

The Freedom and the Fetter

“God...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 leading to death,
and to the other the aroma of life leading to life,”
2 Corinthians 2:14-16.

Love is the highest and the greatest commandment. It is the highest goal and the greatest gift without doubt. The Holy Ghost gives Christians both the ability and the desire to fulfill the law of love. He imputes them with Christ's righteousness despite their inability to do either. Christians are known by their love for one another. We are to bear one another's burdens and support one another in times of need. We're to deal with one another as we would one for whom Christ gave His life. There are Christians in my life that bless me and give me an evidence of my own salvation by the way I love them, in the way I feel about them and what I want for them in life and life eternal, 1 John 3:14. We're to respect one another and accept differences in secondary or tertiary doctrine rejoicing that we have learned the weightier matters of the new law. That doesn't mean we can't sometimes debate or even fight over belief; what it means is that we'll fight in unity always coming back to our mutual affirmations. We're all to study to show ourselves approved. We're to forgive one another and confess our sins to those we trust and know in Jesus. Other Christians are nothing short of a means of grace that God has given to His people. Such things are a sweet aroma in life. Some disciples, spiritually speaking, literally smell like heaven to me. When Christians come together in unity to sing, hear the Bible opened by a man called of God, for kids, for the poor, for evangelism or other worthy causes it's a wonderful thing. Church is the gathering of the saints. When we're singing enriching songs to God together I've felt some of the most incredible joys in life. I have cried while singing to God as a friend. The reason I cry is because I know how sinful I am. The abasement of self is key. I'm a wretch yet a disciple. I'm a traitor against God yet He made me a follower and calls His disciples friends, John 15:15. I cannot conjure up those emotions when they come, nor do they come often, but when they do it's a great blessing. It changes us. We can surely be caught up in songful worship to Him and vent our faith in sanctifying emotions. It is wonderful when our emotions are felt in a song to God as a result of the truths we sing.

God has given Christians to one another for their joy and strength. The church is literally a family of families whose unity is secondarily creedal and primarily ontological. Our unity is in our common baptism into the very body of Jesus Christ. It's a spiritual unity. We're unified in and by the Spirit, not merely in our minds or opinions. One manifests in the other. It all begins with grace and in the Spirit of our God. Our creeds reflect our unity in our common faith once for all time delivered to the saints, Jude 1:3. We're one in fulfillment of Jesus' prayer through

regeneration in God the Holy Spirit, John 17:20-21. No one can know God alone as well as he can know God in the church. We're the aroma of life to each other there. We go to church to know God. Through the spoken word and through each other we come to behold Christ rightly. God blesses and reveals Himself through His church, Ephesians 3:10. We're to be in church with each other for a thousand reasons. Perhaps the greatest of which is captured by C.S. Lewis' in his essay "Friendship." Lewis had two very close friends in his life. After the death of one of them he writes about the fact that he not only lost the friend who had died, but part of the other who lived.

In each of my friends there is something that only some other friend can fully bring out. By myself I am not large enough to call the whole man into activity; I want other lights than my own to show all his facets. Now that Charles is dead, I shall never again see Ronald's reaction to a specifically Charles joke. Far from having more of Ronald, having him "to myself" now that Charles is away, I have less of Ronald... In this, Friendship exhibits a glorious "nearness by resemblance" to heaven itself where the very multitude of the blessed (which no man can number) increases the fruition which each of us has of God. For every soul, seeing Him in her own way, doubtless communicates that unique vision to all the rest. That, says an old author, is why the Seraphim in Isaiah's vision are crying "Holy, Holy, Holy" to one another, Isaiah 6:3. The more we thus share the Heavenly Bread between us, the more we shall have.

No Christian can know God alone better than they can among others who follow Him. God has designed it this way. We are a means of grace to one another. When it's genuine it's called fellowship. How sweet it is to partake of God's mercy through friends in Christ. This is the freedom and the freeing power of love demonstrated in one clear manner. It's not that Christians are only the aroma of life to people in their own church. They're the aroma of life to anyone they meet anywhere who is in the Way. I'm simply addressing the fact that the greatest display of New Testament love is in the visible church community. This is God's design.

