

2:14–17 *The Aroma of Christ*

THE TRIUMPH OF CHRIST'S NAME.

DESIDERIUS ERASMUS: I give thanks to God, who always through us spreads abroad the triumph of the Christian name and [through us] renders the triumph more illustrious as day by day the glory of the gospel shines more widely. Everywhere on earth he disseminates knowledge of himself through our proclamation, using us, so to speak, in the place of sweetly smelling incense. For in preaching the glory of the gospel everywhere in the world, what else are we doing but scattering the fragrance of Christ, pleasing even of itself and salvific for all, but for many, through their own fault, deadly? It is salvific for those who believe in the gospel and attain salvation, but death-dealing to those who reject it and double the condemnation of death upon themselves by adding to their former outrages the offense of ingratitude and stubbornness. PARAPHRASES ON 2 CORINTHIANS 2.⁶

PAUL EXTOLS THE FRUITFULNESS OF GOD'S MINISTRY THROUGH HIM.

JOHN CALVIN: Here Paul again boasts in the success of his ministry and asserts that he has not been idle in the various places he has visited. But so as to do this without causing envy, he begins by giving thanks, which he again repeats afterward. Now he does not extol his own accomplishments out of

a spirit of ambition, that his name might be extolled, nor does he give thanks to God by way of pretense (like the Pharisees), while being inflated with haughtiness and ambition. Instead of this, his heartfelt desire is that whatever is worthy of praise, should be recognized as the work of God alone so that his power alone might be extolled. And he recounts his own praises for the good of the Corinthians, so that when they hear that he has served the Lord with such great fruit in other places, they might not allow his labors to be unproductive among themselves and may learn to respect his ministry which God made everywhere so glorious and fruitful. COMMENTARY ON 2 CORINTHIANS 2:14.⁷

GOD GIVES VICTORY TO THE WEAK AND MISERABLE. MARTIN LUTHER: So our king is the defender and savior of the miserable, abounding in comfort toward the humble and distressed, completely victorious over his stubborn enemies. And we are really sure of victory if we hold fast to this king. What kind of kingdom would that be if we had to live continually surrounded by enemies, exposed to everyone's plots and weapons, always suffering and hard pressed? There must be some change, and those who have borne with so much must someday gain the victory. Victory is certain if only we persevere, as

⁶CWE 43:213–14.

⁷CO 50:32 (CTS 40:156–57).

Paul says in [2 Corinthians 2:14](#): “I thank God who always causes us to triumph in Christ Jesus.” Christians do not succumb to despair and lack of trust, they do not turn from the Word, they do not deny Christ. They persevere in teaching and confessing him—at times strongly, but at other times feebly. For he is a conquering king and a king of the miserable. He can raise us up even though at times we are weak. COMMENTARY ON [PSALM 45:5](#).⁸

GOSPEL MINISTERS SHARE IN CHRIST’S VICTORY. JOHN CALVIN: Now Paul means that he was also a participant in the triumph that God accomplished, because it had been achieved through his exertions, just as lieutenants escorted on horseback the chariot of the chief general as sharers in the honor. Therefore, just as all ministers of the gospel fight under God’s command, so they also win for him the victory and the honor of triumph. But at the same time, he honors each of them with a share in the triumph according to the military rank he has assigned to them, and the diligence performed by each of them. And so, they enjoy as it were a triumph, but it is God’s rather than theirs. Paul adds the phrase “in Christ”—the person through whom God himself triumphs—inasmuch as he has conferred on him all the glory of authority. COMMENTARY ON [2 CORINTHIANS 2:14](#).⁹

