

# 2 Corinthians 2 - Church Discipline and Restoration

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2 Corinthians, we are in chapter 2. Open your Bible there, please, if you would. And we're going to do our best to cover the whole chapter here this morning, because it's all the same thing, and then we'll move along. Let me read through the chapter. It's really not all that long, and then we'll open up in prayer. Paul writes:

*<sup>1</sup> For I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you. <sup>2</sup> For if I cause you pain, who is there to make me glad but the one whom I have pained? <sup>3</sup> And I wrote as I did, so that when I came I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice, for I felt sure of all of you, that my joy would be the joy of you all. <sup>4</sup> For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you.*

*<sup>5</sup> Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you. <sup>6</sup> For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, <sup>7</sup> so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. <sup>8</sup> So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. <sup>9</sup> For this is why I wrote, that I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything. <sup>10</sup> Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, <sup>11</sup> so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.*

*<sup>12</sup> When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, <sup>13</sup> my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia.*

*<sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, <sup>16</sup> to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? <sup>17</sup> For*

*we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.*" (ESV)

Stop there. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, as we come before You, we open up our hearts to You that You might speak into them the ministry of wisdom and understanding from the Scriptures. That we might grow in the grace and knowledge of Your heart toward us, that we might learn the things that need to be learned in our lives, and that we might put them into practice.

Father, we look to You for all that, especially the part about putting it into practice. We need the courage and the strength to do that. Help us, Lord, not just to be hearers, but also doers of the Word. And we ask it in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior, amen.

You will remember those of you that were here last week that we ended our study in chapter 1 with a statement by the apostle Paul to the church there in Corinth, saying essentially, the reason that I changed my travel plans, and didn't come back to see you when I said I was going to come back to see you was because I wanted to spare you. And that's a very, very, important thing.

Paul was being criticized because of his change of plans, and people were making all kinds of statements about whether or not he was dependable and so on and so forth. But he said to them, I didn't want to come back at that time in order to spare you. Because his first visit to them was a very painful one.

And so he continues that now with that thought here in chapter 2, look with me again in verse 1, and he explains this a little more. He says, *"For I made up my mind not to make another painful visit to you."* The first one was very painful and nothing got resolved.

He said, *"<sup>2</sup> For if I cause you pain (by coming back to see you again), who is there to make me glad..."* If I have in fact pained you, you're not going to be able to give me any joy and I you. And he says, *"<sup>3</sup> ...(so) I wrote you as I did, so that when I came I might not suffer pain from those who should have made me rejoice, for I felt sure of all of you, that my joy would be the joy of you all."*

And what he's basically saying here is that he felt that coming back to visit them again quickly would be counterproductive, because there was frankly a lot of confronting to do. Some of you hate confronting and I get it. I'm not a big fan of it myself. I mean, I do it and it has to be done sometimes, but it's never fun,

right? I mean, people will often say to me, I just hate confrontation. Well, Paul had to confront the believers in Corinth because they were just, they were really whacked out and going through some, I mean, they were being drawn away.

They were becoming critical and questioning his authority, and Paul feared for their lives in Christ. So, he had to confront the sin that was happening in the church there. By the way, we're not exactly sure what all that sin was, but there was sin in the church, and it had to be confronted.

And that's what this chapter is a little bit about, and that's what we're going to be dealing with today. We're going to be talking here about church discipline. I was just going to look around to see if anybody wanted to get out quick, because it's probably not the message you can't—I just can't wait for him to talk about church discipline, because it's really not one of those subjects that we would really think is a great thing to study in the Word.

But, the beauty of teaching through the Scriptures like we do, chapter by chapter, verse by verse, is that we can't avoid it. This is where we are, 2 Corinthians chapter 2, and he deals with church discipline, he deals with confronting sin. And so that's what we're going to talk about. But again, confronting is never fun.

