

## Message #7

## II Corinthians 2:12-17

I recently listened again to a lecture given by Dr. Lewis Sperry Chafer on the beginning of Dallas Theological Seminary. It is a fascinating story. In the lecture, Dr. Chafer said that the school almost ended up in the Chicago area, specifically taking over the campus of Wheaton College. The President of Wheaton College at the time was Dr. Blanchard and the student body had dwindled down to about 200 students and Dr. Blanchard wrote Dr. Chafer to come to Chicago to take over the property. Dr. Chafer got on a train and traveled to Chicago and then took another train out to Wheaton. He said that he decided to break the ice and said to Dr. Blanchard, "What are the terms?" In other words, what are you looking to get so we may start a theological school? At that point, Dr. Blanchard said we are not going to sell the school. Today, a man gave me \$18,000 and the school can go on for quite a while. Dr. Chafer said he took a train back to Chicago and then back to Dallas where he was the pastor of the Scofield Memorial Church. Dr. Chafer had a meeting in Dallas with another minister whose name was Pastor Anderson and he said to Dr. Chafer, bring the school here to Dallas. The rest is history. Dr. Chafer said God wanted this school in Dallas. The setbacks of Chicago were all part of God's sovereign plan to put the school in Dallas.

If you are like me, you don't like setbacks. If you are like me, you don't like it when things seem to fall apart. But if we stop to realize that even setbacks and change of plans are part of God's sovereign will in directing our lives, we can look at things entirely differently.

As we look down through these verses you will notice that there are a couple of interesting words that communicate an important point multiple times. The word "sweet aroma" (οσμην) that refers to a sweet smell (2:14, 16, 16), and the word "fragrance" (εὐωδία) which refers to the fragrance of a sacrifice (2:15). By using these words in this context, what Paul is saying is this:

**OUR LIVES ARE A SWEET, FRAGRANT AROMA TO GOD AND HE USES THE SETBACKS AND CHANGES OF PLANS AS PART OF HIS SOVEREIGN PLAN TO SOVEREIGNLY DIRECT US TO PLACES WHERE HE MAY USE US TO COMMUNICATE HIS TRUTH.**

That is exactly the way Paul saw his apostolic life and ministry. When we are living our lives in harmony with the Scriptures, our life is a sweet, fragrant aroma to Him and He is directing our steps. So the setbacks and change of plans that occur are all part of His sovereign plan for our lives. We may plan to work and retire from some place and all of a sudden things change. We may plan to live a long, healthy life and all of a sudden we get sick. We may plan to follow some charted course we have laid out and all of a sudden everything seems to fall apart. In these very moments, God is sovereignly directing our lives to people and places to whom He wants us to minister. That is what Paul communicates here.

Now Paul was being criticized by some of these Corinthians as a man who was fickle because his plans had changed. He was being criticized as a man who did not follow through on his word because he did not go to Corinth as quickly as they wanted. So he spent time trying to reestablish his credibility. He wanted these Corinthians to realize that his life was a sweet, fragrant sacrifice for God and God was directing it and using him according to His will and purposes.

Now there are a series of seven ministry points that God wants us to understand:

**MINISTRY POINT #1** – A ministry door was opened by God for Paul at Troas. **2:12-13a**

Psalm 37:23 says that “The steps of a man are established by the LORD and He delights in his way.”

Paul is defending his conduct in ministry, specifically his travel itinerary. He had not gone right back to Corinth and was being criticized for it. Now Paul wanted these Corinthians to realize that the reason why I went to Troas was for the purpose of finding Titus so I could get a report from him on how you were doing as a church.

Now Troas, ancient Troy (known today as Hissarlik), is a key port located on the northern coast of Asia in modern day Turkey. Paul jumped on a ship and went north from Ephesus, approximately 130 miles up the Aegean and came to the port of Troas.

Now Paul says when I got to Troas, thinking about the Corinthians, God opened a door for me to preach and teach and expand the ministry. The idea of an “open door” is the idea of God giving opportunities for ministry, specifically to preach and teach His Word. God is the one who opens doors for the communication of God’s Word (Col. 4:3) and He is the one who opens people’s hearts to receive it (Acts 16:14).

Now the implication of this statement that God opened this door is that God does not always do that. In other words, God does not open doors everywhere. He closes doors at times and He opens doors at times and all of this is part of His sweet, fragrant work.

What Paul wanted these Corinthians to realize is that he had originally gone to Troas to look for Titus to get a report about them; but when he got to Troas, God opened doors for ministry. God opened a door for Paul to preach the Gospel in Troas, and ultimately a church was established. His ministry flourished in Troas.