VICTORY IS IN CHRIST. WOLFGANG MUSCULUS: Why does Paul not say, “who always gives us the victory in the world,” but rather “who always gives us the victory in Christ”? The victor who was marching forth in Christ was, as it were, the conquered one who was afflicted in the world. This is the sort of victory that Christians experience: they encounter extreme suffering as far as the world is concerned, and while they seem to be conquered in the world, they are in fact victorious over both Satan and the world. Yes, indeed, they are victorious while they keep their souls intact and undefeated through all sorts of tribulations by virtue of patience in the faith of Christ. Thus, the tyrannical murderers of believers are defeated, and those who were murdered are victorious. The tyrant shouts “No! No!” The confessor of Christ says, “I recognize that vengeance is inappropriate, but I will confess that I am a Christian to my last breath.” And when the final article of victory is proclaimed, he calls upon Christ his Deliverer, and commends his spirit to the one whom the impious, defeated, and bewildered tyrant blasphemes. The battle is not of this present and momentary life. But you acknowledge and confess as Lord either Christ or Satan. You align yourself either to the truth with the elect of God, or to lies with the reprobate of Satan. And you

⁸ [LW 12:229](#).

⁹ [CO 50:33 \(CTS 40:157–58\)](#).

either live and experience salvation in eternity with Christ and all his saints, or you perish forever with the devil and all the wicked. The person who is victorious in this battle is not the one who kills, but the person who perseveres unconquered in the truth and faith of God. COMMENTARY ON [2 CORINTHIANS 2:14](#).¹⁰

THE SWEET FRAGRANCE OF DIVINE KNOWLEDGE. CARDINAL CAJETAN: Paul describes the second divine benefit from true ministers of the gospel. Not only does [God] triumph over demons through us by using us in the battle against the world to bring it under subjection, but he also reveals through us not only his knowledge but also the fragrance of his knowledge. There is a difference between good and wicked preachers of the gospel, because wicked preachers only hand over the knowledge of God, while good preachers also reveal the fragrance of divine knowledge, that is, sweetness, desirability, and delight. Now the sweetness of divine knowledge consists in works conforming to knowledge, and to this is [added] desirability and delight. Those who speak without action only reveal the teaching of faith. But those who both speak with action reveal in themselves the sweetest fragrance of knowledge that they have from God.

¹⁰ Musculus, *Commentarius ... in posteriorem epistolam Pauli ad Corinthios*, 78.

COMMENTARY ON [2 CORINTHIANS 2:14](#).¹¹

THE FRAGRANCE OF THE GOSPEL IS SWEET TO SOME PEOPLE, FETID TO OTHERS. HULDRYCH ZWINGLI: It sometimes happens that a minister of the Word is forced into exile. This is so that God might make known his gospel in other places so that the fragrance of his Word might be poured out everywhere. This charming metaphor is drawn from things with sweet fragrances; some such fragrances revive, others kill. Sweet and fragrant is that gospel balm which is spread about by us—though it is from God, not us. Indeed, it brings death to some people, and life to others; some people are pleased with it and approve it, others reject and curse it. Simeon also testified to this fact when he said that the Christ had been appointed for the resurrection of some but the fall of others. And these things are spoken to comfort those who faithfully preach the Word of God, who defend truth and righteousness. For no matter how faithfully they preach the Word, it is inevitable that they should be hated by some, and their message judged fetid by others. ANNOTATIONS ON [2 CORINTHIANS 2:14](#).¹²

PAUL COMPARES HIS TEACHING TO OLD

¹¹ Cajetan, *In Posteriolem Pauli Epistolam ad Corinthios Commentarii*, 157.

¹² Zwingli, *Annotatiunculae ... ex ore Zvinglij*, 153–54; citing [Lk 2:34](#).

TESTAMENT SACRIFICES. TILEMANN

HESSHUS: Paul commends his teaching with a striking metaphor drawn from sacrifices. Scripture says concerning Noah's sacrifice, "The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma." And Moses afterward repeats in Leviticus that "the aroma was pleasing to the Lord." Paul applies this phrase to his sermons, as if to say, "God has witnessed in the law that he delights in the aroma of sacrifices and incense, especially if they are offered by a faithful mediator. Now, the sufferings that I endure in proclaiming the gospel, are the sacrifice of the new covenant, and I know that God is more pleased with my sermons and struggles (like a burned sacrifice) than with all the incense and sacrifices of the Jews, who reject the appearing of the Messiah." When Paul says, "We are the aroma of Christ," he shows that Christ is the high priest who satisfies the wrath of the eternal Father by his sacrifice; and that the entirety of his doctrine proclaims only the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, who became a sacrificial victim for the sins of the world. This message concerning the crucified and resurrected Christ that resounds in the world is a most fragrant aroma to God. By this message is announced the immeasurable wisdom and goodness of God, and his eternal justice and compassion. By this message the lies of Satan are refuted and the kingdom of hell destroyed. By this message the holy church is gathered

