

# DON'T FOUL THE FRAGRANCE

## 2 CORINTHIANS 2:1-17

But I determined this within myself, that I would not come again to you in sorrow. For if I make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad but the one who is made sorrowful by me? And I wrote this very thing to you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow over those from whom I ought to have joy, having confidence in you all that my joy is the joy of you all. For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you.

But if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me, but all of you to some extent - not to be too severe. This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him.

For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.

Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia.

Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life. And who is sufficient for these things?

For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.

Years ago a strike by the milk deliverers in NYC was averted at the last minute. Negotiations between union leaders and company executives had become intense.

An insider commented, “The parties were far apart... There was just too much anger, too many flareups. Nothing was getting accomplished...” Milk deliveries would’ve come to a screeching halt for the folks in NYC if both sides had not agreed to a *cooling off period*.

The *ten-day cool down* allowed passions to settle.

It helped negotiators think more clearly. Emotion was removed from the equation. The *cooling off* gave *new meaning* to an *old saying*, “Don’t cry over spilt milk!”

And it was “a *cooling off period*” that helped Paul and the Corinthians. *Why too, should they cry over spilt milk?*

There’d been a falling out of sorts between the planter of this church and it’s people. And rather than another visit, Paul knew a *cooling of emotions* was needed.

Chapter 2 begins, "But I determined this within myself, that I would not come again to you in sorrow."

In Chapter 1 the Corinthians had criticized Paul for promising to visit them, yet not following through.

They accused him of being flighty, wishy-washy, unable to keep his word. They used his aborted visit, *what amounted to a rescheduled appointment*, to attack Paul's credibility. They called into doubt his word in general - even the trustworthiness of his ministry.

Yet there were legit reasons for his postponement, not the least of which was for everyone to "cool down."

In 1:23 Paul had written, "To spare you I came no more to Corinth." Tensions were high. Feelings were raw. Paul was angry at their libel-laden accusations.

At the time the relationship between the apostle and the upstart church was volatile. If Paul had visited at that time, sparks could fly - a real blow-up might occur.

To avoid potential damage, Paul stayed put.

Notice verse 1, Paul says he determined, "*I would not come again to you in sorrow.*" This seems to indicate he'd paid an earlier visit to Corinth that we're not told about in his letters, or in the book of Acts.

Acts 18 describes Paul's initial visit to Corinth, and it was anything but *sorrowful*. Paul spent a year-and-a-half planting the church. It was a joy. He had a blast!

It was later when he returned from Syria to Ephesus that he heard of trouble in the Corinthian church. That's when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians to address their errors.

There are scholars who believe Paul followed up that first letter with a jaunt across the Aegean Sea. He paid the Corinthians a visit... *that didn't go so well!*

Paul tangled with his critics. Tempers flared. Words were hurled. Hurts ensued. It got so heated, the visit seriously threatened their relationship. He left Corinth exceedingly *sorrowful*, worried about the church.

This is what he references in verse 2, "For if I make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad but the one who is made sorrowful by me?" Paul wanted his relationship with the Corinthians to be mutually encouraging. They were his brothers. He hoped they would *cheer each other up*, not *bum each other out*.

He writes, "And I wrote this very thing to you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow over those from whom I ought to have joy, having confidence in you all that my joy is the joy of you all." Paul was concerned, if he had come to Corinth at that time his presence might've created a conflict so extreme it would've cause a permanent breach between them. That's what he had been trying to avoid by postponing his visit.

Often Christian ministry and leadership involve confrontation. When people err, they need to be corrected. When rebellion rises, it has be challenged.

When authority is usurped, someone in authority has to stand up. Blatant sin and brewing rebellion can't be tolerated or it festers into something destructive.

Someone has to impose order, and work out a resolution - even if it's an unpleasant one. In these situations a person has to step up and be "*the heavy*."

Yet this was not a role Paul relished. This kind of a trouble-shooter becomes a target himself. He gets exposed to friendly fire. In just doing what's right he can bruise feelings, and when that happens people get defensive - they polarize - they retaliate. *It's awful*.

The odds of there being a misunderstanding ratchet through the roof. Collateral damage is a real possibility.

And this is why Paul tried to avoid being the heavy. He usually sent Timothy or Titus when an enforcer was needed. He let someone else do the discipline.

And this is the policy we've adopted at Calvary Chapel. Once upon a time, *I did the church discipline*. I went to folks in sin, and had the hard conversations.

