

## **Spiritual Senses: the Aroma**

Scriptures speak of the spiritual sense of smell: God's sense of smell and the sense of smell of people.

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I'll come home from work, unlock the front door and step into our apartment and a wonderful aroma hits me- my wife is cooking one of her awesome creations, and suddenly I'm hungry. Do you think God gets hungry when He smells barbecue? "Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. And the Lord smelled a soothing aroma." (*Gen 8:20-21*) Throughout Exodus, Leviticus and Numbers, every time the aroma of the barbecued burnt offerings are mentioned, it was an aroma pleasing to the Lord. The Lord was so pleased by the sacrifices in the tabernacle when they were performed with a repentant heart that desired to get right with God and obey Him. How pleased the Lord was to offer atonement for the person whose right hand was on the head of the sacrificial lamb as it was slain for his sin. Today, we have no animal sacrifices, but "we are to God the fragrance of Christ" (*2 Cor 2:15*) -our faith in Christ is a sweet smelling aroma to God.

That aroma doesn't go unnoticed in the world- it's a sweet smell to some, but to others, it is the smell of death as our lives to them are a reminder of Jesus Christ and of Judgment Day. Our sense of smell is a funny thing, isn't it? My wife's sense of smell is so much better than mine. She bought this battery operated device that shoots fragrance into the air and asked me, "Do you smell the cloves?" "Honestly, I don't smell a thing!"

At work I walked into our warranty lab- the moment I opened the door, the putrid smell of sewage slapped me in the face. I had no choice but to endure it- I had work to do. I complained to one of my coworkers, "That smell is awful!" He replied, "We opened the overhead doors for an hour and then closed them. I thought the smell was gone, I can't even smell it any more." His nostrils had become desensitized to the smell.

In life, our spiritual senses are either getting more and more sensitive, or they're becoming desensitized. In *Hebrews 5:11-6:12*, the author of Hebrews, in the middle of his sermon trying to illustrate the awesomeness of Christ and how He is our everything, interrupts himself and calls on the reader to wake up and smell the coffee- to awaken his spiritual senses before it is too late. If one has been a follower of Christ for years, one would expect that he/she would have some keen spiritual senses and not be a baby any longer. No longer would spiritual milk be the diet, but rather solid food (*Heb 5:12-13*) "Solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil." (*5:14*) A discerning spiritual nose gets more and more sensitive all the time to sin and righteousness and by "reason of use" applies the Word of God to ever more sensitive areas of his/her life, longing to be holy as Christ is holy. The spiritual nose detects the fragrance of sin in areas that before weren't noticed. There is a continually sharpened awareness of God's holiness and a longing to be more like Christ and a hatred of the sin within. There is a deep loathing of stinky things in our lives that before hardly caused our noses to even flinch. Such sense of smell brings

us continually to our Great High Priest to find grace and mercy, whose blood completely cleanses us from an evil conscience (*Heb 10:22*), and from dead works (*Heb 9:14*) that we may serve the living God, and freeing us from the stink within.

Not so with the unbeliever who isn't searching for forgiveness. This is crucial regarding evangelism. The unbeliever is, spiritually speaking, like my co-worker who couldn't smell the sewage smell any more. How does God fix a desensitized nose?

1) By the fragrance of the Law through the mouth of believers. The Law makes sin "exceedingly sinful" (*Romans 7:7,13*) revealing sin to the unbeliever. It magnifies and concentrates the senses to the stinky smell of sin.

2) Through the fragrance of the life of Christ in a believer, "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. And who is sufficient for these things?" (*2 Cor 2:15-16*) We're a fragrance- we can't change that fragrance to suit the unbeliever. We are what we are. We can't change the law either. Some will smell an aroma of life, as they realize their sin, repent and receive the Savior. Others will be reminded of their spiritual darkness and to them our words and actions in sharing the gospel are the smell of death. We aren't sufficient for these things- we're inadequate to do any of the work of evangelism, yet God does it through us, using His word, His law, and His Christ in us, a powerful aroma. We must refuse to try to alter this smell in any way because of the response of the one smelling it, "For we are not, as so many, peddling the word of God; but as of sincerity, but as from God, we speak in the sight of God in Christ." (v17) Some seek to alter the smell of the conviction of God's word, to tone it down, to neuter it by toning down the conviction. To do so is to peddle God's word and to be insincere. God plainly says to alter the message is to reveal wicked motives, whether it is for financial gain or fear of man or other selfish motives. We are the aroma- don't hide that aroma, but fan it around to everyone as you boldly share the fragrance of Christ with everyone.