

Introduction

The tenor of this exuberant passage, coming as it does after the description of the depressed state of verse 13, shows the shift of thought from the difficulties of Paul's ministry to the power of God to overcome those difficulties. As such, it begins with the contrastive "Now" (δέ, but) and continues with "thanks to God." The apostle's thoughts are inspired to shift for a few pages from his unrest in Troas and Macedonia to the general triumph that is his in the gospel ministry, and probably to the outcome of the Corinthian situation, to which he will come in chapter 7.

1. Reason for Thanksgiving, v. 14

Thanks is given to God for two reasons: first, that he leads us in triumph and second he manifests a fragrance of the knowledge of Christ through us. Note these two points in some more detail:

A. Triumphal Procession

The first verbal form in the verse is θριαμβύεω thriambueo. The verb means to "lead in a triumphal procession" rather than specifically "to cause to triumph." While the latter is true, i.e. that God does give us ultimate victory, in this context the image is that we are part of a victory parade with God and Christ at the head. One dictionary puts it this way: "The picture is the triumphal entry of a military hero into the city of Rome. The victorious Roman general marched into the city in a long procession preceded by the city magistrates. They were followed by trumpeters, then the spoils taken from the enemy, followed by the king of the conquered country, then officials of the victorious army and musicians dancing and playing; and at last the general himself, in whose honor the whole wonderful pageant was taking place...Paul represents himself as one of the victorious general's soldiers sharing in the glory of his triumph." See also Col. 2:15.

In spite of seemingly insurmountable difficulties (e.g., the problems in Corinth, the "sentence of death" in 1:9), God demonstrates his all-surpassing power to give the victory.

B. Diffusing Fragrance

The second verbal form is from φανέρωο phaneroo, to make manifest. What is being made manifest? The text says 'the sweet savor/fragrance of His knowledge.' This refers to the knowledge of Christ being spread out. If we keep our thinking in terms of the triumph parade, this would tie in with the fragrant aromas of spices, incense, perfumes that would waft throughout the parade route. But more importantly, I think, since it is in every place that this occurs, the spread of the fragrance is parallel with the advance of the gospel of Christ.

There are at least three important points to get from this besides the picture itself. First, it is 'through us.' The apostolic ministers, and I hope you agree that we as well, have the privilege of having the knowledge of Christ diffused through us as it were a sweet fragrance.

Second, it is 'in every place.' This is not just in some places where the apostles go, but in every one.

Third, it is God who is doing the manifesting. This is significant as we will see in the next verse.

2. The Fragrance of Christ, vv. 15-16

The next two verses explain how it is that Paul can think that through him the fragrance of the knowledge of Christ can be diffused everywhere. After all, some places are not friendly to the gospel. Some do not like the "smell" of the Christian minister and want to get rid of him.

A. Sweet Aroma to God.

The amazing thing is that first of all, he says, we are a fragrance of Christ to God. Why so amazing? Because God himself is the one manifesting this knowledge through us. He Himself is pleased with this! The word used here is slightly different than the one for a general "smell" in verse 14; this word refers to a sweet odor, a good -smelling thing.

We are this way whether we are in the midst of those being saved or those who are perishing.

Note first that there are only two camps: saved and perishing. The present tense verbals indicate that they are presently 'in process' and this is a character trait that marks them.

Second, see that the measure of a man's ministry is not ultimately now many converts he makes, but whether or not his ministry is a sweet savor to God, that is, he is truly presenting the message of Christ.

B. Aroma to Others.

Not only are we an aroma to God, but also to others. on the one hand, to those who are in the midst of perishing because of their sins, we smell as death. The message, because it is given faithfully and because it is given, leads to death. After all, the gospel message does have a negative side to it (Rom. 1:17-18).

On the other hand, we are a blessed fragrance to those who are being saved. The message is one of life and it brings life.

C. A Question.

In light of this, no one is sufficient for these things, Paul says by way of rhetorical question. Who could be—the job of preaching the gospel (whether pastor or 'minister of reconciliation' as we all are) is more critical, I would argue, than that of the trauma room surgeon working on a life-and-death case. The manifestation of the outcome may somewhat delayed in our case, and this may lead to a loss of the sense of urgency of the task at hand. Such a horrifying truth, that we encounter people and preach to them, and their eternal destiny is determined according to their response to the message.

3. The Sincerity of the Messengers, v. 17

At the end of verse 16 we were left with a question as to who could be adequate as a minister of such an important, life-and-death message. The answer is no one—that is, if you are really trying to be true to the message. If you water it down and make it palatable to everyone, then many people could be "sufficient," or at least think they were, because there would be no edge to their message. There would be no dividing line in the sand because the message would fit everyone's desires and interests. This is just the subject of verse 17.

