

A MINISTRY FOR HUNGRY SAINTS

IN THIS WORLD, WE EXPERIENCE SUFFERINGS: BUT GLORY IS COMING

SECOND CORINTHIANS

✠ II CORINTHIANS

An overview of the Book of Second Corinthians, by Given O. Blakely

Lesson # 10

COMMENTARY ON: 2:15-17

2 CORINTHIANS 1:3-4

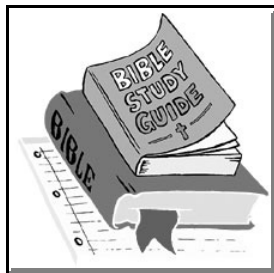
"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."

A SWEET SAVOR OF CHRIST

The effects of Christ's atoning work, the influence of His imputed righteousness, and the impact of His life within the saved has an effect upon God Himself. From every quarter of the world, the aroma of Christ is rising to God – an aroma that justifies what He has accomplished in Christ Jesus. There is no neutrality in these effects. They are bringing either life or death, either justification or condemnation. Men are either being saved or are perishing. There is no middle ground – no area occupied by men until they reach a formal decision. This is a staggering consideration, but it will bring to us a deeper understanding of the blessing of receiving God's great salvation and the cursing of rejecting it.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:1-2

"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. for in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven"



Since May, 1993, a ministry instituted for the encouragement of believers in Christ



The Epistle of Second Corinthians

Lesson Number 10



TRANSLATION LEGEND: ASV=American Standard Version (1901), BBE=Bible in Basic English (1949), DRA=Douay-Rheims (1899), ESV=English Standard Version (2001), KJV=King James Version (1611), NKJV=New King James Version (1982), NAB=New American Bible, NASB=New American Standard Bible (1977), NAU=New American Standard Bible (1995), NIB=New International Bible, NIV=New International Version (1984), NJB=New Jerusalem Bible, NLT=New Living Translation, NRSV=New Revised Standard Version (1989), RSV=Revised Standard Version (1952), TNK=JPS Tanakj (1985), Webster=The Webster Bible 1833, YLT=Young's Literal Translation (1862).
LEXICON LEGEND: FRIEBERG=Friberg Lexicon, UBS=UBS Lexicon, LOUW-NIDA=Louw-Nida Lexicon, LIDDELL SCOTT=Liddell Scott Lexicon, THAYER=Thayer's Greek Lexicon

----- Bible Translation Codes with Identification -----

A SWEET SAVOR OF CHRIST

“ 2:15 For we are unto God a sweet savor of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: ¹⁶ 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? ¹⁷ 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.” ^{KJV} (2 Cor 2:15-17)

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, vigilance, perseverance, pressing toward the mark, and reaching forward to the prize before us.

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).

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.

- We have a treasure in an earthen vessel (2 Cor 4:7).
- There is *“another law”* in our members, warring against the law of

our mind (Rom 7:23).

- In our *“flesh”* nothing good dwells (Rom 7:18).
- We are in a world that is passing away, together with its lusts (1 John 2:17).
- We have an *“old man”* within, as well as a *“new man”* (Eph 4:22-24).
- There are *“fleshly lusts”* about us that are warring against our soul (1 Pet 2:11).
- We are wrestling against principalities, powers, the rulers of

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the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness in high places (Eph 6:12).

- ☛ Our adversary, the devil, is walking about, seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet 5:7).
- ☛ The things of God are to be sought, and an affection developed for them (Col 3:1-2).
- ☛ We do not know what to pray for as we ought (Rom 8:26).
- ☛ Faith has constituted us strangers and pilgrims in this world (Heb 11:13; 1 Pet 2:11).
- ☛ The flesh profits nothing (John 6:63).
- ☛ Spiritual life can only be lived by faith (Rom 1:17).
- ☛ We must “walk in the Spirit” in order to avoid fulfilling the lusts of the flesh (Gal 5:16).
- ☛ 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).