Christians are the aroma *of Christ* to one another in the presence of God, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" Psalm 133:1. God is totally sovereign over all things. In His sovereignty He has designed means to His ends. It's that simple. God alone can save a soul from judgment, yet He ordains the message to be preached by men who can save nothing, 1 Corinthians 1:21; Acts 26:17-18. In His providence, God alone knows and determines what will happen in your life, yet He invites us to pray and make our requests known, Matthew 6:8; Philippians 4:6. The Holy Spirit's fellowship alone is the source of grace, yet He gives you others and perhaps even a spouse, Ecclesiastes 4:10; 1 Peter 3:7. The Bible alone can build a man into faith, yet God has established and built a church to edify us on our way to the celestial city, Colossians 3:16. Christians are indeed a great blessing to one another. I know many that I love and that love me. They are the aroma of life leading to *eternal* life to me because we are shared by the Son, 1 John 5:12.

Yet these same people are the aroma of death to others. To whom are they the aroma of death? What does that mean? How can a person who's full of life ever be an aroma of death? That's the difficulty for many of us today, and perhaps this is good in many ways. Have you ever smelled death? It isn't pretty. That's you to some people if you're like Jesus. We understand the aroma of life part pretty easy, but how does the next part of 2 Corinthians 2:14-16 have any part in a life truly bearing the fruit of the Holy Spirit? Gentleness is a fruit of grace so how can people who are manifest in it ever be angry against others? Is it a contradiction? Are we to be spiritual schizophrenics? I submit to you that it wholly relates to two things: 1) whether or not you're maturely following Jesus, and 2), the company kept or addressed at any specific point. Christians, even non-pastors, are not supposed to be kind to wolves! We should, as much as depends on us, live at peace with all men, Romans 12:18, but we're not supposed to be nice to wolves when they come prowling. Neither are we supposed to tolerate false doctrine. We're supposed to be kind to the sheep and protect the flock. We're also supposed to stop the mouths of the swine. All this is the work of honest servant ministry, 2 Timothy 4:2. The key is that true shepherds are not peddling the word of God. They're out for the glory of God and the eternal joy of men. They preach first to please God. They give their all. They know they are both the smell of life and death because of it, 2 Corinthians 2:17. It depends on the audience. If we had the choice, surely we would only lead to life, but that is never the case in this world.

This letter is to my fellow Christians who find themselves bound by a false sense of "love" imposed on them by the flowery preaching of Satan in our day. These false prophets have always existed, but they're more available today. Pleasantry is false sometimes because it comes from a counterfeit Gospel or perhaps only a partial counsel from the Bible. Many of you share the Gospel in this world. You talk to people about sin and they resent you for it. You're not a jerk about it. You don't do it like a Westboro "Baptist" moron. You actually know and love Jesus so you want others to do the same. Your heart is in the work. You give your life for the Gospel, but you're faced with a dilemma. The world tells you that you're arrogant. Perhaps most of the opposition even comes from those in the church. They call you judgmental, polemic, prideful or divisive. They say that you're not being like Jesus. First let me say that it may be that they're right. Sometimes we need to fearfully examine our motives and be sure we're not unnecessarily offending. There is, however, a necessary offense in the preaching of the Gospel and I want to focus on the fact that the Bible tells us to expect it. There will always be offense; we do not want to be the source of it. A good pastor can help you to see where the offense in your life is coming from.

