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# 2 Corinthians

**But I determined this within myself, that I would not come again to you in sorrow. 2 Corinthians 2:1**

As the previous chapter concluded, Paul said that he had not come to Corinth as previously planned in order to spare them. Building upon that now at the beginning of this chapter, he says that he "determined this within myself..." He had changed his plans based on careful forethought, not as a rash and sudden whim. He thought the matter through and made his determination. In this fixed state of mind, he said that he "would not come again to you in sorrow."

This is not speaking of his sorrow, but the sorrow that would have to be levied upon the Corinthians by his correction of their conduct and doctrine. This will be more completely explained in the next verse. Paul is showing that he had the very best interest of the Corinthians in mind at all times and that he cared for them as his own special flock.

Life application: When considering those you fellowship with, always try to remember to have their best in mind. If there is a reason why you should temporarily distance yourself from them, make sure that they understand why. The confusion which results from not knowing why people take certain actions can cause personal or even congregational grief. Paul has given us this example in his actions towards the Corinthians and it is good that we follow suit in it.

**For if I make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad but the one who is made sorrowful by me? 2 Corinthians 2:2**

Opening this chapter, Paul noted that concerning his visit to the Corinthians he had decided that he "would not come again to you in sorrow." The reason for this is explained in this verse now. "For if I make you sorrowful" relates to the previous verse. If he came in sorrow, meaning with the need to discipline, then they would be filled with sorrow.

The "I" in this is emphatic and it implies that there were others who caused them trouble as well, thus he is singling himself out to make his point - "For if I (emphatic) make you sorrowful, then who is he who makes me glad but the one who is made sorrowful by me?" The intent of his words is that there existed such a relationship between them. If one side were sorrowful, the other side was there to comfort the other. However, if both sides were sorrowful, then neither could comfort the other. There would be only a mournful and tense gathering.

In this, the question is rather abrupt and it uses a singular, not a plural number for "he" and "the one." Some see this as the man referred to in 1 Corinthians 5. He is just a single member of the church, but he has caused the entire congregation to lose their joy. However, what is more likely is that this is referring to the whole collectively. In other words, "Who is he then....?" The reason this is likely is that the entire congregation was involved in allowing the offender to stay in the church, despite his immoral conduct. This is what Paul will address in order to correct. Because of this, the singular speaks for each individual within the whole.

Paul knew that the entire congregation would mourn over his visit and needed discipline and thus there would have been only sorrow for all concerned. Because of this, such a visit would ultimately be unproductive.

Life application: Paul has demonstrated wisdom by addressing an issue via letter rather than personally in order to maintain a sense of harmony between the believers. Eventually, a personal visit would be in order. If we can learn from this example, we will be better off than always assuming that a personal face to face visit is the best option in all circumstances.

**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*. 2 Corinthians 2:3**

The first words, "And I wrote this very thing to you" could mean one of several things. It could be referring to his change in plans concerning his visit (1 Corinthians 16:7), it could mean the rebukes of his former epistle to expel the incestuous man, or it could even be that he is conveying the thought "I write" instead of "I wrote." If the last is correct, it is a form of communication known as an epistolary aorist. In essence, "What I write to you now has the very object of sparing you a painful visit" (Pulpit).

Whichever is correct, or even if he intends something different than any of these options, his writing was intended to smooth things over by letter prior to a visit. If he simply came and dictated what was necessary to be done, there would only be "sorrow over those from whom I ought to have joy." In other words, "Instead of a happy gathering, there would only be sadness." This is what Paul was hoping to avoid by a painful visit.

By following this course of action, he felt that his letter would convey his "confidence in you all that my joy is the joy of you all." Stated differently if he maintained his joy, then they would be joyous over that. The intent was that there would be no unhappiness with them because he would come to them in joy.

Life application: It is true that there are times when a firm hand of discipline is required and that it should be done in person. However, if the same result can be obtained through a written letter and maintain harmony and fellowship between

the two parties, isn't that a preferred option? Let us always consider how to maintain love and harmony, particularly in our relationships with other Christians.

**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. 2 Corinthians 2:4**

In the previous verse, Paul noted that he had written to the Corinthians rather than visited them in order to avoid sorrow in the encounter. Now he shows them the level of sorrow that he had already felt, simply by writing. He says that "out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote to you."

