

**2 Corinthians 2:14 -3: 9
Dig Deeper, April 28, 2004**

Having counseled the saints to forgive, receive and comfort the repentant, sorrowing, banished brother Paul returns to those who were carping at him. His explanation of why he had put off his promised personal visit led him to their need to forgive their brother. And he informs them that he had even passed by an open door for the gospel at Troas because of his concern for their spiritual well being. He even says this door had been opened to him of the Lord. We read later, in Acts 20, that there were disciples there and that Paul stopped and remained till the first day of the week to remember the Lord with them. So despite Paul passing them up to find Titus, the gospel did reach those at Troas at a later date, whether through Paul or someone else. But in any case, assembly problems apparently supercede gospel opportunities in importance and priority. If the assembly were divided, where would the evangelist bring new converts for fellowship and discipling? And that is precisely the problem evangelists have today. Keeping the unity of the Spirit locally and internationally is basic to the intent of the gospel. If the trumpet give an uncertain sound, how do coverts know where to seek fellowship and godly care?

Paul here seems to be saying something else as well. Isn't he saying **the preaching of the gospel** is what is **essential**, not the **results**? The preaching of the pure, unmixed gospel is what glorifies God! That it is preached freely to all, without discrimination, demonstrated the wondrous mercy and grace of God. God is not obligated to present the gospel to anyone much less to save anyone. However we are all obligated to give it out to all.

1Corinthians 9:16 For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! 17 For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me.)

No human being deserves to have the gospel, but all are responsible to God to receive it. Therefore the evangelist is spoken of here as a sweet smelling aroma **no matter what the results!** Men naturally tend to focus on result and measure "success" by numbers receiving Christ. Glory to God that some do believe. Others may measure success by the numbers brought under the sound of the gospel. Glory to God that so many have been given the opportunity to hear. All sense the aroma. To those who refuse it, **those who preach** are an aroma unto **death**. They go into hell with the scent of the gospel refused lingering in their minds. To those who receive it, **those who preach** are an aroma of **life**. The saved delight in that aroma forever. Note it is those who preach that are spoken of as being the aroma, not the gospel itself.

2Timothy 4:5 But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.

What a blessing to do the work of an evangelist in the poor, lost world. What a great blessing to be a spiritually

gifted evangelist. A sweet smelling savor to God and to all. What a responsibility. To preach Christ and Him crucified,

1Corinthians 1:18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

23 But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; 24 But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

What life is imparted to the spiritually dead! A life unto life. A life in Christ that commences with being born again, then grows up unto Christ,

Ephesians 4:11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: 13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: 14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; 15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: 16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

growing: "in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever." *2Peter 3:18*

"forever," for it is eternal life.

The illustration here in chapter two is apparently based upon the victorious procession of a Roman conqueror returning in triumph from war, surrounded with wonderful odors of sweet incense proclaiming his victory. Captives in the procession were selected to be summarily slain, or to be released, upon the arbitrary (hopefully informed) judgement, or perhaps whim, of the victor. This practice demonstrated publically, in no uncertain terms, his utter, invincible, unquestionable power. Paul uses this brutal Roman practice to illustrate the life and death consequences of the gospel to its hearers, and the sweetness of its proclaimers to God.

Romans 10:13 For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. 14 How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!

But notice that Paul's concern for one local Assembly **supercedes** his concern for the lost, and for preaching the Gospel. Were his priorities right? We might wonder.

Especially a gifted evangelist with a deep longing for the salvation of precious souls, might wonder. But Paul **was** a gifted evangelist, perhaps the most gifted and zealous of all. He goes through every conceivable hardship, difficulty, resistance and persecution to reach souls for Christ. As he wrote this he was just rebounding from terrible life threatening experiences in Ephesus which he refers to more than once in his letters to them.

His priorities were right on. But he also remarks in wonder, “And who is sufficient for these things.” For in this passage we have affirmed for us the total sovereignty of God in choosing and saving each person that is saved, all the while doing so through the “foolishness of preaching.”

1Corinthians 1:21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

Who is sufficient for these things indeed!

Then he points to some, probably among them, that were in the business of “hawking” the word of God, as in an open market, selling it to those who would pay. Perhaps not for money but for prominence or for a following, or the like. How many there are in the world in this business today. Not really seeking to win souls for Christ but to win souls for their church, their denomination or for their cause. And some are blatantly simply seeking wealth. They distort, or corrupt the word of God for their own ends. We must be so careful when we go about to study the scriptures that we don’t merely have a preconceived notion or philosophy looking for a scripture to support it. Unscrupulous persons can prove anything using the Bible. We can too, if we aren’t prayerful and careful.

Now he approaches the Corinthians again regarding their questioning his authority to minister to them. Of course, they might properly desire a letter of commendation for visitors unknown to them, and provide letters of commendation for those of them who had occasion to travel and visit elsewhere, but for Paul? He was the one who had brought the gospel to them and established the assembly there over a period of a year and one half. They were a letter written in Paul’s heart and his companion’s hearts as well. (What a warm loving statement of his care for them!) They, as the assembly there, were known and read of all men. What we do on the planet is also known and read by all men. What do they see? What message do they read? Do they see Christ? See His salvation available to all? Do they see a difference in our lives produced because we are born again?

John 13: 35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

Are we each a sweet savor? A sweet savor of life unto life? Paul could point his detractors in Corinth to the sweet savor of his life and his message of grace. Could we if we had to? Actually we are to demonstrate that every day.

The letter is written in their hearts, on fleshly tables of the heart(s). Engraved, but in warm, living persons, not the cold, hard stones of the Law of Moses. Inscribed in the Assembly as a whole. To be read of all. This remark reminds us of God’s promise, through Jeremiah, (31:31-34) of a new covenant, not yet completed, to be given to Israel. And Paul speaks of himself and others as ministers of this New Covenant. This is where the New Testament in our Bible gets its name. He clearly distinguishes between the two and contrasts the two. And obviously we are to lay hold upon the New and not return to the Old (except as it illustrates the New).

1. not the Old, the New;
2. epistle not written merely with ink, written with the Spirit of God;
3. not merely engraved in stones, written in the fleshly tables of the heart;
4. not in letter, in spirit;
5. not what kills, what gives life;
6. not ministration of death, ministration of the Spirit; not ministration of Moses, but ministration of the Spirit;
7. not a fading glory shining in Moses face, but the exceeding glory of the Lord Jesus Christ;
8. not a ministration of condemnation, but of righteousness.

What a contrast! Why would anyone want to go back to the Old? Yes the Old was wonderful, holy, just and good. But it is inadequate to save and bless souls because all humans are weak in the flesh, born sinners. The New Testament is devoted to introducing the New, the Better, the Christ, based upon grace and truth. To be accepted and voluntarily, but faithfully, practiced in holy love for the Savior/Giver, NOT as rules to be obeyed under threat of punishment by a holy God. Therefore much of the New Testament, as here, warns Jewish believers not to return to the Old, and warns the Gentile believers not to adopt the Old Testament, once given to the Jews but never to the Gentiles. Yet soon after the Apostles were “promoted” to glory much of what is called Christian disregarded this. They began taking up elements of the Old Testament order, law and its physical ceremonial worship and hierarchy. Why? Because it appeals to the prideful fleshly nature we all inherited from Adam. Yet Christ died to free us from all this, to freely serve Him in love.

As Paul ASKS:

...who is sufficient for these things?

THEN ANSWERS:

And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God;