

The Smell of the Gospel

“One man’s junk is another man’s treasure.”

We’ve all heard statements like this. They demonstrate that we each value things differently. What you like, I may hate and vice versa. This ought to prepare us for the different responses we’ll get when we proclaim the gospel of Jesus. One man may love it, while another hates it. One woman will follow it, while another will avoid it.

Paul talked about his own experiences with this dichotomy in **II Corinthians 2:15-16**.

For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.

I thought this was a humorous way to put it, but Paul basically says that to some people the gospel stinks. All they can smell in the gospel is death. That is an amazing statement considering the gospel is good news that leads to life. However, all some folks will be able to see is the death of the old self (cf. **Colossians 3:5**). They want to hang on to the old self. They want to cling to their own goals. They want to clutch their own desires. They can’t imagine a better way. They can’t fathom a better life. In **Luke 17:33**, Jesus said that whoever saves his own life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will save it. Some folks can’t get past the loss of their own life in order to gain the even more abundant life in Christ.

For others, the gospel stinks because they can’t wrap their overly large minds around it. That is, they are just too smart (so they think). Rather, they are so puffed up in thinking how smart they are, they cannot accept the simplicity of the gospel. As Paul said in **I Corinthians 1:18-31**, the Jews long for signs and the Gentiles want wisdom. Instead, God gave us Jesus crucified. It wasn’t the kind of sign the Jews wanted, and it definitely didn’t appear to be wisdom to the Gentiles. But through this seeming folly, God has provided salvation for all who will accept it.

So, to some folks, the gospel stinks. It smells like death. However, to those of us whose lives are being changed by it, it smells like life. Some folks, when walking through the garden of God’s gospel can only smell the fertilizer. But those who actually witness its splendor enjoy the smell of the roses. To those who have taken the plunge and accepted the gospel, we are learning what abundant living is about. We are discovering the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and self-control of the gospel and we smell new life. These promises are coming to each of us, sometimes slowly, sometimes quickly. But they are coming.

The worldly simply can’t understand it. Those who are seeking other paths to God simply can’t abide it. But we know the goodness of God through His gospel. And we need to remember it.

I am writing this because this week I need to remember it. Over the last week, I’ve read a novel that touted eclectic new-age mystical religion and mocked truly Biblical Christianity and Christians. Then I saw a comic strip that blatantly bashed believers while glorifying atheism as the only intelligent option. Then I watched a news show as a popular political comedian declared that Christians practiced mass delusion (to be fair, he lumped all religions in with us).

After being bombarded with this, I was beginning to get angry. My initial thought was to retaliate. I was trying to think of some way I could lampoon, criticize, satirize, and humiliate those who refuse to accept Jesus. It was a good thing that I came across **II Corinthians 2:15-16** again this week. It put everything into perspective. We just have to understand that not everyone is going to be as excited about the gospel as we are. Some people will only smell the death. They won’t understand the new life. They will see what appears to be folly. They won’t grasp the wisdom.

When that happens, our job is not to respond in kind. They may mock. They may ridicule. They may hold their noses. We do not have to respond to them in the same way. In fact, according to **Titus 3:1-7**, we are reminded that when we experience the vitriol of those who are still in the world and in sin, we need to show kindness and love. After all, we are only different from them by the grace of God. At one time, we too could only smell the death. At one time, we too thought God’s way was folly. We all went our own way. By God’s grace, we have been rescued from that prison (cf. **II Timothy**

2:25-26). We must not puff ourselves up with pride because of our submission, but humble ourselves because of God's grace.

While some will never allow themselves to smell the true fragrance of the knowledge of Christ, we can take joy in what Paul said in **II Corinthians 2:14**.

But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere.

That is, no matter how anyone responds to us, we are in the procession of the victor. Our God reigns and our God wins. Whether others accept the message we offer or think it stinks, we are still victorious as we are sharing the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ. We can take comfort in that. We do not have to rise up to the catcalls of our opponents. If we did, then we truly would stink. We can simply continue to share the glorious gospel. And then we come before God as a pleasing perfume and fragrant aroma.