This shows the depth of the sorrow and pain that he possessed for needing to correct their faulty doctrine and tolerance of sin. He says he suffered "affliction." This is a strong word indicating "tribulation." It is used throughout the New Testament to indicate persecution or severe trials.

The word translated as "anguish" is *sunoché*. It is used only twice in the New Testament and conveys the idea of distress, anguish, or anxiety. Its only other use is in Luke 21:25, translated as "distress" -

"And there will be signs in the sun, in the moon, and in the stars; and on the earth distress of nations, with perplexity, the sea and the waves roaring..."

This word, according to Albert Barnes, "means, properly, 'a holding together or shutting up'; and then, 'pressure, distress, anguish' - an affliction of the heart by which one feels tightened or constrained; such a pressure as great grief causes at the heart."

Understanding this, we can see the true depth of Paul's sorrow for the confrontation that was needed via his pen. It came through "many tears," but he

notes to them that those tears were "not that you should be grieved, but that you might know the love which I have so abundantly for you." Having conveyed these words to them, they should now understand the full weight of the words of the previous verse.

If he had come under such circumstances, already sorrowful to this extreme state, then when they were made sorrowful through the correction they needed, everyone would be sorrowful. There would be no one to comfort anyone else. Rather than such a difficult meeting, he felt it best that he would write, let them absorb his instruction, and then come to them at a later time.

Life application: Again, we can learn much from Paul's example. He had the best intent for the individual situation in mind. If a personal encounter would be unproductive or counter-productive, then he knew that a letter would instead be the better choice. Rushing into face-to-face discipline is not always the best means of handling a situation.

**But if anyone has caused grief, he has not grieved me, but all of you to some extent—not to be too severe. 2 Corinthians 2:5**

The construction of this verse is such that it can actually have one of at least three varied meanings. Regardless of which it is that Paul intended to convey, the overarching thought is that there was an offense; there was grief involved in that offense - towards Paul and towards the church; and that therefore the entire church was affected.

The word "anyone" is singular and it is most probably referring to the unnamed individual in 1 Corinthians 5. He remains unnamed here. Paul had instructed the church to bring discipline against him due to his immoral actions which had caused this grief. That occurred and now there is no strong language against him here and there are no heavy handed demands being made. Rather he is carefully and tenderly handling this situation concerning the unnamed offender in order to get it behind them.

The next six verses will continue to explain this and what should be done about it. The church had suffered and now the church needed to be healed of the matter without prolonging it any further.

Life application: Church discipline is detailed in the Bible, but the Bible also shows that if the measures of discipline are met, then reconciliation should be anticipated. Just as Christ forgives us of our offenses when we repent, so the church should act in like manner towards offenders who repent as well.

**This punishment which *was inflicted* by the majority *is* sufficient for such a man,**  
2 Corinthians 2:6

Explaining the source and now the intended correction of the matter which caused such grief, Paul brings up the actions that had been taken based on his epistle. If this is referring to the incident in 1 Corinthians 5 (as it most probably is) concerning a sexually immoral man, he had recommended the following -

"...deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." 1 Corinthians 5:5

It appears the Corinthians took the action as recommended by Paul and it actually provided two intended purposes. The first is obvious. It was to serve punishment upon the offender in hopes of him turning from his immorality. In essence, it was intended to bring him back to a right fellowship with the Lord and the church. Secondly, it was to return purity to the church, both by expelling the impure man as well as to return purity to the hearts of the congregants who had allowed such immorality to occur without any repercussions.

Whether they took Paul's recommended course of action, or whether they modified it, such as a meeting informing him that this action would take place if he didn't comply (or whatever else may have occurred), the punishment worked.

Because of this, Paul says, "This punishment which was *inflicted* by the majority is sufficient for such a man."

The word translated as "punishment" is only found here in the New Testament. It is not a word which carries a heavy punitive penalty, such an "eternal punishment." Rather, it is the word *epitimia*. It means "the *fitting* (appropriate) response necessary to *turn someone in the right direction*." And this is exactly what occurred. A hope of turning this man (and the congregation!) in the right direction was anticipated, and it is what came about. Because the remedy worked, Paul says that it was sufficient.

Life application: The intent of corrective punishment is to correct. The Bible says, "If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? <sup>8</sup> But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons" (Hebrews 12:7, 8). Should you face such chastening, count it as an honor that you are a child of God and a member of His church. This is especially true in today's world where sexual immorality is so prevalent in the "church" (which is no church at all). Such people prove that they are not children of God through their wicked actions.

