

THE ALTAR OF INCENSE

“For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing.”

—2 CORINTHIANS 2:15

The final piece of furniture before the curtain which separated the Holy Place from the Most Holy place was the altar of incense. This was where fragrant incense was to be burned every morning. No other kind of incense was to be used on this altar, and no burnt offering, grain offering or drink offering was ever to be offered here. Only once a year on the Day of Atonement, as the priest made his way onto the Most Holy Place, was he to sprinkle blood from the sin offering on the horns of the altar.

The chief function of this altar was to offer an aroma, and it was an aroma for God. God has a sense of smell, but we must ask: what aroma is pleasing God? To what do His senses respond with joy and delight? Paul writes, “But thanks be to God, who always leads us as captives in Christ’s triumphal procession and uses us to spread the aroma of the knowledge of him everywhere” (2 Corinthians 2:14). Putting it frankly, Paul is saying that to God we smell of Jesus.

What this means practically is perhaps made clear from another statement in the book of Revelation. When the angel opened the seals in heaven, it says, “the smoke of the incense, together with the prayers of God’s people, went up before God from the angel’s hand” (Revelation 8:4). If we are the aroma of Christ to God, and the

prayers of God's people ascend to Him as the smell of incense, then combining these two would suggest it is our fellowship, intimacy, knowledge and communion with Christ that derives from prayer, which brings the pleasure of a sweet aroma to God.

If this is true that through our union with Christ, which is brought about and made real by coming to the cross of Christ in repentance and faith, then the goal to which this leads and brings joy to the heart of God is that we know and love His Son. To know the Bible, Christian doctrine, the church and service, but not have a growing and deepening knowledge of Christ Himself will be ultimately futile.

Herein lies the crux of the matter. The Lord Jesus Christ is our friend, our Saviour, our Lord and our Life. We know Him and we are known by Him. We love Him and are loved by Him. We trust Him, obey Him, worship Him and want to please Him. All divine truth will lead to this, and all spiritual reality will derive from this.

PRAYER: Precious Lord, I pray for a work of your Spirit that will freshen and deepen our relationship more every day. Thank You, Lord.

TO REFLECT UPON: Am I living in an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ?