What is That Smell?

2 Corinthians 2:12-17 NLT

I am going to start off today by sharing some of the top ten worst smells as rated by people on the internet.

The Top Ten Worst Smells

1. Vomit

2. Decomposing Body

3. Skunk

4. Rotten Eggs

5. Raw Sewage

6. Human Excrement

7. Body odor

8. Dumpster

9. Rotting Fish

10. Cigarette Smoke

The Top Ten Best Smells in the World according to thetoptens.com

1. Fresh clean air
2. Vanilla
3. Coffee
4. Barbecue
5. Rain
6. Bacon
7. Campfires
8. Melted Chocolate
9. Fresh Petrol (Gas)
10. Freshly Cut Grass

One of my favorite smells is the smell of coffee roasting. I like it when it is brewing, as well, but the burning smell of a coffee roaster is awesome.

When I worked on houses and townhomes in the Seattle and Ballard area, every morning around 8:30 or 9:00am I could smell coffee being roasted. And guess what I did? I either went and got coffee and donuts, or I sent someone onsite to go get coffee and donuts.

I chose to use coffee as my example because, not everyone drinks coffee or even likes the smell of coffee. And most people you ask, who drink coffee, would probably tell you that it is an acquired taste. I even know some people that like the smell of coffee, but don’t like the taste.

I am sure that all of you have favorite smells, and I would guess that those smells bring back good memories or act as a prelude to something good. I mention this because as we move on in the book of 2 Corinthians Paul uses the word fragrance to describe Christians. Let’s begin in chapter 2, verse 14.

14 But thank God! He has made us his captives and continues to lead us along in Christ’s triumphal procession. Now he uses us to spread the knowledge of Christ everywhere, like a sweet perfume. 15 Our lives are a Christ-like fragrance rising up to God. But this fragrance is perceived differently by those who are being saved and by those who are perishing. 16 To those who are perishing, we are a dreadful smell of death and doom. But to those who are being saved, we are a life-giving perfume.

And who is adequate for such a task as this?

There are a few principles that I would like to point out in these three verses.

1. Believers belong to Christ, Paul says we are captives (which doesn’t mean we are slaves, but rather “He has us captive.” In other words we follow where He goes and obey His commands. At least that is the Christian’s goal.
2. Jesus uses us to spread the knowledge of Himself (everywhere). It is true that God the Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit don’t need us, but it is clear that God wants to use us to spread the truth of Jesus.
3. Some will be pleased with the news of Christ (like a sweet perfume). Some will think the news stinks.

Remember this as you live your life and share Christ and your beliefs with others. Remember that just like the fact that not everyone likes the smell of coffee, some will turn up their nose about believing in a Savior.

1. The last principle we see in verse 16, is the no one is adequate for the task of bringing the Good News. It is true that Isaiah wrote:

“How beautiful on the mountains

are the feet of the messenger who brings good news,

the good news of peace and salvation,

the news that the God of Israel reigns!

Isaiah 52:7 NLT

But depending on the perspective of the hearer, the news might not be so beautiful. So let me try my best to give you guidelines for being as sweet smelling as possible. There really are two main things. They relate to your mind and your actions.

First of all, do your best to get rid of offensive behavior. As James writes:

21 So get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls.

James 1:21 NLT

Even evil people don’t like you when you are evil. They may feel comfortable with you but they don’t trust or respect you. And as a Christian if you are knowingly living an evil life, it will take a toll on your body, your mind, and your will. It is possible for us to be saved and still have terrible soul-life because we repeatedly live by our sin natures. If you struggle to put away sin, admit it to God and don’t go back to it. Let’s consider John chapter 8

4 “Teacher,” they said to Jesus, “this woman was caught in the act of adultery. 5 The law of Moses says to stone her. What do you say?”

6 They were trying to trap him into saying something they could use against him, but Jesus stooped down and wrote in the dust with his finger. 7 They kept demanding an answer, so he stood up again and said, “All right, but let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone!” 8 Then he stooped down again and wrote in the dust.

9 When the accusers heard this, they slipped away one by one, beginning with the oldest, until only Jesus was left in the middle of the crowd with the woman. 10 Then Jesus stood up again and said to the woman, “Where are your accusers? Didn’t even one of them condemn you?”

11 “No, Lord,” she said.

And Jesus said, “Neither do I. Go and sin no more.”

John 8:4-11 NLT

This doesn’t mean that she was going to be able to completely stop sinning. But He was encouraging her to make different life choices, based on knowing the mercy and grace of Jesus Our Lord. So every time you find yourself on the wrong path remember the words of James and the words of Jesus to this woman and stop in your tracks.

The second tool has to do with your mind and really the more we use this second tool the less we should have to use the first. The second tool is found in Philippians 4 where Paul writes:

Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. 9 Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.

Philippians 4:8-9 NLT

What we think about leads to what we do. If we think we belong in a garbage dump, we will probably spend time in garbage, and consequently we will have the aroma of garbage.

If we think on the beautiful message of the gospel and the love, the mercy, the grace, and the righteousness of Christ, we will be like a sweet fragrance to God and to those who are being saved. It is true that some will still hate your smell, but they might not hate it forever.

I remember being a teenager and going to work with my dad. He always had a thermos of coffee with him. As we were driving, he would open up the thermos and pour himself a cup. I never wanted any, until one day I did. He took his coffee with cream and sugar. A lot of cream and sugar. And when I drank finally took a drink, I realized it wasn’t that bad. But guess what? I can’t even drink coffee the way my dad drinks coffee anymore. I like it bold, strong, and with just a touch of sweet.

I say this because all we can do, as Christians, is continue to put away the filth in our lives, think on things that are true and praiseworthy, and tell people the Good News of the Gospel of Jesus. It is up to them to take a drink. Some may never do it, but for others, Jesus may become a daily necessity. We have a part to play, God uses us to bring the sweetness of His life and His message to others, the rest is up to them.

It is this truth that leads Paul to finish with verse 17.

17 You see, we are not like the many hucksters who preach for personal profit. We preach the word of God with sincerity and with Christ’s authority, knowing that God is watching us.

Paul, like us as ministers of Christ, knew full well that some preachers told people what they wanted to hear, they fabricated their message according to the aroma preferences of others. This is kind of like the Barista who let’s you feel like a coffee drinker even though you drink a 24 ounce double sweet white chocolate mocha. I’m not saying it doesn’t have some of the effects of coffee, but if that is the only coffee you drink, it’s no guarantee that you like coffee.

Paul was not like the Barista. He served up the strong bold flavor of the truth of Christ crucified, buried, and resurrected knowing that with some listeners it would never pay off.

We are sinners, who need a Savior and Advocate between us and our Creator God. Jesus is our Savior and Advocate and He made our salvation possible by living among us, dying for us, being raised from the grave for us, and by living in the heavenlies to guarantee our place with God forever.

How does that smell to you?