**...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. 2 Corinthians 2:7**

Paul has been exceedingly comforting and delicate in his words towards the offender. He has not called him by his name and he has referred to him in a roundabout manner. For example, the word "him" in this verse isn't in the original, but is inserted by the translators for clarity. In the previous verse, he noted that the punishment which had been meted out by the majority was sufficient. It served its purpose and the man was reformed. However, what can be inferred is that he is not only reformed, but immensely sorrowful for having brought disgrace upon Christ, the fellowship, and himself.

Because of this, Paul says "on the contrary..." This is something like "on the other hand." In essence, "Instead of continuing his discipline, you should on the other hand now take a new direction." And this new direction is "rather to forgive and comfort *him*." Where there was discipline (possibly excommunication which was recommended by Paul) there should now be reconciliation. Where there was judgment, there should be forgiveness. And where there was upsetting the brother and the fellowship, there should now be comfort.

His reason for this action is clearly stated, "...lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow." The word translated as "swallowed" is used to indicate being totally consumed, as if gulping something down. It is used in Hebrews 11 to indicate the death of the Egyptians who pursued Israel -

"By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry *land*, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned." Hebrews 11:29

Therefore, it is unclear if Paul was worried about him being so consumed with grief that he may simply walk away from the faith or even commit suicide. Whatever word had come to him concerning this man, he wanted it known that he held him in great concern and in great love.

Life application: It is apparent from this passage that church discipline is to be used in order to bring a person to a point of sorrow and repentance and then it is to be ended. To continue to discipline someone who has amended their ways can only end in harm towards that person.

**Therefore I urge you to reaffirm *your* love to him.** 2 Corinthians 2:8

Having suffered punishment sufficient to bring repentance, Paul was concerned that the offender may arrive at a state of extreme sorrow where great harm may come to him. In hope of that not taking place, he urges those at Corinth "to



reaffirm *your* love to him." By doing so, he would feel that he was fully brought back into the fold in good-standing.

The word for "reaffirm" here is *kuroo*. It is found only here and in Galatians 3:15. In Galatians, it is used when speaking of the establishment of a covenant -

"Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though *it is* only a man's covenant, **yet if *it is confirmed***, no one annuls or adds to it."

A covenant stands as it was agreed on. This seems to be the idea with the man who had been the offender in this situation. He was disciplined, but he was also a saved believer in the Lord. That would not change. All believers are sealed with the Holy Spirit when they believe (Ephesians 1:13, 14) and this is a guarantee which will not be broken. One result of this is that they are brought into the body of Christ. Though they may be disciplined, they are no less a part of that body. Paul is therefore asking them to receive him back as such after his discipline, just as Christ will receive him at His coming.

In order to do this, Paul uses this word *kuroo* to ask them to reaffirm his position in Christ. According to Thayer's, the intent here is that they were "to make a public decision that love be shown to a transgressor by granting him pardon." The man had been openly rebuked and disciplined. Paul's words imply that he should be openly shown that he has been received again into the fold.

Life application: If the intent of discipline is realized, it is only proper to make a public display of reconciliation when a public display of discipline was meted out. Otherwise, there will seemingly be a greater importance placed upon the discipline than there is on the restoration.

**For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. 2 Corinthians 2:9**

Greek scholars debate whether Paul is writing here about his first letter or this letter. The verb is in the aorist tense and so either is possible. If he is writing about his first letter, he indicates that the instructions for disciplining the man were included in that letter rather than him coming to the church personally to test the obedience of the Corinthians "in all things."

He had given them a directive to "put away from yourselves the evil person." By writing, he would then have been testing their obedience to his authority as an apostle, even when he was separate from them. In essence, it was a test of compliance to his directive. It is easy to be obedient when one in authority is present, but it is less so when that same authority is absent.

The second opinion is that he is using the tool known as an "epistolary aorist" in this verse which concerns this same letter. In essence, "For to this end I also write (this letter), that I might put you to the test (concerning forgiving the man who has been disciplined), whether you are obedient in all things (both in punishment and in restoration)."

In the end, the challenge is the same for the Corinthians: Will they be obedient to Paul's directive concerning a very sensitive issue even though Paul is not personally present. Whichever is the case, Paul was trusting in their faithfulness to his directives as an apostle of Christ. As this letter has become a part of the Bible, the exact same premise carries over to each one of us.

