

Fact Sheet for **"A Fragrance of Christ"** **2 Corinthians 2:12-17**

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This week Helen and I were in Canada. As we were preparing to re-enter the United States reports of the shooting at Umpqua Community College in Roseburg began to surface. (Helen and I, and Bonnie Sano, had been on that campus this spring conducting a Messianic Passover service.) As we spoke to the border guard he asked if we had heard and asked what the latest news was. We told him what little we knew. As we talked he found out I was a pastor of a Baptist church and told us that his father is a pastor of an Evangelical Free church. Immediately there was a kinship between us.

Later we kept listening to the news. It seems the shooter shot the professor then ordered the students who had dropped to the floor to stand up. He asked if they were Christians. If they said "Yes" he said, "Good, because you're a Christian you're going to see God in just about one second." Then he shot and killed them.

Shortly after the reports of the shooting surfaced the Westboro Baptist Church Twitter account became active with their members tweeting, "God repays with the #UCCShooting. We pray you be reconciled to God!" Later they posted, "While we were seeing the face of America's godless youth in one state, God sent the shooter to another!" And the church announced that their members will picket the funerals of those killed.

Why the hatred against Christians? Westboro Baptist Church is certainly adding to it. But most all of the Christians I know try to live by verses such as Galatians 5:22-23 and Hebrews 11:24. We at our church try to be a positive force in our community. Most churches do similar things. So why the hatred against Christians?

Let's look at a passage from 2 Corinthians that was written about 2,000 years ago by the Apostle Paul.

Paul was the recipient of a lot of unjust criticism from the Corinthian church. This NT book is his defense to them.

Here's one of their criticisms. Why does Paul have so much trouble in his ministry? In chapter 1 Paul mentioned that the things he suffered in ministry (similar to the things they were suffering) had had some good results. The comfort they received from God in their troubles would help them comfort others. Also their troubles kept them relying on God instead of on themselves.

Here's another of their criticisms. Paul said he wanted to visit, but he hasn't come. In chapters 1&2 Paul responded that he was not vacillating in his plans to visit Corinth, but that he didn't want his visit to be another hard on dealing with the sin of one man from their congregation and their reaction to him.

Other criticisms cutting down Paul were being stirred up by some who wanted to be the authoritative voices in the Corinthian church. Paul was giving direction to the church for free. They were charging for their instruction and didn't want to lose this opportunity for gain. So they blasted Paul. There is a reference to them in verse 17.

¹² ¶ **When I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, even though a door was opened for me in the Lord, ¹³ my spirit was not at rest because I did not find my brother Titus there. So I took leave of them and went on to Macedonia.**

There was an open door for Paul to preach the Gospel in Troas, a door he didn't take at that time but would take it later (Acts 20:5-11). And Paul had intended on visiting the Corinthians before going to Macedonia (1:16) but didn't.

"In addition to his apprehension about the church in Corinth, Paul was now also concerned about Titus' safety. For all Paul knew Titus might have been carrying with him a portion of the proposed Corinthian collection (cf. 2 Cor. 8:6) and fallen prey to bandits. Why else had he failed to meet Paul in Troas?"¹

At this point Paul takes a different direction in his letter. He moves from a defense of his circumstances and choices to a focus on Christ.

¹⁴ ¶ But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. ¹⁵ For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, ^{16a} to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.

Paul is using a strong example from the Roman military. "Everyone loves a parade" goes the saying. But the origin of the parade has its roots in the military and politics. Generations of rulers have projected their power through displays of strength and trepidation, going back to humanity's first civilizations. Paul was using the illustration of a Roman military parade. Triumphal military leaders forced their captives to march behind them through the streets. Incense was burned in this processional and offerings were made. The air was filled with aromas. If any were condemned to death they would be executed at the end of the parade.² For the victors this was sweet. For the captives this was death.

The real issue as to how someone responds to Christians is where that person stands with the Lord. What does this lead you to think about the shooter at Umpqua Community College? What does this lead you to think about the border guard we encountered?

At the beginning of this message I asked "Why the hatred against Christians?" First, this is not new. It was there in Paul's day and has been ever since. Second, it is evidence of how the Gospel sifts people out.

Paul then writes...

^{16b} Who is sufficient for these things?

In the next chapter he adds to this in 2 Corinthians 3:5.

Now Paul takes a swipe at some of his detractors.

¹⁷ For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ.

Don't be surprised when you find anti-Christian sentiment.

But let it be because of the Gospel, not because your own callousness or insensitivity.

¹ The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament, p. 559.

² Josephus *War* VII 5. 6.