweet savor” is found in the expression “dear children.” The people of God are admonished, “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children” (Eph 5:1). Other versions use the expression “beloved children” (NASB). It is our business to be “savory” unto the Lord!
2. **WELL PLEASING.** It is said of Israel, “with many of them God was NOT well pleased” (1 Cor 10:5). Those in Christ are reminded, “But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is WELL PLEASED” (Heb 13:16). It is our business to be well pleasing to the Lord.
3. **ALL PLEASING.** In the tabernacle, the savor of the sweet incense was to be found continually (Num 4:16). Similarly, the life of the believer is to be characterized by “ALL pleasing.” No part of the life is to be offensive to the Lord. “That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto ALL PLEASING, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God” (Col 1:10). It is our business to be pleasing to the Lord in every aspect of our lives.
4. **APPROVED UNTO GOD.** In Christ Jesus there is such a thing as being “approved of God.” While this is, in a sense, realized in justification, the believer is to pursue this status with zeal. “Study to show thyself APPROVED UNTO GOD, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15). It is our business to obtain Divine approval in our labors.
5. **ACCEPTABLE TO GOD.** While there is a general sense in which we are made “accepted in the Beloved” (Eph 1:6), there is a sense in which we labor that we may be “ACCEPTED of Him” (2 Cor 5:9). We are to present our bodies “holy, ACCEPTABLE to God” (Rom 12:1). It is our business to offer up spiritual sacrifices that are “ACCEPTABLE to God by Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2:5).

Those who are acquainted with the manner of the Kingdom of God will acknowledge there is much within the professed church that is not pleasing to God. Such circumstances are a contradiction to the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Let it be clear that salvation makes no provision whatsoever for NOT being pleasing to God!

This is one of the reasons for much of the exhortation found in the Epistles. Conditions had arisen within the church that were NOT pleasing to the Lord. Unless those conditions were

corrected, the future, for them, would have no blessing in it.

In Christ Jesus we are not governed by cold and heartless Law. Rather, we are brought into a filial relationship with God. That relationship brings satisfaction to Him as well as to us (Isa 53:11). It causes Him to joy, as well as ourselves (Zech 3:17). Delight is experienced by the Lord, as well as those He has delivered from the enemy (Jer 9:24).

More is involved than simply “doing the right thing,” or avoiding doing “the wrong thing.” In Christ Jesus God is taking out a people for His great Name (Acts 15:14). These are not a people like Israel, who continually provoked the Lord, honoring Him with their lips, while their hearts were far from Him (Isa 29:13; Matt 15:8). Rather, they are a people with a new heart and spirit (Ezek 36:26), who DO fulfill the word of Zephaniah: “He will rejoice over thee with joy; He will rest in His love, He will joy over thee with singing” (Zeph 3:17). Other versions read, “He will exult over you with joy” (NASB), and “He will take great delight in you” (NIV).

God has made full provision in Christ for a continuous sweet aroma to be rising to Him from the church collectively, and from every individual believer. It will not go well for those from whom this sweet aroma is not rising to God.

#### A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

“For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life.” (Verse 15, 2 Cor 2:15-17)

Lesson 9 of 34

#### AN IMPROPER EMPHASIS

A word ought to be said here concerning an inordinate emphasis on the unworthiness of man, or the fact that Divine benefits are undeserved. It is true that our deliverance from the power of darkness, and our consequent translation into the kingdom of God’s dear Son (Col 1:13), were not in the least owing to our own goodness or achievements. Salvation, or justification, is wholly by grace, and is completely undeserved on our part. Anyone who truly knows the Lord, and is living by faith, knows this is the case.

However, in salvation God works a very real change in man, so that he becomes a “new creation” in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 5:17), having been “born again” (1 Pet 1:23). The “new man” is, in fact, “created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph 4:24). He is “renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him” (Col 3:10). The “saved” person has been “made acceptable” to the very God he once offended (Eph 1:6), and is being “made the righteousness of God” in Christ (2 Cor 5:21). All such people “should be called the sons of God” (1 John 3:1).

It is wholly inappropriate to become tolerant of an “undeserving” condition in that situation. In fact, we are admonished to “WALK WORTHY of the vocation wherewith we were called” (Eph 4:1), “WALK WORTHY of the Lord unto all pleasing” (Col 1:10), and “WALK WORTHY of

God” (1 Thess 2:12). That is the kind of life that is a “savor unto God,” and it is to be expected from everyone who wears the name of Jesus. Walking in, or after, the flesh is never acceptable (Rom 8:12-13) – and that alone makes us “unworthy.” When Paul wrote, “For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God” (1 Cor 15:9), he was speaking of being an apostle, the first ranking members of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:28). He was not speaking of a continual condition that required continual repentance.

I approach this matter with sobriety, and the greatest of caution, lest I be misunderstood. When it comes to worthiness, none of it can be traced to our own persons or achievements. However, there is a very real spiritual status of being “worthy” in the eyes of God and Christ. That state is not a human achievement, but a conferment through the new creation. Jesus said of the faithful few in Sardis, a “dead” church, “Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white: for THEY ARE WORTHY” (Rev 3:4). Jesus also spoke of “they which shall be ACCOUNTED WORTHY to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead” (Luke 20:35). When addressing the matter of the coming destruction of Jerusalem, Jesus said, “Watch ye therefore, and pray always, that ye may be ACCOUNTED WORTHY to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man” (Lk 21:36). When the apostles were punished for preaching the Gospel, “they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were COUNTED WORTHY to suffer shame for His name” (Acts 5:41). Several times believers are admonished to “WALK WORTHY” (Eph 4:1; Col 1:10; 1 Thess 2:12). When addressing the matter of persecution Paul wrote, “So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be COUNTED WORTHY of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer” (2 Thess 1:4-5). He also wrote, “Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would COUNT YOU WORTHY of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of His goodness, and the work of faith with power” (2 Thess 1:11).

It is obvious that this worthiness is not a state the saints themselves have produced. That is why we read of being “ACCOUNTED worthy,” and “COUNTED worthy.” Walking, or living, in a worthy manner is living by faith (Heb 10:38), walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:16,26), and not grieving or quenching the Spirit (Eph 4:30; 1 Thess 5:19). It is walking in the newness of life (Rom 6:4), and “cleansing ourselves of all filthiness of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord (2 Cor 7:1).

There is a sanctifying influence in salvation itself that causes a person to be worthy in the sight of God – “made accepted in the Beloved” (Eph 1:6). This worthiness makes no allowance for personal boasting. But, when the effects of salvation are realized by faith, praise erupts from the hearts and mouths of the saints. There is certainly a humbling awareness of what we “were” (Rom 5:6,8; 6:17; Eph 2:5,12; 5:8; 1 Pet 2:25). But we can live in the greater glory of who we ARE in Christ Jesus: “a sweet savor of Christ” unto God! That is the clear result of what the Lord has done, and it is right to glory in it (Jer 9:24-25; 1 Cor 10:17).

## A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

## “OF CHRIST”

“For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish.”  
(Verse 15, 2 Cor 2:15-17)

Every major version reads the same (“of Christ”), with a single exception. The New Living Translation reads, “a fragrance PRESENTED BY CHRIST to God.” I do not believe this fosters a proper view. The believers themselves are the fragrance. This verse affirms the source of that fragrance, NOT the means by which it is presented.

Men become precious to God when Jesus is living in them. That is, when His life is being expressed through them. This is a conscious matter, and is not something that is accomplished within the believer independently of their intention and knowledge. Paul states it this way: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me” (Gal 2:20). Christ living in us results in “the savor of Christ.” We experientially enter into this by living in a very deliberate manner – a manner that is dictated by our faith, and directed by the Holy Spirit as we ingest the Word of God, by which we live. Elsewhere this purposeful manner of life is referred in a variety of different ways.00

1. It is living by faith (Gal 3:11).
2. It is walking by faith (2 Cor 5:7).
3. It is living in the Spirit (Gal 5:25a).
4. It is walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:25b).
5. It is living while looking at the things that are not seen (2 Cor 4:18).
6. It is patiently running the race set before us, looking unto Jesus (Heb 12:2).
7. It is presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice unto God (Rom 12:1).
8. It can also be viewed as resisting the devil (1 Pet 5:8), crucifying the flesh (Gal 5:24), mortifying the deeds of the body (Rom 8:13), and saying “NO!” to ungodliness and worldly lusts (Tit 2:12).
9. It is living in such a way as justifies the statement, “as He is, so are we in this world” (1 John 4:17).
10. It is walking in the newness of life (Rom 6:4).
11. It is living “unto Him” who died for us and rose again (2 Cor 5:15).
12. It is working out our own salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12).
13. It is cleansing ourselves of all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord (2 Cor 7:1).
14. It is living while seeking the things that are above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God (Col 3:1-2).

None of these things can be accomplished unintentionally, or without personal effort. They cannot be done seasonally, or sporadically. Further, salvation supplies in abundant measures everything that is required to actually do these things. They are part of the preparations that are required to be married to Christ (Rom 7:4; Rev 19:7), and to “ever be with the Lord” (1 Thess 4:17). One of the primary purposes of “the church” is to provide an environment where these things can be perfected and matured (Eph 4:11-16).

This kind of life emits a pleasing fragrance to God – the “savor of Christ.” Our lives are pleasing to the Lord when “the life” of Jesus is “made manifest” in their “mortal flesh.” As it is written, “Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest IN OUR BODY. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus’ sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in OUR MORTAL FLESH” (2 Cor 4:10-11). That is, when Jesus expresses Himself through our human capacities.

## A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

Lesson 11 of 34

### THE APOSTLES

“For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life.” (Verses 15-16, 2 Cor 2:15-17)

This was especially true of the Apostles, through whom the good knowledge of God has been made known. These have been set “first” in the church, having the priority over all other gifts: “And God hath set some in the church, FIRST APOSTLES, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues” (1 Cor 12:28). “And He gave some, APOSTLES; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers” (Eph 4:11). The church is built “upon the foundation of THE APOSTLES and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone” (Eph 2:20). Things never before known to the sons of men have now been “revealed unto his HOLY APOSTLES and prophets by the Spirit” (Eph 3:5). When it comes to “doctrine,” or teaching, the early church properly “continued steadfastly in THE APOSTLES’ DOCTRINE. . .” (Acts 2:42).

The teaching of every church should reflect that priority. Sadly, this is not generally the case. Most American “Christians,” as well as the majority of those converted by Americans, do not shape their understanding by the “apostles’ doctrine.” That (Romans thru Revelation) is generally the least known section of Scripture.

However, the “savor of Christ” cannot be limited to the Apostles, even though, because of their message, they are the highest ranking members of the body of Christ. The measure of the savor may differ, but the substance of it does not. Christ’s life is lived out in all of His people – the entire body of Christ. This is why the church is referred to as “THE FULNESS of Him that filleth all in all” (Eph 1:23). It is also said of those who are “born of God,” “And OF HIS FULNESS have all we received, and grace for grace” (John 1:16). Again, the saved are told, “Christ IN YOU, the hope of glory” (Col 1:27).

Jesus said, “If a man love Me, he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and WE WILL COME UNTO HIM, AND MAKE OUR ABODE WITH HIM” (John 14:23). It is this indwelling that is the cause of the “savor” that is pleasing to God. This does not refer to mere thoughts about Christ, but to Christ Himself, through the Holy Spirit, making His abode with men. This is a critical point of both apostolic doctrine and prayers. The glorious complexity of

this is made known in the Pauline statement, “For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, [in order] THAT He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man; [in order] THAT Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; [in order] THAT ye, being rooted and grounded in love, MAY BE ABLE to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; AND TO KNOW the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, [in order] THAT YE MIGHT be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:14-19). Compare that to the popular saying, “Ask Jesus to come into your heart” – a statement not found in Scripture. According to apostolic doctrine, Christ dwelling in your heart is accomplished after God strengthens you with might by His Spirit in the inner man. Then, Christ dwells in your heart “through faith.” That is the person from whom the savor of reference rises to God.

That is certainly an aggressive objective, and it cannot be achieved in a casual and sporadic environment where steadfastness in the apostles’ doctrine is not found. The truth of the matter is that there is a religious culture in the professing church that mandates spiritual sterility. Any group of disciples in which this sterility is not dominant, is always an exception to the modern rule. That simply means that the fragrance that is intended to emit to God in them that are saved and in them who are perishing is not found. The revealed objectives of God cannot be met because the means through which they take place are being ignored. That is serious, because the Lord Jesus Himself has made quite clear what God the Father will do with those who are not bearing fruit to Him (John 15:1-5).

When Christ lives within (Gal 2:20), that life produces a fragrance that rises to God Himself, and it is pleasing to Him. Every believer has a part in this glorious experience – the experience of being pleasing to God Himself. That is a provision received by faith through believing the Gospel that was originally preached by the apostles. No other message, regardless of its popularity and seeming success, can produce these results.

## A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

Lesson 12 of 34

### IN THEM THAT ARE SAVED

“For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, IN THEM THAT ARE SAVED . . .” (Verse 15, 2 Cor 2:15-17)

Other versions read, “those who are BEING SAVED” (NKJV/NASB/NIV/NRSV), “in those who are getting salvation” (BBE), “those BEING SAVED” (NLT/YLT).