His words are written under apostolic authority and thus carry the weight of having come directly from the Lord. Are we willing to accept his (and thus the Lord's) authority and be obedient to his prescriptive writings, or will we be disobedient to them? How easy it is to go to verses outside of Paul's writings in order to justify disobedience! But it is Paul who is the apostle to the Gentiles

during this dispensation. Thus it is his letters which set the standard for the church age. Let us be willing to accept them and be obedient to them.

Life application: The book of Acts is a descriptive account of the establishment of the church. It is not intended as a tool of instruction for the establishment of doctrine. Rather, Paul's words are given for that purpose. If something occurs in Acts which seems contrary to one of Paul's directives, there is a reason for it. The variation then is not for doctrinal use, but to show how the church was established. Once it was, we are to prefer Paul's commands over the narrative found in Acts. Taking everything in its intended context will keep the congregation from confusion and faulty doctrine.

**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,**  
2 Corinthians 2:10

Paul is speaking in a rather general way here concerning forgiveness of an offender. Though it is vague and roundabout, he is certainly referring to the person mentioned in verses 3-8. In other words, the general principle can be applied to the specific individual. He is affirming the right of the congregation to forgive an offense and that he will, in turn, support their decision. In essence, he is saying, "I have confidence in you to make the right decision in such cases and I am supportive of your decision when it is made."

To shore up this thought he adds, "For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes." His words are in the past tense, stating as an accomplished decision his support for what was or will be decided upon by the church; it was for their sake that his forgiveness was granted. He is showing solidarity with them in what they have resolved concerning the particular matter.

To finish his thought he adds that it was "in the presence of Christ." The Greek literally reads, "...in the face of Christ." It is as if Christ was literally present and watching what occurred. His words then are intended for those in Corinth to

understand that, "I have acted with Christ watching me, to whom I am accountable."

The whole verse speaks of a process which is intended to bring reconciliation, ensure harmony, and yet uphold the strictest standards of integrity, knowing that the Lord has His eyes on the situation.

Life application: One aspect of Christian life that should be remembered is that we are in the presence of the Lord at all times. Our words, our actions, our interactions, and etc are all known to Him. Some day we will stand before Him and give an account of our lives. Judgment is coming, so let us act as if we believe it now. But the good news is that our judgment in Christ is not for salvation or condemnation, but for rewards and losses. Let us work for the former so we do not receive the latter!

**...lest Satan should take advantage of us; 2 Corinthians 2:11**

Paul has been addressing forgiveness and now he gives a very important reason for it - "... lest Satan should take advantage of us." Here he gives the devil's proper name, Satan. It means "an adversary," "an accuser," or "an enemy." The devil (Satan) is this adversary, accuser, and enemy of both God and man. Paul had first recommended that the Corinthians "...deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Corinthians 5:5). However, because of the circumstances, he was now taking the avenue of forgiveness and reconciliation.

This path is taken so "lest Satan should take advantage of us." The verb for "take advantage of" indicates to "overreach." In essence, it is "a game against the Tempter, in which the souls of men are at once the counters and the stake" (Ellicott). A spiritual match of wits and strategy was being waged and Paul wanted to ensure that the devil would not succeed in his efforts to harm the souls of either the man in particular or the congregation in general.

His reason for this is given, "...for we are not ignorant of his devices." Paul had a great amount of experience in waging this battle against the devil. In Ephesians 6, he writes concerning the spiritual warfare around us and specifically "the wiles of the devil" in verse 11. He also notes later in this letter that "a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan" (2 Corinthians 12:7). In writing to the Thessalonians, he notes that Satan actually hindered his way in visiting them.

In these and other instances, it is apparent that Paul knew well that Satan is a powerful adversary and that he needed to stay ahead of him always.

Life application: The spiritual battle is real and we need to be aware of it. Keeping in the word, staying close to God in prayer, and remaining united to other believers in close fellowship are all ways that this battle can be effectively handled and won.

**Furthermore, when I came to Troas to *preach* Christ's gospel, and a door was opened to me by the Lord, 2 Corinthians 2:12**

Paul now returns to the sequence of events that he left off with in verse 4. Verses 5-11 were an insert thought which have now been completed. He had determined to not go directly to Corinth for the reasons previously stated. On his journey to Macedonia, he came to Troas, which was on the route between Ephesus and Macedonia.

On the way he says "when I came to Troas." There is an article in front of "Troas" which leads scholars to think he is referring to the general area and not specifically the city. There in that area, he notes that concerning Christ's gospel, "a door was opened to me by the Lord."

