

The Church in this Present World

2 Cor 2:14-3:6 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. ¹⁵ For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. ¹⁶ 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? 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. ^{3:1} Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some others, epistles of commendation to you or letters of commendation from you? ² You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; ³ clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart. ⁴ And we have such trust through Christ toward God. ⁵ Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God, ⁶ who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

This past week as our nation celebrated Independence Day I could not help but to think about how this nation is so far removed from its founding heritage. I am indeed a citizen of this fair land, but I found myself feeling more like an observer than a participant. The passage where Paul contrasts the church and this present world system came to mind and I quote from Philippians 3:18-20 *"For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame — who set their mind on earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ."*

In my life time I have seen so many changes in the attitudes of people of America that I could not help but dwell upon the fact that we, the church, are but pilgrims passing through a foreign land. Like Abraham we have no permanent dwelling place. Therefore I thought it is good to ask this question this morning, "What then is our relationship to this present world and the nations of this world? We know we are to pray for those in places of leadership, and that we are to be obedient to the proper laws of the land. As was expressed by our Lord and King Jesus Christ, *"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's."* (Matt 22:21)

While we are to be the best of citizens in our land at the same time we must be cognizant of the fact that our citizenship is in heaven and that we are but pilgrims and strangers upon the earth. What then is our relationship to this land in which we now live? In the passage I read for our text this morning we are expressly told that the Church is to be the source of blessing in a fallen world. - *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.* The Church then is the fragrance of Christ to in this present world, both to the saved and to the unsaved. As we read in verse 15, *"For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing."* So I wish to consider this passage under two headings, 1st. To the redeemed the Church is a sweet aroma of life leading to life, and 2nd. To the unredeemed the church is the aroma of death leading to death.

A. To the redeemed the Church is a sweet aroma of life leading to life. - *the aroma of life leading to life.*

1. The Church is that place where the believers meet with and rejoice in their Redeemer.

a. To the believer the church is where God dwells.

Matt 18:20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

b. This is what caused David much rejoicing.

Pss 122:1 I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go into the house of the Lord."

c. It is a sweet aroma because the church is the pillar and ground of the truth. – 1 Tim 3:15-16 *“The house of God, which **is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.**”*

- (1) Source of our faith Rom 10:17
- (2) Source of our liberty Jn 8:32
- (3) Source of the message hope

d. Of all people upon the earth we are aware that the Church is not some man-made organization.
e. But with all our weaknesses we remain the epistle of Christ before the world.

*2 Cor 3:2-3 You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; **clearly you are an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, that is, of the heart.***

f. As such we are not peddling (making merchandise of) the word of God.
(1) But we are the proclaimers of Christ and Him crucified.
(2) As such we need to guard our lifestyle before the world that they may see Christ in us.

g. Therefore with all its weaknesses it is the fragrance of Christ in a sin-cursed world.

B. To the unsaved world the church is an aroma of death leading to death.

1. The church is the proclaimer of truth but:

a. The world prefers the lie. - *who exchanged the truth of God for the lie.* (Rom 1:25)
Ps 62:4 They delight in lies; - Ps. 36:4 they do not abhor evil – take pleasure in unrighteousness

b. Being deceived, they do not love the truth

2 *Thess 2:10 “... **because they did not receive the love of the truth,** that they might be saved.*

c. They find comfort in deceiving and being deceived. - 2 Tim 3:13-14 deceiving and being deceived.

d. They want the approval of the church not the correction or rebuke of the church.

Rom 1:32 Who, knowing the righteous judgment of God, that those who practice such things are deserving of death, not only do the same but also approve of those who practice them.

2. The Church is the light of the world.

a. The world prefers the darkness because the light reveals their evil deeds.

CONCLUSION: Summing it up we may indeed be a stench in the nose of the unsaved.

But take comfort we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing

Therefore we should not consider it strange to be a foreigner and pilgrim in this passing world.

Rather let us rejoice for we are citizens of heaven.

As such may we continue to be the light of the world and the pillar and ground of truth

Let us pray that perchance God may use us as that fragrance and grant repentance and faith to one who is presently in opposition and that God might see fit to use us *“to bring them to the truth.” 2 Tim 2:25*