### BEING SAVED

From the etymological point of view, the word translated “saved” is in the present passive voice, giving it the meaning of “BEING SAVED,” or in “the process of BEING SAVED.” However, we are not confined to strict language considerations for this view. Apostolic doctrine presents

salvation as something that is PRESENTLY BEING ACCOMPLISHED – not something that has been experientially finalized. It is disastrous to approach life in Christ as though as though it was already experientially perfected. It also requires dishonesty and a lack of understanding to hold such a view.

1. Jesus said those who forsook all to follow Him, for His sake “and the Gospel’s,” would receive eternal life “in the world to come” (Mk 10:29-30).
2. Those who through patient continuance in well doing, seeking for glory and honor and immortality, are promised “eternal life” (Rom 2:7).
3. Confirming that salvation has not yet been realized in its fulness, we are admonished to “work out” our own salvation “with fear and trembling.” This is to be done in the awareness that God is working in us “both to will and do of His good pleasure” (Phil 2:12-13).
4. Those in Christ are admonished to “lay hold on eternal life” (1 Tim 6:12).
5. The ones who “endure unto the end” will be saved (Matt 24:13).
6. Jesus is “able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:25).
7. In its fullest sense, salvation is “ready to be revealed” (1 Pet 1:5).
8. Our salvation is “nearer than when we believed” (Rom 13:11).
9. God has not appointed us to wrath, “but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess 5:9).
10. Those in Christ are referred to as those who “shall be heirs of salvation” (Heb 1:14).
11. We will be saved by Christ’s intercessory life. As it is written, “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life”(Rom 5:10).

As simplistic as it may sound, we are not in heaven yet! While we remain in the body, there is a sense in which we are “absent from the Lord” (2 Cor 5:6). We have not “already attained,” neither are we yet “perfect.” It remains for us to “apprehend that for which” Jesus has “apprehended” us (Phil 3:12-13). As one version reads “Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead” [NASB] (Phil 3:12-13). In other words, we are in the process of “BEING SAVED.”

We have become a new creation in Christ Jesus (2 Cor 5:17), but the change is not yet complete. This has been clearly revealed to us. We are daily being changed by the Spirit of God, and shaped into the image of Christ. This transformation is taking place to the precise degree that we behold the image of the Lord in the face of Christ Jesus. In other words, as we “look unto Jesus” (Heb 12:2), the Holy Spirit is transforming us into His image. This is taking place by degrees. In other words, it is a process in which certain progress is gradually being made. As it is written, “And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor 3:18, NRSV). Thus, we are “BEING SAVED.”

Those who are “being saved” are growing “in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Pet 3:18). They are pressing toward the mark (Phil 3:14), waiting and

looking for the return of the Lord (Matt 25:13; 1 Thess 1:10), resisting the devil (1 Pet 5:8), and perfecting holiness “in the fear of the Lord” (2 Cor 7:1). They are “BEING SAVED.” These are the people who are being “led by the Spirit” (Rom 8:13), are being brought “to glory” (Heb 2:10), and are running “with patience the race” set before them (Heb 12:2). They are “BEING SAVED.” They need an Intercessor in heaven (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25). They need an Intercessor within (Rom 8:26-27). They need the teaching of the grace of God (Tit 2:11-13). They are “BEING SAVED.”

Our text says that those in Christ “are unto God a sweet savor of Christ” in those who are “BEING SAVED.”

### A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

“For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish.” (Verse 15, 2 Cor 2:15-17)

Lesson 13 of 34

### A SENSE IN WHICH WE ARE SAVED

Although our salvation is not yet complete, or finalized (Rom 5:9-10; 8:23; 1 John 3:1-3), there is a firstfruits sense in which those in Christ are saved NOW. They have already been “delivered from the power of darkness, and translated into the kingdom” of God’s dear Son (Col 1:13). They have already been raised up together with Christ, and made to sit together with Him “in heavenly places” (Eph 2:6). Their names have been “written in heaven” (Heb 12:23). They are “in Christ” (Gal 3:28), and Christ is “in” them (Rom 8:10; Col 1:27). Now, they “should be called the sons of God” (1 John 3:1), even though there is more to be accomplished (2 Cor 5:1-3; 1 John 3:2). They have been “reconciled unto God” (Rom 5:10; Col 1:21). They have been “joined unto the Lord,” and are “one spirit” with Him (1 Cor 6:17). They have been “added to the Lord” (Acts 5:14), and are presently “joint-heirs” with Christ (Rom 8:17).

It is therefore written, “even when we were dead in trespasses, (God) made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) . . . For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God” (Eph 2:5,8). Those in Christ are told “ye ARE sanctified, but ye ARE justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11). They are reminded, “For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which ARE SAVED it is the power of God” (1 Cor 1:18). And again, “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; by which also ye ARE SAVED, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain” (1 Cor 15:1-2).

This salvation, however, is “by grace THROUGH FAITH,” and is only as sure as our faith. That is precisely why we are admonished to “fight the good fight of faith and lay hold of eternal life” (1 Tim 6:12), take “the shield of faith” (Eph 6:16), and “take heed . . . lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God” (Heb 3:12). From that perspective, we are BEING SAVED.” There is a part of us that has not yet been changed – our bodies. By

grace and the power of God, we can govern them (1 Cor 9:27), and present them to God as a “living sacrifice” (Rom 12:1-2). However, as long we have them, there is something about us that is not yet “saved” – even though we can have the blessed prospect of our bodies being saved – “changed,” like we were within (1 Cor 15:52; Phil 3:20-21; 1 John 3:1-3).

The “saints” (Rom 8:27; 1 Cor 14:33), or “the people of God” (1 Pet 2:10), have advantages that no other people on the face of the earth have. These are advantages that enable them to overcome the world (1 John 5:4-5), resist the devil (James 4:7), stand against the wiles of the devil (Eph 6:11), cleanse themselves “from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God” (2 Cor 7:1), “never fall” (2 Pet 1:10), can “obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16), and have “the comfort of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9:31). Angelic hosts minister to them (Heb 1:13-14), and their temptations all come with a custom made “way of escape” (1 Cor 10:13). Think of these marvelous advantages. Christ can “dwell in their hearts by faith” (Eph 3:16-17). The Holy Spirit dwells in them (Rom 8:9-11). God Himself dwells in them (2 Cor 6:16; 1 John 4:12,15,16). They have the means through which they can “comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God” (Eph 3:16-19). They possess a hope that is a stabilizing anchor for the soul (Heb 6:19). There is a very real sense in which they have already “come unto mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel” (Heb 12:22-24).

How does all of that stack up next to the horde of psychiatrists, counselors, advisers, life-coaches, and educators that have invaded the church? If they were not required to initiate the church, how can they possibly be employed to correct it? If you were to take all of the seemingly good things that they have, and put them together, how would they compare with what we have in Christ Jesus? What are they able to do that salvational resources cannot do? Why should any professing “Christian” or any group of “Christians,” like Israel, seek help from Egypt? If we are warned against “the world” (1 Cor 1:21; 2:12; Col 2:8,20; James 4:4; 2 Pet 1:4; 1 John 2:15-17; 5:4-5), how can we possibly receive valid and effective help from it in things that pertain to life and godliness?

The church must rid itself of all charlatans, opportunists, counselors employing worldly knowledge, and religious professionals. They have provided a door of entrance for the devil, whether willingly or in ignorance. If Satan is “the god of this world,” as God has affirmed (2 Cor 4:4), then the things of this world are the things he employs to seduce people, so they do not rely upon the God who created them and saved them.

## A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

Lesson 14 of 34

## A SAVOR IN THEM BEING SAVED

“For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish . . .” (Verses 1-2, 2 Cor 2:15-17)

What is the effect of the life of Christ within those who are faithfully preaching the Gospel, and in those who “are saved”? In particular, what is that effect upon God Himself, for the savor is “UNTO GOD”? It seems to me that there is very little these days being said about the effect of the lives of people (as well as the message being preached) upon God Himself. While men busy themselves in ensuring that people think well of them, they are advancing toward the day of judgment, when the effect they have had upon God Himself will be announced to an assembled universe.

Our text affirms that the aroma of reference is a “sweet savor” unto God – something that is pleasant and satisfying. Keep in mind, the savor of reference is emitting from the ministers of the Gospel – “WE are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved” (NKJV). The rendering “in them that are saved” is to be understood as “in the presence of,” rather than within the individuals being saved. As one has said, “In spreading the fragrance of Christ the preacher himself becomes fragrant” (PLUMMER). The fragrance emitting from the proclaimer of the Gospel also comes upon those who embrace that Gospel, and shape their lives by it.

Allow me to be more particular on this point. The “savor of Christ” is referring to the knowledge of Christ that is made known through the real Gospel that is being preached, and experienced by believing that Gospel. This is confirmed by the previous verse: “Now thanks be to God who . . . THROUGH US diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place” N (2 Cor 2:14).

Now, Paul is elaborating on the words “in every place.” This is not limited to geographical locations – although it can be seen from that perspective, as in Corinth, Ephesus, Thessalonica, etc. Here the Spirit speaks of “in every place” as among two classes of people – those who ARE “being saved,” and those who ARE “perishing.” Now, those who are “being saved” are particularly considered.

Envision a group of people who are “being saved.” From among them, a sweet smelling fragrance is rising to God. Tracing the fragrance, you find it is coming from a particular individual. That person is preaching and expounding the Gospel of Christ – the “record God has given of His Son” (1 John 5:10-11). He is so ministering that God, through his preaching, is “making manifest the savor of His knowledge.” The hearers are coming into an acquaintance with the Living God – and they are growing and advancing in that acquaintance. God is known among the people because of the message that is being preached – the message through which God works, bringing the people to know Himself. It is a message which is said to be “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom 1:16). The people have not been shaped by a routine, or a program, but by as message! Their works are not what made them what they are, but the message they have believed.

In our text, Paul says he and Timothy, who had labored among the Corinthians, “are” the aroma. In this case, the aroma is not the praise rising from the assembly. It is not what is conceived to be their worship. It is not even their prayers. Rather, the sweet and pleasing fragrance is coming from the ones who are delivering the Gospel, which is “the power of God unto salvation.” It is

the activity of making Christ known that causes the fragrance itself.

One will be hard pressed to establish that God is well pleased with any body of people who are “being saved” where the Gospel is not being affirmed and expounded. If the means of the saving knowledge of God is withheld, there can be no pleasing aroma to God. If the message of His Son is not absolutely preeminent, a certain offensive stench begins to form – and it is the stench of spiritual death. Where the apostolic doctrine of Jesus Christ Himself is not being preached, no pleasing aroma to God is even possible. The aroma is not produced by doing good deeds in the community, or championing a political persuasion, or even rescuing people from the streets. The aroma of reference is originally emitting from Christ, then from those who faithfully declare Him, then from those who believe that message and live accordingly.

Every church, or congregation of professing believers, is emitting some kind of aroma to God. If their lives and teaching correctly reflect Jesus Christ as He is presented in the Gospel, the aroma is sweet and pleasing to the Lord. It has actually come upon the people because of the ones who brought the message to them. The aroma is produced by the Gospel itself, which is the means of making Christ Jesus known. In our text, it first emits from the one who declares and expounds the Gospel, then coming upon the ones who believe the message and live accordingly.

I can only speak for the geographical areas with which I am familiar. I have found that very little is known about what is actually being preached in the average congregation. In fact, the thrust of many congregations has been changed from preaching to a basic musical format. The people call it “praise and worship,” but that is their definition. The lives and understanding of the people lead one to believe they are, like the Jews of Jesus’ day, honoring God with their lips, but their heart is far from Him (Matt 15:8; Mk 7:6). The people are the result of what they have heard and embraced.

When dealing with flawed churches, this is precisely how the apostles approached defective living. They traced it back to what the people had been taught (2 Cor 11:3; Gal 1:6-9; Col 2:8; Jude 1:4). After identifying the problem, Paul would expound the Gospel again, declaring not only what it IS, but what it produces when it is heartily embraced.

May it be our objective that, while we are “being saved,” the proclamation and remembrance of Christ is regularly found among us. Let those who speak in the name of Christ, preachers and teachers, prophets and exhorters, be noted for their clear and concise proclamation of Jesus Christ! Jesus must be proclaimed and known. When, and only when, that takes place, a pleasing aroma will rise to our God.

## A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

Lesson 15 of 34

### IN THEM THAT PERISH

“For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To

the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life.” (Verse 1, 2 Cor 2:15-17)

“ . . .and in them that perish.” Other versions read, “among those who are perishing” (NASB/NIV/NRSV), “in those who are going to destruction” (BBE), “those perishing” (NLT), and “those being lost” (YLT).

There is a category of people who “ARE PERISHING.” In this text, these are people among those to whom the Gospel has been preached – people who have rejected that Gospel, not receiving the atonement. These are individuals among whom a sweet savor is rising to God – a “savor of Christ.” It is not accruing to their benefit, but it IS bringing glory to God. It is not to their advantage, but is glorifying to Christ Jesus.

### THEY ARE PERISHING

The language is strong, jarring the soul: “them that perish,” or “them that ARE perishing.” Who are those who “ARE PERISHING?”

The Scriptures approach this in a variety of ways, leaving no doubt as to the identity and present destiny of these people.