Perhaps you've heard sound Biblical counsel about being peaceable to all men and you've had to beg God to search your heart to see if the opposition to some in your life comes from pride or conviction. Is it truly the Gospel alone that offends people? Is it simply the message that men are wretched transgressors of God's law in need of complete pardon in Christ alone that offends them? If so then I call that a necessary offense. Is it you that offends? Is it your personality, or your tone? Is it time and place? If it's the Gospel and the righteousness of God then you're in good company in Christ. This does offend self righteous people. Examine

your motives. God does not abide the proud. Humble yourself. Submit to counsel and be certain that you're heart does not condemn you before God. Many men throughout church history were called prideful and arrogant for their stand on the truth. Men like Athanasius, Bunyan, Luther, Spurgeon, Calvin and others were all faced with the plank of pleasing God or pleasing man. If God raised you up to their level of influence the fight may merely be one of greater numbers than it is in your life now. True love fights for truth itself. You are my enemy if you deny the Trinity. You are my enemy if you think that men are at all disposed to salvation by their works, Ephesians 2:8-9. You are God's enemy if you believe those things and so you're my enemy as well. These truths themselves are worth everything. This is not arrogance, this is godliness and I will fight you for it, Jude 1:3.

Some false preachers say that Christians should never fight. This breaks my heart and I want to fight their lies. No strife! No strife, they say. This teaching binds the faithful in fetters of false love. We see sin, but we're told that anger is not right. Christians then have conviction in their heart, but a false teaching in their head that causes them to doubt the rightness of their righteous indignation. Anger is always taught as wrong by false prophets. Let me say plainly that anger is a fine thing and it's sometimes given from God. Christians hate sin and falsehood less than God does. If we follow Christ we must fight. Just a simple look at Jesus in John 2:13-15 shows us that anger is an attribute of God Himself. This life will involve strife. No, we're not Jesus but hopefully we're moving to a place where even our anger is for the glory of God. That's a good anger. We must be taught this. Yes it can be dangerous for some to hear that anger is alright, but so be it. It must be taught. Anger has its place. We see this not only in the teachings of Christ and the Apostles, but in their own lives as well. We're no better, folks. Expect a fight! In fact, rejoice when it comes, Matthew 5:11. Christians follow a Man who was murdered for His teaching; we will have opposition in it as well! Men have only gotten more proficient in sin since His earthly day. Jesus taught disciples that they should remember how the world treated Him. He said, "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you," John 15:18. Here's a reflective truth, dear friend. If there's no one in your life who despises you *because you smell like something unpleasant in relation to God*, it's not because you're being like Jesus, it's because you're a hypocrite. Don't pride yourself because everyone loves you. You're not bearing *all* the fruit. In fact: "Woe to you when all men speak well of you, for so did their fathers to the false prophets," Luke 6:26. False prophets receive praise from men. They're yes men. If you're not sometimes despised you're not sharing the same message to the same people that Jesus shared; you're likely not following Him at all. The response to the message depends on the audience. I've preached the Gospel to the same group of people and seen completely different reactions to it. Sheep will love you, but goats and wolves will despise you. Many loved Jesus and the Apostles with great affection. It should be the same with us. The only way that you can be sure you're right is in Scripture, prayer and Godly counsel. Know the Bible. Knowledge coupled with humility brings grace. Your enemies will quote the passage about love "Puffing up" only when they disagree with what you're saying. Let's not play textual tennis. While I'm talking about these passages don't just consider passages that speak about our

necessary gentleness and patience. Those are equally profitable of course. Here, however, we're looking at other things. The whole of the Bible reveals the whole of the ministry of believers. It depends on how you're following Jesus and the company you're in.