The verb means to peddle or huckster. The object is the word of God, that is, the gospel message. It speaks of twisting the message and seeking profit from the mutation that results. Paul does not go about with a twisted message for greedy gain.

Rather, he speaks sincerely the message from God. He is aware that he speaks it before God (in his sight), so he does not alloy the message with any impurities. There are no hidden pretenses or motives here.

There are many people who do this. Not to cast too wide a net, but Paul does say 'many' or 'the majority.'

Conclusion

What a wonderful privilege that we have to be led in triumph after the victorious risen Saviour, with Him supernaturally diffusing through us the knowledge of Him in every place. If we allow ourselves to be proper channels, then we can be the ones who are the aroma of life unto life and death unto death. But we have to not peddle the word, not twist it nor go for greedy gain in any way. Let us press on in this way!

Diagram (NKJV)

14 Now¹ thanks *be* to God

who always leads² us in³ triumph in Christ,
and [who always] through us
diffuses⁴ the fragrance⁵ of His knowledge⁶
in every place.

15 For we are to God the [sweet] fragrance⁸ of Christ⁹
among¹⁰ those who are being¹¹ saved
and among those who are perishing.¹²

16 To the one [those who are perishing]
we are the aroma¹³ of death *leading* to death,
and to the other [those who are being saved]
[we are] the aroma of life *leading* to life.
And who is sufficient¹⁴ for these things? [No one!]

¹ This is actually δὲ, which is contrastive to the earlier verses.

² Pres-act-part masc-dat-sing θριαμβύειο, to lead in a triumphal procession or lead in triumph. Sometimes this refers to the troops, other times to the captives. KJV ‘cause to triumph’ is not exemplified anywhere. It can also mean to expose to shame, as in Col. 2:15, ‘triumphing over them in it,’ speaking of Christ’s devastating defeat of ‘principalities and powers.’ Here Paul and Christians are exultant troops in Christ’s army being led by Him. The picture slightly shifts as the fragrance spreads, indicating the advance of the gospel.

³ KJV: ‘causes us to’

⁴ KJV: ‘makes manifest.’ Pres -act-part masc-dat-sing. This is missionary manifestation. Presents indicate that this is contemporaneous with the triumphus? Present certainly says it is happening now.

⁵ KJV: ‘savor.’ This is a smell, odor, aroma, fragrance.

⁶ Question as to what kind of genitive this is: ‘which is, namely?’ ‘His’ refers to Christ, the knowledge of Christ.

⁷ The places where those being saved are, as well as the places where the perishing are.

⁸ KJV: ‘sweet savor.’ Either from the triumphus, or referring to OT sacrifices, such as Lev. 1:9, 13, 17, 23:18, Num. 15:7, 28:2-6. There are actually 42 references to ‘sweet savour’ in the OT, and the one here.

⁹ I find it fascinating that in verse 14 God diffuses the fragrance through us, but then we are a sweet fragrance back to God. Here ‘of Christ’ is a gen. of apposition, i.e. ‘aroma which is Christ.’ So the effect of Paul’s ministry toward God here; later toward his audiences. Regardless of the outcome of the preaching ministry, we are pleasing to God because we preach Christ. Note that our success is not counted by converts (man-centered approach) but by faithfulness to God (God-centered approach).

¹⁰ KJV: ‘in’, and so later in the verse. Could it be ‘before’ or ‘in the midst of?’ In any case, the same message produces two radically different outcomes.

¹¹ KJV omits ‘being,’ somewhat obfuscating the present tense and the passive idea. This is a pres-pass-part, masc-plu-dat. Both this and the following participle have an article acting as a substantiver.

¹² KJV says ‘that perish,’ again making unclear the present tense. This is a pres -mid/pass-part, masc-plu-dat. Probably passive to perish. Participle here and above used as nouns to emphasize character trait. Note that there are only two groups of men (1 Cor. 1:18, other places).

¹³ KJV: ‘savor.’ The KJV keeps basically the same translation (savor or sweet savor) throughout the passage, though there are two Greek words: οσμή and ευωδία (2:15). The former seems more general (2:14, 2:16 twice; see John 12:3, Eph. 5:2, Php. 4:18) for bad or good odors; the latter a ‘good smell’ (Eph. 5:2, Php. 4:18). The Ephesians passage as ‘sweet-smelling savor’ (ευωδία followed by οσμή), whereas the Php passage has the reverse: ‘an odor of a sweet smell.’ Triumphal processions were ‘accompanied by the release of sweets (sic) odors from the burning of spices in the streets (Rogers and Rogers, p. 396).