Paul chose to do his confronting in a letter, hoping that they would respond to his letter. And then when he came to visit them in person, they would have already responded well, and he could spend his time among them joyfully. And they even criticized him for that. They even criticized him for doing it in a letter.

He even talks about it. He says, people will say of me, well, he's bold and weighty in his letters, but when he's among us, he's really not that big of a deal. And what Paul is doing here is he's doing his best to confront them in a way that is going to be beneficial.

And I appreciate the fact that he chose to do it in a letter. I don't know about you, but I really love writing. And I appreciate the fact that when people have questions for me as a pastor, whether they're Bible questions or relational questions that they want to hear from the Bible about or whatever.

I appreciate when people give me the opportunity to compose myself and literally compose a response because, especially when you're confronting a situation, you know how easy it is to say something that you don't really mean. And when you're composing it on a computer, it's just easy, you write a

sentence or even a paragraph, and then you look at it and go, yeah, you just hit the backspace key, brrrrrr, right? We can't do that when you're talking. I mean, we'll say that, we'll be talking to somebody and we'll go, woah, woah, woah, back up. You said it. It's out there, right? And even though you might go—and just do something funny to show them that I didn't really mean to say that. You said it.

I appreciate the ability to be able to compose a response to people or to be thoughtful in my responses to people, and what they're trying to say. And that's what Paul's trying to do here. I want to think through how I'm going to confront this situation because this is not going to be fun. And I really want you guys to respond well, so that when I do come back, we can have the joyous time together that I want to have with you.

And he talks more about this letter that he wrote that was so difficult. Look at verse 4 in your Bible here. He says, “*For I wrote to you out of* (look at these terms that he uses) *much affliction* (he says) *and anguish of heart and with many tears...*” Notice that, notice this was not a fun letter for Paul to write. He didn't enjoy it.

There's some people that give you the impression that they like to correct other people. But it's not fun correcting. It's not fun bringing discipline. Even as a parent, when I would discipline my children when they were very small, I didn't like it. If there are some parents of small kids here and you don't like disciplining your children, join the group. And I would tell my children that.

When they really did something, I had to confront them and we had to go into their room and close the door, and I'd sit down with them and say, I hate this. I would just tell them straight out, I don't like this. This isn't fun. But, here's the deal, I love you so much that I got to do this. And then you go through them, but it's never fun. It's like, I mean, I relate much affliction, anguish of heart, many tears, when I would discipline my kids, I would cry. Cause I hated doing that stuff.

Look what he goes on to say at the end of verse 4. He says, what I did not to cause you pain but so that you might know how much I love you. He says that you would “*know the abundant love that I have for you.*”

What is discipline all about, you guys? It's about showing love. Correction is not made for the sake of feeling like I'm in charge. You're going to do what I say, I'm in charge. You do, I say jump and you say how high or whatever ridiculous sort of things we say sometimes. It's all about showing love, right?

What we're doing here, and this is something every parent understands, we're inflicting a little pain in order to spare them of much greater pain later on. By the way, that's why we take our kids to the dentist, right? We know from having been to the dentist probably not going to be an enjoyable experience no matter how much we tell them they're going to get a toy afterwards. And we try, we focus on the toy. They're going, I don't want to go to the dentist.

Yeah, but that toy thing, remember? They got the toy box. And you can choose any toy you want. And you might be able to distract them for a minute or two. But ultimately, they're going to have to sit in the chair, which I thought is a great metaphor for the judgment seat of God, by the way. Because all your sins are going to be laid bare in that chair. Let me tell you right now. Oh, you've been eating a lot of candy.

And it's going to be painful, but you know what? We go to the dentist because we know that it's going to spare us from a lot of pain and heartache later on. And isn't that why God disciplines us? Let me show you a passage on the screen from Hebrews chapter 12, look at this:

**Hebrews 12:11 (ESV)**

*For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.*

The writer says, and he says, *“For the moment all discipline seems painful (right?) rather than pleasant, but later (on) it yields a peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who've been trained by it.”* Because why? You've been spared even greater pain because of the discipline and the training that you've received.