If they accepted what I said, great! But if they bucked it, and got mad, their anger was directed at me - and since I'm the guy up front on Sundays they ended up leaving the church. Sadly, they stopped hearing God's Word, which was really what they needed most.

That's why I've tried to turn over the confrontations and discipline to our elders and assistant pastors. Now if a person

gets angry, they're ticked off at James or an elder... *but they'll still come and hear the Bible Study.*

My relationship with the person is preserved, so I can help them grow in Christ... And this was the reason Paul didn't make his promised visit to Corinth.

He was trying to preserve his relationship with those who were bucking and kicking against biblical truths.

Rather than visit Corinth, Paul sent a letter instead.

Verse 4, "For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you, with many tears, not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you." It could be that the letter he refers to is 1 Corinthians. In that letter he called out sin and called the church to repentance.

But some scholars believe there was another letter - a letter we no longer possess. They call it, Paul's "severe letter." This was the letter he bathed in tears, and wrote in "anguish of heart." They suggest Paul's *severe letter* was written right after his *sorrowful visit*.

I think it is possible there was a letter from Paul we no longer possess. Not everything the apostles wrote was considered to be divinely inspired Scripture.

Certainly whatever Paul wrote to the Corinthians was applicable at that time. But it may not have applied to all Christians, at all times, and in all places. If it had the Holy Spirit would've preserved it and pass it on to us - as he did the other 27 books of the New Testament.

In both 1 Corinthians and in his severe letter, Paul's subject was *sin in the church*. That's what he speaks of in verse 5, "But if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me," but all of you to some extent - not to be too severe." Realize, whenever there's blatant sin in the church, it becomes a blight on the whole church.

Here Paul says, the sinner hasn't just grieved him.

Though he's kicked against Paul's authority, his sin isn't a sin against Paul. It's a sin against everyone!

Remember the OT story of Achan. Because of this one man's sin the army of Israel was defeated when they went into battle against the city of Ai. Sin in the camp led to deadly consequences for the entire nation.

All Israel ended up *aching* because of *Achan!* And the same scenario was facing the church at Corinth!

Recall the immorality Paul dealt with in 1 Corinthians 5. A brother was shacking up with his father's wife - his step-mother - and the church hadn't stepped in!

These weren't relatives who got drunk at the family reunion, and ended up in a compromising situation. That would've been bad enough, but these two guys were playing house - acting like husband and wife.

By permitting it, the church had sanctioned incest!

And worse, the Corinthian believers were proud of their tolerance. They thought they were being loving and non-judgmental by refusing to impose moral standards on their

members... In contrast, Paul was up in arms! Even the pagans realized the evils of incest.

This was the sort of racy, raunchy story you'd see on [The Jerry Springer Show](#), not in the church of Jesus.

It's been said, "[Tolerance is the virtue of the man who has lost his convictions.](#)" That's what happened in Corinth. An entire church had lost its moral bearings.

This is why Paul rebuked the Corinthians.

There's no merit in being soft on sin. The sin of this man and woman was a cancer, that if tolerated would spread and eat away at the health of the whole body.

The church needed to call this incestuous couple to repentance, or else kick them out of the church.

Their choice was to repent or be dis-fellowshipped.

They could continue in sin or in the church, *but not both*. Paul concluded in 1 Corinthians 5:5, "[deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh.](#)"

We all sin and slip at times, but *falling to temptation* and a *lifestyle choice* are different decisions. One comes from weakness - the latter is an act of defiance.

We'll help you if you stumble into sin, but if you dig in your heels and want us to ignore it or approve of it - we can't!... If you hunker down in a sinful relationship, or be persistently irresponsible toward your family, or get drunk or stoned all the time... then have at it... but keep that behavior *out there*, don't bring it *in here*.



The Church needs to be in the world, but we become useless when worldly practices get into the church.

The church isn't for *perfect Christians* - they don't exist... but neither is it for *pretend Christians* who only want to look or feel spiritual. The Church is for *practicing Christians* who are trying to please God.

If you want to sow your wild oats, have at it - then when you're broken and empty, come back and we'll help you heal and start to grow again. But don't ask us to sit around and watch you ruin your life without telling you that you're wrong and insisting that you change.