- ☛ While we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord (2 Cor 5:6).
- ☛ In the world, because we are in Christ Jesus, we have tribulation (John 16:33).
- ☛ We occupy a universe that is groaning in travail, waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God (Rom 8:19-21).
- ☛ We are assaulted with fleshly lusts that war against the soul (1 Pet 2:11).
- ☛ The Holy Spirit that dwells within us “lusteth to envy,” desiring our affection and commitment (James 4:5).
- ☛ We are in a situation that requires “striving against sin” (Heb 12:4).
- ☛ One part of us – the “outward man” – is perishing, while the other part – the “inward man” – “is renewed day by day” (2 Cor 4:16).

AN ACTIVE ENVIRONMENT DEMANDS OUR OWN ACTIVITY

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.

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 it has, in fact, been overcome.

Notice how differently the Spirit speaks to us. In the midst of this remarkable activity, we are admonished “work out” our “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 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).

WHY SAY THESE THINGS?

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!

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

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. 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 angelic hosts. In his writing he is struggling 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).

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.

UNTO GOD

“2:15a **For we are unto God . . .**”

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 one 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. This is a confrontation that cannot be avoided. At that time, the wrath of God will be revealed against “*all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men*” (Rom 1:18). Then, God will be “*justified in all*” of His “*sayings*” (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 take 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.

“WE”

“*For we . . .*”

This phrase is a continuation of the thoughts expressed in the preceding verses.

- ☛ God “*comforteth US in all of our tribulation*” 1:4a).
- ☛ “*WE ourselves are comforted of God*” (1:4b).
- ☛ Both the sufferings of Christ and the consolation of God “*abound in US*” (1:5).
- ☛ God “*establishes US with YOU in Christ*” (1:21a).
- ☛ God has “*anointed US*” (1:21b).
- ☛ God has “*sealed US*” (1:22a).
- ☛ God has “*given US the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts*” (1:22b).
- ☛ God always causes “*US to triumph in Christ.*”
- ☛ God makes manifest the “*Savor of His knowledge by US in every place.*”

The particular reference is to Paul and Timothy, and 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.*”

“UNTO GOD”

“... are unto God . . . ” Some versions read “*for God.*”^{NAB}

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.*”

The Centrality of God

In redemption, the role of God the Father Himself is critical. 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 absolute centrality of God in salvation.

- ☛ A strong faith gives “*glory to God*” (Rom 4:20).
- ☛ In Christ we are “*reconciled to God*”

- (Rom 5:10).
- ☛ Having been raised with Christ, we are alive “*unto God*” (Rom 6:11).
- ☛ We are to yield ourselves “*unto God*” (Rom 6:13).
- ☛ We have become “*servants to God*” (Rom 6:22).
- ☛ We “*bring forth fruit unto God*” (Rom 7:4).
- ☛ Our bodies are to be presented “*a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto*

- ☛ Those in Christ have turned from idols “*to God*” (1 Thess 1:9).
- ☛ We are to give diligence to present ourselves “*approved unto God*” (2 Tim 2:15).
- ☛ Jesus is a “*merciful and faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God*” (Heb 2:17).
- ☛ Within the framework of the New and better covenant, we “*draw nigh unto God*” (Heb 7:19).
- ☛ We are coming “*unto God*” through

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.

- ☛ “*God*” (Rom 12:1).
- ☛ Every tongue “*shall confess to God*” (Rom 14:11).
- ☛ Every one of us will “*give account of himself to God*” (Rom 14:12).
- ☛ The one who serves Christ “is acceptable **to God**” (Rom 14:18).
- ☛ Through Jesus Christ, glory is given “*to God*” (Rom 16:27).
- ☛ In “*the end,*” Jesus will deliver “*up the kingdom to God, even the Father*” (1 Cor 15:24).
- ☛ Our trust is “*through Christ to Godward*” (2 Cor 3:4).
- ☛ We give thanks “*unto God*” for “*His unspeakable gift*” (2 Cor 9:15).
- ☛ We have become dead to the Law that we “*might live unto God*” (Gal 2:19).
- ☛ Jesus gave Himself as “*an offering and sacrifice to God*” (Eph 5:2).