The world loves idolatry. It loves its gods and goddesses. God openly mocks them for this all throughout the Bible, 1 Kings 18:27; Isaiah 44:9-20. The world loves its religious systems. Please hear me: Paul echoes Jesus that you are to "love your neighbor as yourself," Galatians 5:14. Just two verses prior he slams the Judaizers and says that if they think a *little* circumcision makes a man holy they should go all the way and just castrate themselves, Galatians 5:12. That's funny! It's supposed to be, but it's not funny to you if you're a wolf. If you're a wolf Paul's arrogant. Paul is gentle to the sheep and works to, spiritually speaking, kill the wolves. Leave them to themselves and they'll accept you as one of their own because you probably are, James 4:4. You must talk to sinners if they're to be saved. This is the means God has ordained. Living the Christian life is not just living like a Christian without audible evangelism. Whoever said that gave way to great error in the church. Christians follow Jesus and He was in no way silent, nor were any of His true disciples. If you follow Jesus, you'll reach out to them with the Gospel both verbally *and* by your lifestyle. It will be both. Some will love you and some will despise you. They'll flatter themselves in their sin by telling themselves that they would have received the message had it come in any *other* tone, by any *other* person or on *any other* day, but this is not true. In truth, people hate Jesus because He testifies that they're evil, John 7:7. When you do that, as you have been instructed to, they will hate you as well. Be sure of that. All people are evil from birth, Romans 3:9-18. Self-righteous people will fight for their own goodness like a selfish man for a rope just before he drowns. Love them enough to speak the truth.

Just imagine for a moment that you're a non-believer who knows two Christians in your life. One of them never speaks to you about faith because you're clearly "Not interested." They go to church a lot and they don't cuss. Perhaps they've even invited you to go once or twice. The other comes to you in conversation and lays it out to you that, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," Romans 3:23. It makes sense, but you're still not buying it. He makes sin personal with you by showing you that this verse defines you personally. It is your story. He talks about the cross and the need of repentance before judgment comes. You can then somehow see that Jesus came to die to purchase your pardon. He came to free you in love. You still get mad though and maybe go away thinking that Christians are all arrogant jerks. Yet perhaps in time God convicts you by your own conscience that you've sinned and He makes you a disciple converting your heart through a gracious faith that leads to repentance and trust in Jesus. You're born again. You begin to read the Bible and become a follower of Jesus and never see either of those two Christians again. You die and see them both in heaven. (Maybe the first made it.) Who would you want to thank? Would you not be so glad that a person cared enough for God's glory and you that he would speak to you? Yes, you would. You'd thank God that some were faithful. You'd actually despise that other hypocrite for his cowardice and inconsideration. Thank God that heaven will not be a place of bitterness against hypocrites. The point is that we should speak to them. Speak to them because you love them. They will hate you without a cause just like with

Jesus, but remember this, love never fails, 1 Corinthians 13:8. Love them enough to perhaps be hated in this life but working for their salvation. God sows and waters. At one point in our lives we must perceive our sin. At another point we must perceive the Gospel who is Christ and His works. Work for that in any way that a man may seem to need. Love never fails!

There's a hard truth for some that I want to combat here head-on because I know it will help some of you. Some people erroneously assert that Jesus was only harsh to religious people. I can't fathom what sort of a "loving" perversion that is. If you have read and profess to have a solid working knowledge of the New Testament and now emerge with a fictitious Jesus who was just polite all the time I must confess that I probably can't help you. However, there are some of you that are simply mistaken and are yet teachable. Jesus was an aroma of death to many people and *not* just the Pharisees. Remember the opening passage of this letter? It says that we are the fragrance of *Christ* before God. It is of Him that we smell. It is the smell of Him and His truth that proud self-righteous people despise. You'll see this manifested when you lovingly open up God's law and show them their personal sin, Romans 7:1-6. That's what Jesus did. Jesus, spiritually speaking, stunk up the streets of Jerusalem in His day. Let me give you one very clear and far reaching example of this. In Matthew 11:7 we see Jesus speaking to "The multitudes." He openly ridicules entire city populations for their sin of unbelief saying, "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you," Matthew 11:20-24. Remember, no one is passive in sin. The people in these cities aren't victims. All men know of God through many gracious means and suppress that truth in their unrighteousness, Romans 1:19-23. This message of Jesus is proclaimed openly upon entire cities before multitudes. Were they all Pharisees in these cities? There were many offended people that day we can be sure. They were manifestly not on the side of truth, John 18:37. This is what it means to be the aroma of death. You yourself are not death but you warn of it and others perceive it in you. Jesus' very words are spirit, John 6:63, and they reveal the dead stink of the heart in the unregenerate when opened up. If men are white-washed tombs then Jesus' words simply opened the casket for them to smell themselves. Of course, to those being saved in any city Jesus was always the aroma of life. The unregenerate people in the cities He addressed here will go to hell and will have smelled their judgment long before by His very words.