to live with God for all eternity. Paul makes known this extraordinary and most delightful consolation when he says that the suffering that comes with teaching the gospel is a "pleasant aroma of Christ to God," in which God especially delights. Therefore, God will preserve the ministry; he will watch over the teaching and learning of the assembly; and he will compensate pastors' struggles and sufferings with abundant rewards. EXPLICATION OF 2 CORINTHIANS 2:15.¹³

THE GOSPEL AS THE FRAGRANCE OF GOD'S KNOWLEDGE. CYRIACUS SPANGENBERG: What is occurring through the preachers of the gospel is actually the work of Christ. He is the true high priest and stands continually before his heavenly Father and makes an incense offering—that is, he spreads through his mouth and preaching the beloved and holy gospel of the divine knowledge in all the world. And it is not inappropriate that the gospel is called a fragrance of the knowledge of God. For in the same way that one will always smell the fragrance of something which smells well and strong before one sees it, we also first understand from the preaching of the gospel what God and his will are, and how he is inclined toward us, and what we are to perform for him, before we see

¹³ Heshsus, *Explicatio Secundae Epistolae Pauli ad Corinthios*, 53v–54r; citing [Gen 8:21](#); [Lev 8:28](#).

him. And just as a good fragrance gives desire and strength, the gospel also does the same.

He does not call the gospel the “knowledge of God” (says Chrysostom[†]) but a “fragrance of the divine knowledge” for this reason, that in the gospel is made known to us that there is a God and that the same is gracious, good, almighty, true, and merciful. Whoever has this knowledge and trusts in it, he has great knowledge indeed, and such knowledge is sufficient for him for blessedness. However, we do not yet see or know God according to his being; our mind is much too small for that. TENTH SERMON.¹⁴

THE PREACHING OF THE GOSPEL SAVES AND CONDEMNS. THE ENGLISH ANNOTATIONS: The gospel is preached indifferently to all manner of persons, but it works in a very different manner. For when it is received by the faithful, it produces in them life and salvation, containing all the causes thereof in itself. But when it is rejected by unbelievers, it becomes in them the occasion of a greater condemnation and makes their perdition inevitable. As the same light of the sun, says Chrysostom,[†] offends those of weak eyes but re-creates

and comforts the clear of sight, and as the same star is to some a morning star bringing the light of day and to others an evening star bringing darkness and night, so the gospel is a comfort to some and a terror to others. It brings eternal life and salvation to some, but (indirectly) everlasting darkness and damnation to others, as is seen in the prophecy of Simeon in [Luke 2:34](#): “Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel.” ANNOTATIONS ON [2 CORINTHIANS 2:15](#).¹⁵

THE SWEET AROMA OF CHRIST. JOHN TRAPP: The church is the mortar; preaching, the pestle; the promises are the sweet spices, which once ground, yield a heavenly and supernatural aroma in the souls of godly hearers. COMMENTARY ON [2 CORINTHIANS 2:15](#).¹⁶

THE SAME SAVOR MAKES SOME ALERT AND OTHERS DROWSY. EDWARD LEIGH: *Beneolentia* [sweet savor] is one word in the Greek.... Gregory in his *Morals* states that this word is like the planet Venus, which for some is Lucifer, a bright morning star, arising in their hearts, by which they are roused up and stirred from iniquity. But for others, it is Hesperus, an evening star, by which they are brought to bed and put asleep in impiety—like those who send out a sweet savor from themselves. ANNOTATIONS ON [2](#)

[†] For Chrysostom’s interpretation, see [PG 61:430 \(NPNF¹ 12:302\)](#).

¹⁴ C. Spangenberg, *Die ander Epistel Pauli an die Corinthier*, 44v.

[†] For Chrysostom’s interpretation, see [PG 61:430 \(NPNF¹ 12:302\)](#).

¹⁵ Downname, ed., *English Annotations*, FF3*.