- Jesus Christ. Who is making intercession for us (Heb 7:25).
- ☛ We are to submit ourselves “*unto God*” (James 4:7).
- ☛ Spiritual sacrifices are made “*acceptable to God by Jesus Christ*” (1 Pet 2:5).
- ☛ 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 effects of a godly life register 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.

A Relationship that Cannot Be Exploited

Our relationship to God is something that cannot be exploited by men. This is not so of human relationships. In this world, it is possible to develop expertise in various interpersonal relationships among our peers. Thus there are purported specials in marriage, raising children, maintaining good credit, the time of youth, business associations, etc.

There is no system of worldly 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 course of academic learning that can improve this aspect of your life.

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 admonished to do this, but there is no form of worldly expertise that can make it happen (Eph 5:2).

As you might suppose, this view is in sharp contrast with professional religion, which makes a place for men that is too large. However, it precisely reflects both the reality and nature of God’s “great salvation” (Heb 2:3).

A SWEET SAVOR OF CHRIST

“^{15b} . . . a sweet savor of Christ . . .”

“A SWEET SAVOR”

“ . . . 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 – εὐωδία (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 “savor” pleasant – delightful and satisfying.

These concepts are found in Apostolic doctrine, and they are refreshing to consider. They 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).

• **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!

• **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.

• **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.

• **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.

• **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 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”* (Zep 3:17). Other versions read, *“He will exult over you with joy,”*^{NASB} and *“He will take great delight in you.”*^{NIV}

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, 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.

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). 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). 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.**

“OF CHRIST”

“ . . . of Christ . . . ” Every major version reads the same, 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

to *“the savor of Christ.”* We enter into this by living in a very deliberate manner. Elsewhere this purposeful manner of life is referred in a variety of different ways.

- ☛ It is living by faith (Gal 3:11).
- ☛ It is walking by faith (2 Cor 5:7).
- ☛ It is living in the Spirit (Gal 5:25a).
- ☛ It is walking in the Spirit (Gal 5:25b).
- ☛ It is living while looking at the things that are not seen (2 Cor 4:18).
- ☛ It is patiently running the race set before us, looking unto Jesus (Heb 12:2).
- ☛ It is presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice unto God (Rom 12:1).
- ☛ 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).
- ☛ It is living in such a way as justifies the statement, *“as He is, so are we*

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, not something that is accomplished within the believer independently

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, 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 equates

in this world” (1 John 4:17).

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”* (2 Cor 4:11). That is, when Jesus expresses Himself through our human capacities.

The Apostles

This was especially true of the Apostles, through whom the good knowledge of God is made known. These have been set *“first”* in the church, having the priority over all other gifts (1 Cor

12:28). 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).

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 the *“savor”* that is pleasing to God.

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.

IN THEM THAT ARE SAVED

^{15c} *... in them that are saved* ... *“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

The word translated *“saved”* is

- Those who through patient continuance in well doing, seeking for glory and honor and immortality, are promised *“eternal life”* (Rom 2:7).
- Confirming that salvation has not yet been realized in its fulness, we are admonished to *“work out”* our own

- In its fullest sense, salvation is *“ready to be revealed”* (1 Pet 1:5).
- Our salvation is *“nearer than when we believed”* (Rom 13:11).
- God has not appointed us to wrath, *“but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ”* (1 Thess 5:9).
- Those in Christ are referred to as those who *“shall be heirs of salvation”* (Heb 1:14).
- 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).

Apostolic doctrine presents salvation as something that is presently being accomplished – not something that has been experientially finalized.

σφζομένους. From the etymological point of view, it 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 this life as though it was already perfected.

- 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).

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).