This terminology is quite similar to the words he used concerning Ephesus in 1 Corinthians 16:8, 9 -

"But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost. <sup>9</sup> For a great and effective door has opened to me, and *there are* many adversaries."

As this journey was from Ephesus to Macedonia via Troas, it becomes apparent through his use of this same term in such close intervals that the Lord was carefully directing his steps for the furtherance of His gospel. In this, we can see that even the anguish of the situation at Corinth was used to further the gospel elsewhere. Nothing happens by chance and all things are being directed by the infinitely wise Lord.

Despite this, there will be a conflict in Paul that will cause a change of plans in his work in Troas. This will be seen in the coming verse.

Life application: At those times when it seems that the Lord isn't there with you, He is. He may be working on something entirely unexpected by you, so trust that He truly will never leave you nor forsake you.

**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. 2 Corinthians 2:13**

In the previous verse, Paul mentioned his arrival in Troas for the purpose of transmitting the gospel. While there he noted that "a door was opened to me by the Lord." However and despite this, he says he "had no rest" in his spirit. The thing that usually brought him the greatest joy was telling others the news of Christ. He worked tirelessly in this and took every advantage of it. And yet, even with a door wide open before him to walk through and share the news, he was in anguish to hear about the state of affairs at Corinth.

He then notes the reason behind the anguish. It was "because I did not find Titus my brother." It is apparent that the two had intended to meet up and either he was late in arriving, Titus was late in arriving, or circumstances had changed Titus' original plans. It was Titus who would carry news about the affairs at Corinth, but

for whatever reason, he now had no way of hearing how things had transpired there. And so he left this great field of harvest at Troas in order to hopefully find Titus in Macedonia.

The entire thought is one which shows the immense care that Paul felt for this church which he was so closely tied to. It was a burden that he felt for all of his children-churches, so much so that he almost couldn't endure not knowing how they were faring in their lives and doctrine. The same general sentiment that is expressed now towards Corinth is also seen in his first letter to the Thessalonians -

"For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain." 1 Thessalonians 3:5

We are shown in these letters of Paul that sometimes correcting doctrine of current believers is to be considered on the same level as evangelizing new ones. The importance of correct doctrine for believers is because if they get off course, then those whom they evangelize will never come to know the truth of the gospel message. Paul felt this burden in the most intense way.

Life application: There are only so many hours in a day and there are only so many avenues we can pursue with this small amount of time we have been given. Let us make sound choices as to where we will focus our attention, redeeming the time as best we can.

**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.** 2 Corinthians 2:14

Paul, in what is not uncommon in his writings, breaks into a shout of joy as he considers the situation. He lets out a resounding "Now thanks be to God." This is based on several key points which came to a confluence in his life at the same time.

First, he had finally met up with Titus. Second, because he had heard the good news from Titus about the positive status of the Corinthian church. And third, he was overwhelmed with the great abundance that came about from his visit to the Macedonian churches concerning a gift for the church in Jerusalem. These points won't be seen until chapters 7 and 8, but Paul hints on them now before addressing many important issues. He will return to these thoughts though and give them in detail at that time.

For these things, he sent his thanks "to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ." The word for "leads us in triumph" is *thriambeúō*. It is used only one other time in the NT, in Colossians 2:15 and it means "properly, to display triumph openly; publically exalting the victor who leads a victory-procession – and putting the conquered on display."

Scholars and translators vary on how to render this. It could either be something like "causes us to triumph in Christ," or "leads us in triumph in Christ." The two are vastly different and yet either could be deduced from the surrounding text. However, the fact that the surrounding issues were handled by the Lord, even directed by Him, it would make sense to say that it is He who leads us in triumph. Because of this, it is He who "through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge and power in every place."

As He leads us in triumph, our lives are used to diffuse what we know of Him to others. The idea of "fragrance" is used by Paul elsewhere to indicate the offering of Christ Himself for us (Ephesians 5:2) and of a gift that was sent to Paul (Philippians 4:18). The intent of this "fragrance" is that it permeates all things and is pleasing in and of itself. Therefore, like incense, the "knowledge and power" of Christ is diffused through the disciples of Christ to the glory of God.