Now Paul goes on, look at verse 5 in your Bible. He goes on and says, *“Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely (but he’s really caused it)—to all of you. <sup>6</sup> For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough...”* That's the phrase I want you to key in on, *“punishment by the majority.”*

Now we learn a couple of things here. First of all, that Paul told them they needed to confront this person who is involved in sin and there needed to be some church discipline, which he calls punishment. But we also see from this verse that not everybody was in agreement with Paul.

He says it's punishment by the majority. In other words, most of the people in the church agreed but not all of them, and that's always going to be the case by

the way, I'll tell you why in a minute. But he says, you, now that you've done this, it's enough. Look what he goes on in verse 7 to say, “*so (he says) you should (now) (correction: rather) turn to forgive and comfort him, or (you) (correction: he) may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.*”<sup>8</sup> *So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him.*” Okay, what's going on here?

We don't really know. We're getting a one-sided letter about something going on. There was drama in the church. There was sinful activity. And Paul wrote to them telling them to confront this sin by some form of church discipline. And so he was wanting them to respond to this individual in some particular way, we don't know how, but he called it punishment. He was probably telling them to withdraw.

And the reason we think that is because he said that elsewhere about situations of sin. In fact, let me show you this scripture from 1 Corinthians, chapter 5, verse 11:

**1 Corinthians 5:11 (ESV)**

*But now I'm writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler— even to eat with such a one.*

Paul wrote to them in his first letter and said, “*...now, I'm writing you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother* (and that means who is a believer in Christ) *if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler...*” He says, don't even, don't, I'm just, I'm not just saying don't associate with him, I'm telling don't even have lunch with him, right?

And what Paul was writing to them about here was that if someone claims to be a Christian, hey, I'm a Christian, I believe in Jesus, I love the Lord with all my heart, and yet that's what comes out of their mouth, but their life is one of sexual immorality and things which they seem unwilling to change their lives about, their unrepentant related to those things and so forth.

Paul wrote to the church of Corinth in his first letter and said, don't associate with such a person. In other words, withdraw. Why? Why? Well, the answer is because to communicate to that individual that sin causes separation. It will separate you ultimately from God. It will separate you from people and other things. Sin always separates, always. Okay? And by the way, that even happens in the life of a believer, it separates.

And to go on dealing with an individual, relating to an individual associated with an individual, who claims to be a believer but refuses to live their lives according to the Word of God and so forth, sends a very bad signal, both to the individual when you're hanging with them and to others who are looking on.

Let's say you're down at the coffee shop, and there's somebody who you're with, and you're known as a believer, and that individual is also known as a believer, but right now they're involved in just rampant, immoral lifestyle type stuff. People who look on are going to go, oh, maybe that's okay, or maybe this person condones that behavior, or something like that. It just flat out sends the wrong signal.

So Paul, in verse 9, Paul goes on to explain why he's writing to them now, to now restore themselves to this brother. But first, he says, first he says this in verse 9, *"...this is why I wrote that, I might test you and know whether you are obedient in everything."* So, he says, first of all, the reason I wrote is to see if you were going to do the hard thing. And remember, we talked about confrontation and withdrawing from somebody that you love. These are not people you dislike. These are people you love. And that's hard.

He says, I wrote to you to see if you would do the hard thing. And it's really, really hard. He says, I wrote it as a test. A test of your devotion. Do you really care about God's Word? Do you really care about your own commitment to Christ? And you know how you and I respond to sin, it says a lot about our commitment to the Lord.

It just does, how we—and I'm not talking about people who are constantly complaining about sin. The sin of the world. That doesn't, that's not a picture of righteousness. Sometimes people will do that. They feel like in order to look righteous themselves, they need to just talk about how bad the world is. And the conversation is constantly negative, oh, this world we live in, it's going to hell, and a terrible thing, and it's just it's not what we're talking about here.