**MINISTRY POINT #2** – Paul left Troas and went to Macedonia looking for Titus. **2:13b**

Paul was having great success in Troas, but he wanted those Corinthians to realize that he was so concerned about the Corinthians and the report of Titus that he left Troas and sailed into Macedonia. Now Paul carefully documents the reasons why he left Troas:

**Reason #1** - He had no rest in his spirit.

Now the Greek construction refers to Paul's immaterial self. Literally, the Greek emphatically reads "the spirit of me" (τῷ πνεύματι μου). Every human is Tri-partite—which means each person has three parts—body, soul and spirit. We have a body that is concerned with this world, we have a spirit that is concerned with self and we have a soul that is concerned with God.

Paul's immaterial self was restless. His intellect and emotions were troubled. In fact, the Greek word "no rest" (ἀνεσις) means he couldn't relax or find relief. Here he was in Troas having great success in ministry, but something was stirring him in that he could not settle down and relax and find relief. He needed to move on.

**This does tell us something about the leading of God. When it is time to move, there will be somewhat of a restlessness of mind.** Apparently, Paul could not mentally shake the thought that he needed to find Titus and go to Macedonia. He was experiencing some form of ministerial mental anxiety and he expected to have a rendezvous with Titus in Troas, but Titus had not shown up.

Personally speaking, this is the way it has been when God has moved me. Something starts stirring and nagging and you can't shake the opportunity. Dr. Chafer said that was the way it was when he founded Dallas. He couldn't shake the idea that a school was needed to train men in the Scriptures.

**Reason #2** - He had not found Titus.

Now Titus was Paul's "true child" in the faith, which means he came to faith under the ministry and teaching of Paul (Titus 1:4). He was saved very early in Paul's ministry and was an uncircumcised Gentile (Gal. 2:3). Titus had made multiple visits to Corinth (II Cor. 8:6, 10; 9:2; 12:18; 7:6; 8:16, 23). Paul had sent Titus to Corinth to check up on the church and so by him saying he was anxious to hook up with Titus, he was basically saying I was very concerned about you Corinthians. Paul did not find Titus in Troas, so he said goodbye and headed to Macedonia.

These Corinthians are accusing Paul of not caring about them and Paul says, look, I was so concerned for you that I left a very fruitful ministry to go to Macedonia to find Titus, just so I could get a report about how you were doing.

Troas was the perfect port to cross the Aegean and go to Macedonia. So he jumped on a ship and sailed straight across the Aegean because he cared about these people.

Now at this point in II Corinthians Paul launches into the most massive digression about his personal, apostolic ministry in all of his writings. Murray Harris called this "the great digression." This digression starts in II Corinthians 2:14 and lasts for 83 verses all the way until II Corinthians 7:4. You could actually read II Corinthians 2:13 and then jump over to II Corinthians 7:5 and it would perfectly fit. Paul begins his digression by presenting this idea:

**MINISTRY POINT #3** – Paul’s life and ministry was a victory march being led by God.

**2:14a**

Now Paul’s ministry life was not easy. Just the travel by foot, horse, or ship was not easy. Plus, when he would preach, he would often find himself hated and persecuted. He was criticized almost everywhere he went. In fact, when he wrote this very epistle he was being criticized by the Corinthians. But Paul wanted the Corinthians to know that his life and ministry was a victory march being led by God.

But notice how Paul begins this section “Thanks be to God.” The Greek literally reads, “to the God grace” (Τῷ θεῷ χάρις). This word “grace” is a critical Pauline word. It is a word that means God is a God of wonderful, unmerited, free grace (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 479). Paul saw his life and ministry as all about grace. He thanked God for the grace that entrusted him with ministry.

Now the words “leads us in His triumph” (θριαμβεῖω) is one that was used to describe the pageantry of a Roman triumph. G. Abbott-Smith said this word speaks of the spectacle or show that featured a triumphal march of the Romans (*Ibid.*, pp. 208-209).

When Rome would be victorious in some military endeavor, they would have a triumphant victory procession in which they would parade their captives before the people.

We can relate to this in what just happened in the Olympics. Our athletes returned and were honored by parades for their accomplishments.

What Paul does here is begin by praising and thanking God for His grace in that he believed that his life was a triumphal procession led by God. He believed that everything in his life, the positive and negative, was all part of the triumphal victory march.

Now carefully notice that the triumphal life is only found “in Christ” (ἐν τῷ χριστῷ). That prepositional phrase is critical because it teaches us that our lives will only be triumphant if they are in Christ.