That's not loving... **Love cares enough to intervene.**

Apparently, after Paul's rebuke, the church at Corinth found the will and courage to confront the incestuous couple. *And they repented! The discipline worked.*

For we're told in verse 6, "This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him." Ironically, the Corinthians swung to the other end of the pendulum.

In 1 Corinthians Paul had to encourage them to take a stand. But now that the man had repented, Paul has to exhort them to forgive him and reaffirm their love...

The Corinthians were just as wrong for *withholding their forgiveness* as they were for *tolerating their sin*.

*Why is it we gravitate to extremes?* We're either too lenient or too harsh. It was G. Campbell Morgan who wrote, "Love never slights holiness, but holiness never slays love." The two go together. If we love someone we'll want for them, both forgiveness and holiness.

Paul says in verse 9, "For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things." We think of church discipline as a test for the person who's fallen into bondage, but it's really an indicator of the spiritual health of the church.

When a situation arises that needs to be addressed, it's the church and its leaders, that are being tested.

Most married couples I know want to have a baby, but when the baby comes they don't always like changing diapers. *That's how I see church discipline.*

We all like people to get born again, but a church with spiritual babes has a lot of dirty diapers to change.

That's why we need to roll up our sleeves, and care!

He continues, "Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices." Paul was willing to forgive this man, and the Corinthians needed to do so as well. Had the church not shown mercy and taken him back in, they would've played into Satan's hands.

Revelation 12:10 calls the devil, "the accuser of the brethren." Satan loves to take a person Christ forgives, and bury him under a mound of condemnation.

Famous psychiatrist Karl Menninger once said if he could convince the patients in psychiatric hospitals that their sins were forgiven, 75% of them would walk out the next day... Un-forgiveness is the worst prison.

Let's not help the devil either way - by *withholding forgiveness* or by *tolerating sin*. Let's represent Jesus!

Corrie Ten Boom and her family were members of the WWII underground who helped the Jews escape persecution. She and her sister eventually were caught and sent to the Ravensbruck Concentration Camp.

Years after the war, Corrie spoke at a church in Munich, where a man approached and paid her a compliment. Corrie recognized this man as one of the Nazi guards at Ravensbruck. In fact, he had stood guard over the entrance to the women's shower and had subjected her and her sister to horrible indignities.

The mere site of him conjured up in her all the horror she had suffered. Vengeful thoughts filled her mind.

Corrie had just spoken on our need to forgive others the way Jesus has forgiven us, but when this man reached out to shake hands, Corrie couldn't raise hers.

At that moment she breathed a silent prayer, "Jesus, I cannot forgive him. Please give me your forgiveness."

In her book "*The Hiding Place*" she recounts what happened next, "As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened.

From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me.” Though she couldn’t do it on her own, the Lord helped her forgive this former enemy... *And He’ll help you forgive when you need too.*

Church discipline is a test. Not just if we’ll stand up to sin - but also, will we extend mercy to the sinner?

Paul continues in verse 12, **“Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, I had no rest in my spirit, because I did not find Titus my brother; but taking my leave of them, I departed for Macedonia.”**

His troubled relationship with the Corinthians was heavy on Paul’s mind. It interfered with his ministry.

**God was opening doors, but Paul was distracted.**

And I’m afraid that’s our problem. How often do you miss the door God opens... *to do a kind deed, or to speak some encouragement, or to share your faith?*

**“Yea, but I’m not distracted”... really?** A recent study revealed the average person checks their cellphone 221 times a day - that's every 4.3 minutes. And that’s probably low. We tend to underestimate phone usage.

What’s even more revealing is that the same study showed that a majority of people check their phone just **“to avoid the other people around them.”** God wants us to look for open doors, not try to avoid them.

Well, Paul too missed out on opportunities in Troas, because he was so eager to know what was going on in Corinth. He pressed on to Macedonia where he hoped to meet his messenger, Titus, with an update.

It always amazes me, that two whole chapters of the Bible (1-2) were written because a church group got upset that Paul didn't visit them when he said he might.

It just goes to show *it's the little stuff that often causes the biggest problems*. Major schisms can occur over slights, or miscommunications, or misconceptions.

I've had folks get mad at me, and harbor a grudge because of a simple confusion. Rather than assume the worst, if they'd just come to me, and asked me what I really meant by what I did or said - we could've resolved the conflict, and enjoyed great fellowship.

Let's all do the hard work of *resolving conflicts*, and *extending forgiveness* when and where it's required.

Paul concludes Chapter 2 with a **big picture** lesson.