We're talking about how we respond in our hearts to sin. Do you remember what Paul said about his letter when he was responding to the sin that was going on in Corinth? How did he respond? He said, I wept while I wrote that letter. I had anguish in my heart. I was broken-hearted over you guys. That's what God's looking for out of us, not waving the bony finger in somebody's face because you sinner.

It's an attitude of brokenness. It's like, oh, this is terrible. It's horrible when we're looking at a brother or sister who's caught in sin, and we're confronting

them. We're confronting them in love. Our response to them is one of absolute undying love, I adore you, why are you doing this? Why are you choosing to live this way when you know that the light of scripture is completely contrary? You know, this is not the way God would have you live. This is not good for you. It's not good for your family. It's not good for your children. Why are you doing this? I love you so much.

You see the difference? Than waving your finger in somebody's face and condemning them. It's a huge difference. It's all about that attitude and how we respond to sin says a lot about our devotion, our personal devotion to Christ. And let me just say one other thing too, some of you are maybe even wondering here—Paul is writing to a church, you understand that, right? He's writing to a whole church here in Corinth.

But how does this apply on a personal level when you see someone in your life, a friend, a brother, sister in the Lord, who's fallen in some area of sin? You see it going on. How does this look for you then to respond to this person? Are you supposed to just withdraw like Paul is suggesting?

We read that passage from 1 Corinthians, he says don't associate with somebody, is that the way we respond every time somebody sins? Heavens no, if we disassociated ourselves with everybody who sinned, we would constantly be disassociating ourselves with one another all the time, right?

People were talking about a situation of unrepentant sin where an individual has been appealed to in the name of love repeatedly, but who continues to refuse those every approach and says, no, I don't care what you say. I don't care what you think. I don't care what God thinks, I'm going to do what I'm going to do.

And there comes a point where we, as Christians, we do have to respond to that, see, you come to that point. But listen, there's a whole lot that comes before that point of withdrawal. There's a whole lot. There's a whole lot of love. There's a whole lot of speaking the truth in love. There's a whole lot of appealing to that person in the name of love.

Pastor Chuck tells a story about a time when he went to a guy in his fellowship who was involved in some sinful activity. I think he'd left his wife, and he was claiming he was going to marry this other woman or whatever. And Chuck decided he was going to go visit him. And it was a long time ago.

But he says he sat down with the guy, and the guy started just talking about how bad his marriage was and justifying his actions. And Chuck just sat and listened.

And as the guy was talking about this and as he was going on just justifying himself, which people often do.

Chuck said, I don't know what came over me because he's not a crier. He started to cry. He started to cry right in front of the guy. He just started weeping. And the guy was like taken aback. But later on, when he returned to the Lord and came back to his wife, he said that made, that spoke more to him than anything else Chuck could have possibly said.

Because Chuck showed, it's not that I've come to condemn you. It's not that I dislike you. I'm brokenhearted about this thing. I am, I'm just torn up over what you're doing. And he didn't say that in words, right? He just wept in front of him. And I thought, wow, that is just so powerful. There's so much we do before that point of withdrawing from an individual. So, please, please understand that.

Now, I want to acknowledge that even though I'm talking this way and saying, we need to love people, and so on and so forth, there are some of you who are still just very uncomfortable about the whole idea of church discipline. And I get that, it's not fun. And frankly, some of us have lived long enough to see church discipline done very badly. And it's not always done well, that's clear.

But it is clearly biblical that there are times when, after we've sought after an individual to return to the Lord and they refused, there is a point where church discipline is necessary. And yet there are many people in the body, even in Paul's situation, we saw it too, they just didn't agree.

Remember how Paul said the punishment of the majority? Not everybody agreed with Paul's letter to do whatever he told them to do against this individual who was involved in sin. Not everybody's always going to agree, and one of the reasons is, and if you're one of those people that just squirms in your chair when you think about confronting somebody in their sin or some church discipline taking place, it could be that you have the gift of mercy/comparison.