1. **WRATH IS UPON THEM NOW.** “He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son SHALL NOT SEE LIFE; but THE WRATH OF GOD ABIDETH ON HIM ” (John 3:36). Jesus does not say the love of God abides on such a person, but the wrath of God. He says they shall not see life, and the wrath of God is abiding upon them. That is their current state, and the only way out of it is to “believe on the Son.” It is as though those who ARE PERISHING are walking under a cloud of Divine wrath, and ready to fall into the bottomless pit at any moment.

2. **CONDEMNED ALREADY.** “He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not IS CONDEMNED ALREADY, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18). Condemnation is not a condition that will begin following the day of judgment. Those who refuse to believe on the Son of God are in a state of condemnation already. Again, the only escape from this status is to believe on the Son of God.

3. **JUDGED THEMSELVES UNWORTHY.** “Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and JUDGE YOURSELVES UNWORTHY of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46). According to this word, those who refuse to act upon the Gospel have excluded themselves from eternal life. Again, the only remedy is to believe on the Son of God.

4. **DO NOT KNOW GOD OR OBEY THE GOSPEL.** “And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance on them that KNOW NOT GOD, and that OBEY NOT THE GOSPEL of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess 1:7-8). Those who have no acquaintance with God – who are not familiar with Him and knowledgeable of His ways – ARE perishing, and God will take

vengeance upon them. The same is true of those who do not obey the Gospel. These “ARE perishing,” and God will take vengeance upon them. Once again, the only escape from that condition, it to believe on the Son, obey the Gospel, and come to know God.

5. **DEAD IN TRESPASSES AND SINS.** “And you hath He quickened, who were **DEAD IN TRESPASSES AND SINS**” (Eph 2:1). Spiritual deadness involves a lack of sensitivity to the Lord, an inability to perceive His truth, and not having ears to hear what He is saying. Such people are, in fact, “perishing,” and are not even considered “a people” to God (1 Pet 2:10).

6. **WALK ACCORDING TO THE COURSE OF THIS WORLD.** “Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience” (Eph 2:2). Those whose lives are lived in harmony with the manner of this world – who are friends with it, think like it, and live for it, “ARE perishing” – now. They are under the control of Satan, professed “free will” not withstanding. The only escape from this “are perishing” status is to flee to Jesus for refuge, and lay hold on the hope God has set before men (Heb 6:18).

7. **ALIENATED FROM THE LIFE OF GOD.** “Having the understanding darkened, being **ALIENATED FROM THE LIFE OF GOD** through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart” (Eph 4:18). To be alienated from the life of God means more than merely not having it. This means there is a hostility between God and man – a hostility that cannot be resolved outside of Christ. This alienation is the result of not knowing God, and causes one to enter the state of “perishing.” Again, the only escape from this status is found in being joined to the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 6:17).

8. **ENEMIES IN THE MIND.** “And you, that were sometime **ALIENATED AND ENEMIES IN YOUR MIND** by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled” (Col 1:21). From the heavenly perspective, the individual who thinks contrary to God can only work wickedness. Such a person **IS** “perishing.” The only way out of that condition is realized in believing on the Son.

9. **NO HOPE AND WITHOUT GOD.** “That at that time ye were **WITHOUT CHRIST**, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, **HAVING NO HOPE, AND WITHOUT GOD IN THE WORLD**” (Eph 2:12). When a person has no hope – hope that extends beyond the passing of this world – they “ARE perishing.” When God is not for them, working all things together for their good, they “ARE perishing.” Again, that condition can be escaped, only through faith in Christ.

10. **NOT A PEOPLE, AND HAVING OBTAINED NO MERCY.** “Which in time past were **NOT A PEOPLE**, but are now the people of God: which had **NOT OBTAINED MERCY**, but now have obtained mercy” (1 Pet 2:10). Those whose sins remain unforgiven, and who have not been born again, have **NOT** obtained mercy, for mercy accomplishes both of those necessities (Heb 8:12; 1 Pet 1:3). Therefore, they “ARE perishing.” Only by obeying the Gospel can one come out of that condition.

11. **SERVANTS OF SIN.** “But God be thanked, that ye were **THE SERVANTS OF SIN** . . . For when ye were **THE SERVANTS OF SIN**, ye were free from righteousness” (Rom 6:20).

Such people do not think they are serving sin, but they are. Whoever does not serve God, does serve sin. When sin dominates a person or people, they “ARE perishing.” AGAIN, ONLY PARTICIPATING IN THE SALVATION OF God can change that situation.

12. AS SHEEP GOING ASTRAY. “For ye were as SHEEP GOING ASTRAY; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls” (1 Pet 2:25). Those who experience a greater and greater distance forming between them and God – those who are wandering without knowing where they are going – are, in fact, “perishing.” They are in a hopeless condition, with the distance between them and the “Judge of all the earth” (Gen 18:25) growing greater and greater. Jesus is the only One who can bring them back to God!

Our text is viewing those who “are perishing” within the context of their exposure to the Gospel. It is not considering the “lost” as a whole. Carefully hear what the apostle says, “For we are to God the fragrance of Christ . . . among those who are perishing.” He does not mean believers merely lived among the perishing, or that they walked among them. He is referring to preaching among them – delivering the message through which God Himself makes “makes manifest the savor of His knowledge,” or “spreads everywhere the knowledge of Him” [NIV] (v 14).

Like it or not, the sweet aroma Christ, as reflected in those who are alive in Him, rises up to heaven from those who “are perishing,” in spite of their rejection of the Gospel. Through those who “are saved” the real status of those people has been revealed. Their need for Christ has been revealed. The effectiveness of salvation has been set before them, and their rejection of it has confirmed how truly great that salvation is.

Faithful ministers of God inform the lost of their condition – and it is not a good one. Until they realize that condition, the Gospel has no meaning to them at all.

## A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

Lesson 16 of 34

### THE REAL SITUATION

“For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things? For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.” (2 Cor 2:15-17)

There is a very real situation that exists where the Gospel of Christ is preached. Remember, the Gospel of Christ “IS the power of God to salvation” (Rom 1:16). As that Gospel is preached, the Holy Spirit goes to work, convicting of sin, righteous, and judgment (John 16:8). That is, He will cause a sense of guilt to arise because they do not believe on Christ. He will work to make the hearers feel the fact of the righteousness of Christ Himself, who, though rejected by the world, was received back into heaven by the Father. He will also work to convict the hearer of the judgment and condemnation of the devil, who is the “god of this world” (John 16:9-11).

This means that all other righteousness is feigned, and is not real. It is nothing more than “filthy rags” (Isa 64:4). Thus, the Spirit’s ministry, through the Gospel, uproots men from trust in self, confirming they are guilty of sin, have no righteousness of their own, and are serving a defeated “prince” – “the prince of the power of the air” (Eph 2:2).

Couple this convicting ministry of the Spirit with the announcement of full provision for sinners. It is the convicting work of the Holy Spirit that makes the Gospel such good news. It announces liberty from the tyranny of the devil and the effects of sin. Jesus said it this way: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He hath anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:19).

This Gospel announces there is a “righteousness from God” that may be obtained by faith (Rom 1:17). Boldly it declares that “through His name whosoever believeth in Him shall receive remission of sins” (Acts 10:43). And again, “by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:39).

The Gospel places this salvation within the reach of inquirers by promising those who repent and are baptized in the name of Christ will receive remission of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). They will be “saved” from all the effects of sin (Mark 16:16; Acts 16:31). It further affirms that Jesus has been “exalted” with God’s right hand to give “repentance” and “remission of sins” (Acts 5:31). It also declares “your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19).

Now, what of the person who rejects this message, choosing to remain in the state from which God has offered deliverance? Is such a person in any sense innocent? Are they merely pondering whether or not this is the right thing to do? Is that how they are to be viewed? When a person does not embrace the Gospel, obeying from the heart the form of the doctrine delivered to them (Rom 6:17), does God look kindly upon them? If they do not believe the record He has given of His Son, how does God view the matter? We are not left to conjecture on this point. “. . . he that believeth not God hath made Him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son . . . and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life” (1 John 5:10-12).

The modern church has been too casual about this whole matter. With all of its training and orientation programs for seekers, it has been diverted to a path strewn with thorns and thistles. By tailoring its gatherings for seekers, it is actually neglecting the means by which men are saved – the “Gospel of Christ.” The truth of the matter is that there is no such thing as a seeker who does not find. That is an impossible scenario. Jesus Himself affirmed with power, “For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (Matt 7:8).

The finding is not dependent upon some initiative launched toward the seeker by men, and do not think for one moment that this is the case. The exalted Jesus is still the Seeker He declared Himself to be when He walked among men (Lk 19:10). When HE finds a genuine seeker, He sends one of His servants to declare the Gospel, and usher them into the Kingdom of God. This

took place when a heavenly messenger directed Philip to an Ethiopian eunuch who was a seeker (Acts 8:26-39). It took place when the Lord directed Paul and those with him to go to Macedonia, where they would find seekers (Acts 16:9-10). It happened when the glorified Christ directed Paul to stay in Corinth because “I have much people in this city” (Acts 18:10). Even when Jesus was with His disciples, He directed them, “Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that HE WILL SEND forth laborers into HIS harvest” (Matt 9:38). Apostolic doctrine teaches, “How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, EXCEPT THEY BE SENT? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!” (Rom 10:14-15). Paul further affirmed of truly successful Gospel preachers, “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as THE LORD GAVE to every man?” (1 Cor 3:5).

The church is not in charge of the reaping, and must not proceed as though it was. There is the “Lord of the harvest,” and He directs His servants where to go. If all of this seems a bit mystical – the fact that the Lord Jesus is really “the Head of the body” (Col 1:18) – then the person must “come up higher” (Rev 4:1; 11:12), where the spiritual environment is pure, and the obscuring cloud of sectarianism cannot be found. When men actually begin walking with the Lord, capitalizing on the fellowship of Christ, into which they have been called by God (1 Cor 1:9), they will find their paths intersecting with real seekers, who will be glad to hear the message of the Gospel.

In the meantime, the Gospel is to be preached “to every creature,” or “everyone” (NLT). When it is preached, “seekers” will believe, and those who are not “seekers” will not believe. If you are familiar with Scripture, you know that neither Jesus nor the apostles remained among those who refused to believe. Now, there is something to think about.

## A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

Lesson 17 of 34

### BEING MORE PRECISE

“For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life.” (2 Cor 2:15-16)

When the Gospel is preached, “seekers” will believe, and those who are not “seekers” will not believe. If you are familiar with Scripture, you know that neither Jesus nor the apostles remained among those who refused to believe.

Allow me to be more precise on this matter. Where the Gospel, the means of accomplishing salvation, is not being declared, nothing pleasing is rising to God from among men. But where that Gospel is, in fact, being faithfully declared, even where it is rejected, a pleasing aroma rises to God from those who have proclaimed it. That is what our text is saying. Further, there is no

time in the life that is in Christ Jesus when the Gospel is irrelevant, or the preaching of it is no longer required. It is “the power of God unto salvation” – salvation as it is referenced to believers:

1. “. . . now is our SALVATION NEARER than when we believed” (Rom 13:11).
2. “. . . in the day of SALVATION have I succored thee” (2 Cor 6:2).
3. “And take the helmet of SALVATION . . .” (Eph 6:17).
4. “. . . work out your own SALVATION with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12).
5. “For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to OBTAIN SALVATION by our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess 5:9).
6. “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great SALVATION . . .” (Heb 2:3).
7. “For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make THE CAPTAIN OF THEIR SALVATION perfect through sufferings” (Heb 2:10).
8. “So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin UNTO SALVATION” (Heb 9:28).
9. “Who are kept by the power of God through faith UNTO SALVATION ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Pet 1:5).
10. “Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we SHALL BE SAVED from wrath through Him” (Rom 5:9).
11. “For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we SHALL BE SAVED by His life” (Rom 5:10).

If the experience of being saved has not yet been finalized, then how can “the power of God UNTO salvation” no longer be required? Our salvation shall NOT be complete until we receive a new body in the resurrection (Rom 8:23; 2 Cor 5:1-5; Eph 1:14), have been safely gathered to the Lord (Lk 3:17), have safely exited the body and passed through the judgment (Heb 9:27), and are “ever with the Lord” (1 Thess 4:17). While we are in the world, the heavenly maintenance of our salvation is realized by Christ’s intercession (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25), and mediation (1 Tim 2:5). Without those two appointed ministries, the “saved” state could not be maintained.

The core of the Epistles is really the preaching of the Gospel – the affirmation of what the Lord Jesus has and is accomplishing–i.e. Rom 5:1,6,8,11,15-21; 6:9-11; 8:1-34; 15:3-5; 1 Cor 1:30; 2:2; 5:7; 15:12-20; 2 Cor 4:4-5; 5:14-20; 8:9; Gal 2:20; 3:13; 5:1; Eph 1:17-20; 2:5-7,13; 5:2; Phil 2:5-11 . . . etc).

In the case of those who “are perishing,” their rejection of the Christ has confirmed their perishing condition. That condition was not discovered by some kind of human diagnosis. It was not the result of an analysis of the human psyche by some worldly-wise man. Rather, it was made known by their rejection of the message which announced salvation, the remission of sins, the provision of righteousness, and an indwelling Spirit. Although the Holy Spirit worked to show them their condition, they thrust His testimony aside, choosing to retain their own way of thinking and living. The testimony of the truth is found in the Gospel itself, and the confirmation of its effectiveness is lived out in the saints.

