

How Do You Smell?

For the longest time, I was afraid to wear deodorant. That was back when it came in a can. On the back of the can was this warning: “Caution: may explode under intense heat.” I could just imagine going out to play basketball in the gym at school and working up an intense heat and having my arm pits explode. How embarrassing as all my teammates watched my arms hurling across the basketball court and missing a free shot. Well, I had to start wearing it if I was to have any friends, but I still had to keep them on the right side of me because my mother bought me Right Guard underarm deodorant. I didn’t have any Left Guard for the other arm.

The sense of smell is one of the powerful senses God has given us. Smell alerts us to danger, such as, a building on fire. Animals need the sense of smell to survive. Smell tells us when someone else is around. There are good smells like fresh bread out of the oven, or the smell of a little baby, and a new car. Then you have bad smells like sulfur or spoiled milk and other things, such as, stinky feet.

Do your feet smell? No! You smell with your nose. How do you smell? This is not a personal question about your body odor, but an inquiry into your spiritual aroma. Paul spoke about this to the Corinthians: “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. For we are to God the fragrance of Christ among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing. To the one we are the aroma of death to death, and to the other the aroma of life to life. And who is sufficient for these things?” (2 Corinthians 2:14-16).

Stench of Sin and Death

Have you ever asked someone while driving down the highway, “What’s that smell?” Perhaps, you were passing by a sewage treatment plant, a paper factory or a dead skunk. We have all smelled the stench of a skunk. Skunks can spray a distance of six to ten feet. However, its foul odor can be smelled by humans for up to 2.5 miles.

Spiritually, sin can spray us with its stench of death for eternity. This world is filled with the stench of sin and death. Solomon warned, “Dead flies putrefy the perfumer's ointment, and cause it to give off a foul odor; so does a little folly to one respected for wisdom and honor” (Eccl. 10:1). Death is the wages of sin (Rom. 6:23), and all have sinned (Rom. 3:23). Therefore, everybody stinks.

In the resurrection of Lazarus, who had been in the grave for four days, we learn that he was not just dead, but he stunk (John 11:38_40). We are not just dead in our sins, we emit a foul odor to the nose of God. God is said to have sense of smell. If we play with dead things we will start to smell like them. Physical death has a distinct odor and so does spiritual death.

How can we remove the stench of sin and death? By victory over sin and death through Jesus Christ. Paul obviously had seen at least one Roman triumphal procession in his life. In the context, he is alluding to this tradition. After a Roman army would conquer a particular tribe or people, there would be a ticker tape parade. However, it was different from the ones that we know. After a great victory, the Roman senate would vote to give the conquering army and general a Triumph parade. First, rank upon rank of trumpeters would march by. Next came the older Roman senators, leading men of the city, such as, rich merchants, government officials, etc. Then came the army with intermittent wagon loads of spoil taken in victory. Finally, the hero and conquering general came riding in a chariot while wearing the garb associated with Jupiter: purple and gold robes. Alongside

this procession were people swinging censers filled with sweet-smelling incense. Various bonfires would be burning here and there along the route. People would pour perfume into the flames so the smell of its fragrance would fill the air. Also, fragrant flowers would be cast by the spectators into the path of the parade and crushed by the hundreds of marching feet. At the very end of the procession the enemy prisoners would be executed.

This is illustrative of the great smell of victory that came when Christ arose victoriously over sin and death at His resurrection.

Aromatherapy

Not only can Christ help us with our past problem with the stench of sin and death, but He can help us as Christians to emit sweet-smelling aroma that will be pleasing to God.

Aromatherapy means "treatment using scents." It is used to relieve pain, care for the skin, alleviate tension and fatigue, and invigorate the entire body. It has been said that certain scents can help with the body's digestion, respiratory, circulatory and excretory systems. Some smells can relieve headaches, ease depression, and even help to improve memory. Doctors have found that a life without fragrance can lead to heightened incidences of psychiatric issues, such as anxiety and depression. The average human has the ability to differentiate 10,000 diverse scents. One Japanese firm reports that air scented with lavender cut keypunching errors by 21 %. Jasmine-scented air dropped errors by 33 %, and lemon in the air was even better by cutting errors by 54 %. Lavender reduces stress. Jasmine relaxes. Lemon stimulates. Odors do make a difference.