The apostle goes from *the trees to the forest* - *from microscope to telescope* - *from the micro to the macro...* So far, he's focused narrowly - on a local conflict with a few believers. There's *a stink* in Corinth.

But from here on, Paul shows why this squabble among a small group in Corinth was so strategic to the cause of Christ. *Any disruption among Christians has colossal implications in the spirit world around us...*

Paul explains in verse 14, "Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place." Here, some historical background is helpful.

When a Roman general led his legions to victory... And not just any victory... there were qualifications...

*The war had to be fought on foreign soil - 5000 enemy troops had to be captured - new territory added to the Empire...* but when that occurred the general was honored by the city of Rome with a triumph!

The "Roman Triumph" was the ancient equivalent of a ticker-tape parade. It was a triumphant procession.

This past June when the NBA Cavaliers became the first Cleveland sports franchise in 52 years to win a championship the city of Cleveland threw a triumphant procession. The team paraded through the streets.

It was estimated 1.3 million fans came to celebrate.

And that was the idea behind the Roman triumph...

Through streets decorated with garland, and packed with Rome's citizenry, came the victory procession!

First, came the Roman senate marching in honor of the general... followed by the trumpeters... Then carts carrying the loot - the spoils of battle... along with paintings and models of defeated ships and citadels...

A white bull came next, which would be sacrificed to Jupiter, god of Rome... Then came the defeated king and captive princes. They'd soon be fed to the lions...

After that were the musicians... then the pagan priests swinging their burning censers, filling the streets and alleys with the sweet smell of incense...

Finally the conquering general appeared, wearing a purple toga, riding in a golden chariot, pulled by four horses (sometimes even elephants), followed by the victorious troops that had marched with him to battle.

One commentary reads, "It made for a tremendous day which might happen only once in a lifetime."

Yet to Paul, this parade was a visual of what was happening spiritually, all throughout the Roman empire.

Everywhere Paul traveled he was part of a triumph - a procession - honoring the victorious General Jesus!

And even today, on city streets and country roads, the world over, Jesus is still marching triumphantly!

He was God in heaven, but He humbled Himself and was dispatched to foreign territory. Our General overcame temptation. On the cross He won the victory over sin and death. His resurrection began His triumph.

And it's interesting, the book of Acts proves that our General qualifies for a Triumph. We're told on the Day of Pentecost 3000 souls were saved. Several days later another 2000 souls were added. General Jesus met His quota! *He conquered at least 5000 captives.*

In fact, His numbers continue to grow. Over the centuries, throughout the generations... down to even you and I... we've been added to His Triumph. Paul sees himself, with every

other Christian who's ever lived, marching with Heaven's Conquering Hero.

*And who are you in this procession?*

Are you a Senator, a co-ruler in His kingdom?

Are you a musician trumpeting His praise?

Are you something He fought for, the spoils of battle?

Are you a sacrifice... a living sacrifice for Jesus?

Are you one of His former foes who fought Him every step of the way, until now that you've surrendered?

Are you one of the troops who marches by His side?

Are you a priest swinging your censer of prayer?

Or are you the sweet-smell of that incense that testifies of the General's greatness and His glory?

***How about all the above!***

Every aspect of the Roman triumph speaks of the spiritual triumph that's lasted now for 2000 years...

Never assume Jesus is marching to win victories.

The victory has already been won. [Like the Roman Triumph we march \*not to victory, but from victory.\*](#) We celebrate a triumph that has already been won!

And Paul adds to this analogy of the conquering general, by focusing on one aspect of His triumph...

In verse 15 Paul writes of its smells, ["For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing.](#)

[To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life."](#)



I love this analogy... we're not only the treasure Jesus fought to obtain... or His conquered foe... or a soldier in His army... *we are the fragrance of Christ!*

It's no surprise, but you and I are **little stinkers!**

**To other Christians** you're a breath of fresh air.

Have you noticed, whenever you discover another serious Christian in the office, or on the job site, or at the gym there's an instant camaraderie! A bond exists.

There's mutual support. It creates a sweet aroma.

But to the unbeliever who has rejected Jesus, another Christian is like a offensive odor. You could call us, "**body odor**" - *after all we are the body of Christ!*

When a person hostile to Christ gets a whiff of a real Christian we're like the smell of spoiled milk - they open a window and try to shoo us out... **A Christian is a sweet perfume to some, and a noxious fume to others!**

Yet if no one smells you at all - if you're odorless, there's a problem! I hope whenever I walk into a room the people either *hold their nose or breathe in deeply.*

Either way, we should give off a smell for Jesus!