And let me just say this about you. We need you, we need you in the body of Christ and you are very necessary, but you're going to be uncomfortable when church discipline takes place, because it's just not your bent, it's not your gift. You're just one of those people, man, you'll just, you'll spend a lifetime appealing to somebody to come back to the Lord, and you'll never get around to that place of confrontation because it just doesn't fit.

But I want you to understand something, those of you who do have that ministry and heart of mercy and compassion, I want you to understand something very

important. I want you to understand that discipline is an act of mercy. I want you to understand that when Paul was telling the church in Corinth to exercise some form of church discipline over this individual, he was being merciful.

He did not suspend mercy in order to execute church discipline. It was an act of mercy. And again, I suggest to you, every parent understands this when we take our child to the dentist. It is not that we're being hard-hearted, that we're inflicting this pain. It's because we love them and because we want the best for them. Let me show you a passage in Proverbs that talks about this a little bit more. Proverbs chapter 19, verse 18. Can we pop that one up quick? Number 908, your pizza's ready. Okay.

**Proverbs 19:18 (ESV)**

*Discipline your son for there is hope; do not set your heart on putting him to death.*

Proverbs 19:18. *“Discipline your son for there is hope...”* Did you catch that? *“Discipline your son for there is hope; do not set your heart on putting him to death.”* Do you see here, how the Bible equates discipline with extending hope? Bringing hope into somebody's life. It's an act of mercy and tender love to discipline.

And again, that's what I used to say to my kids back when I was doing that sort of a thing. They're all grown now and left home. But, to respond to them and say, I love you and that's why I'm going to have to spank your little behind right now. I don't want to do this. I hate doing this. But I love you so much that you need to learn what is wrong and what is right.

And this is the way that lesson is going to be impressed upon you. So, it is an act of mercy. It is truly an act of mercy. And that's why Paul then says, after that time of discipline, there needs to be restoration. And he explains why in verse 10, look with me there. He says, *“Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ (look at verse 11), so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs.*

And there it is. We've got to be so careful when we're dealing with confronting people in the love of Christ about some sinful activity going on in their lives. Because see, it's not just you and them, there's an enemy involved, too. And he wants nothing more than to separate people, and get them mad, make them angry.

And you know what? Church discipline has made some people angry. And the enemy has gotten in and he's done a very effective work. And he's brought division rather than restoration. We always want restoration whenever discipline is extended. We always do it for the purpose of restoration. But the enemy comes in many times and brings division. I bet all of us know somebody who will not darken the door of a church because somebody got in their face about their life or whatever, and maybe they didn't do a good job of it, very possible.

But somehow, some way, the enemy got involved in the process, and he, like Paul says, we understand his designs or as the New King James says, “...*his devices*,” or frankly, even as the New American Standard Bible says, even a little better, “...*his schemes*.” We understand his schemes. We know what he's up to. We know what his desire is, it's to ruin people and ruin their relationships, right? And so what is he going to use? Pride and arrogance, and lack of forgiveness, and people who don't do discipline very well, and put all those things together and just make a mess, let's just make a mess out of this. That's his desire.

Paul says, we got to be very careful here. He says, you've inflicted the punishment upon this individual. Now, reaffirm your love to him. Go back to him, tell him, hey man, we love you. You know why we did this? We did this because you were on a road, a path to destruction, my brother. And we had to do this to express to you the danger, and the significance of just how destructive this behavior, and pattern of life was. But now that you've turned, now that you've responded, our hearts are lightened and our desire is to bring restoration. It's like, come on back, man, we love you. We did this because we love you, you see. That's what it's all about.

So once again, there's probably somebody here today who's wondering, so how exactly does church discipline work today? The answer is, not very well. I'll just be honest with you, not very well. And one of the reasons is, it's our own fault, but we have become so fractured as a church, as the body of Christ, to withdraw from someone or to confront someone in their sin.