God is glorified when His Son discovers the real state of men! It is not that their condemned

state pleases God – it does not. It is “the savor of Christ” that pleases Him. In particular “the savor of the knowledge of Him” that is so sweet to Him. The fact that His messengers embraced the message pleased Him. He was pleased that they saw the implications of that message, and availed themselves of the abundant provisions it announced. A sweet aroma ascended to God when they declared that message – even in the face of hostility and opposition.

A sweet aroma went up to God from Stephen, and from those who stoned him, when he stood among God’s enemies and was put to death. When, because of his faithful preaching, Paul was beaten five times with forty stripes and three times with rods, and when he was stoned, a sweet aroma arose to God from among those who were perishing. The origin of the aroma did not come from the perishing ones, but from the one who did not fail to make the truth known among them.

When the Gospel is preached among those who “are perishing,” the sharp contrast between the saved and the lost is at once made known. Then we are faced with the offense of the cross to the lost (Gal 5:11), and the preciousness of it to the saved (Gal 6:14). That circumstance confirms that the proclaimer, who knows the Lord, is really a stranger and pilgrim in this world (1 Pet 2:11). It verifies that such are not of this world, just as Jesus was not of it (John 8:23; 15:19; 17:14,16). It validates their claim of citizenship in heaven (Phil 3:20).

That is something of what is involved in a sweet savor rising from the faithful when they are “among those who are perishing.” It rises from them because they declare the Gospel of Christ with their mouths, and live it out in their daily lives.

## A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

Lesson 18 of 34

### A SAVOR OF DEATH UNTO DEATH

“For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life.” (Verse 16, 2 Cor 2:15-17)

“ . . . To the one we are the savor of death unto death . . . ” The Spirit now elaborates on the sweet savor that rises to God from those who know Him, who are proclaiming the Gospel among those who “are perishing.” This is not a contemporary way of thinking, and it therefore will require some personal discipline of thought to properly consider it. We are being exposed to Kingdom thinking and manners of expression. Just as Samuel told the people the manner of a kingdom under an earthly king (1 Sam 10:25), so Paul is showing us the manner of “the kingdom of Christ and of God” (Eph 5:5).

### A SAVOR OF DEATH

Paul has already declared that the messengers of the Gospel are a sweet fragrance of Christ unto God. Now he will show us that they also emit a fragrance among men, and that fragrance is not always seen as “sweet” and pleasant.

## “TO THE ONE”

“To the one . . .” Other versions read, “to the latter” (NAB), and “for these last” (NJB). Here is how the messengers are viewed by those who are “perishing.” The individual’s view of the message is said to be their view of the messengers as well. The message of the bearer of glad tidings cannot be despised without despising the messenger who brought it.

Ultimately, this is seen in the Lord Jesus. He clearly stated that the rejection of what He said constituted the rejection of His Person, and God the Father as well. “He that REJECTETH ME, AND RECEIVETH NOT MY WORDS, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day.” (John 12:48). And again, “Jesus cried and said, He that believeth on Me, believeth not on Me, but on Him that sent Me” (John 12:44).

## “WE ARE”

“To the one we are . . .”

The savor, or aroma, that is being expounded is not rising from the perishing. It is not coming from those who are dead in trespasses and sins. It is coming from the ones who are bringing “glad tidings of good things” (Rom 10:15): “WE ARE the savor. . .”

The point here is that the condition of the perishing is confirmed by their refusal of the “glorious Gospel of the blessed God” (1 Tim 1:11). The status of the damned is ratified by their failure to believe the Gospel, and by their attitude toward the messengers as well.

Ponder some of the responses of those who were “perishing” to the bearers of good news from God. Of Jesus they said, “He hath spoken blasphemy” (Matt 26:54), “This man is not of God” (John 9:16), “we know that this man is a sinner” (John 9:4), “Why doth this man thus speak blasphemies? who can forgive sins but God only?” (Mark 2:7), and “Now when the Pharisee which had bidden Him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This Man, if He were a Prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth Him: for she is a sinner” (Luke 7:39). They also said, “How can this man give us His flesh to eat?” (John 6:52).

Consider a few examples of how those who were “perishing” spoke of faithful messengers.

1. Of Stephen they said, “We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God” (Acts 6:11), and “This Man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law” (Acts 6:13).
2. Of Paul and Silas they said, “These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans” (Acts 16:20-21).
3. Of Paul they said, “This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place” (Acts 21:28). And again, “For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a

mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes” (Acts 24:5). Some said that he taught, “Let us do evil, that good may come?” (Rom 3:8).

In all of these texts, the reproach was heaped upon the messengers. They were emitting a fragrance to their hearers, but it was not viewed as pleasant. For those who are eager to reach the lost, maintain that eagerness, but know that their response to the Gospel identifies them most precisely. When they reject the message by not believing and embracing it, the sweet aroma of the messenger which rises unto God, also makes known the condemned state of those who reject the message. As that same sweet aroma touches the rejecters of the Gospel, it is described as “it is an aroma [wafted] from death to death [a fatal odor, the smell of doom]” (AMPLIFIED).

In the case of these people, the message of Jesus made them fall. Simeon alluded to this when he prophesied to Mary, the mother of Jesus. “this Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against” (Luke 2:34). Peter taught the same thing when he wrote, “Unto you therefore which believe He is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENCE, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed” (1 Peter 2:7-8).

The saints of God are not seeking for people to be condemned, and God is not looking for a reason to condemn them. We have a glorious message to deliver to every creature under heaven. But be it known that “he that believeth not shall be damned” (Mark 16:16), “is condemned already” (John 3:18), and “the wrath of God abideth on him” (John 3:36). That is the savor of “death unto death.” a wonderful and glorious message, delivered by those who themselves have embraced it, thus becomes the means to solidify the condemnation of every person who rejects that message. Now, there is something to think about.

## A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

Lesson 19 of 34

### “A SAVOR OF DEATH”

“For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life.” (Verses 15-16, 2 Cor 2:15-17)

“ . . . the savor of death . . . ” Other versions read, “aroma of death” (NKJV), “an aroma from death” (NASB), “the smell of death” (NIV), “a fragrance from death” (NRSV), “odor of death” (NAB), and “we are a fearful smell of death” (NLT).

To those who “are perishing” the bearers of the Gospel are like the stench of a dead body. What they say is not only viewed as irrelevant, but is offensive as well. This confirms that the carnal mind is, indeed, “enmity against God,” or “hostile toward God” [NASB] (Rom 8:7). When the

Gospel itself is viewed as offensive nonsense, and its messengers held in disdain, we are being exposed to the aggressive antagonism of the carnal or worldly mind. Thus the aroma that emits from the child of God, is itself offensive to those rejecting the Gospel. But as that aromas is reflected off those very rejecters, they themselves become an offense unto God.

## RESPECTABLE RELIGION

We are living in a time when religion is viewed as respectable by those who have no sustained interest in the things of God. As a consequence of this environment, the message of the Gospel is actually being rejected by many who are wearing Jesus' name. When that message is expounded in their presence, they say that it is too deep, or perhaps not relevant, or even too serious. The cry is for things that are more mundane, more earthy, and less convicting.

Let us not be deceived by the veneer of religious culture. Our text is stating the case as it really is. When those who declare the "whole counsel of God" are placed to the side in favor of a more palatable message, they are really being perceived as having "the savor of death." All of this may conveniently be ignored, perhaps by feeding the multitudes, or engaging in other charitable works. We do well to follow Jesus in such deeds. When He had fed the multitudes, He put the truth squarely before them. He did so with such firmness that "many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him" (John 6:66). To them, He had the "savor of death" – even after He had fed their bellies.

## THE OTHER SIDE

There are two sides to the Lord Jesus: two ministries, and two effects of His Person and words. Hear the word of Simeon to Mary: "Behold, this Child is set for THE FALL AND RAISING AGAIN of many in Israel; and for a sign which shall be spoken against" (Luke 2:34). Again, the word of Jesus is also fulfilled: "And whosoever shall fall on this Stone shall be broken: but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder" (Matt 21:44).

The very words of Jesus – words that announced salvation – will judge the unbelievers in that day: "He that rejecteth Me, and receiveth not My words, hath One that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). The "words" that Jesus spoke were not words of condemnation, but a message of salvation. Immediately preceding this statement, Jesus said, "I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on Me should not abide in darkness. And if any man hear My words, and believe not, I judge him not: for I came not to judge the world, but to save the world"(John 12:46-47). Thus, the very message that offered hope in this world, will bring condemnation in the world to come to those who rejected it. Those who refuse to accept this message cause a fragrance of death to rise to God. That is, the message of God's great salvation becomes the very means by which they will be condemned.

Jesus is not only a "Foundation Stone," but a "Stumblingstone" as well – a Stone of stumbling. As it is written, "This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner . . . As it is written, Behold, I lay in Zion a stumblingstone and rock of offence . . . Unto you therefore which believe he is precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the

stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient” (Acts 4:11; Rom 9:33; 1 Pet 2:7-8).

The Lord Jesus becomes a “Stone of stumbling” to those who consider His messengers to have the smell of death upon them. Such people push Jesus aside, refusing to build their lives upon Him and what He said. To them He is an offense, and His Word intolerable and worthless.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the pivotal point upon which the eternal destiny of all men is determined. That destiny involves either being “joined to the Lord” (1 Cor 6:17), or being “punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power” (2 Thess 1:9) – and God is glorified by both determinations.

## A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

Lesson 20 of 34

### “UNTO DEATH”

“For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savor of death unto death . . .” (Verse 16, 2 Cor 2:15-17)

“ . . . unto death . . .” Other versions read “leading to death” (NKJV), “of death and doom” (NLT), and “an aroma [wafted] from death to death [a fatal odor, the smell of doom]” (Amplified).

When the Gospel is heard and rejected, it compounds the dilemma of the unbeliever. Not only is he “dead,” but his condition leads to a certain death that is even worse – the “second death” (Rev 2:11; 20:6,14; 21:8), from which there is no recovery. For the one who does not believe, there are, as it were, wafts from the Abyss – the dreadful odor of death. It is noxious. It is poisonous. It worsens the condition of the unbeliever. Woe to the person who imagines that such people can be rescued from their dilemma by a neatly organized study. The Spirit speaks of “pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh” (Jude 1:23) – and even that is to be done “with fear,” lest the attempted rescue end up defiling the proposed rescuer.

When the Gospel is believed, the powers of heaven are set in motion,. When it is not believed, the powers of hell enter into the matter. The Gospel of Christ is “THE POWER OF GOD unto salvation.” If that Gospel is not believed, there is no other effective power to save – not a plan, not kindness, not professed love and concern!

We read that sin leads to death: “sin hath reigned UNTO death . . .” (Rom 5:21); “Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin UNTO DEATH” (Rom 6:16). The “motions of sin,” or their expression in words and deeds, are said to “bring forth fruit UNTO DEATH” (Rom 7:5). John spoke of a sin that was “UNTO DEATH” (1 John 5:17).

But this is not the focus of this text. Here there is a SAVOR that leads to death – like breathing a poisonous gas. The person breathing the fumes is, technically, already “dead in trespasses and sins” (Eph 2:1). However, that death is not the ultimate death. A person can be raised from death in trespasses and sins by believing the Gospel of Christ. However, the “UNTO DEATH” of our text is one from which men cannot recover.

Let me be clear about the message of this text. When the messenger of the Gospel is viewed as though what he said requires no response from the hearer, the hearer is pushed closer to hell – closer to the lake of fire that is reserved for the devil and his angels (Matt 25:41; Rev 20:15). If this sounds serious, believe me when I say that sound is not serious enough. There is such gravity in the words of the Gospel, that they demand an immediate response. Hesitation to respond tightens the grip of death in sin, and moves one closer to the “second death” which is yet to come.

There is a sense of urgency in the Gospel itself. The first time Stephen spoke to the Sanhedrin, he discerned their hardness and said, “Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which showed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it” (Acts 7:51-53). That is not how he started his defense, but when he saw the message was being rejected, he changed his tone.

Upon the basis of a first time rejection in Antioch of Pisidia, Paul said, “It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles” (Acts 13:46).

I am by no means encouraging hasty judgment, or a lack of gentleness and forbearance. I am saying it is time for discernment, Divine direction, and Divine power. Sin must be addressed as a most serious matter – not a hurt, hangup, or habit. Pointing men to such things as generational curses and “addiction” are actually ploys of the devil. The “weapons of our warfare” are not obtained in the schools of human wisdom. It is time to take hold of those weapons and be found aggressively “pulling down strong holds; Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ” (2 Cor 10:4-5).

There is a condition that leads to irrevocable death – “the savor of death unto death.”

## A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

Lesson 21 of 34

### DIVINE DETERMINATION

“For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life. And who

is sufficient for these things? For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.” (2 Cor 2:15-17)

There is also a note of Divine determination in this text. While it is imperative that this matter be approached with great fear and reverence, it is equally imperative that we consider it.

