

Who is Sufficient?

Westview Church | 2 Corinthians 2:12-17 | Pastor Brett Toney | March 1, 2026

The Greatest Thing

Being a Christian is the greatest thing. Do you feel that? I think it is objectively true. Being a Christian is objectively the greatest thing. God created this world to communicate his glory by filling it with people who reflect him. That's what Christians *are*. Brothers and sisters, our existence is accomplishing God's very purpose for creation. And as Paul again underscores in our passage this morning why the Corinthians can trust him, he is modeling this utterly humble delight of being a Christian. Church, we ought to overflow in grateful humility that God has made even you and me a means of revealing Christ in this world. O, how we do not deserve this, but thanks be to God who has determined it good that Paul and you and me would be in Christ to make Christ known. If you are not a Christian—not in Christ, whether young or old—I pray that you would catch a whiff of the sweet aroma of Christ in this passage that he would be life to you. There are three components of being a Christian that we see in this passage: restless concern, prideless aroma, and meritless speech. Paul draws attention to these in his own life so that the Corinthians would trust him. And by doing so, he models for us why being a Christian is the greatest thing.

Restless Concern (2 Corinthians 2:12-13)

The first way Paul is modeling for us the greatness of the Christian life is in his restless concern for the Corinthians. Verses 12-13 serve as a bridge from his explanation of the change in his travel plans to his extended focus on the nature of his ministry in the coming chapters. But like what we've seen previously, he's not just recounting where and what happened. Why is Paul telling the Corinthians that his spirit was not at rest without Titus? It's because Titus was with *them*. We're told in chapter 7 that Titus finally met up with Paul in Macedonia, having been

comforted by the Corinthians' repentant response to Paul's severe letter (7:5-9). So great was Paul's anguish for these brothers and sisters that he passed through Troas more speedily despite the open door for the gospel there. He chose to forego fruitful gospel ministry. Instead, he hastened on to Macedonia in hopes of finding Titus with a report on this church.

The Christian life is not about personal fulfillment, self-actualization, or feeling better about yourself. It is intrinsically a relational experience. We ought to have a restless concern for one another. When there is slowness of spiritual growth, a persistence in marital discord, a slackness in the habits of grace, we ought to have a restless concern for one another. Brothers and sisters, do you feel this? Do you relate to this? When you wake up in the middle of the night with the baby or to go to the bathroom, and you have trouble getting back to sleep, does your mind go to one another? Do you turn in your bed and in your soul, praying for your Discipleship Group to be standing firm by faith? If not, cultivate that concern by praying more consistently for the members of the church. Print off the directory and have it at your bedside or in your Bible. Get a little Field Notes booklet to jot down prayer requests for one another. What a privilege to be burdened in your spirit by the Holy Spirit for your brothers and sisters here!

Prideless Aroma (2 Corinthians 2:14-16)

So, Paul demonstrates a restless concern in v.12-13 and then a prideless aroma in v.14-16. The thought of his role as a herald of the good news of the gospel that the Corinthians had heard and received, that those in Troas and Macedonia had done likewise—it leads Paul to break out in praise. “Thanks be to God!” But Paul isn't overflowing in gratitude because he's an apostle or that he holds such a high place in the Church. No, there's no place for pride in a Christian. Look at the two things he says God does in v.14: God “always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ” and God “spreads (that is, reveals) the smell of the knowledge” of Christ.

But what is the place in the procession for Paul and all Christians? We're not on the white charger at the front of the parade. We're not marching through the streets of New York with the ticker tape confetti falling, celebrating *our* victory.

No, consider the only other place this word for being lead in triumphal procession is used in the New Testament. Colossians 2:15, “[God] disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by *triumphing over them* in [Christ].” Jesus leads in triumphal procession the disarmed and shamed rulers and authorities of this present darkness. They are the conquered POWs, the enemy forces who have been defeated and now lead through town to the glory of the conquering general. That is the same imagery Paul is using here of himself, of those who are *in Christ*. Every one of us who have repented and believed on Jesus were rebels. We were traitors. We took up weapons in armed rebellion against the King of Creation. And we have been conquered by King Jesus. We are captives of Christ. We are the spoils of his victory. Paul is not highlighting our glory but our weakness. You and me, we have deserved nothing but death for our treason. But being captive to Christ, we always now exist to highlight the splendor of *his* victory.

The second thing God does in v.14 is spreads or reveals the smell of the knowledge of Christ in every place *through us*. I think Paul here is drawing on the imagery of the Old Testament sacrifices. This word for “fragrance” is used time and again for the pleasing aroma of the whole burnt offering sacrificed in faithful obedience to the Lord.¹ Jesus was that final and complete sacrifice on behalf of his people, and we are but the “*aroma* of Christ.” We do not contribute to the atoning sacrifice. We are but the resulting scent that God breathes in with great pleasure in his Son. Where is there boasting on our part in this prideless aroma?