- Those in Christ are admonished to *“lay hold on eternal life”* (1 Tim 6:12).
- The ones who *“endure unto the end”* will be saved (Matt 24:13).
- 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).

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. **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). 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.”*

A SENSE IN WHICH WE ARE SAVED

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). Our names have been *“written in heaven”* (Heb 12:23), we are *“in Christ”* (Gal 3:28), and Christ is *“in”* us (Rom 8:10; Col 1:27).

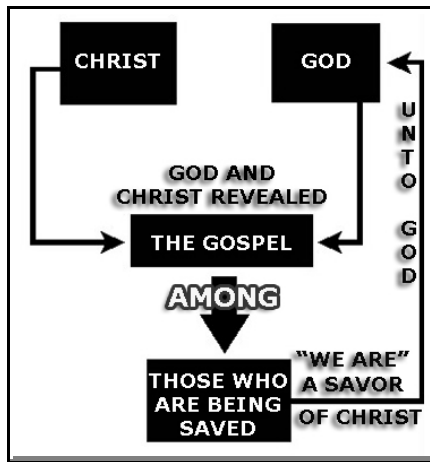
It is therefore written, *“even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved) . . . For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not*

of yourselves; it is the gift of God” ^{NKJV} (Eph 2:5,8).

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”* (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). We are *“being saved.”*

A SAVOR IN THEM BEING SAVED

What is the effect of the life of Christ within those who are faithfully preaching the Gospel? In particular, what is that effect upon God Himself? Our text affirms it is a *“sweet savor”* – 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 KJV’s 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}

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 Gospel, 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”* ^{NKJV} (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 single 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 Him.

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.

One will be hard pressed to establish that God is well pleased with any body 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. 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.

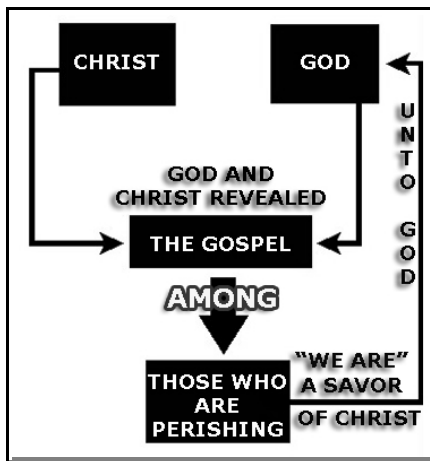
IN THEM THAT PERISH

“^{15d} . . . and in them that **perish.**” Other versions read, “among those who **are perishing,**”^{NKJV/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 whom the Gospel has been preached – people who have rejected that Gospel, not receiving the atonement. These are individual 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.

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 of these people.

• **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). It is as though those who are perishing are walking under a

cloud of condemnation, ready to fall into the bottomless pit.

• **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.

• **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). Those who refuse to act upon the Gospel have excluded themselves from eternal life.

• **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. The same is true of those who do not obey the Gospel. These “are perishing.”

• **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.”

• **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.

• **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.”

• **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.”

• **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.”

• **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.”*

• **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). When sin dominates a person or people, they *“are perishing.”*

• **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.”*

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.”*^{NKJV} He does not mean they 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).

THE REAL SITUATION

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

further affirms that Jesus has been *“exalted”* with God’s right hand to give *“repentance”* and *“remission of sins”* (Acts 5:31). It further 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

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.”

servicing a defeated *“prince.”*

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).

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

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. 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. It is the Lord Jesus Himself who promises, *“For every one*

that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened” (Matt 7:8).

BEING MORE PRECISE

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.

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.

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 God. In particular “*the savor of the knowledge of Him*” that is so sweet to Him. The fact that His messengers had 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, when he stood among God’s enemies and was stoned 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 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 declaring the Gospel of Christ.

A SAVOR OF DEATH UNTO DEATH

“^{16a} *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. 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} “*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 . . .*” (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*”

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”: “WE ARE the savor!”

(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 of 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.