The words “death to death” were first written by Jeremiah the prophet. His use of the phrase pertained to certain judgments and chastisements that were to come. However, the language itself provides a sort of index to certain aspects of the Divine nature. The text is found in Jeremiah 43:11. “And it shall come to pass, if they say unto thee, Whither shall we go forth? then thou shalt tell them, Thus saith the LORD; Such as are for death, to death; and such as are for the sword, to the sword; and such as are for the famine, to the famine; and such as are for the captivity, to the captivity” (Jer 15:2). Some of the later versions clarify the remarkable strength of this expression.

1. “And it shall be that when they say to you, ‘Where should we go?’ then you are to tell them, Thus says the LORD: “Those destined for death, to death; And those destined for the sword, to the sword; And those destined for famine, to famine; And those destined for captivity, to captivity.” (NASB/NIV/NRSV)

2. “Whoever is marked for death, to death; whoever is marked for the sword, to the sword; whoever is marked for famine, to famine; whoever is marked for captivity, to captivity.” (NAB)

In our text, the meaning of the phrase is that those who remain in a state of death are appointed to the second death. We know from Scripture that there is a point, known only to the Lord, from which a recovery from death is impossible (Heb 6:4-6; Heb 10:26; 2 Pet 2:20-21). However men may choose to speculate about this condition, it is very real. It has been clearly articulated by the Holy Spirit, and is to be taken seriously. The ONLY way to avoid the condition is to have your life “hid with Christ in God” (Col 3:3) – a state that is to be deliberately and zealously maintained.

God DOES speak of people who have been ordained to condemnation. “For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ORDAINED TO THIS CONDEMNATION, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ” (Jude 1:4). Other versions read, “marked out for this condemnation” (NASB), “designated for this condemnation” (NRSV), and “the fate of these people was determined long ago” (NLT).

God is said to “make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor” (Rom 9:21). There is such a things as “vessels of wrath fitted to destruction,” or “objects of wrath – prepared for destruction” [NIV] (Rom 9:22). This is traced to Divine discretion: “Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honor, and another unto dishonor?” (Rom 9:21). Peter also speaks of those who are “disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed,” or “which is also what they were destined for” [NIV] (1 Pet 2:8). There are also those of whom it is written, “their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep” [NASB] (2 Pet 2:3).

To be sure, this is not a subject for human speculation. The inspired words that address it, however, are to be taken seriously and believed. There is no need to apologize that these words are in Scripture, or to avoid them, pretending they are not there. God has revealed this about Himself, and it is to be believed. It is not said to create doubt, but to promote “reverence and godly fear” (Heb 12:28), “soberness” (Acts 26:25). It is intended to move men to purposefully “give diligence to make your calling and election sure” (2 Pet 1:10).

Whatever it takes to distance ourselves from the category of “death unto death” is to of done, and done NOW. That action, in a sentence, is to embrace the Gospel wholeheartedly, obeying it, and being saved by it. We are to highly regard the messengers of this word as did the Thessalonians: “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which EFFECTUALLY WORKETH also in you that believe” (1 Thess 2:13). A word that is preached and believed that does NOT work effectively in the believer, is NOT the Gospel – whatever men may say.

Those who view faithful messengers of God as though their word was not important are like those who breathe noxious fumes that will put them to death. They are moving into a category of people God has appointed to condemnation. I hardly see how anything can be more serious than this! As “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15), it is the church’s business to make this known. The “savor of death” leads into death. When those who preach the Gospel are viewed with disdain, the grip of death tightens on the individual. That is simply the way it is.

## A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

Lesson 22 of 34

### A SAVOR OF LIFE UNTO LIFE

“For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life.” (Verse 16, 2 Cor 2:15-17)

“ . . . and to the other the savor of life unto life.”

The effect of the message and the messenger upon those who are “being saved” is also declared. I want to underscore that these are not possibilities or mere probabilities. What we are reading is what DOES occur. It is the manner of the Kingdom. This is how the messengers of the Gospel effect those who believe the word they deliver. These are messengers that are “sent” from God (Rom 10:15), and “given” to men by God (1 Cor 3:5).

### “A SAVOR OF LIFE”

“ . . . and to the other the savor of life . . . ” Other versions read, “aroma from life” (NASB), “the fragrance of life” (NIV), and “life-giving perfume” (NLT).

Jesus said of those receiving the ones He sent, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth Me; and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me” (John 13:20). This is not how it should be, this is how it IS! Boiled down to its essence, in order for life to be promoted by the Gospel, THE HEARER MUST SEE JESUS AS GOD SEES HIM. The Gospel is, after all, “the record that God gave of His Son” (1 John 5:10-11).

The hearer must be “well pleased” with the Savior announced by the Gospel – AS GOD IS (Matt 3:17; 17:5). He must be “satisfied” with the travail of His soul, which was for the sins of the world – AS GOD IS (Isa 53:11). The hearer is required to “love the Son,” and commit everything into His hands – AS GOD DOES (John 3:35). When the messenger is a “savor of life” – perceived as bringing a message of life to the hearer – these responses will be evidenced.

We have a record of people who smelled the “savor of life” when the message of the Gospel came to them. That record is like an exposition of holy messengers being perceived as “the savor of life.”

1. “And it came to pass, that, when Jesus was returned, the people GLADLY RECEIVED HIM: for they were all waiting for Him” (Luke 8:40).
2. “Then they that GLADLY RECEIVED HIS WORD were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls” (Acts 2:41).
3. “Howbeit many of them which HEARD THE WORD BELIEVED; and the number of the men was about five thousand” (Acts 4:4).
4. “But WHEN THEY BELIEVED Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women” (Acts 8:12).
5. “And it was known throughout all Joppa; and MANY BELIEVED in the Lord” (Acts 9:42).
6. “And when the Gentiles heard this, THEY WERE GLAD, and glorified the word of the Lord: and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed” (Acts 13:48).
7. “Therefore MANY OF THEM BELIEVED; also of honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few” (Acts 17:12).
8. “And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, BELIEVED ON THE LORD with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing BELIEVED, and were baptized” (Acts 18:8).
9. “And many that BELIEVED came, and CONFESSED, and showed their deeds”(Acts 19:18).
10. “And my [Paul’s] temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but RECEIVED ME as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus” (Gal 4:14).
11. “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, YE RECEIVED IT not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1 Thess 2:13).

How is it that such marvelous responses were realized? It was because the messengers were the “savor of life” to the people – those who were “being saved.” Their message was perceived as good, and worthy of embrace – and that message did, indeed, produce the life of which the messengers gave evidence. There was a sweetness to their words, a sense of imminent blessing – seasons of refreshing (Acts 3:19). Faith and hope came to those who believed that message, and it was mingled with joy and peace.

## A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

Lesson 23 of 34

### THE THESSALONIANS

“For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life.” (Verses 15-16, 2 Cor 2:15-17)

The Thessalonians heard Paul preach, and he was unto them “the savor of life.” Here is how their response is described. “For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1 Thess 2:13). The messengers were to them “the savor of life.” What they preached left the right impression on the Thessalonians, and powerfully motivated them to respond in a way that glorified God, confirmed the truth of the Gospel, and provided a sterling example of its power unto salvation.

Keep in mind, Paul and company were not with the Thessalonians for a lengthy period, as he was in Corinth (Acts 18:9-11), and Ephesus (Acts 20:31). He was there for only three weeks (Acts 17:1-2), and then had to leave because of the fierce opposition his presence stirred up (Acts 17:5-10). Yet, in that brief period of time, the savor of Christ was wafted into their presence by the preaching of the Gospel, and it proved to be “unto life.”

When Paul wrote his second letter to the Thessalonians, the “savor” was still at work among them: “We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth; So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure: Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer” (2 Thess 1:3-5). What is even more, their response revealed both the choice and work of God: “But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth: Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Thess 2:13-14).

### THE GALATIANS

In the beginning, the Galatians also received the Gospel in a commendable manner. This was true even though the messenger came to them when infirm in the flesh – anything but appealing to those who are of this world. “Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first. And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus” (Gal 4:13-14). Paul was, to them, “the savor of life.”

The “savor of life” awakens the soul, bringing sensitivity to God and an awareness of the jeopardy of remaining in sin. Blessed are the people who hear messengers with such a savor as this! In Galatia this was neutralized when false teachers came among them, through whom there was no savor of life unto life. In fact, Paul affirmed those reprehensible teachers moved them to be “removed from Him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel” (Gal 1:6).

It is still true that many “Christians” have had to overcome what they were taught in order to enjoy the rich things of God, and sit at the table of salvation, which is described as “a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined” (Isa 25:6) Paul spoke of this spiritual bounty as “all spiritual blessings in heavenly places (Eph 1:3). Peter described it as all things that pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Pet 1:3). Those are things that come under the category of “savor of life unto life” – abundant life! If these things are not present, either the Gospel has not been preached, or it has not been believed. Let us be clear about this: a worldly church is emitting the stench of death.

## A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

Lesson 24 of 34

### “UNTO LIFE”

“For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life.” (Verses 15-16, 2 Cor 2:15-17)

“. . . unto life.” Other versions read, “leading to life” (NKJV/NJB), and “that leads to life” (NAB), and “a life-giving perfume” (NLT).

The word translated “unto” is a primary preposition, and of great significance in Scripture. It is translated from a Greek word that has a very wide application. Its root meaning denotes an “entrance into, or direction, or limit: into, to, toward, for, and among” (THAYER). Other lexical definitions are “denoting motion toward a place and moving to” (FRIBERG), “denoting purpose, and sometimes result” (Newman), and “in the direction of” (LOUW-NIDA).

The “savor of life,” therefore, is like a kind of door leading into life – eternal life. It is like a road that takes us in the direction of life. The purpose for this “savor” is the obtaining and nurturing of spiritual life. This life is begotten, but that life does not conclude with being begotten, it must be nurtured, or maintained. That life must be brought to maturity, and the Gospel contributes to that end. That is why those who preach it are, to those who are “being saved,” “the savor of life” that leads into a deeper, mature, and productive spiritual life. That is how “newness of life” is intended to develop. Where spiritual life is not maintained, it eventually fades away. It is “eternal” in that it blends with, and prepares for, eternity. But the experience of eternal life cannot be maintained in a state of stagnancy or dormancy. No person can maintain fellowship with God and Christ (1 John 1:3; 1 Cor 1:9) without growing up into Christ.

The Gospel is calculated to produce and sustain spiritual life. When it is proclaimed and

believed, life – life toward God – will invariably be the result. That is involved in it being “the power of God unto salvation” (Rom 1:16). You cannot take heed to the Gospel and become dead toward God. Conversely, you cannot embrace it without becoming dead to the world. It is no wonder that those in Christ are said to be saved by the Gospel, if they keep it in memory (1 Cor 15:1-3).

Lest anyone be led to the conclusion that maturity of life is a kind of option for the professed believer, let this be clear: spiritual life that does not mature will die. It is like the life of a seed sown among thorns and thistles. Eventually it is viewed as futile, bearing no fruit. Jesus said such people only “believe for a while,” and in time of temptation “fall away” (Luke 8:13). The professing church has done a miserable job in establishing this in the hearts and minds of the people, even though the church is the Divinely appointed “pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15). Its neglect in this area is reprehensible and inexcusable.

## LIFE GODWARD

The “life” of reference is basically Godward – “alive UNTO GOD” (Rom 6:11). Thus Paul wrote of this appointed objective: “that I might live UNTO GOD”(Gal 2:19). And again, “For whether we live, we live UNTO THE LORD” (Rom 14:18). This kind of life advances in understanding, perception, godliness, and power.

There is also an association of the messenger with God Himself. This life involves being “alive from the dead” – from death in trespasses and sins (Rom 6:13; Eph 2:1). In fact, deliverance from the condemning Law is said to be in order that we “might live UNTO GOD” (Gal 2:19). Death, in this case, is a lack of response to God.

Spiritual life involves sensitivity to the Lord – being able to hear Him who is speaking “from heaven” (Heb 12:25). It includes being able live in this world while “seeing Him who is invisible” (Heb 11:27). This is life that compels one to “seek the things that are above, where Christ sits on the right hand of God” (Col 3:1). It moves the tender soul to set their affection “on things above, and not on things on the earth” (Col 3:2). Such persons run the race set before them, all the while looking unto Jesus, “the Author and Finisher” of their faith (Heb 12:1-2).

To “live unto God” embodies presenting our bodies a “living sacrifice” unto Him (Rom 12:1). It includes hearing what the Spirit is saying “to the churches” (Rev 3:22). A person who is “alive” yields themselves “unto God” (Rom 6:13), yielding their “members servants to righteousness unto holiness” (Rom 6:19).

The truth of the matter is that some preachers make us more cognizant of God. Others make us more aware of this world and ourselves. The latter have nothing whatsoever to do with life, and have no utility for spiritual good among the people. They are institutional men who have nothing more than academic credentials or, at the best, some form of worldly expertise. There is no place for such people in the vineyard of the Lord – no place at all!

## A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

Lesson 25 of 34

### REAL PREACHING PRODUCES REAL LIFE

“For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things? For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.” (2 Cor 2:15-17)

Our text is speaking about preachers – real preachers. That is, those who are “sent” by God into His harvest (Matt 9:38; Rom 10:15), and given to the people (1 Cor 3:5). Because of their message, they emit a pleasing fragrance both to God and to those who are “being saved.” Their message causes spiritual growth and maturity as well as the new birth. It promotes spiritual advance and sensitivity toward God.