Life application: Paul takes time to weave the difficulties of His life into larger pictures of God's obvious hand in them by bringing them together not for greater difficulty, but for overall benefit. If we can overlook the small difficulties in our lives and see how they all actually turn out for a greater benefit, then we can truly rest in the fact that God has it all under control. Let us learn from the Bible that



there is a good end and God is working towards it, even through our failings, faults, and trials.

**For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. 2 Corinthians 2:15**

In the previous verse, Paul spoke of himself and the other ministers of Christ saying that He "...as through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place." Building upon that, he now states that "we are to God the fragrance of Christ." Their ministry is what diffuses "the fragrance of His knowledge in every place." God has chosen to use fallible humans to carry the infallible message of His Son to the people of the world.

In this, the fragrance goes forth as God purposes. The imagery is that of the streets of Rome after a triumph had been realized for the empire. The air would be filled with the fragrance of incense as the victors proceeded through the streets. However, there is another part of the scene that the world saw. Not only would the victors walk in their uniforms with their heads held high, but following them would be the vanquished foes. They would be captives taken as slaves or for display in the Coliseum where they would be put to death. The same fragrance would go forth to both, but the effect upon them would be completely different in its reception.

This fragrance of Christ then diffuses "among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing." In Paul's words is an inescapable truth. Some will be saved and some will perish. The gospel is the standard by which this will come about. Those who receive Christ will be the victors and to them the sweet fragrance is that of life and salvation. Those who reject Christ will be the vanquished. Among them that sweet fragrance will be a testimony against them that death, banishment from the presence of God, and eternal punishment will be the result.

Life application: In today's pluralistic world, people teach that there are many ways to God and that salvation can mean a host of things. Instead of following what God has said in His word, they make stuff up that sounds good and they run with it. But such a message has no true pleasing fragrance. The incense has been tainted with untruth and it only carries the smell of death. There is but one way to be saved - through Jesus Christ, and that salvation carries with it an ultimate truth - reconciliation with God by the putting away of sin. There is no other way, so accept the gospel, be saved, and be a victor through the work of Christ.

**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?**

2 Corinthians 2:16

Paul just noted that the apostles (meaning the message they carried) are "to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing." Expanding on that, he gives a contrast as to how this fragrance is received. He says that, "To the one *we are* the aroma of death *leading* to death." In Greek, it reads *ek thanatou eis thanaton* - "from death to death."

The state of the unregenerate is already death. This is because "the wages of sin is death" and "all have sinned." Those who reject the gospel message do so from death to death. There can be no life for someone who is already dead and who has chosen the path of death by rejecting Christ. Therefore, Paul equates the fragrant message of Christ as the aroma which a prisoner headed to death would smell. As Vincent's Word Studies notes -

"Some find here an allusion to a revolting feature of the Roman triumph. Just as the procession was ascending the Capitoline Hill, some of the captive chiefs were taken into the adjoining prison and put to death. "Thus the sweet odors which to the victor - a Marius or a Julius Caesar - and to the spectators were a symbol of glory and success and happiness, were to the wretched victims - a Jugurtha or a Vercingetorix - an odor of death" (Farrar)."

This same type of terminology has been noted among the rabbis as well. It is obviously a universally understood concept then. People of all cultures know that death is the end. Most cultures believe in an afterlife that must somehow be merited. Therefore, if the way of merit is not attained, then there is only death leading to death. Thankfully for the Christian, there is an absolute assurance which is found nowhere else. It is "to the other the aroma of life leading to life."

For the one who reaches out and receives the fragrant aroma of the gospel message, it is *ek zoes eis zoen* - "from life to life." The Source of life is found in the gospel message which centers on Jesus Christ. When that life is received in an animated being, he moves to the life which is true life. The spiritual reconnection to God is made and eternal life is granted. It is more than a hope, but it is rather a certain, present, and guaranteed reality.

Paul finishes the verse with the sobering words, "And who *is* sufficient for these things?" He asks this rhetorically as a way of showing the immense responsibility laid upon the one who shares the gospel message. It is a two-edged sword which will lead some to life and some to death. The words when transmitted will lead to either eternal life or eternal damnation. Who would take such a responsibility lightly? Who would even be willing to speak such words, knowing what the result *could* be? Paul implies here that it is the grace of God alone which enabled him to pronounce the eternal destiny-deciding words.

Life application: We have all been asked to share the message of Christ, either in word or in action. As our lives are to be a gospel message in and of themselves, let us walk soberly and consider that when we fail to responsibly reflect Christ to others, it may be to them the fragrance of death leading to death. How great is our responsibility then!