People feel very little reason often to respond biblically or appropriately when they are confronted by their sin because there's another church down the road and they won't care, or I'll just be a little more discreet with my lifestyle, or whatever I'm doing.

A number of years ago, many, many, years ago, we had a situation where there was a gal in our fellowship who was divorcing her husband for unbiblical

reasons. We questioned the thing and found that there was no biblical ground for divorce.

And so we confronted her and just said, you're doing this for unbiblical reasons. You need to understand something about this, if in case you're getting rid of husband one because you got your eyes on the potential for husband number two, that's a problem because remarriage is not in the offing because of the way this whole thing is going about. And we showed her all the scriptures that talk about that. She promptly got up, went down the street, divorced her husband, and married somebody else. How does your church discipline work today? Not too good.

It's just in Paul's day, if the believers in Corinth withdrew, they were alone. There was no church down the street. I couldn't go down to the first church or the second church, if anything, for that matter. And fellowship, there was just one, there was one body of Christ in that probably in that region. And so, there was something that was more significant about the body of Christ expressing confrontation towards someone, and withdrawing or pulling back from fellowship that would have a greater effect back in those days.

But I don't want to make it sound like it never works because I am very pleased to say there have been times over the years when people have responded to church discipline. And when I say church discipline, I'm usually talking about the leadership here becoming aware of a situation that is unbiblical, dangerous/whatever.

And we go to the individual, and we confront them as lovingly as we can. And there have been times that's happened, and people have responded very well. And the way you would want someone to respond, you're right, this is sin, I know it. God's been convicting me, pray with me that I put this thing behind me and walk the way the Lord wants me to. And those are great, and the person grows in a huge sort of a way, when they respond appropriately to that kind of confrontation.

But anyway, Paul finishes this letter in verse 12 and following. Look with me there, please, in your Bible. He says, *"When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, <sup>13</sup> my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia."*

What is Paul saying here? See, you've got to understand, and this is something that you don't know without figuring it out, that Titus was the one who gave the

letter, he was the bearer of the letter. Paul wrote the letter, put it into Titus's hand, and sent him to Corinth with it.

So Paul stayed back, and he said, here, I was in Troas, and God had really opened up some real cool opportunities for us to minister the gospel. But he said, even with that open door, my heart was just not settled because I hadn't—where was Titus, this was an open-ended thing.

Paul knew that he sent a very hard letter to these people, very terse, very confrontational, very you guys need to do this sort of a letter. And they could have responded any number of ways, including burning the letter, I suppose. And saying, forget you, Apostle Paul. And Paul had no way of knowing what their response was, and who knows how long he had to wait to get a response? Months, maybe. Can you imagine carrying that on your heart?

And Paul treated these people like they were his children. And any parent who has ever seen a wayward child where you're waiting for them to respond appropriately and you have no idea where it's at, the agony that Paul probably was going through. He said he went to Macedonia to try to hasten his meeting with Titus.

And he's going to go on here in verse 14 and he's going to give you the impression the meeting was good. And it was good, look at verse 14. He says, *“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.”* And he's beginning to praise the Lord, and the reason he's doing that is because Titus came back and told him, Paul, that was a hard letter, but they responded well. You would expect him to say that right here. You would expect him to say, thanks be to God, you guys responded well. He's not actually going to get around to that till chapter 7.

Seriously, he's not going to come back and tell us what their response was until the seventh chapter of this letter. This is just typical Paul. He's just going to start talking about other things, and he's actually, you'll notice in verse 14 again, he said, *“....thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession (and who), and through us, spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of God everywhere.”* And this is what he's going to springboard onto.