A message that does not produce and sustain spiritual life is not Gospel. It is spurious and damaging, even though it may appear harmless. It is “another gospel,” and is to be treated with absolute disdain. The people of God are to allow the person bringing such a powerless message to be “accursed” – be he man or angel. As it is written, “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, LET HIM BE accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, LET HIM BE accursed” (Gal 1:8-9).

The acid test of a message is what it produces in those who receive it. If it produces life in those who embrace it, the “savor of life” is upon the messenger who brings it – both before God and its recipients.

If the messenger brings a message that God uses to enable people to “grow up into Christ in all things” (Eph 4:15), both God and the people detect the “savor of life” upon the messenger.

All of this may appear quite inconsequential until you ponder the state of the average modern American church. Suddenly you become aware that there is actually more spiritual death in it than life. Responsiveness to God and tenderness of heart before Him are the exception, not the rule. Such things as “counting all things but loss” (Phil 3:8), “pressing toward the mark” (Phil 3:14), and running the race with patience (Heb 12:2) are most unusual – and in some churches these things appear to be altogether absent.

Such things as being “strong in the Lord” (Eph 6:10), resisting the devil (James 4:7), fighting the good fight of faith (1 Tim 6:12), standing against the wiles of the devil (Eph 6:11), shining as lights in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation” (Phil 2:15), being steadfast and unmoveable (1 Cor 15:58), not grieving the Holy Spirit (Eph 4:30), not quenching the Holy Spirit (1 Thess 5:19), being “rooted and built up” in Christ (Col 2:7), etc., are NOT at acceptable levels in the average church. Growing up into Christ in all things, even though it is the revealed objective for every believer (Eph 4:15), is exceedingly rare. Affections that have been set on things above are

becoming more and more tenuous in the churches. There is a marked propensity to brevity and entertainment – neither of which were at all prominent when the church began.

Within every individual and every congregation, either life or death has the supremacy. People are either “being saved,” or “are perishing.” It is the desire of God, and every minister of God, for the people to have life – life unto God – to flourish and mature to His glory. Anyone who is even casually acquainted with the truth of God knows that these things are true.

The thing that must be considered is WHY these inferior and unacceptable conditions exist. It is certainly not because the Gospel has been faithfully preached and embraced, for the record God has given of His son cannot produce such conditions. Paul assessed the Corinthian situation and boldly affirmed they had embraced “another Jesus,” “another gospel,” and “another spirit” (2 Cor 11:4). He appraised the Galatian churches and said they had left God to embrace “another gospel” (Gal 1:6). Jude evaluated those to whom he wrote and concluded that while they were asleep opportunists had crept in “unawares” (Jude 1:4). Paul warned the Colossians about some man spoiling them “through philosophy and vain deceit” (Col 2:8). He told the believers in Rome to “mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them” (Rom 16:17). He warned Timothy of a time when the characteristics of a sinful world would be found within the churches, and admonished him, “Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away” (2 Tim 3:1-5).

Why were such things said, and even embalmed in print? It is because a powerless message produces a spiritually impotent people, while the Gospel, when embraced, produces a people that are pleasing unto God. Where – anywhere – spiritual life is at an unacceptable level, some lie has been embraced as though it was the truth. The truth of God will simply not produce inferior and halting “Christians.” It will neither produce nor encourage ignorance, but will always produce a sweet aroma of Christ in those who preach it, and those who believe and embrace it.

## A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

Lesson 26 of 34

### WHO IS SUFFICIENT FOR SUCH THINGS?

“And who is sufficient for these things?” (Verse 16b, 2 Cor 2:15-17)

Other versions read, “who is adequate for these things?” (NASB), “who is equal to such a task?” (NIV), “who is enough for such things?” (BBE), and “Who is qualified for this?” (NAB)

The word translated “sufficient” means “sufficient, competent, with sufficient power, a match for, equivalent to, adequate, and large enough” (THAYER). Other lexical definitions are “fit, worthy, and qualified” (FRIBERG), and “able” Neuman).

This is a rhetorical question, and the answer is obvious. The thought is that no one, of himself, or through natural means is adequate for the task of distinguishing between the living and the dead.

By nature, no one is adequate to the task of preaching Christ so as to promote spiritual life and the knowledge of God. This is not something a person can be “trained” or educated to do, and those who attempt such a thing are foolish.

The truth of the matter is that satisfactorily executing the office of a minister of God is something that requires more than nature can deliver. Nature, in any form, cannot produce the “savor of life” and “the savor of death.” It is not possible for any form of human wisdom to contribute so much as one weightless mote to spiritual life. Neither, indeed, is it at all possible for the wisdom of this world to enable one to distinguish who is alive unto God and who is not. It simply is not possible. No word originating with man can awaken a soul that is dead in trespasses and sins, nor can any person of himself contribute to the sustaining of spiritual life. No person, however learned, disciplined, and gifted, is capable of, or sufficient for, such things. The effectiveness of salvation is wholly in the hands of Jesus. All things have been placed in His hands, and Jesus knew it. As it is written, “Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from God, and went to God” (John 13:3).

The modern church, with all of its external trappings, academic advancements, and scientific know-how, is making no advancement in the sufficiency of reference. Armed with its arsenal of human wisdom, it is only contributing to spiritual decay and death. It has so blurred the lines between godly and ungodly, that the difference can scarcely be detected by the average person. While the church has been commissioned to “make disciples,” their work is only effective if it is directed by the glorified Christ, who is in total charge of that operation.

Later in this very book Paul will speak of this sufficiency – and it is in the same context of life. “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but OUR SUFFICIENCY IS OF GOD; who also hath MADE US ABLE MINISTERS of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life” (2 Cor 3:5-6).

#### ABLE MINISTERS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Note, Paul does not say they were made “able ministers” of the plan of salvation, but of “the new testament.” And what is the “new testament?” It is the promised “new covenant” – “I will put My laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to Me a people: and they shall not teach every man his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know Me, from the least to the greatest. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more” (Heb 8:10-12).

An “able minister of the new testament” is one whose ministry results in these promises taking place. The people produced are in agreement with God, and think after His manner. They know the Lord, are acquainted with His ways, and live in fellowship with Him. Their sins and iniquities have no more dominion over them, for they have been forgiven. Where these results are not found, there has been no effective ministry. Where churches have to set up programs to teach people how to live–i.e. How to have successful marriages, how to raise children, how to lead a disciplined life, etc., an effective ministry has NOT taken place. No matter how successful

their professed ministers may appear, they have not been effective as God intends. Either they delivered a spurious message that God did not support, or they have been ministering to people who have willingly remained alienated from God.

There is a competency that can only come from God! Paul affirmed they had been made “faithful ministers of the new covenant.” The Corinthians had a good start, and were doing well UNTIL incompetent ministers were allowed in their ranks – men that preached “another Jesus,” “another gospel,” and “another spirit” (2 Cor 11:4). God did not support their ministry, so those who submitted to it went backward instead of forward.

Thanks be unto God that there are men whom He has made adequate! It is our business to know who they are.

The circumstance of incompetent ministers, whom God has not made sufficient, accounts for much of what is being paraded before us today in the name of the Lord.

## A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

Lesson 27 of 33

### CORRUPTING THE WORD OF GOD

“For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.” (Verse 17, 2 Cor 2:15-17)

The Gospel may seem to lend itself to corruption among those who are perishing. It is not because of any inherent weakness or flaw in it. Rather, God has designed it in this way in order to make charlatans the better known. Such men feel they can alter and tweak the Word of God to suit their own fancy. Salvation is so designed that these false teachers can be readily discerned by those who walk in the Spirit. We have been given the Holy Spirit in order to unveil their pretensions (intentional or not), and enable us to abide in Christ Jesus (1 John 2:27).

### “NOT AS MANY”

“For we are NOT as many . . .” Other versions read, “we are not as SO many” (NKJV), “we are not like many” (NASB), “Unlike so many” (NIV), “we are not as THE many” (ASV), “we do not, as the many” (DARBY), and “we are not like the many” (NAB).

The article “the” is in the Greek text, meaning that Paul is referring to a single group of people who have one thing in common – they corrupt the Word of God. What a trait!!

The word “many” means “many, multitude, numerous, and great. It is equivalent to abundant and plenteous” (THAYER). Paul is not speaking of a few theological renegades here and there. Already, the religious opportunists had swelled into a vast multitude, moving across the religious landscape like covetous hucksters, using the Word of God as a mere commodity and religious novelty – something to promote their own careers and agenda. That generation of teachers

continues to this very day.

#### “CORRUPTING THE WORD OF GOD”

“. . . which corrupt the Word of God . . .” Other versions read, “peddling the Word of God” (NKJV/NASB), “we do not peddle the Word of God for profit” (NIV), “peddlers of God’s Word” (NRSV), “make use of the Word of God for profit” (BBE), “make a trade of the Word of God” (DARBY), “adulterating the Word of God” (DOUAY), “make merchandise of the Word of God” (GENEVA), and “those hucksters – and there are so many of them – who preach just to make money” (NLT).

The word “corrupt” is translated from a word (kap-aal-eu-on-tes), which means “to be a retailer, to peddle, to make money by selling anything . . . to try to get gain by teaching divine truth – to corrupt, to adulterate; peddlers were in the habit of adulterating their commodities for the sake of gain” (STRONG’S). Lexically, The word means “to be a retailer, to peddle, to make money by selling anything; to get sordid gain . . . to trade in the Word of God” (THAYER), “a petty retail merchant who sells deceitfully, hawk, peddle, to be a huckster; peddling the Gospel for personal gain, adulterating the Gospel” (FRIBERG), “peddle for profit” (Neuman), “to engage in retail business, with the implication of deceptiveness and greedy motives – to peddle for profit, to huckster” (LOUW-NIDA), “to sell by retail . . . playing tricks with life, corrupting it (LIDDELL-SCOTT).

There are several key ideas in this word, and all of them are well summarized in the word “corrupt.”

1. Making a business out of dealing with the Word of God.
2. Seeking personal gain in the Christian arena.
3. Interpolate the Word of God in such a way as to promote personal profit.
4. Twisting and watering down the Word of God so that it suits one’s personal objectives.

Personally, I do not care for the representation of peddling to gain a profit. That is really not the point of the text. The point being made is that in order to do that – seek to gain profit by peddling the Word – an attempt must be made to distort and manipulate the Word itself, for nothing in the Word of God can possibly promote such a motive. Further, when you ponder the religious (“Christian”) empires that exist in our time, with massive assets and real estate, and ministers with annual salaries approximating and even exceeding a million dollars, you realize this text is certainly applicable to our time. In order to realize the objective of making money by using the Word of God, a person must corrupt, distort, misrepresent, falsify, and interpolate that Word. A deliberate attempt must be made to make the Word of God serve men – men in the flesh, and in this world. At the time Paul wrote this letter, a little past the middle of the first century, there were already “many” doing this.

This is a remarkable text of Scripture. It reveals how false and corrupting teachers crept into the church in the middle of the first century, less than forty years after the day of Pentecost. They were like the deceptive merchants that still line the streets of the third world countries, hawking their wares with deception – cheating and deceiving the people in order to line their own pockets

with silver. There were, and still are, religious professionals who see in the Word of God something they think can be turned to personal worldly advantage.

However, the Word of God cannot be exploited in this manner. You cannot gain financial or worldly advantage by dealing with the Word of God – even though multitudes of modern religious hucksters are teaching that you can. The Word of God is “the sword of the Spirit” (Eph 6:17), and He is interested solely in the will of God, not the prosperity of men! Men “live by every word of God” (Lk 4:4) – not in the flesh, but in the spirit, for “the flesh profiteth nothing” (John 6:63).

Therefore, when men seek to use the Word of God for personal gain, they must, in some way, corrupt it, for there is nothing about the Word that promotes such self-interests. Perhaps they will put their own ideas into the Word, and call it a translation – like the New Living Translation, The Message, or the New World Bible. They may choose to add their comments to the Bible, and call it a “Study Bible,” “Woman’s Bible,” “Student’s Bible,” “Soul-winners Bible,” or even one that bears their own name – all under the cover “Holy Bible.” Of course, these are more modern innovations, and they have proved to be significant business enterprises. Jewish leaders did the same thing. They took the Talmud (consisting of Jewish traditions), and equated it with the Torah, or the Law of Moses. Some of Jesus’ strongest denunciations were to such people (Matt 15:3,6; Mk 7:8-9,13).

However, Paul has more in mind: what men are preaching – how they present the Word of God. Those who “corrupt” it filter it through their own objectives and preconceived notions. If they are Jewish teachers, they may emphasize the texts on circumcision, and affirm “Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1). In so doing, they are promoting their own group, not the Lord Jesus Christ or His great salvation.

These hucksters may be promoting a routine, discipline, or way of life which they think is pivotal to pleasing God. Some of them may “forbid to marry, commanding to abstain from meats” (1 Tim 4:3). Others may bind certain views of meat, drink, holy days, new moons, or Sabbaths (Col 2:16). Still others may promote disciplines – routines involving self-imposed worship, false humility, and the harsh treatment of the body (Col 2:23). Some will promote a return to the principle of Law for justification, teaching that salvation primarily depends upon individual effort rather than the grace of God through faith (Gal 5:4). One woman, who claimed she was a prophetess from God, taught Christ’s “servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed to idols” – all within the church, and in the name of Jesus (Rev 2:20). Paul told the elders at Ephesus, “Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them”(Acts 20:30).

