

2 Corinthians 2:15

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish:

Analysis

For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ—The phrase Christou euōdia (Χριστοῦ εὐώδια, "the fragrance of Christ") continues the triumphal procession metaphor. Apostles themselves become the incense—their lives and message exude Christ's aroma. The dative tō theō (τῷ Θεῷ, "to God") indicates this fragrance primarily pleases God, regardless of human response. Ministry success is measured by God's pleasure, not popular acclaim.

In them that are saved, and in them that perish—The present passive participles sōzomenois (σωζόμενοις, "those being saved") and apolymenois (ἀπολλυμένοις, "those perishing") describe two groups experiencing the same Gospel message. The same proclamation produces opposite effects: life for some, death for others. This anticipates verse 16's stark question. Paul refuses to alter the message to increase appeal—the Gospel's offense is inherent, not a communication failure. Faithful preaching divides humanity into two camps, fulfilling Christ's prediction (Luke 2:34, John 9:39).

Historical Context

In Roman triumphs, incense held different meanings: to victorious Romans it celebrated conquest, but to captives marching to execution it meant impending death. The same aroma meant life to victors and death to the defeated. Paul applies this dual significance to Gospel proclamation—identical message, opposite effects based on the hearer's response.

Related Passages

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does recognizing ministry as primarily pleasing God free us from people-pleasing?
2. Why does the same Gospel message produce salvation in some and hardening in others?
3. How should the reality of rejection affect evangelistic methodology and expectations?

Interlinear Text

ὅτι	Χριστοῦ	εὐωδία	ἐσμὲν	τῷ	θεῷ	ἐν	τοῖς
For	of Christ	a sweet savour	we are	G3588	unto God	in	G3588
G3754	G5547	G2175	G2070		G2316	G1722	
σωζομένοις	καὶ	ἐν	τοῖς	ἀπολλυμένοις			
them that are saved	and	in	G3588	them that perish			
G4982	G2532	G1722		G622			

Additional Cross-References

Ephesians 5:2 (References Christ): And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.

1 Corinthians 1:18 (Salvation): For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

Ezekiel 20:41 (Parallel theme): I will accept you with your sweet savour, when I bring you out from the people, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you before the heathen.

Philippians 4:18 (References God): But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.

Genesis 8:21 (Parallel theme): And the LORD smelled a sweet savour; and the LORD said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done.

2 Thessalonians 2:10 (Salvation): And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

Exodus 29:18 (Parallel theme): And thou shalt burn the whole ram upon the altar: it is a burnt offering unto the LORD: it is a sweet savour, an offering made by fire unto the LORD.

Exodus 29:25 (Parallel theme): And thou shalt receive them of their hands, and burn them upon the altar for a burnt offering, for a sweet savour before the LORD: it is an offering made by fire unto the LORD.