For those of you who will keep reading, God bless you, I hope this gets clearer. I think this is an important message and I'll bet someone has spoken to you about something similar somewhat recently. Many of God's preachers continue to address it. It is a message for our time because we have many false prophets among us as in Jeremiah's day, Jeremiah 23. Jesus mocked the Pharisees and told His own to leave them be. He said they're, "...Blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch," Matthew 15:14. Do we imagine that

they led only themselves? Did Pharisees only lead other Pharisees? No. Jesus speaks here of the blindness both of the Pharisees and those who follow them doing what they do. No one is passive. No one is a victim of their sin; they're perpetrators in active rebellion, Romans 1:18. In Romans, Paul speaks to the Jews about their boasted positions of leadership over the blind, Romans 2:19.

In Luke 12:54 we again see Jesus speaking "To the multitudes" and in verse 56 He calls them "Hypocrites" for denying Him. Though Luke 13:1 may indicate a passage of time from chapter 12 it is not certain. The folks in chapter 13 may have been the same people from chapter 12. Here, some people come to Jesus with a need. They have a question about some terrible events that had taken place among them. Jesus doesn't even address their question. He addresses their sin instead. Scripture does not tell us that these people are Pharisees or Sadducees; they're just every day people. Let's read it: "There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish, Luke 13:1-5. Do you think that some were offended when He said this? He makes no apology.

Let's quickly contrast Luke 12:51 and John 14:27. I want us to see more of how we are an aroma both of life and death in Christ. Please note that both passages are spoken to the disciples. First the verses respectively: "Do you suppose that I came to give peace on earth? I tell you, not at all, but rather division." "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid." Is this a contradiction? No. This is the life of every believer who has received the promise in John's Gospel being displayed in Luke's. We have peace with God through Christ. Among the sheep there is rest and great peace, yet if we go out there are wolves. Among us there are goats, Matthew 25:33, these are false converts in the church. They're hypocrites who are not saved. They've never known God they just look like they know Him. We have goats and wolves among the sheep. We know both by the fruits. We must go out! We are as lambs to be slaughtered, Romans 8:36. Does that evoke an image of a life without strife? Only if you're under a false prophet or you're not going out with the message rightly. We bear the fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5:22-23, yet we also fight against wolves, 1 Timothy 1:18-20. We're not all pastors, but we all love the flock and fight when needed to protect each other. We are not wolves, nor do we operate like them, but we're out for God's purposes. These are just some examples of how Jesus dealt with people in very strong ways that surely offended some of them. Don't let anyone bind you in a false "love" fetter telling you that you have to be like Jesus all the time just being nice to people. Talking about sin will not be perceived as nice by self righteous people. Your love will be perceived as being not nice at times. Sometimes you will actually be down-right angry against someone. It's ok. If anyone says Jesus was not at times, such a person has no knowledge of the

New Testament. Read it. Some were offended. Others heard Him and considered themselves. Perhaps this led them to life. Certainly Jesus' strongest words were to the religious guides, and to them He was the strongest aroma of death, but it was not only to them. He smelled up a lot of people who rejected Him. To the disciples He was always still the aroma of life.

