We Are the Aroma of Christ

2 Corinthians 2:1-17

Key Verse: 2:15 “For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.”

Last week in the second part of chapter one we learned Paul’s absolute defense for the gospel message. When he said, “In Christ always has been Yes”, Paul mentioned the absoluteness of the gospel message, which cannot be revoked or compromised. We may compromise or negotiate for something else, but not for the gospel, which is bought with the price of the blood of Jesus. In today’s passage Paul continues to show his affection of Christ for the Corinth Church. We’ll see the image of Christ Jesus and smell his aroma from Paul’s affection for the church.

First, his painful visit and tearful letter (1-4) Look at verses 1-4. “***So I made up my mind that I would not make another painful visit to you. For if I grieve you, who is left to make me glad but you whom I have grieved? I wrote as I did, so that when I came I would not be distressed by those who should have made me rejoice. I had confidence in all of you, that you would all share my joy. For I wrote you out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to grieve you but to let you know the depth of my love for you***.” As we have studied thus far, Paul changed his plan of visit to the Corinth Church. His original plan was to visit Corinth first from Ephesus on the way to Macedonia. But he changed his plan and skipped Corinth and went to Macedonia directly. In chapter one Paul explained the reason why he had changed his mind. He explained two main reasons: first it was to follow the Holy Spirit. Second it was for the sake of the church. Paul followed the Holy Spirit and experienced God’s grace. (1:12) He also believed that his absence could work better for the church than his visit. (1:23-24)

In verse 1 Paul said that he decided not to have another painful visit to the church. When we read 1 & 2 Corinthians carefully, we learn that Paul had visited Corinth right after he sent his second letter, which is 1 Corinthians, through Timothy. According to the Bible scholars, Paul wrote one more letter to the church before he wrote 1 Corinthians, which is his second letter. After sending 1 Corinthians, Paul visited the Corinth Church which did not show favor to him. His visit was in the middle of turmoil and troubles in the church. Some opposed Paul and hurt him. As a shepherd for the church Paul’s heart was broken. This is why Paul called it ‘painful visit’ in verse 1. After coming back from his first trip, Paul wrote another letter, which was his third letter, which Paul mentioned in verse 4. We call this ‘tearful and anguished letter.’ I believe that in his third letter Paul must have harshly rebuked the church as their shepherd. Paul wrote this letter out of great distress and anguish of heart and with many tears. (4) Paul said that his anguished and tearful letter was the expression of the depth of his love for the church. (4)

Have you ever written such an anguished and tearful letter to someone whom you love and trust? When he or she doesn’t understand your genuine love, but misunderstands you and even accuses you, your heart must have been broken. You cannot but kneel before God and cry out with tears. Paul had the same broken heart for the church. Paul started the church during his second mission trip. He had prayed for them and supported them after he left. The church was like his lovely son to Paul. But the church brought lots of problems to Paul who left them. Paul counselled them case by case through his letters and visit. Still, some of them rejected Paul and maligned his way and ministry. Paul must have remembered his past life before he met Christ Jesus. He did exactly the same, even more damaging work to the church of God. But Jesus became patient with him. Jesus prayed for this ignorant Paul with anguished heart with many tears. Now Paul shared Christ’s affection for the church, who used to act like him. As Jesus showed his affection for Paul, so also Paul showed his affection for the Corinth Church. Like Paul, let us remember how patiently God has borne each of us with great love. And let us share Christ’s affection and compassion for others who need our prayer and support.

Second, forgive your offender (5-11) At that time in the church there were some who did not admit Paul’s leadership. They rejected Paul thinking that he was not one of the Great Apostles. They brought divisions to the church. But Paul forgave them when they repented. For the unity of the church Paul accepted them as brothers and sisters in Christ. Now Paul asked the church to forgive those who repented. Look at verses 5-11. “***If anyone has caused grief, he has not so much grieved me as he has grieved all of you to some extent—not to put it too severely. The punishment inflicted on him by the majority is sufficient. Now instead, you ought to forgive and comfort him, so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. I urge you, therefore, to reaffirm your love for him. Another reason I wrote you was to see if you would stand the test and be obedient in everything. Anyone you forgive, I also forgive. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes.***” Someone said that the most difficult thing to practice among Jesus’ teaching is forgiveness. Indeed, forgiveness is the most difficult as well as the most beautiful and powerful thing which Jesus taught and did. On the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught his disciples to love their enemies. “*You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,*” (Mt 5:43-44) As he had taught, Jesus forgave his enemies who had betrayed him, crucified him, and deserted him. Jesus prayed on the cross, “*Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing*.” (Lk 23:34) Jesus prayed for those who had nailed him on the cross. Jesus loved those who had betrayed him and deserted him. Paul knew that Jesus had forgiven him and loved him even though he was a murderer and persecutor to the church. When Jesus met Paul on the way to Damascus, he did not rebuke Paul about his wrongdoings. Jesus didn’t ask him about his sin, even one little thing, but forgave him and called him to preach the good news. Later Paul confessed that he became who he was only by the grace of God which is the forgiving love of Christ. Now, Paul asked the Corinth Church to forgive his enemies as Christ forgave him.

Paul had the compassion and affection of Christ for one lost soul. In the past, he was proud, merciless, and ruthless when he had allowed Stephen to be stoned to death. He had no compassion for one soul. But now he had compassion for the one who was wounded and broken by his sin. Paul showed his shepherd's heart for the one lost sheep. He shared Christ’s shepherd’s heart who leaves 99 sheep in the open country and goes after the lost sheep until he finds it. (Lk 15:4) People in this world condemn those who hurt them. They avoid their enemies as possible as they can. But we Christians are different from them. We follow Jesus’ example who loved his enemies and prayed for those who persecuted him. Before we judge others, we must have compassion for them. It is the Lord who judges, and it is we who love and have compassion. May God help us to share the affection of Christ and practice his forgiving love for our brothers and sisters, spouse, co-workers, and even our adversaries. Amen!