- 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).
- Of Paul and Silas they said, *“And brought them to the magistrates, saying, 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).
- 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.

“A Savor Of Death”

“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).

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 by, perhaps, 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 is confirmed: *“Behold, this Child is set for the fall and rising*

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.

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.

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

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). This, 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 accept this message cause a fragrance of death to rise

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*

versions read “*leading to death*,” and “*and doom*.”^{NKJV}
^{NLT}

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).

We read that sin leads to death: “*sin hath reigned unto death . . .*” (Rom

closer to the “*second death*” which is yet to come.

Divine Determination

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.

- ☛ “*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}
- ☛ “*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}

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).

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.

nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner . . . As it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion 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**.

“UNTO DEATH”

“ . . . unto death . . . ” Other

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, is 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

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,” NKJV/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. **Whatever it takes to distance ourselves from such a category 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).

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! 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.

A SAVOR OF LIFE UNTO LIFE

“^{16b} . . . 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.

“A SAVOR OF LIFE”

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

Jesus said of those receiving whom 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 hearer must be “well pleased” with the Savior announced by

the Gospel (Matt 3:17; 17:5). He must be “satisfied” with the travail of His soul, which was for the sins of the world (Isa 53:11). The hearer is required to “*love the Son,*” and commit everything into His hands – as the Father 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.*”

☛ “*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).

- ☛ “*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).
- ☛ “*Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand*” (Acts 4:4).
- ☛ “*And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord*” (Acts 9:42).
- ☛ “*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).

Boiled down to its essence, in order for life to be promoted by the Gospel, the hearer must see Jesus as God sees Him.

- “Therefore many of them believed; also of honorable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few” (Acts 17:12).
- “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).
- “And many that believed came, and confessed, and showed their deeds” (Acts 19:18).

How is it that such marvelous

commendable manner. The 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

are “being saved,” “the savor of life” that leads into a deeper, mature, and productive life.

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 it is the Divinely appointed “pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim 3:15).

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.

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).

The Thessalonians

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.”

The Galatians

In the beginning, the Galatians also received the Gospel in a

this!

“UNTO LIFE”

“ . . . unto life.” Other versions read, “leading to life,”^{NKJV/NJB} and “that leads to life.”^{NAB}

The word translated “unto” is a primary preposition, and of great significance in Scripture. It is translated from the Greek word εἰς;

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,”^{FRIEBERG} “denoting purpose, and sometimes result,”^{UBS} and “in the direction of,”^{LOUW-NIDA}

The “savor of life,” therefore, is like a 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 the subject of life does not conclude with being begotten. 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

Life Godward

The “life” of reference is basically Godward – “alive unto God” (Rom 6:11). There is also an association of the messenger with God Himself. This life involves being “alive from the dead” – 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).

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).

To “live unto God” embodies presenting our lives 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.

REAL PREACHING PRODUCES REAL LIFE

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). 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 life is not Gospel. It is spurious and damaging,

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.

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 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.

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 life – life unto God – to flourish to His glory.

WHO IS SUFFICIENT FOR SUCH THINGS?

“^{16c} And who is sufficient for these things?” 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” is *ικανός* (ik-an-os), and means “sufficient, competent, with sufficient power, a match for, equivalent to, adequate, and large enough.”^{THAYER} Other lexical definitions are “fit, worthy, and qualified,”^{FRIEBERG} and “able.”^{UBS}

This is a rhetorical question, whose 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 as 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 of 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 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.

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).

Here is a competency that can only come from God! Thanks be unto Him that He has made men adequate!

CORRUPTING THE WORD OF GOD

“^{17a} For we are not as many, which corrupt the Word of God . . . ”

The Gospel intentionally lends itself to corruption among those who are perishing. It is not because of any inherent weakness of flaw in it. Rather, God has designed it in this way in order to make charlatans the better known. 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

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.