And that's why he finishes here, this chapter, look at verse 15 and 16 by saying, *“For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, <sup>16</sup> to one (we are), a fragrance from (death unto*

ultimate death, that's why he says) *death to death* (and), *to the other* (we are) *a fragrance from life to life*. (And) *Who is sufficient for these things?*”

And I'm going to close with this, but this is a very fascinating passage, so don't let your attention stray, because this is really good. I've learned a lot about this passage and what he's saying here. I used to think that what he was saying here is that we Christians metaphorically give off an aroma. And it's the aroma of Christ, and we Christians, we smell good, again the metaphor being carried forth, to believers and to those being saved, and we smell pretty nasty to those who have rejected God and don't care anything about Him and so forth. I thought that's what he was talking about.

But I've come to learn differently. The word 'aroma' is an interesting word that is borrowed from the Old Testament. And it's used many, many, times when God is talking about sacrifice, animal sacrifice. In fact, go through the book of Leviticus and find out how many times the word 'aroma' is used. And you know what it's characterized? A pleasing aroma. Every time God tells him to do a particular sacrifice, he says, do this, sacrifice this animal, da, da, da. And he says, and it will be a pleasing aroma to God. Okay?

The sacrifices offered are a pleasing aroma. Alright? Now, Paul is dealing with this same idea of us being an aroma to God. We're an aroma to God among these two different classes of people, but ultimately it's an aroma to God. And he says it is the aroma of Christ. And how does that aroma happen? Just by simply being a Christian? No. It happens the same way those animals became a pleasing aroma, they had to die. They had to be placed on the altar and die.

And then the flame had to be lit and they had to be burned, right? Do you understand? As believers, we have a similar sort of a thing going on in our lives, but it doesn't just happen because we're Christian. It happens because we're living a sacrificial life. We're living a life unto God. And when we do, that is a pleasing aroma to God. Let me show you this from Romans chapter 12 verse 1:

**Romans 12:1 (ESV)**

*I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.*

*“I appealed to you therefore brothers, by the mercies of God, to (do this) present your bodies as a living sacrifice (he uses the words) holy and (acceptable, he might just as well say a pleasing aroma, it's the same idea) acceptable to God, which (he says) is your spiritual worship.”* So, as believers,

when we offer ourselves in sacrifice, and what I mean by that people, is we surrender ourselves to Jesus. When we surrender ourselves to him and say, you are Lord, I am going to die. I'm going to become less, so that you might become greater. I open myself to your lordship. That's a sacrifice that is a pleasing aroma to our God, okay. So remember that.

The idea of this aroma is all about living the life that is offered to God. But notice too, Paul also says there are others who smell this aroma. There are those who are being saved and there are those who have rejected God. And that aroma smells differently to them. To one, it smells like death unto death, and to the other, it smells like life unto life. And you think to yourself, that's weird. How can something smell like both? How can something smell like death to somebody and life to somebody else? It's not literally saying it stinks like death.

I mean, we've all smelled like an animal on the side of the road or something. Yuck, right? That's not what he's talking about. He's talking about it's an aroma that speaks of death to one and speaks of life to another. Here's what he's talking about. Did you notice back in verse 14 he talked about praise be to God who always leads us in triumphal procession. Did you catch that part?

Do you know what he means by triumphal procession? He's talking about the victory parades that the Romans used to do when they conquered an enemy. They would go out, fight their battle against whoever, and then they'd conquer their enemies, and they would put them in chains or tie up their hands with ropes, and they would literally walk them from the place of battle back to their home city, and they would parade them into the city along the streets, and they would say, we're the victors, right?

And our enemies are back here, and they're chained or roped or whatever, and then what they would do, because they were pagans, is they would burn incense to their gods as an act of thanksgiving. So, as this victory parade is taking place, the city is filled with this incense, this aroma, right? Well, guess what? To the Romans, they smell that incense and what do they think? Victory! But when those people who have their hands tied, and they're at the back of the procession, smell that smell, what do they say? Defeat and probably impending death. Do you see?

The same aroma can mean different things to different people. And that is what Paul is talking about here. When you and I live a life unto God, surrendered unto Him. We become a pleasing aroma to God, and we smell like life to other believers. But it smells like death to those who have rejected God. And they are never going to look at your surrendered life and think it looks good.