Third, we are the aroma of Christ to God (12-17) As we know, Paul was a man of mission. For the sake of God’s ministry Paul was ready to give up all his benefits. During his first mission trip, Paul suffered much for God’s ministry. He was strong and had do-or-die spirit in carrying out God’s mission. At that time John Mark accompanied Paul and Barnabas. But in the middle of their trip Mark dropped out. Mark might have been burdened by Paul’s strong character and do-or-die spirit. For the second mission trip Barnabas suggested Paul to take Mark again. But Paul strongly refused it because Mark had dropped out during their previous trip. After a severe arguing, Paul and Barnabas set apart. Paul did not yield for the sake of the mission. Paul gave up Mark to continue to build up his mission. But now see how Paul was changed. Look at verses 12-13. “***Now when I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me, I still had no peace of mind, because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I said goodbye to them and went on to Macedonia.***” Paul knew that the Lord had opened a door for Troas. For the sake of the ministry in Troas, Paul could have stayed there. But Paul put Troas into God’s hand and went to Macedonia to find Titus. Paul had the affection for Titus, one soul, more than his ministry. In the past Paul gave up John Mark and set out for his mission. But now Paul chose Titus, leaving his ministry into God’s hand.

Now Paul’s heart was full of thanks and joy because he shared the affection of Christ. Look at verses 14-16. “***But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ’s triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing. To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task***?” In these verses Paul describes Christians as a pleasing aroma to God. In the days of Roman Empire, there were triumphal processions of war heroes marching to the throne of Caesar. While the triumphant generals and soldiers were marching, captives and groups of plunder followed them. People of the city who came to welcome them spread the smell of victory along the street. They enjoyed the triumphal sight and smelled the pleasing aroma. Paul describes us as captives in Christ’s triumphal procession. Christ Jesus is the triumphal general who rescued us from the hand of our enemy Satan, and we are following Christ Jesus as his captives who shared his joy and victory. Some may feel uncomfortable with the expression as captives. But we are the glorious captives of Christ and wonderful servants of God. In the past we were slaves to Satan. The life of slavery to Satan was miserable. But our Lord Jesus set us free from Satan and made us slave to the righteousness of God. Now we are proudly marching with our Lord and Savior Jesus and sharing his joy of salvation and victory.

Paul praised God who saved him and used him to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere. (14) In fact, God saved Paul and sent him to Asia and Europe to spread the knowledge of Jesus wherever he visited. Look at verse 15 again. We are the aroma of Christ Jesus. Aroma is good and sweet smell. Becoming the aroma of Christ means we spread good and sweet influence of Christ to others. What are the good and sweet influence of Christ? There are many but forgiving love of Chris. The word aroma is *euodia* in Greek, which also means fragrant offering. Jesus became the fragrant offering for our salvation. Like Jesus we also become the fragrant offering for Christ. Paul said in Ephesians 5:2, “*and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice*.” There was a prodigal son of American missionaries in Korea. He grew up under his missionary parents, but he didn’t believe in God. One day this American boy heard the story about Reverend Sohn Yang Won, who had lost his two sons by a communist during the Korean War. Soon the communist was arrested and brought to the pastor. Reverend Sohn did not retaliate his enemy. Instead, he pleaded people not to kill him, and later he adopted him as his own son. He forgave his enemy and accepted him as his son. Reverend Sohn practiced Christ’s forgiving love. The American boy was deeply touched by the story of Reverend Sohn, and he repented of his sin and accepted Jesus as his Savior and Lord. The missionary’s son grew up and became a medical doctor missionary who had invented the first Ambulance in S. Korea. He is Dr. John Linton.

Look at verse 16. “*To the one we are an aroma that brings death; to the other, an aroma that brings life. And who is equal to such a task*?” When we have the aroma of Christ, we become the smell of death to those are perishing and the fragrance of life to those who are saved. God will use us according to his good purpose whether we become the smell of death or the fragrance of life. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:18, “*For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God*.” Amen!

In conclusion we learned about Paul’s affection for the church and his depth of love for one lost soul. I pray that we may spread the aroma of Christ this semester, especially to every campus near us. Let us pray that the aroma of Christ may fill this room, this area, this city of St. Louis, and this country. Amen! One word: We are the pleasing aroma of Christ!

**Paul’s Mission Trip**

1. First mission trip: 48-49 AD

Antioch-Antioch (Acts 13-14)

Paul, Barnabas, John Mark

1. Second mission trip: 51-53 AD

Jerusalem-Jerusalem (Acts 16-18)

Paul, Silas, Timothy

1. Third mission trip: 54-57 AD

Antioch-Jerusalem (Acts 19-21)

Paul, Timothy, his disciples (Erastus, Sopater, Aristarchus, Secundus, Gaius, Luke)

1. Journey to Rome: 59-60 AD

Jerusalem-Rome (Acts 27-28)

Paul as a prisoner

**Paul’s Letters to the Corinthians**

1. First letter (lost): (ref. 1 Co 5:9)
2. Second letter (1 Corinthians) written in Ephesus AD 53-54.

First visit to Corinth---painful visit (2 Co 2:1)

1. Third letter (lost)---anguished and tearful letter (2 Co 2:4)
2. Fourth letter (2 Corinthians) written in Macedonia AD 55