The Stench of Sin
by Brett Hickey

Most of the places you go this week, there will be an eight hundred pound gorilla in the room. Everyone (or almost everyone) wants to pretend that this beast does not exist. You do not mention this word in polite company. It’s socially unacceptable. It’s a downer. This beast gives off a foul odor, but people have become so used to it that they can no longer smell it. Adam and Eve should have smelled that smell when they were staring at the forbidden fruit, but they gobbled it down enthusiastically instead. We’re talking about s-i-n and God says it stinks. What say you? Can you smell that smell? It’s rank, putrid, and rancid. God wants you to smell this nasty rascal for what it is. Jesus died, in fact, in part to activate your sense of smell to recognize the stench of sin especially when it invades our own lives.

When we think of Jesus, the crucifixion and the resurrection, we often focus on the blessing of grace, love and forgiveness—and well we should. These are the heart and soul of the gospel. Pulpits across the country are centered on these benefits today. Let us never overlook them. When we maintain the Lord’s Supper as an important element of our weekly worship, it is rather difficult to lose sight of grace. But, keep in mind, taking in the greatness of God’s grace and recognizing the abundance of His love and forgiveness is inextricably linked to our awareness of the extreme evil of sin and its consequences. When, however, we soften sin we diminish God’s grace. When we dismiss sin entirely from our minds, we destroy the foundation of the gospel.

This morning, we will heighten our awareness of the great evil conquered at the cross and revisit how that great sacrifice was intended to change our lives. But first, enjoy our song…

The Bible tells us in Hebrews 10:1-4, “For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.”

God wanted to snuff out the stagnant smell of sin that dominated man’s existence. Animal sacrifices only removed the odor temporarily. This didn’t satisfy God, and since the stench of sin is barred from heaven the blood of bulls and goats failed to give us the complete cleansing we so desperately needed.

No one that ever lived was as sensitive to the stench of sin as was Jesus. He smelled it everywhere he went. Often, He was almost overcome by it when it surrounded him in such concentrated form. Even the Pharisees who prided themselves in their moral superiority reeked of sin in Jesus’ nostrils. Jesus came to teach us about sin as well as salvation. It’s hard for us to fathom how repulsed Jesus must have been on the cross as He bore the sins of the world on His back. But, we need to try.

Understand, on the other hand, that S-I-N is how Satan smells fun; S-I-N is how Satan spells victory. No, Satan cannot win the war, but he can win battles and, obviously, that’s good enough.

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1 All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.
for him. It’s time we get cynical about sin. Sin is real, and it’s not our friend. It’s not neutral. Sin is what affixed Jesus to the cross. Each drop of blood, as we sometimes sing, was shed for you and me, but it’s just as true that each and every sin he had to bear on Calvary.

The Bible acknowledges that there is pleasure in sin, but it is short-lived. Sin rejects restrictions that are for our ultimate good, and as a result, sin makes man literally sick—in the long-term, if not before. Sin is killing us physically, but, more importantly, sin separates us from God spiritually. Sin hinders our prayers, breaks down our bodies, shatters our marriages, cripples congregations and hampers our happiness.

We need to understand that if Satan had his way, he would remove the word “sin” from the English language. If Satan had his way, we would either not be able to smell what the Scriptures call “sin” at all or he would have us always enjoy sin, especially our own sin, as a pleasing fragrance. He has fairly well succeeded in this objective as far as the world is concerned. Not only can the worldly man no longer smell sin for the disgusting odor it gives off to God, but the people of God seem not to be able to differentiate it from any other smell. The word “sin” itself has largely vanished from our vocabularies unless we are in the house of God or reading it from the Scriptures. This gratifies the devil.

We need to remember that Satan is a predator and man is his prey. The apostle wrote in I Peter 5:8, “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour…” The weapons of his warfare are temptation and sin; if we can’t smell them when he lays the trap, he’s bound to get us.

Meanwhile, if God has His way, we will have our sense of smell “exercised to discern both good and evil.” If God has His way, we will recognize sin—especially our own sin—for what it is and be increasingly disgusted by it. If God has His way, we will grow to hate every sin we commit. As Paul put it in Romans 12:9, “Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.” When one who is not a child of God gets to this point, he will immediately desire to be born of water and of the spirit; when we as children of God smell that smell for what it is, we will rush to cleanse ourselves from the filthiness of the flesh by repenting of our sin, confessing our sin and praying to God to forgive us for our sin (Acts 8:22-24; I John 1:9).

THE STENCH OF SIN

British statesmen Edmund Burke is credited with a number of notable quotations. Among them: “No passion so effectually robs the mind of all its powers of acting and reasoning as fear.” Another quote is: “Nothing is so fatal to religion as indifference.” Burke also said: “People never give up their liberties but under some delusion.” But my favorite Burke quote is: “All that is needed for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.” This same man, Edmund Burke, wrote after an election in 1771, “Our judgments stink in the nostrils of the people,” indicating how morally reprehensible the government had become to the senses of the governed.

One of the oldest books in my library is entitled Lancelot Andrewes and His Private Devotions. Lancelot Andrews, Bishop of Winchester, was a notable scholar and preacher who, upon the passing of Queen Elizabeth I of England, spoke at the coronation ceremony of King James I in
1603 A.D. Andrewes was the Royal Chaplain to Queen Elizabeth I, King James I and King Charles I. Andrewes knew fifteen modern languages and six ancient languages. No wonder he was the first scholar chosen for the great task of translating the majestic King James Version that will soon observe its four hundred year anniversary. The book, *Lancelot Andrewes and His Private Devotions*, is an English translation of the prayers he prayed in Greek and Latin.