In fact, right now, why don't you just lean over to the person next to you, and take a whiff! *What do smell?*

Realize, smells and odors can be pungent. If you've been around cigar smoke, or if you've been cooking bacon, or if you've been cleaning with ammonia the people around you will know. You'll emanate that odor.

And if you walk with Jesus, they'll pick up His scent.

You won't smell like cigars, but you'll send out a waft of *love, and grace, and joy, and forgiveness, and mercy, and peace, and kindness*. Rather than stink up the joint, people will consider you a breath of fresh air.

Love the Lord, and His smell will linger with you!

Once a prospective missionary to China enrolled in a language class. To communicate with the Chinese the missionary had to learn their very difficult language.

The first day of class a professor walked into the room. She strolled from row to row, between the students, never saying a word. After touring the room she left abruptly - only to return a few minutes later.

That's when she addressed the class, "[Does anyone notice something different about me?](#)" Silence. She was wearing the same dress, the same shoes, etc.

Finally one young man raised his hand, "[I do notice you've put on a lovely smelling perfume.](#)" He was right. She'd splashed on the perfume while outside the room.

That's when she made her point to the class, "[It will take a long, long time before any of you learn Chinese well enough to be able to share the Gospel of Jesus with a Chinese-speaking person. But even before you do that, you can minister the sweet fragrance of Christ to these people by the quality of the life you live.](#)"

We usually think of evangelism as *what a person says*, but it can also be *how a person smells*. It's about giving off a sweet fragrance to the people around you.

*Are your actions scented with love?  
Has your attitude been dusted with grace?  
Does the incense of the Holy Spirit burn in you?  
Do you release His aroma wherever you go?  
We are called to be **"the fragrance of Christ!"***

And this is why the issues going on in the church at Corinth were such a big deal... *It wasn't just the accusations the Corinthians were hurling at Paul... or the man sleeping with his step-mom and how the church had reacted... or whether the Corinthians were willing to forgive the fellow after he repented...* There was much more to it - that was just part of the story!

The Christians in Corinth were also part of this procession - this triumphant parade of General Jesus.

What would the spectators - angels and pagans and fellow believers alike - say, if in the midst of this march to honor Jesus, the Corinthians were seen *grumbling and complaining about Paul - and indulging in lustful behavior, or tolerating others who did the same - or if they refused to forgive each other even when they'd been forgiven by Jesus?* They'd foul up the fragrance.

Rather than a sweet-smell there'd be a stench.

And this is why the issues that go on in our church, Calvary Chapel, are such a big deal... *when you complain about your brother or the church leaders...*

*When you choose sin over a lifestyle of holiness...  
Or ignore your brother when he's in trouble...*

*Or worse, when you chose to be unforgiving...*

If it were just us effected, it would be tragic enough. *But it's not just us. We're raining on someone else's parade! We're tainting the honor that belongs to Jesus.*

We're marching in His Triumph... Millions of angels are watching. People around us are watching... Are we giving off a sweet smell, or does our witness stink?

This is why Paul asks at the end of verse 16, "**And who is sufficient for these things?**" This is a huge responsibility, and we need Jesus to empower us.

The chapter ends, verse 17, "**For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ.**"

The one smell that turns off God and people alike is *hypocrisy*. Phoniness is a stench in every nostril.

Paul says he wasn't a "**peddler of the Word.**" The term "**peddler**" was used of a salesman who defrauded his buyer. He'd water down his tonic, or rig his scales. He would use deception. It was anything for a sale.

Paul wasn't like the used car salesman who slaps the hood of the car - then tells you what you want to hear... He was sincere. He kept a clear conscience.

As he says in verse 17, Paul remembers, he is "**from God**" and he "**speaks in the sight of God in Christ.**"

Paul knew He was part of a triumph to honor a great General! He wanted *all He did - but especially the way He conducted His ministry* - to honor His Lord Jesus.

And you too are part of that Triumph. Let's remind ourselves continually that we're the fragrance of Christ.

Don't foul up the fragrance! Don't let your life be an embarrassing odor. Let's give off sweet-smells of *love, joy, peace, purity, devotion, sacrifice...* Be a godly stinker... be a perfume in the nostrils of God and man!