¹⁴ The idea is one of sufficiency, ability, adequacy. No one is—after all, this is a life-and-death thing. Some will die – those who reject it. Others will live. Your work is critical as a minister.

17 For¹⁵ we are not,
as so many,¹⁶
peddling¹⁷ the word of God;¹⁸
but as of sincerity,¹⁹ [the message is given sincerely]
but²⁰ as from God,²¹ [the message is given purely]
we speak [the word of God]
in the sight²² of God in Christ.²³

Definition of the Triumphus, v. 14.

http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/secondary/SMIGRA*/Triumphus.html: ‘TRIUMPHUS, a solemn procession in which a victorious general entered the city in a chariot drawn by four horses. He was preceded by the captives and spoils taken in war, was followed by his troops, and after passing in state along the Via Sacra, ascended the Capitol to offer sacrifice in the temple of Jupiter.’ There is a long article there, cited from William Smith, D.C.L., LL.D., *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Antiquities*, John Murray, London, 1875.

The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary, p. 1309: ‘Among the Romans the highest honor that could be bestowed on a citizen or magistrate was the triumph or solemn procession in which a victorious general passed from the gate of the city to the capitol. He set out from the Campus Martius along the Via Triumphalis, and from thence through the most public places of the city. The streets were strewn with flowers, and the altars smoked with incense. The procession was formed as follows: First, a band of musicians, singing and playing triumphal songs; the oxen to be sacrificed, their horns gilded and heads adorned with headbands and garlands; the spoils, and captives in chains; the lictors (officers who attended chief magistrates appearing in public), carrying fasces (the officer’s insignia of office; it consisted of a bundle of rods bound with an ax with its blade projecting and was carried before magistrates as a badge of authority) adorned with laurel; a great company of musicians and dancers; a long train of persons carrying perfumes; the general dressed in purpose embroidered with gold, wearing a crown of laurel and carrying in his right hand a laurel branch and a scepter in his left, his face pained with vermilion, and a golden ball suspended from his neck. He stood erect in his

¹⁵ Because there is a distinction in his message, a sharp edge, if you will (as explained in the next clauses), it drives some away and others it draws in. The sharp edge is evident because he preaches the word without huckstering it.

¹⁶ There are many people who are huckstering the word of God. Actually the MT has ‘the rest’ but TR and UBS have *hoi polloi*, many. This ought to tell us that a vast number of people are peddlers. It could refer to the wandering sophists, or the Judaizers who have troubled the Corinthian church.

¹⁷ KJV: ‘corrupt.’ It is a hapax legomenon, κατηγενόντες. It means to huckster, to retail, to trade in, merchandise, figuratively it comes to mean adulterate or corrupt, for gain/profit. So it has two ideas: twisting it and **profiting** from the resulting mutation. This is a periphrastic participle with εἰπέ. A similar phrase is used in Isa. 1:22 about diluted wine. Buyers would be cheated.

¹⁸ The phrase ‘word of God’ refers not to manuscripts but to the gospel, the message of God.

¹⁹ εἰλικρινείας, unmixed, without alloy, so in a moral sense pertaining to being sincere, without hidden motives or pretense, pure.

²⁰ The second but gives emphasis in ascending scale, Rogers and Rogers, p. 396.

²¹ The message is from God (Gal. 1:1) and Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:12)

²² Usually rendered ‘before’ God.

²³ Those who peddle the word of God actually can be a ‘sweet-smell’ to those who are perishing because they alter their message into whatever sounds good. ‘In Christ’ seems adverbial.

chariot; a public slave was by his side to remind him of the vicissitudes of fortune and of his mortality. Behind him came the consuls, senators, and other magistrates, on foot; the whole procession closed with the victorious army.

Rogers and Rogers New Exegetical Key p. 396: "The picture is the triumphal entry of a military hero into the city of Rome. The victorious Roman general marched into the city in a long procession preceded by the city magistrates. They were followed by trumpeters, then the spoils taken from the enemy, followed by the king of the conquered country, then officials of the victorious army and musicians dancing and playing; and at last the general himself, in whose honor the whole wonderful pageant was taking place...Paul represents himself as one of the victorious general's soldiers sharing in the glory of his triumph."

This definition, though doubted by some, seems to me to be the best way to explain the fragrance metaphor that follows in the next phrases.

Illustration for the aroma of death, v. 16a

Giant 'corpse flower' blooms in Germany

October 21, 2005

BERLIN (Reuters) - The world's ~~tallest~~ -- and smelliest -- flower has bloomed, reaching a height of 2.94 meters, 18 centimeters more than the previous record for the species, the Stuttgart botanical garden said on Friday.

The Titan Arum, or Amorphophallus Titanum, nicknamed "corpse flower" because of its putrid stench, blooms rarely and briefly.