¹⁶ Trapp, *A Commentary or Exposition*, 708*.

CORINTHIANS 2:15.¹⁷

FAITHFUL MINISTRY IS FRUITFUL BEFORE GOD. JOHN CALVIN: Let us now learn by the example of the prophet [Jeremiah], that whenever Satan or our flesh raises an objection and says that we ought to desist from preaching celestial truth because it doesn't produce its proper and legitimate fruits, it is nevertheless a good odor before God, though fatal to the ungodly. Though then the truth of the gospel proves the savor of death to many, yet our labor is not on that account of no value before God; for we know that we offer to God an acceptable sacrifice; and though our labor is useless to others, it is yet fruitful as to the glory of God; and while we are the odor of death unto death to those who perish, yet to God, even in this respect, our labor is acceptable. LECTURE ON JEREMIAH 20:9.¹⁸

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST IS BOTH AN AROMA OF LIFE AND OF DEATH. WOLFGANG MUSCULUS: Wherever Paul was preaching the gospel of Christ and spreading its beautiful fragrance, he encountered different outcomes. Some people approved his message and embraced it by faith. These were the elect and those predestined for eternal life. Others disapproved of his message and rejected it. These were the

reprobate and those perishing. Yet the aroma of Christ was intrinsically pleasant and, by the initiative of God, it was spread to the entire world through the preaching of the gospel, although to some it was the aroma of life to life, but for others it was the aroma of death to death. In the former, the fragrance by its intrinsic power was bringing about life; in the latter, because of their own sin and guilt, the fragrance was bringing about death.

Now it should not seem surprising that Paul calls the fragrance of Christ "good" not only for those who were saved by the good aroma of life but also for the reprobate who were perishing by the aroma of death, since Christ did not come into this world for either judgment or death. For it is also very common in human affairs that the same object, which is good and useful in itself, serves as good for some and evil for others; and in some affairs, a different and contrary result is intrinsically obtained. Love believes all things, hopes all things, trusts everyone, and is gentle, compassionate, and kind to everyone ... And nevertheless, love is employed well by some and badly by others; it provokes some people to do good and gives other people an excuse for contempt and apathy. Medicine is good in itself, but still it is rendered useful for some people and harmful for others on account of the difference of the patients. Human knowledge, which is a singular gift of God, renders some people useful,

¹⁷ Leigh, *Annotations upon all the New Testament*, 257*.

¹⁸ CTS 19:34* (CO 38:346).

but other people haughty and dangerous. So too wealth, which is a sign of divine favor, renders some people generous and others proud. The splendor of the sun illuminates some and blinds others. A beautiful fragrance, as one finds in a storeroom of spices and perfumes, refreshes some people and renders others depressed. So also Christ himself came bringing resurrection to some and ruin to others. COMMENTARY ON [2 CORINTHIANS 2:16](#).¹⁹

THE GOSPEL BOTH JUDGES AND BLESSES. CYRIACUS SPANGENBERG: The sun gives light that is useful and good, but its light is repugnant to anyone who has bad eyes. Honey is sweet, but it nevertheless tastes very bitter to some sick people. Thus, the gospel is also good and precious. That it does not smell or taste good to all people is because of their wickedness. Inasmuch as the gospel judges these same people, its power comes to light just as much as when it makes others blessed.

In the same way then the gospel is today already an odor of death to death for all stubborn papists and enemies of the gospel. They might die for wickedness, because we will not allow them their flea market, but attribute instead the righteousness of man before God as to faith alone in Jesus Christ. ELEVENTH

SERMON.²⁰

SCRIPTURE IS FULL OF GOSPEL COMMENDATIONS LIKE THIS. PHILIPP MELANCHTHON: “Who is suitable for these things?” This here is the fourth passage in this letter concerning the ministry of the gospel. The opportunity presents itself when Paul begins speaking about ministers, saying “Who is suitable for these things?” Now this is a most excellent commendation of gospel ministry through which he teaches both from whence the power of ministry comes, and how it differs from the law. Commendations of gospel ministry of this sort are necessary for confirming the faith and strengthening consciences in courage, not only because the gospel is so novel and foreign to the flesh, but also because when consciences are afflicted one cannot magnify grace enough. The human mind always conceives God’s mercy as a thing smaller and more restricted than it should. Hence, the prophets are full of gospel commendations of this sort: [Isaiah 2](#), “Come, let us walk in the light of our God”; and [Isaiah 52](#), “The Lord has bared his holy arm,” that is, his Word, “before the eyes of all nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God”; and [Psalm 68](#), “You will shed rain willingly upon your inheritance.” ANNOTATIONS ON [2](#)