It is one thing to remove a bad smell. It is important to replace it with a new fragrance. Christ is the new fragrance in our new lives as Christians. "Therefore be followers of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma" (Ephesians 5:1,2). Just as we are attracted by pleasant smells, so the smell of Christ's sacrifice makes us appealing to God.

Just how does a Christian smell? We are recognized by how we smell! Do you smell like dead fish? If so, you must be a fisherman. The Christian emits (in a figurative way) the very smell of Christ's sweet sacrifice. It comes out in our attitudes, actions and words. As we travel through life, we are sending a sweet -smelling fragrance to God in a world that otherwise stinks. For example, if someone comes around you and stink, your image is created of that person. Stinky people usually don't have many friends. A lot of people make the mistake of trying to cover up that smell by doing good deeds or by being kind to strangers, or by helping little old ladies across the street.

To improve your fragrance you need Christ. Consider Christ's visit to Simon the Leper's home. The smell of lepers will turn your stomach. It is the smell of rotting flesh that is dying right on their bodies. A woman came and anointed Jesus with expensive perfume, and His presence changed the smell of the entire home of Simon. And when Jesus was in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, a woman came to Him having an alabaster flask of very costly fragrant oil, and she poured it on His head as He sat at the table. But when His disciples saw it, they were indignant, saying, "To what purpose is this waste? "For this fragrant oil might have been sold for much and given to the poor." But when Jesus was aware of it, He said to them, "Why do you trouble the woman? For she has done a good work for Me. "For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always. "For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it for My burial. 13. "Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her." (Matthew 26:6-13).

- Washing

How do we remove the stench of sin and death from our lives? Those who have been sprayed by a skunk are told to soak in tomato juice. This is supposed to remove the smell. You can't cover up the smell! You have to wash it away.

When sprayed by sin we must wash it away. Psalm 51:7 says, "Wash me, and I will be whiter..." One of the beatitudes of Revelation states, "Blessed are those who wash their robes..." (Revelation 7:14). When Ananias came to Saul of Tarsus to tell him how to remove the stench of his sin he said, "And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord" (Acts 22:16).

- **Stay Clean**

After we have been washed, we can always go right back to the mud hole of sin and wallow in it. This is not only a possibility, it is most probable according to 1 John 1:8-10. Staying out of the garbage dumps of the world helps you not to stink again. What can we do when we sin again? Do we get re-baptized? No. As a child of God and a Christian, you can be cleansed of your sins daily by repenting, confessing and praying for forgiveness. "But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. ... If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:7,9).

- **Sweet-Smelling Worship**

Another way to keep smelling good before the Lord is to worship Him in an acceptable manner. In Genesis chapter eight we see Noah coming out of the ark 377 days after the flood began. First, he built an altar to God. "Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the Lord smelled a soothing aroma. Then the Lord said in His heart, "I will never again curse the ground for man's sake, although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done" (Genesis 8:20,21). Was it that the Lord was pleased by the aroma of a burning animal? No. It was more so that the Lord was pleased by Noah's heart of worship and his offering of worship to Him.

- **Living Sacrifice**

During the Patriarchal and Mosaical Age, animals were sacrificed. Dead animals will not do anymore. Today, we as Christians are the sacrifice. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" (Romans 12:1). The pleasing aroma of living sacrifice comes from the soul completely offered up to God.

- **Prayer Is a Fragrant Incense to Heaven**

Prayer gives off a sweet smell to the Lord according to Ps. 141:2: "Let my prayer be set before You as incense, The lifting up of my hands as the evening sacrifice." So, if you "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. 5:17) you will never have to worry about your spiritual B.O.

Ask others to tell you how you "smell." This takes guts. Spiritual "B.O." detracts from the message of Christ. Do you give off the fragrance of life or the odor of death?

– Daniel R. Vess, The Forum, December 2, 2007