**MINISTRY POINT #4** – Paul’s ministry manifested a sweet aroma of Christ in every place.

**2:14b**

Now do not miss what Paul says here—our lives manifest a sweet aroma for God as we go from place to place communicating the knowledge of Him. In other words, we are on a triumphal victory march and as we move through our life we will find ourselves in various places and our job is to communicate knowledge of the grace of God everywhere we go. When we do that, we are a sweet aroma for God.

Several months before Mr. Miles went home to be with the Lord, he was hospitalized for a time in Wyoming. He believed that God had sent him to this hospital because there was a nurse who needed to hear about Jesus Christ. He witnessed to this nurse multiple times.

That is exactly what Paul is saying here. Life for Paul was not often pleasant, and frankly, his circumstances were often lousy. But he viewed his life as a triumphal march and when he would go from place to place he would communicate knowledge of the grace of God.

Now of course to communicate knowledge you must have knowledge, which shows the importance of going through these books of the Bible.

**MINISTRY POINT #5** – Paul’s ministry was a sweet fragrance regardless of results.  
**2:15-16a**

This is very important. Paul went from place to place preaching and teaching the grace of God found in Jesus Christ. Some believed and were saved and were guaranteed heaven, and some didn’t and are perishing and are on their way to hell.

Either way, God viewed Paul’s ministry as a sweet fragrance. Our job is not to save the elect, which is God’s job. Our job is to go from place to place and communicate knowledge of the grace of God.

When we do that, some believe and they have the smell of life, and some don’t and they have the smell of death.

In all reality, there are two groups of people in this world right now—those who are saved and heading to heaven and those who are perishing and heading to hell. That is it.

**MINISTRY POINT #6** – Paul’s ministry was an awesome responsibility. **2:16b**

When Paul asks “who is adequate for these things?” the question seems to imply a negative answer “no one.” No one is adequate in and of himself for this responsibility.

Do you begin to grasp the importance of your salvation here? Our lives are to be a manifestation of grace and communicating the knowledge of Jesus Christ and this is a “life/death” issue.

In other words, our lives are important every place we go because there are life/death eternal issues at stake. Our job is to be a manifestation of God’s grace everywhere we go because people are on their way to hell.

Paul went from place to place proclaiming Jesus Christ to those perishing and when he did, some believed and some didn’t.

**MINISTRY POINT #7** – Paul did not use cheap marketing tactics anywhere but depended on God in every place he went. **2:17**

Paul never “peddled the Word of God” as some cheap huckster. The word “peddled” (καπηλευω) is one that means he never was involved in any type of corrupt marketing strategy that would make a merchandising of the Word of God (*Ibid.*, p. 230).

Now Paul was certainly not against a minister being paid. In fact, he wrote about that point in I Corinthians 9:1-14 and I Timothy 5:17-18. Paul was not against people giving him money. In fact, he praised the Philippians for supporting him (Philippians 1:3-5; 4:10-16). So Paul was not against receiving money for ministry. But he was against merchandising tactics to get people’s money.

Paul says I have never been some cheap “peddler” who went from place to place trying to get people’s money. Paul had never tried to figure out ways to make merchandise of the Word of God. He said our ministry was about preaching God’s Word and we did this out of sincerity, realizing we were in the presence of God.

There are many ministers today who are on TV and radio, who are nothing but cheap peddlers and hucksters who are simply out for money. They are not giving out the true knowledge of God; they are simply going after people’s money.

**Verse 17** is rich because we see how Paul viewed his ministry:

- 1) His source of his ministry was God (“from God” (εκ θεου)).
- 2) His content of his message was Christ (specifically an “in Christ” (εν χριστω) message).
- 3) His motive for all ministry was God’s presence (“in the sight of God” (κατεναντι θεου)).

Our Christian life is serious business. We are on a victory march and we need to be a grace reflector and a grace communicator everywhere we go.

In the course of years, all of us have attended funerals for people we have loved. All of us here have been touched by the death of someone who meant a great deal to us. Now I truly believe the Rapture of the Church could happen at any moment. I truly think we could be caught up in the air to meet with those loved ones again any second. But I don’t know for sure. I don’t know the day, nor the hour when Jesus Christ will Rapture his church, so we must think realistically. I am in my 60’s. If the Lord doesn’t Rapture the church for a few years, I am on a death march and all of us here are on the same march. Based on statistical data, I fully expect, in the next couple of decades, to depart from this world via death. Now I will certainly try to keep myself in some sort of healthy shape. But in the end, death will track me down and it will track you down.

Now the exciting reality of this for those who have believed on Jesus Christ is that our death march is a life march. We are marching toward everlasting life. This life march gets even more exciting if we are focused on doing God’s will and proclaiming God’s Word.