“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}

the Gospel for personal gain, adulterating the Gospel,” ^{FRIEBERG} *“peddle for profit,”* ^{UBS} *“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.”*

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

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.

their pretensions, 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.

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

“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 words *“corrupt”* is translated from the word *καπηλεύοντες* (*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

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. They were religious professionals who saw in the Word of God something they thought could be turned to personal 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 interests. Perhaps they will put their own ideas in 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.

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).

Paul spoke of perilous times, when men would retain a *“form of godliness”*

- ☛ Babylon (Rev 14:8).
- ☛ The false prophet (Rev 16:13).
- ☛ Great Babylon (Rev 16:19).
- ☛ The great whore (Rev 17:1).
- ☛ A woman with a golden cup filled with the abominations and filthiness of her fornication (Rev 17:4).
- ☛ Mystery, Babylon the Great (Rev 17:5).
- ☛ The Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the earth (Rev 17:5).
- ☛ A woman drunken with the blood of the saints (Rev 17:6).
- ☛ Babylon, that mighty city (Rev 18:10).
- ☛ The great whore which did corrupt the earth with her fornication (Rev 19:2).

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.

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).

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.

- ☛ A beast with the horns of a lamb, but the mouth of a dragon (Rev 13:11).

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 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.

The point here is not that these articles themselves are wrong. Rather, it is that men are huckstering the Word of God for profit.

WHEN MEN MUST CORRUPT

When men seek to obtain personal worldly gain 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 worldly interests. This, of course, 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.

If, for example, a person wants to

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:

has not presented Himself as doing. Some purpose is being served that cannot be helped along by the pure and undiluted Word of God.

WE ARE NOT

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.

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. **None of them 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.

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.

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.**

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

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**

SPEAKING IN THE SIGHT OF GOD

“^{17b} . . . *but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.*”

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 mind-set 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. 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. These flow from faith, and fellowship with the Son of God.

“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,” ^{FRIEBERG} and “the quality of sincerity as an expression or pure or unadulterated motives,” ^{LOUW-NIDA}

The idea is that of something being held up to the light for examination. In that light, no impurities or corruption is found. The matter is precisely what it is represented to be. In this text it means that Paul is speaking with a 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.

“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}

With Paul, there was no promotion of a human agenda –no advancement of a religious institution. 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 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.

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.

“IN THE SIGHT OF GOD”

“ . . . in the sight of God . . . ”

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. 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 I speak primarily with the people in mind, I am not serving them well.

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. 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.

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!

“SPEAK WE IN CHRIST”

“ . . . speak we in Christ.” 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 the Greek word *ἐν*, which is a primary preposition denoting fixed position. A secondary meaning is “*by the instrumentality of*” ^{STRONGS} – 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 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).

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 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).

Paul has thus separated himself from all religious pretenders. He is serving no agenda but the one established by God – His “eternal purpose.” 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.

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”

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.**

mingling 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.

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 cared nothing for their responses. He was speaking to them, but he was speaking for Christ in the sight of God.

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. 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. This, of course, is all by Divine design, and is as it should be.

(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.

He put the Stumblingstone before the Jews, and announced what the Greeks thought to be absurd and foolish. He cared nothing for their responses. **He was speaking to them, but he was speaking for Christ in the sight of God.** He knew that those foreknown by God – 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).

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 a unfaithful steward. That is a condition every person must avoid.

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

The truth of the matter is that apart from Christ 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

Our day is one in which the need for godly preachers and teachers is obvious – men that 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.

Our next Hungry Saints Meeting will be held on Friday, 10/1/2004. In this session, we continue our current series of lessons on the Epistle of Second Corinthians. The eleventh lesson will cover verses one through three of the third chapter: **"EPISTLES OF CHRIST."** The people of God themselves are a message from God – a message written by the Spirit of the Living God. What is more, they are being read by all men. Our meeting will begin at 7:00 P.M. You are invited to bring your family and friends for fellowship around the Word of God. Refreshments are served afterward, with a time of extended fellowship for everyone.

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