But what's more is that God uses this smell that we are of Christ to make Jesus known in every place. Verse 15, "We are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing." Throughout the world, wherever Christians go, we take the smell of Jesus. Like putting on a sweatshirt that you wore at the bonfire the night before, the smell is still there. But this smell is not pleasant to everyone. Paul says in v.16 that those who are being saved find the aroma of Christ to be "from life to life." But for those who are perishing, the aroma of Christ is found to be "from death to death." The same smell is perceived very differently.

I think of this like when we would pull up to my in-laws' farm in the summer. We would step out of the van on a hot day and get slapped in the face with a strong smell. A western breeze would bring the scent of the manure pit straight to the house. I would gag. It was a smell from death to death. But to my wife, that smell brought her straight back to her childhood. To her, that was the smell not of manure but rich fertilizer for lush fields. It was the smell from life to life, even a sweet pungency. This aroma of the sacrifice of Christ is perceived in two different ways to two different groups. If you are being saved, what rich scent. If you are perishing, how foul.

What do you smell? When you are around Christians, is it attractive or repulsive? What does that mean for you? Are you being saved or perishing? For us who are the aroma of Christ, have you experienced this before? You are going about your life, not being intentionally provocative but living consistently as a Christian. As you do so, you're told you're judgmental or sanctimonious. It's the aroma of Christ that is revealing death to the perishing. It's unavoidable, Christian. Yes, you should be mindful that you're not adding to the offense of Christ by your uncharitable words and conduct. But you will be found to be repulsive to non-Christians because Jesus is repulsive to them. That is, Jesus as revealed in his Word and through his people, not the

Jesus of their own imagining. The Jesus revealed in these pages as the one who demands submission and repentance, who humbles his own and vanquishes pride. The Jesus who conquers traitors and deploys their weakness and joy for his glory.

Meritless Speech (2 Corinthians 2:16-17)

To this restless concern and prideless aroma, Paul adds meritless speech. Rather than being put off by such a humiliating depiction of the Christian life and our witness in the world as captives, as a sweet *or* offensive scent—rather than being put off by this imagery, Paul glories in it. Verse 16, “Who is sufficient for these things?” He cannot fathom being so worthy as to be a captive of Christ, to be the aroma of Christ. God would have *him*, a murderous persecutor of Christ be made a captive and aroma to make this very Christ known wherever he goes!? *He* gets the humble privilege of revealing Jesus to moms and engineers and sales people and religious leaders and politicians?! There is no merit that Paul or you or I can add to this privilege of testifying to the victory of Christ over sin and death through his very own death and resurrection. No merit at all! What can we add? We were dead. We were traitors. We were in high-handed rebellion. Yet by the mercy of God in Christ we have been made witnesses.

And we are witnesses who must speak, verse 17. There were those in Paul’s day who would speak the gospel, preaching Christ, to make a quick buck. They had no restless concern. They were no prideless aroma. I think Paul would say they thought their eloquence merited their compensation. They added flourish to the message of the cross. And they cheapened it by doing so. Not so for Paul or those who imitate him. Rather, when we speak the gospel—and speak we must—we do so like God, from God, before God, and in God. We do so with sincerity, just like God is faithful and true (1:18-20). We speak commissioned by God, or more simply and literally, “from God.” It is by his authority that we speak, not our own. We’re mindful of this because we

Speak as though standing before him, in his sight. And the only merit we have to so speak is the merit of Christ himself. “We speak in Christ.” “Who is sufficient for these things?”

The Table

What a gift that God has so bound us together in Christ that we would have a restless concern for one another. What love God has formed between us! Thanks be to God that Christ has conquered us despite our treason that we would be captives of Christ. And that being *his*, we would be so united to him that we would even be his aroma. You and me, a pleasing fragrance, a prideless aroma, to the Most High through which the knowledge of Jesus Christ is made known in every place. Wherever we go, we bear witness to Christ the King. Who are we to be so privileged? Who among us is worthy to open our mouths in meritless speech on behalf of *the* Word? None! I deserve humiliation and public execution and eternal damnation for my rebellion against the King. This is how Paul conducted himself, and why the Corinthians should have trusted him. And it is why we ought to imitate him.

Jesus has given us all sufficiency so that we might speak like God, from God, before God, and in God. And speak we must. The very purpose of the world is that God’s glory would be on display through images of him like you and me. Images that have been renewed from the stench of death in sin to the aroma of Christ in life. Such image bearers are replicated only as we speak in Christ of all that he has done, of how he has made us sufficient for such a task. So, Church, overflow in grateful humility that God has made you a means of revealing Christ in this world. Because being a Christian is the greatest thing.

¹Cf. Gen 8:21; Ex 29:18, 29:25, 29:41 (48x in LXX)