All of these were present when Paul wrote to the Corinthians. However, the Apostles indicated that things would get worse.

Peter warned scattered believers, “But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And

through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not” (2 Pet 2:1-3).

It will not go well with anyone who corrupts the word of God, seeking to use it to advance their own agenda. Such efforts are always wrong, sinful, and dishonoring to the Lord Jesus.

## A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

Lesson 28 of 33

“For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.” (Verse17, 2 Cor 2:15-17)

## TRULY PERILOUS TIMES

Paul spoke of perilous times, when men would retain a “form of godliness” while rejecting its power. Their religion would allow them to remain fleshly and worldly while wearing the name of Jesus. That is, within the framework of preaching, and exposure to a corrupted form of the word of God, a falling away would actually take place (2 Tim 3:1-5; 2 Thess 2:3). In this case, a “falling away” was induced by flawed preaching, distorted doctrine, and the vaunting of powerless religious tradition. Therefore Paul wrote, “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away” (2 Tim 3:1-5).

John was given a vision from Jesus concerning this corrupt church. It was presented under some arresting figures. They all have to do with unfaithfulness to God and Christ – a concept that belongs to religion, not the world as ordinarily perceived.

1. A beast with the horns of a lamb, but the mouth of a dragon (Rev 13:11). The represents a spiritual entity that comes in apparent peacefulness (horns of a lamb), yet speaks things that are in synch to the devil himself, who is described as a “dragon” (Rev 12:3-9)
2. Babylon (Rev 14:8). An organized body that holds the people of God captive.
3. The false prophet (Rev 16:13). Coming in the name of the Lord, with a message purporting to be from the Lord, yet is false to the core.
4. Great Babylon (Rev 16:19). Extensive, pervasive, and powerful.
5. The great whore (Rev 17:1). Promoting the prostitution of affection that belongs to God, yet is given to the world – particularly the world in religious garb.
6. A woman with a golden cup filled with the abominations and filthiness of her fornication (Rev 17:4). Her unfaithfulness to the Lord has made everything she has and does contaminated. It is like poison to the soul. What pretends to be a church is really nothing more than a spiritual brothel.
7. Mystery, Babylon the Great (Rev 17:5). An approach to religion and Christ is presented that is a mysterious network of lies, subversion, and delusion.

8. The Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the earth (Rev 17:5). Unfaithfulness begets more unfaithfulness – even in the world. In this case, it is corrupt religion that made the world worse than it was in the first place. By taking the things of the world and associating them with God, Satan had an even greater ability to spread his corruption.
9. A woman drunken with the blood of the saints (Rev 17:6). The greatest persecutor of those who are in Christ has proved to be professing Christendom. To this day, the saints experience the greatest and most consistent opposition from those who profess to wear the name of Jesus.
10. Babylon, that mighty city (Rev 18:10). Spiritual Babylon is marked by seeming success, spreading throughout the world, dominating communication media, and receiving recognition from those who are actually the enemies of Christ.
11. The great whore which did corrupt the earth with her fornication (Rev 19:2). The world has become worse because of corrupt “Christianity.” It has lowered the bar, so to speak, so that evil can spread more easily.

The point to see in all of this is that Satan has been aggressive in his attack of the saints. Wherever he has found faithless and worldly souls who wear the name of Jesus, he has marshaled them for his cause. They use the Word of God, but only, according to their own distorted perception, as it serves their purpose. They may use it to market slogans on expensive articles of casual clothing. They may make a business of selling religious jewelry, plaques, calendars, and the likes. It may involve a lucrative musical empire, organizational programs, and methodologies that are hawked to help people supposedly manage sin.

The point here is not that moral helps are of themselves wrong. Rather, it is that men are huckstering the Word of God for profit. The warnings about a falling away are certainly to be taken seriously. They are not accompanied by placards that declare what they really are (Matt 24:24; Acts 20:30; 2 Thess 2:9-12; 1 Tim 4:1-3; 2 Tim 3:1-5; 2 Tim 4:3-4; 2 Thess 2:3; 2 Pet 2:1-3,10-19). If all of this was important enough for the Holy Spirit to move holy men to write extensively about it, it is important enough for men to take heed to what He had made known.

## A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

Lesson 29 of 34

### WHEN MEN MUST CORRUPT THE WORD OF GOD

“For we are not as many, which CORRUPT THE WORD OF GOD: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.” (2 Cor 2:15-17)

When men seek to obtain personal worldly gain or fame from the Word of God, it is necessary to corrupt it. It must be passed, as it were, through some filter that will make it appear to say what promotes specific worldly interests. It is why men build entire ministries around things that are not central in God’s revealed eternal purpose, nor are they things for which Jesus died and rose again. In order to justify such diversions, men must corrupt the Word of God.

Examples of such purported ministries on which men focus are, marriage, the home, youth, philanthropic works, social adjustment, behavioral correction, recovery ministries for

“Christians,” obtaining wealth, higher education, etc. None of these, or similar emphases, required the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. They did not require the Word to become flesh and dwell among us (John 1:14). They did not demand the condemning of sin in the death of Christ (Rom 8:3). None of them can blend with God’s “eternal purpose” (Eph 1:10-11; 3:11), or includes the church being presented to Christ “a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish” (Eph 5:27). None of them conclude with a state that enables one to enter safely into the realm of the dead.

The kind of corruption to which I refer is the very means by which sectarianism and denominationalism are maintained. It is the way through which peculiar theological doctrines are promoted and made secure. An erroneous theological emphasis requires the corruption of the Word of God.

If, for example, a person wants to promote the notion that once you are saved it is not possible to fall away, he is forced to corrupt the Word of God in that promotion. He must explain away texts that do, in fact, speak of falling away (Luke 8:13; 2 Thess 2:3; Heb 6:6). He must brush aside the warnings against the entrance of an evil heart of unbelief (Heb 3:12), or failing of the grace of God (Heb 12:15). In order to hawk that teaching, the Word must be corrupted.

If a person teaches that the primary objective of the church is to reach the lost, then there is no need for any of the epistles, which are all written to the churches, and do not contain so much as a syllable that establishes that point. Once that view is adopted, the person simply reads over the necessity of fruit bearing (John 15:2-8; Rom 7:4), being conformed to the image of Christ (Rom 8:29-30; 2 Cor 3:18), growing up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:15), not being children in understanding, but rather being men in that area (1 Cor 4:20), the necessity of edification (1 Cor 14:26), giving heed to what the Spirit says to the churches (Rev 2:7,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22), doing everything in the name of the Lord (1 Cor 10:31; Col 3:17,23), perfecting holiness in the fear of the Lord (2 Cor 7:1-2), walking worthy of the Lord (Col 1:10), etc.

Perhaps a person wishes to promote the teaching that “baptism has nothing to do with salvation.” In order to do this, he must corrupt the texts that affirm baptism actually saves us (1 Pet 3:21), that our sins are washed away in baptism (Acts 22:16), that we are baptized into Christ (Gal 3:27), or that we die, are buried, and risen with Christ in baptism (Rom 6:2-4). In order to hawk that teaching, the Word must be corrupted.

Time would fail me to mention other emphases that are found in the Christian community – doctrines that are taught aggressively with Bible in hand: Sabbath-keeping, justification by works, soul-sleeping, two resurrections of the dead, annihilationism, the secret rapture of the church, etc, etc. There are also erroneous emphases that are being barked out as though taught by the Word of God. Such things as worldly prosperity, church government, soul-winning, Christian education, and the likes, are held forth as though they were the MAIN point of Scripture. However, in order to do this, the Word of God must be corrupted. Furthermore, some form of profit is realized by these corruptions. It may be financial or institutional, personal or sectarian. But something is being promoted and advanced that God has not presented Himself as doing. Some purpose is being served that cannot be helped along by the pure and undiluted Word of God.

If men do not give attention to this matter while they are in this world, they will be confronted with it on the day of judgment.

## A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

Lesson 30 of 34

### WE ARE NOT

“For WE ARE NOT as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.” (Verse 17, 2 Cor 2:15-17)

Paul affirms “we are not” of this class of people – hucksters that corrupt the Word of God. He was not a religious professional gaining worldly advantage from his work.

It is refreshing for the faithful to consider what THEY ARE NOT.

1. When commanded to bow down before an idol, the three Hebrew children responded, “Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, WE ARE NOT careful to answer thee in this matter” (Dan 3:16).
2. “What then? shall we sin, because WE ARE NOT under the law, but under grace? God forbid” (Rom 6:15).
3. “Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for WE ARE NOT ignorant of his devices” (2 Cor 2:11).
4. “But I trust that ye shall know that WE ARE NOT reprobates” (2 Cor 13:6).
5. “So then, brethren, WE ARE NOT children of the bondwoman, but of the free” (Gal 4:31).
6. “Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: WE ARE NOT of the night, nor of darkness” (1 Thess 5:5).
7. “But WE ARE NOT of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul” (Heb 10:39).

Yes, the saints of the Most High God are not only noted for what they are, but also for what they are not. They are no longer what they WERE – “the servants of sin” (Rom 6:17), “free from righteousness” (Rom 6:20), “without Christ” (Eph 2:12), “sometimes darkness” (Eph 5:8), and “as sheep going astray” (1 Pet 2:25). The new birth is a line of demarcation between the old and the new, the dead and the living, bondage and freedom, ignorance and illumination. This differentiation also carried over into Paul’s preaching. He was not like the charlatans, who sought to gain personal advantage by religious involvements.

The truth of the matter is that Paul’s preaching brought him more worldly disadvantage than advantage. Ponder some of his testimony: “troubled on every side . . . perplexed . . . persecuted . . . cast down . . . delivered unto death . . . stripes above measure . . . prisons more often . . . deaths oft . . . five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in

perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren . . . we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life” (2 Cor 4:8-9,11; 2 Cor 11:25-27; 12:8).

It was what Paul PREACHED that caused these seeming disadvantages. Unlike many of our time, he did not alter his preaching in order to avoid persecution and rejection. None of the experiences he lists would ever have happened if he was NOT speaking the Word of God. To avoid such repercussions, he had only to cease preaching the Word, or corrupt it – and he refused to do either. He was acutely conscious of the fact that he was a steward, and stewards must be faithful. That is a Divine requirement: “Moreover IT IS REQUIRED in stewards, that a man be FOUND FAITHFUL” (1 Cor 4:2).

And what can be said of preachers and ministers that do not make clear to those who hear them that “without faith it is impossible to please God” (Heb 11:6), or that to desire to be a “friend of the world” makes one “the enemy of God” (James 4:4). What of those who do not labor to make crystal clear that fruitless branches will be cut off (John 15:5-6; Rom 11:22), and that those who are not ready when Jesus comes will not be with Him forever (Matt 24:44; 25:10). What may be said of those pretentious ministers who do not tell the people that God will not tolerate unfaithfulness (Rev 2:10), or that the Holy Spirit is not to be grieved or quenched (Eph 4:30; 1 Thess 5:19)? What of those who do not insist that the people “go on to perfection” (Heb 6:1), and grow up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:15), or not to be children in their understanding (1 Cor 4:20). What of ministers who become so involved in directing the lives of the people that they fail to tell them God requires the cleansing of themselves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit (2 Cor 7:1-2)? What of those who labor to show people how to be successful in this world, but spend little or no time informing the people that God absolutely requires that they be prepared for the world to come (Lk 18:30; 2 Tim 2:12)? And what of those ministers who do not make clear to the people that “the judgment to come” (Acts 24:25) is going to be “according to their works” (Matt 16:27; 2 Cor 11:15; 2 Tim 4:14; Rev 20:12-13).

All such ministers are among those who “corrupt the Word of God” – and the seriousness of that circumstance cannot be overstated.

## A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

Lesson 31 of 34

### SPEAKING IN THE SIGHT OF GOD

“For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.” (Verse 17, 2 Cor 2:15-17)

In sharing the manner in which he preached the Word, Paul is not presenting one of the options available to preachers and teachers. This is the Kingdom standard, and no other mindset is acceptable to God. Neither is it possible for any genuine fruit to be brought to God by some other approach. This is the way in which genuine Kingdom results are realized – real converts

resulting, and authentic maturity taking place. Further, these are not areas in which men can be trained or schooled. The well of human wisdom is too shallow to yield what is required for being translated into the Kingdom of God's Dear Son (Col 1:13), and growing up into Christ in all things (Eph 4:15). These flow from faith, and fellowship with the Son of God. Being men in understanding instead of children (1 Cor 4:20), cannot be achieved by human wisdom, workshops, conventions, and the likes. Such things can only be realized where God Himself is working, together with the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Faith is imperative, and abiding in Christ is mandatory. Further, Jesus will not receive part-time disciples (Lk 14:13).

#### “AS OF SINCERITY”

“ . . . but as of sincerity . . . ” Other versions read, “but as from sincerity” (NASB), “with sincerity” (NIV), “as persons of sincerity” (NRSV), “our words are true” (BBE), “but as out of sincerity” (NAU), and “but it is in all purity” (NJB).

