

## Smells like Christ

*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. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life.* 2 Cor. 2:14-16 ESV

As I write this, I am eating a marvelous root beer float made of A&W root beer and Gurnsey's vanilla ice cream, with each bite and sip there are wisps of childhood memories drifting through my mind. My parents kept an exorbitant amount of ice cream in the house. My dad was raised on a dairy near San Diego, which may have started his addiction, one that he hasn't kicked in his 80 years of life. For as long as I can remember, my dad could not resist bringing home 5-quart tubs of randomly flavored ice cream bought at the local Jilbert's Dairy in Marquette. Even today, my dad has a separate freezer in the basement of his house that is an enabler for his ice cream vice.

Although ice cream flowed like water in my childhood home, root beer was relatively rare. Both of my parents were actually very healthy eaters and so pop was not a common commodity in our house. So, when the two magical ingredients did conjoin, it was a very special occasion. Pouring just the right chilled root beer over rock-hard ice cream that had been scooped into a beer-stein-like mug that had been in the freezer overnight was a thing of beauty. The crispy frozen root beer shell on the glass and the ice cream, the effervescent froth you had to eat with a spoon, and the heavenly ice-cold alloy of vanilla and frozen liquid gold... but I digress.

Scientists have determined that, of our main five senses, the sense of smell is unique. It is the one sense that apparently bypasses our sensory "gatekeeping" system (in the thalamus) and, instead, is directly connected to our emotional and memory processors in our brain (the limbic system).<sup>i</sup> Therefore, smells have the incredible ability to trigger strong emotional responses and refresh strong memories buried in the mental closet for decades.<sup>ii</sup> The sense of smell is also unique among our senses in that it is much more sensitive than our other senses. It is estimated that, while we can only see about a million different colors<sup>iii</sup>, we can hear a few thousand unique tones (although these can be combined in amazing ways...),<sup>iv</sup> we can smell over a **trillion** unique smells!<sup>v</sup>

So, the next time you encounter phrases such as that quoted above in 2 Cor. 2:14-16, consider the physical model that God has provided within in our own bodies for the power of fragrances and aromas. If we can experience up to a trillion smells that are connected in a direct and special way into our minds and memories, capable of eliciting powerful emotions, how much more powerful is it that we are a "powerful aroma of Christ" to the world, or that our sacrifices are a "pleasing aroma" to God.<sup>vi</sup>

We often talk about, someday, seeing with perfect (spiritual) sight or hearing with perfect (spiritual) ears... what about smelling with perfect (spiritual!) noses? So, even eating a root beer float can be a form of worship. Hmm... I think I'll have another.

Pastor Aaron

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.news-medical.net/health/What-does-the-Thalamus-do.aspx>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fnbeh.2015.00036>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://www.pantone.com/articles/color-fundamentals/how-do-we-see-color>

<sup>iv</sup> Each octave can be divided into 12 semitones, each with approximately 20 distinguishable "detunings," and we can hear about 10 octaves.  $12 \times 20 \times 10 = 2400$  unique tones.

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.nature.com/articles/nature.2014.14904>. And dogs, by the way, are estimated to have even 100x more sensitive senses of smell.

<sup>vi</sup> The "pleasing aroma" to God that is the worship of his people is references over 30 times in Genesis, Leviticus and Numbers.