So what's the point of this letter? Why is this on my heart? Today we're so bound by social constraint and weak theology. It only takes like seven to ten years to earn a Ph.D. yet we've got some people in the church who have professed faith in Jesus even longer than that and think it's ok to say that they still need milk. We will not tell men about sin because some wolves have told the sheep that that's God's job. That's false. It's our job as well. We're actually arrogant enough to think that the salvation of sinners lies in our presentations or music in the church. We think that God's grace is so fragile that we better be sure to catch people after lunch or else they may not get saved. Let me lay some fears to rest for some of you. You can't send anyone to hell, ever! Enemies of God cannot get any further away from God than they already are. Positionally speaking people can't die any more. We can't "push" them away. They're already away. This is not to say that we can't be jerks and un-necessarily upset people, but their eternal destination was determined by God before they were born. We cannot overthrow that. Today there are many dangerous "Nice guys" in the pulpits. Their teaching could never be an aroma of death to the unsaved because they don't talk about sin and death at all. They act as if the perfumes of kindness reverse the decay. They're wolves in nice suits. They will only make earth a nicer place to go to hell from. Every true pastor will warn his people of such teachers. They preach a false Gospel without a cost. Men like Joel Osteen are a perfect example of Satan's newest strategy in the church. They are blind leaders of the blind. Luther said, "Satan, the god of all dissension, stirreth up daily new sects, and last of all, which of all other I should never have foreseen or once suspected, he has raised up a sect such as teach...that men should not be terrified by the Law, but gently exhorted by the preaching of the grace of Christ." This is even more evident in our day. It is the kind of teaching exemplified by quick fix "say this prayer" preachers that produce what I call a fetter of love. They shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces in new ways.

A fetter of love is one that binds us. True love does no such thing. It should be put in quotes to say that it is not love. It is a pseudo-imitation love. It is a worldly "love" that is not out for the ultimate good in anything. It's the kind of neighborly love we might see celebrated at dinner time in the homes of the people on the night they cried for Jesus' crucifixion. It is a doctor who will not warn a patient of a terminal disease lest he ruin their weekend. It is a love that binds Christians from speaking truth out of a fear of offense. We've been taught that there is no offense in the Gospel when truly it is the Gospel itself that has already been lost by such teachers. Christians are taught today that judgment should have no part in their lives. Such people willingly forget 2 Corinthians 2:14-16 and that it is through *us* that God either stinks up a life or makes it smell better. "We are the fragrance..." We have a fear of men and shame on us for the cowardice of it. We're actually afraid that because the lady in the next office won't be so friendly to us anymore if we share the Gospel with her that we won't go. We live in a generation of

wimpy Christians. They are so doctrinally ignorant it's scary. They blindly accept opposing faiths into their fellowship without hesitation thus clearly calling into question the validity of their own salvation, 2 John 1:10-11. Even true believers are so arrogant that they believe it's their own "Free wills" that saved them with Jesus' help. We're not a very tested people and I'm a product of my time. I pray that this letter find some of you emboldened in love. Because you've been on your knees before God in secret, you'll never be on your knees before men.

Don't be bound by a false love. Tell people about their sin. Some won't like it, I guarantee it! Prepare yourself to be outcast. Friendship evangelism is a dangerous way to try to appease the sting of people who hate God, but it's not going to work. Eventually, if you're afraid of smelling like death to some you'll simply have to compromise the Gospel. There will be no other option. People are people. If we're following Jesus and becoming more like Him some will think we stink and others will smell the sweetness of God through us. It depends on whether they're a sheep, a goat, or a wolf. We follow a Man who was murdered for His teaching, why would people who hate Him feel any different about us? Speak truthfully to all in the sight of God. Don't be bound by the fetters of a "love" that isn't loving. Love them like Jesus loved them. Speak the truth to the glory of God trusting in Him. Examine yourself and pray to keep yourself focused on the God who saved you. There's a true love that frees us and a false love that binds us. Be wary of those who would make you too nice to love others enough to speak of hell and sin. We want to become more like Jesus. This is good. Following Him is what it's all about. Let's just make sure that we're seeing Him as He was so that we can follow Him as He is: "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me," John 15:20-21. Here it is most clearly displayed that, "To the one we are the aroma of death leading to death, and to the other the aroma of life leading to life." Love them with your eyes on eternity; everything will be made clear in its time.

Thank you for your attention to this letter.