¹⁹ Musculus, *Commentarius ... in posteriorem epistolam Pauli ad Corinthios*, 80.

²⁰ C. Spangenberg, *Die ander Epistel Pauli an die Corinthier*, 47v.

CORINTHIANS 2:16.²¹

WHO IS SUFFICIENT FOR THESE THINGS?

JOHN TRAPP: And yet now, who does not think themselves sufficient for that sacred and terrifying function of the ministry? Moses said, “Who am I?” Our modern upstart says, “Who am I not?” It was with great difficulty that Bradford was persuaded to become a preacher. Latimer leapt in the air when he laid down his bishopric, since he had been discharged, as he said, of so heavy a burden. Luther used to say that if he were again to choose his calling, he would dig or do anything other than take upon himself the office of a minister. COMMENTARY ON 2

CORINTHIANS 2:16.²²

GOSPEL DOCTRINE IS CORRUPTED IN TWO

WAYS. JOHN CALVIN: I do not think it likely ... that those people whom Paul here reproached openly preached doctrines that were wicked and false. Rather, I think that they corrupted the right use of doctrine for the sake of either gain or ambition, so as completely to deprive it of effectiveness. This Paul calls “adulterating.” Erasmus prefers to call it “huckster-

²¹ *Melanchthons Werke*, 4:99–100; citing [Is 2:5](#); [Is 52:10](#); [Ps 68:9](#) (Vg. [67:10](#)).

²² Trapp, *A Commentary or Exposition*, 709*; citing [Ex 3:11](#). Hugh Latimer* was an Anglican bishop critical of Catholic practices and social injustices. John Bradford* was an evangelical preacher and chaplain to Edward VI*. Both were martyred during the reign of Mary I*.

ing” (*cauponari*). The Greek word *kapēleuein* is drawn from retailers or tavern keepers, who falsify their wares so as to fetch a higher price.... For the doctrine of God is corrupted in two ways. It is corrupted *directly* when it is mixed up with falsehood and lies, so that it is no longer the pure and genuine doctrine of God, though it is commended with this false title. It is corrupted *indirectly* when, although it retains its purity, it is nevertheless twisted in different directions to please people and is disfigured by shameful flattery so as to chase after favor. Thus, some people are found whose doctrine is not impious, but either because they hunt after the world’s applause by making a display of their cleverness or eloquence, or because they are ambitious for some position or pant after filthy lucre, or because they desire to gain power in some way—they thereby corrupt the doctrine itself by wrongly abusing it, or by making it subservient to their depraved desires. COMMENTARY ON 2 CORINTHIANS 2:17.²³

FOUR CONDITIONS OF A SUITABLE MINISTER.

PHILIPP MELANCHTHON: There are ... four conditions of a suitable apostle: First, [he speaks] “with sincerity,” that is, he does not pervert the Word of God. Second, [he speaks] “from God,” that is, proclaiming the Word of God with as much certainty

²³ [CO 50:35](#) ([CTS 40:162–63](#)).

as other prophets. Hence, [Jeremiah 5](#), “I am placing my word in your mouth”; and, [Matthew 10](#), “It is not you yourself who speak.” ... Third, “in the sight of God,” that is, I am not seeking to please people or focusing upon the judgment of human beings, but the judgment of God, as that passage in Galatians states: “If I were pleasing human beings, I would not be a servant of Christ.” Fourth, “in Christ,” that is, through the spirit and power of Christ. Here, Paul ascribes efficaciousness to the Word, as is also seen in that passage, “I will give you a mouth and wisdom that no one will be able to oppose”; and [Isaiah 51](#): “I have put my words in your mouth, so that you might establish the heavens and lay the foundations of the earth” (which happens in the new creation); and [Psalm 107](#): “He sent out his Word, and he healed them.”