The word “sincerity” means “purity, sincerity, ingenuousness (innocence), which God effects by the Holy Spirit” (THAYER). Other lexical definitions are, “strictly judged by the light of the sun, hence clearness, purity; morally purity of motive, integrity” (FRIBERG), and “the quality of sincerity as an expression of pure or unadulterated motives” (LOUW-NIDA).

The idea is that of something being held up to the light for examination. In that light, no impurity or corruption is found. The matter is precisely what it is represented to be. In this text it means that Paul is speaking with an acute consciousness of God Almighty. He knows that “all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do” (Heb 4:13). His heart is in what he has said, and his motives are pure and holy. He is not speaking or writing to please men (Gal 1:10). He is not attempting to make a name for himself, and he is not promoting a religious organization. He speaks with an acute consciousness that he will stand before the Lord and give an account of his stewardship. What he has done will be measured by the commission delivered to him (Acts 26:18).

#### “AS OF GOD”

“ . . . but as of God . . . ” Other versions read, “as from God” (NKJV/NASB), “like men sent from God” (NIV), “as persons sent from God” (RSV), “as commissioned by God” (RSV), and “as envoys of God” (NJB). This is a mindset that is alarmingly absent in much of the “Christianity” of our day. Whether wittingly or unwittingly, an agenda has been adopted that promotes an institution, a faction, or a humanly devised theological position. These motives may secure a professional religious position, but they will not be honored in heaven.

With Paul, there was no promotion of a human agenda – no advancement of a religious institution or cause. He was a messenger from God, and God was speaking through Him. What he said is what God wanted to be said. It is what God had commissioned and sent him to declare. There was no question about it – no room for opinion on the subject.

I have heard preachers without number who were unable to make such a statement. They were not sure of their message, or if God was actually saying what came out of their mouths. Although

such men are very common in our day, there ought to be none of them. They should all cease and desist from speaking in the name of the Lord until such time as they know that what they are saying is what the Lord is speaking “from heaven” (Heb 12:25).

As you must know, an institutional mind-set is thoroughly confused by such a statement. Nevertheless, if a person cannot preach and teach with purity of motive, and knowing that what he says is from God, he ought not to speak. God has made no allowance for such men to speak for Him. If they insist on doing so, they will be classed with the false prophets of old. God said of them, “I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran: I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied” (Jer 23:21). And again, “For I have not sent them, saith the LORD, yet they prophesy a lie in My name; that I might drive you out, and that ye might perish, ye, and the prophets that prophesy unto you. Also I spake to the priests and to all this people, saying, Thus saith the LORD; Harken not to the words of your prophets that prophesy unto you, saying, Behold, the vessels of the LORD's house shall now shortly be brought again from Babylon: for they prophesy a lie unto you” (Jer 27:15-16).

God forbid that such men should even be heard! Like the false prophets of old, they are leading the people to destruction. Behold the “church” of our time. It is the product of a message – a sterile message, an uncommissioned message, a worldly message!

## A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

Lesson 32 of 34

### “IN THE SIGHT OF GOD”

“ . . . but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.” (Verse 17, 2 Cor 2:15-17)

Other versions read, “we speak before God” (NIV), “as standing in His presence” (RSV), “as before God” (BBE), and “We know that the God who sent us is watching us” (NLT).

The truth of the matter is that Paul was more consciousness of the One FOR whom he spoke, than the ones TO whom he spoke. His audience did not capture his total attention. Paul refers to himself as “an apostle of Jesus Christ THROUGH THE WILL OF GOD” (1 Cor 1:1), four times as “an apostle of Jesus Christ BY THE WILL OF GOD” (2 Cor 1:1; Eph 1:1; Col 1:1; 2 Tim 1:1), and once as “an apostle of Jesus Christ BY THE COMMANDMENT OF GOD OUR SAVIOR” (1 Tim 1:1). He also referred to himself as “an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, AND GOD THE FATHER” (Gal 1:1), and “A SERVANT OF GOD, and an apostle of Jesus Christ” (Tit 1:1). He knew that, as it is with all of the members of the body of Christ, “now hath GOD SET THE MEMBERS every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased Him” (1 Cor 12:18).

Every person purposefully placed by God “in the body” of Christ, is responsible first and foremost to Him, and to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is “the Head of the body, the church” (Col 1:8). This responsibility cannot be ignored with impunity. Every member of the body shall “give account of himself to God” (Rom 14:12). Those who are over the flock of God and feed them

“must give account” for their responsibility. I will tell you that there are specific leaders and teachers that are responsible for the current condition of the churches. This is how it was in Corinth (2 Cor 11:4), Galatia (Gal 1:6), Thyatira (Rev 2:20), and those to whom Jude wrote (Jude 1:4). All such leaders shall give an account of themselves to God, and they will give it before an assembled universe. Paul spoke and wrote with this ultimate accounting in mind.

This is a secret to being a good preacher or teacher. If one ever forgets that God is listening to, and judging, what he is saying, a place will be made for corruption to enter. If one speaks primarily with the people in mind, he is not serving them well. If the leaders become embroiled in the personal affairs of the people, they will be prone to wander, and will find themselves resorting to men for assistance. Like the priests of old, spiritual leaders have relevance only “in things pertaining to God” (Heb 5:1). In fact that is the relevance of the current ministry of Jesus Christ Himself: “Wherefore in all things it behooved Him to be made like unto His brethren, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest IN THINGS PERTAINING TO GOD, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people” (Heb 2:17). That is, He is ensuring that the relationship with God that is forged by redemption is not ruptured.

Candidly, in our time, it appears that this is not a popular way of ministering. I have tried to recall some of my years in Christian schools of higher learning, and I do not recall very much being made of this kind of responsibility to God. It is imperative that we speak “in the sight of God,” acutely aware of His watchful eye and hearing ear. When we consider that God is, so to speak, in our audience, we will speak differently. Our speaking will be characterized by sobriety. There will be a tone of urgency in it, with less levity and fewer diversions into meaningless bypaths. We will depend more upon the Scriptures, and less upon the wisdom of men. That is how it is when we speak “in the sight of God.” Mind you, whether we know it or not, this is the really the case. Paul, however, says that he knows it, and fully acquiesces to that circumstance.

By saying this, Paul is also declaring that religious opportunists who “corrupt the Word of God” do NOT speak with this in mind. After much exposure to the speaking religious community, I can tell you there is far too little of the kind of awareness Paul here affirms. The reason for this condition is that, after all is said and done, contemporary Christianity simply is not promoting God-consciousness. That is the primary reason for its fundamental absence!

## A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

Lesson 33 of 34

### “SPEAK WE IN CHRIST”

“For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.” (Verse 17, 2 Cor 2:15-17)

Nearly every version reads precisely the same – “in Christ.” One exception is the New Living Translation that reads, “with Christ's authority.” That, however, is a wholly inappropriate translation. The word “in” comes from a Greek word, which is a primary preposition denoting fixed position. A secondary meaning is “by the instrumentality of” (STRONG’S) – which differs

vastly from the ordinary meaning of “by the authority of.”

Paul is affirming that he is speaking out of his fellowship with Christ – a fellowship into which all believers are called (1 Cor 1:9).

The phrase “in Christ” is used seventy-seven times in Acts through Jude. Things that are “in Christ” include faith (Acts 24:24), redemption (Rom 3:24), the saved themselves (Rom 8:1), life (Rom 8:2), the love of God (Rom 8:39), hope (1 Cor 15:19), rejoicing (1 Cor 15:31), triumph (2 Cor 2:14), liberty (Gal 2:4), unity (Gal 3:28), spiritual blessings (Eph 1:3), the new creation (Eph 2:10), consolation (Phil 2:1), the high calling of God (Phil 3:14), faith and love (1 Tim 1:14), the promise of life (2 Tim 1:1), God’s purpose and grace (2 Tim 1:9), grace (2 Tim 2:1), salvation (2 Tim 2:10), living godly (2 Tim 3:12), and a good manner of life (1 Pet 3:16) – to name a few.

It is obvious from all of these texts that Jesus is being viewed as the locus, or environment, in which these realities are found and experienced. The same is true of our text. Paul spoke from within Christ – out of his union with the Lord, with whom he had, having been “joined to the Lord,” become “one spirit” (1 Cor 6:17). Another way of saying the same thing is that he had “the mind of Christ” (1 Cor 2:16). He was speaking as one who was “sent” to preach (Rom 10:15), and “given” as a bearer of the Divine message to “every man” (1 Cor 3:7). He was not representing a certain group of Christians, but was the representative of Jesus Christ Himself. He was not representing a particular movement or theological persuasion, but was speaking as a heaven-sent emissary. He had not been chosen by a religious council, by the Jesus Christ Himself (Acts 9:15). He was not delivering what men had accessed as the proper message, but the exclusive message that would result in opening men’s eyes, turning them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, in order that they “receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in” Christ (Acts 26:18).

He did not bring a message that announced God desired to become involved in the affairs of men, or enable them to fulfill their dreams. He brought a message that affirmed God desired for men to become involved in His affairs, and to participate in His purpose. He announced something God had to give that could not be imagined or obtained from any other source. His message was accompanied with Divine power, and with the Holy Spirit. When believed, it would eventuate in people being born again (1 Pet 1:23), created anew (2 Cor 5:17), and becoming the workmanship of God (Eph 2:10). Not only would their sins be forgiven, but sin would no longer have dominion over them (Rom 6:14). Believing his message would result in the grace of God effectively teaching the people “that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Savior Jesus Christ” (Tit 2:12-13).

The word Paul preached was not “the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1 Thess 2:13). Other versions read, “which is at work in you believers” (ESV), “continues to work in you” (NLT), and “which is effectually at work in you who believe [ exercising its superhuman power in those who adhere to and trust in and rely on it]” (AMPLIFIED). A word that has to be followed up by a program developed by men has no Divine power. The Gospel IS “the power of God unto salvation” (in all of its completeness), “to every one who believes” (Rom 1:16). Any other message, no matter how

meticulously it was developed, can lead to salvation, or bring the saved one to maturity in Christ.

Paul has thus separated himself from all religious pretenders. He is serving no agenda but the one established by God – His “eternal purpose” (Rom 8:28; Eph 1:11; 3:11; 2 Tim 1:9; 1 John 3:8). He speaks as the steward of God, not the servant of men. The message he brings is the very word that God wants declared among the sons of men. Blessed are those people who, like the Thessalonians, “receive it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe” (1 Thess 2:13).

## A SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST

“For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: To the one we are the savor of death unto death; and to the other the savor of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things? For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.” (2 Cor 2:15-17)

Lesson 34 of 34

## CONCLUSION

The role of preaching is a critical one in the work of the Lord. It is through this means – a message that is declared – that God saves those who believe. As it is written, “For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching [a noun – “the message preached” NKJV] to save them that believe” (1 Cor 1:21). The Jews, Paul affirms, preferred “a sign” – some “miraculous sign” (NIV). The Greeks sought “after wisdom” – human knowledge and reasoning. Neither Jew nor Greek relished the proclamation of something already accomplished – something that was intentional, and was to be received by faith; something upon which the saving or damning of the individual hinged.

Today, the requirements have been brought to even lower levels. One might add, “and the Americans require entertainment, pleasant sounds, and arresting sights.” Paul did not cave in to the demands of his generation, and we must not cave in to those of our generation. We are not living in a godly generation, and consequently its demands are all the more to be rejected.

It is time to embrace the approach of Paul: “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness” (1 Cor 1:23). He purposely declared something he knew the disinterested would reject. He put the Stumblingstone before the Jews, and announced what the Greeks thought to be absurd and foolish. He was not motivated by their uncomely responses. He was speaking to them, but he was speaking for Christ in the sight of God. He knew that those foreknown by God (Rom 8:29-30) – Christ’s sheep – would hear what he said. “But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:24).

The truth of the matter is that apart from Christ, as regards salvation in its entirety, there is neither effective power nor valid wisdom. It is imperative that our preaching and teaching reflect

this perception. We dare not dilute our message by attempting to mingle it with the wisdom of this world. We dare not rob it of its power by catering to those who are alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them. We will be held in strict account for what we preached, as well as how we preached it.

There is a sweet and pleasing savor that rises up to God from those who declare His message, making known the record He has given of His Son. Such good pleasure will be answered with rescuing and edifying power – power to accomplish the will of the Lord in those who believe.

These very same messengers emit a certain fragrance among men also. That fragrance is not always pleasant. For those who believe, the bearers of glad tidings of good things have beautiful feet, and bring refreshment for the soul. They are the perfume of life to such people, who receive them with gladness and readiness of mind, also coming to emit that precious fragrance. But for those who themselves are perishing, these messengers are nothing more than an aggravation. They are seen as having the odor of death and uselessness upon them, and they aggravate and increase the condition of the ungodly. Those who believe that message are also emit an unpleasant odor to the ungodly. This, of course, is all by Divine design, and is as it should be.

When godly men speak the truth before God and in Christ, it is intended to help the godly advance, and to cause further decay in those who refuse to believe. No individual is at liberty to try and avoid these results. To do so causes one to be an unfaithful steward. That is a condition every person must avoid.

Our day is one in which the need for godly preachers and teachers is obvious – men who are willing to speak with unquestionably pure motives, out of their fellowship with Christ, and with a keen sense of speaking in the sight of God.

– Given O. Blakely