Garden staff have nicknamed the purple flower "Diva" and are charting its life on their web site, www.wilhelma.de.

But those keen for a glimpse, or a whiff, in person must be quick: just 24 hours after the 11 year-old plant produced its first flower, the bloom began to wilt on Friday.

The Titan Arum was discovered in 1878 in its sole indigenous habitat, the Indonesian island of Sumatra, and grows in cultivation in only a handful of places around the world.

Its scent has been likened to rotting fish or animal flesh.

"The smell is crucial to its survival in its natural habitat because it attracts pollinating carrion beetles and flesh flies," said botanist Franziska Lo-Kockel.

Lo-Kockel brought the bulb of the plant, weighing some 40 kilograms, from the University of Frankfurt to the Stuttgart gardens 11 years ago.

Criticality of the Ministry, v. 16c

No one is sufficient for these things, Paul says. Who could be—the job of preaching the gospel (whether pastor or ‘minister of reconciliation’ as we all are) is more critical, I would argue, than that of the trauma room surgeon working on a

life-and-death case. The manifestation of the outcome may somewhat delayed, but we do not have, I think, any sense of the urgency of the task at hand. Barret p. 102 says that this is a horrifying truth, that we encounter people and preach to them, and their eternal destiny is determined right there.

Illustration of Peddling the Word, v. 17

The “all in one” concentrate cleaning solution that the man brought over. He demonstrated it on some stains below the windows. “You cannot get it except through me,” he says. Of course, later I looked online and saw it. But then a few weeks later another guy came over with a product that had a different name but did the same thing. He demonstrated how it would shine our brass door handle. He asked if we had kids around and were concerned for their safety. ‘This stuff,’ he said, ‘is safe. Look! It won’t hurt anyone.’ He unscrewed the top of the spray bottle and licked the dip tube a few times! (I wonder how it tastes—especially after going to 100 houses and demonstrating that way!) The marketing tactics used by these and other such folks are not entirely honest and are full of pressure. They are trying to sell to make a commission.

Second Illustration of Peddling the Word, v. 17

Market-driven ministry. The purpose driven church. Felt needs. Focus on the particular needs of the person and move to the gospel as a way to solve the person’s real need (sounds like a backdoor approach). If you cannot satisfy those felt needs, you won’t make any headway. Health and wealth gospel. The consumer gospel. People are ‘selling’ church all the time. Trying to make it interesting, appeal to people’s desires. The fear is that if the message is not interesting, no one will listen. The preacher becomes a salesman. The focus is on the audience as sovereign instead of the message of the sovereign God. Paul’s focus was on the message.

Study on the phrase “Word of God” in the KJV

Occurs 4 times in the OT and 44 times in the NT.

Most often refers to the message of God, the gospel – Luke 3:2, 4:4, 5:1, 8:11, 8:21, 11:28, Acts 4:31, 6:2, 8:14, 11:1, 13:5, 13:44, 13:46, 17:13, 18:11, 19:20, Rom. 9:6, 10:17, 1 Cor. 14:36, 2 Cor. 2:17, 4:2, Eph. 6:17, 1 Thess. 2:13, 1 Tim. 4:5, 2 Tim. 2:9, Titus 2:5, Heb. 4:12, 6:5, 13:7, 1 Peter 1:23, 1 John 2:14

Sometimes refers to the effects or results of the gospel – Acts 6:7, 12:24

Sometimes refers to the written word of God – Mark 7:13, John 10:35

Sometimes refers to the spoken word of God – Heb. 11:3, 2 Peter 3:5

Sometimes refers to a prophetic message – Col. 1:25, Rev. 1:2

Sometimes refers to the reason why some were martyred or imprisoned, i.e. for the sake of the gospel – Rev. 1:9, 6:9, 20:4

Sometimes refers to Christ – Rev. 20:4

Note on 1 Peter 1:23, Heb. 4:12, 1 Thess. 2:13, Eph. 6:17, Rom. 10:17 – despite my always quoting these with respect to the written word, to which they do indeed apply, it is the message of that Word which does the cutting and transform-

ing. It is not a mystical property about a black leather-bound codex of about 1100 pages that make it powerful like this. It is the message which it represents. We say that the Bible IS the message, the word of God, but the Bible was not completed until after many of these texts were written. Really any fuzziness between the book and the message should not confuse us, however, because the Bible is the Word of God, not a particular bound book.

This does not refer to MSS but the message. Only a very small portion of people saw, handled, copied MSS. The vast majority of peddlers were those adulterating the message as they went around teaching it. We have the same thing today. They take a version of the Bible or multiple versions and say from it what they want.