ANNOTATIONS ON [2 CORINTHIANS 2:17](#).²⁴

FIVE MARKS OF LEGITIMATE MINISTRY. WOLFGANG MUSCULUS: We find here ... five sure marks of the legitimate ministry of a true minister of Christ. The first mark is found where Paul says, “we speak.” Hence, those silent and false bishops who rule rather than preach are excluded. Paul expresses the second mark when he says, “in Christ.” Every kind of teaching that does not relate to the sub-

ject of Christ is excluded. The third mark is found where Paul says, “as men of sincerity.” ... The one who preaches Christ purely and sincerely is he who mixes nothing foreign with the teaching of Christ. Every kind of admixture is excluded, whether it consists in human traditions, or the observance of the law, or the cunning of human wisdom. For who can count all the kinds of mixing with which the pure teaching of Christ has been vitiated from the times of the apostles until now? The fourth mark relates to Paul’s words “but as men [commissioned] by God.” That the true minister of Christ is established by divine rather than human authority is required, therefore, so that when he speaks in the church of God, it is as if he speaks the Words and oracles of God. Paul expresses the fifth mark when he says, “in the sight of God.” Some things are spoken in the sight of and with regard to human beings. Other things are spoken in the sight of and with regard to God himself, who is everywhere present and who sees and hears everything we do and say. In the sight of human beings there is room for hypocrisy, deception, and bargaining—but not at all in the sight of God. When these marks are missing, we do not acknowledge that there is a minister of Christ. COMMENTARY ON [2 CORINTHIANS 2:17](#).²⁵

²⁴ *Melanchthons Werke*, 4:100; citing [Jer 5:14](#); [Mt 10:20](#); [Gal 1:10](#); [Lk 21:15](#); [Is 51:6](#); [Ps 107:20](#) ([Vg. 106:20](#)).

²⁵ Musculus, *Commentarius ... in posteriorem*

PREACHING IS NO SMALL THING. CYRIACUS SPANGENBERG: Faithful, upright teachers speak before God, that is, they know that God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit are always present when they speak of God or preach. Therefore, they also speak of God in the way they hope to answer to him at the last judgment. They teach in the way that they know God would have it, that they may stand before him. For God goes to all sermons and hears how and what we teach about him. Preachers should reflect on this. Therefore, it is no small thing to be a preacher. ELEVENTH SERMON.²⁶

AGAINST THE GREED OF CATHOLIC THEOLOGAINS. ARGULA VON GRUMBACH:

What you so long have plied
 God will no more abide;
 Deceiving rich and poor alike
 No one can possibly be your like:
 You wheel and deal, you strut around
 Affluence in your life abounds
 Yet dare to claim a spiritual name
 When all we see is greed and shame.
 And hypocritically market
 God's Word like some cheap trinket.
 Hear this! Paul boasts it's true,
 In Second Corinthians chapter two:
 That Christians resembled not the
 many
 Who aim in life to grab each penny.

²⁶ C. Spangenberg, *Die ander Epistel Pauli an die Corinthier*, 48v.

In Christ, from God, he speaks;
 Nothing he does is done for greed.
 Speaks each word with honesty
 Before God's face talks truthfully.
 If the same thing you could do
 Right joyously we'd follow you.
 But you would lead us all astray;
 Let the stones cry out today!
 While you oppress God's Word and
 —Shame!
 Consign souls to the devil's game
 I cannot and I will not cease
 To speak at home and on the street.
 As long as God will give me grace
 I'll tell my neighbor, face-to-face.
 For Paul has not forbidden me,
 Where God's Word cannot yet run
 free,
 As sadly is the case with us.

AN ANSWER IN VERSE TO JOHANNES OF LANZHUT.²⁷

²⁷ Grumbach, *Argula von Grumbach*, 181–82. In this poem, Argula responds to a scurrilous poem published in 1524 by a theologian at the University of Ingolstadt named Johannes of Lanzhut, which had attacked her Protestant convictions and her outspoken defense of the evangelical message.