In one of his sermons on prayer preached in 1611, Andrewes said, “Even so the wicked imaginations, and unchaste thoughts of our hearts, which yield a stinking smell in the nostrils of God, are sweetened by no other means then by prayer...” This great Bible scholar associated impure thoughts with a horrible odor that would ascend before the throne of a Holy God.

In the Scriptures, the idea of behavior putting out a foul odor is found in 2 Samuel 10:6, “(T)he children of Ammon saw that they stank before David…” Later, the New Living Translation puts the rebellion and disobedience of God’s people in perspective when it renders Isaiah 65:5, “These people are a stench in my nostrils, an acrid smell that never goes away.” The Holy Spirit suggests this same idea in 2 Peter 2:20-22 by likening the Christian who goes back to sin as "A dog that returns to his own vomit," and, to "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire." Such is how sin smells to God. This is how God views my sin, your sin. Surely, we do not want God to make these kinds of associations with our lives.

**THE FRAGRANCE OF CHRIST**

As a matter of fact, a number of New Testament scriptures show how pleasing our lives can be to God using another olfactory metaphor. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 2:14-16, “Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place. 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?” He uses similar words in Ephesians 5:2 to describe how Christians dominated by lives of love give off a refreshing bouquet as the scent of their actions drift before His throne: “And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.” In Philippians 4:18, Paul tells the Christians at Philippi that their generous financial support of his efforts to preach the gospel is presented to God as “a sweet-smelling aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, well pleasing to God.” And, of course, the most familiar positive scriptural citation associating the sense of smell with prayer is found in Revelation 8:4: “And the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, went up before God out of the angel’s hand.”

Dozens of times in the first five books of the Bible, God speaks of the different sacrifices and burnt offerings as coming before him as a sweet smelling aroma. Then, the last time this phrase is used in the Old Testament in Ezekiel 20:41, it’s used to describe the collective fragrance given off by the people of God: “I will accept you as a sweet aroma when I bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you have been scattered; and I will be hallowed in you before the Gentiles.”
ABOMINATIONS

This is contrasted in the Old Testament with the especially abhorrent odor given off by certain sins. Some of the sins condemned in the Old Testament are so reprehensible to God that they are tagged by at least three different Hebrew words that are translated abomination. One Hebrew word, *Baash*, means to have a bad smell, stink, smell bad. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* says that another word “piggool” translated abomination refers to “sacrificial flesh that has become stale, putrid, tainted (see Leviticus 7:18; 19:7; Ezekiel 4:14; Isaiah 65:4). Driver maintains that it occurs only as a "technical term for such state sacrificial flesh as has not been eaten within the prescribed time," and, accordingly, he would everywhere render it specifically "refuse meat." This would have little difference from road kill after rotting for a few days. Nasty!

WE KNOW NASTY

Now, I know nasty. You can relate to the idea of foul odors too, can’t you? Have you ever been to a congregation where a diaper was disposed of in the church bathroom on a Sunday in August? What happens when you walk in the door on Wednesday? The odor will nearly knock you down. Fifty miles from home on a recent trip, I hit a skunk. I forgot all about until I stepped out of my vehicle. During an ice storm last year when our electricity was out for eight days, we blocked off our living room and one bathroom from the rest of the house and opted to rely on our fireplace and blankets to keep warm. Louise is a great cook with the stove, oven, Crockpot and even microwave, but she is just not as experienced with cooking out of a fireplace; we didn’t really have the right equipment either. With my worthless assistance, we put hot dogs in a roasting pan and tried to cook them in the fireplace. Unfortunately, after just a few moments the roasting pan on fire. You can imagine all the hooting and hollering? By the time we got the pan out of the fireplace the room was filled with the rancid odor of burnt hot dogs. Ugh! I played football for eight years. Football is a great sport, but a locker room crammed full of sweat-encrusted pads, pants, shoes and socks for fifty young men is really repulsive. I like the taste of onion and garlic myself, but I’d just as soon you leave them alone. We’re making light of offensive odors, but listen, when these abhorrent odors are brought before our noses, we want out; we run the other way. They disgust us; they repel us. That’s the way God reacts to our sin and that’s how God wants us to react to sin—especially our own sin. When we see our sins for what they are, we should be anxious to rid them from our lives.

WHERE THE ODORS ORIGINATE

Let’s remember where sin comes from. Sin is the creation of Satan. God “made man upright” (Eccl. 7:29) and placed him in the pristine environment of the Garden of Eden. Satan enticed Adam and Eve to sin. Would you buy a painting or a piece of pottery made by Charles Manson or some violent terrorist and place it in your home? Of course not! Well, neither should we take any sin, the creation of Satan, and hang it in our hearts or harbor it in our lives.

Not including its synonyms, the word “sin” is found 1400 times in the Bible. Meanwhile, the more intense word, “abomination,” is found only about seventy times. Ponder carefully some of the sins that come before God as those that give off what He considers the most offensive odors:
Proverbs 6:16 “These six things the LORD hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him: A proud look, A lying tongue, Hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that are swift in running to evil, A false witness who speaks lies, And one who sows discord among brethren.”

Proverbs 15:8-9 “The sacrifice [worship]\(^2\) of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, But the prayer of the upright is His delight. The way of the wicked is an abomination to the LORD, But He loves him who follows righteousness.”

Proverbs 17:15 “He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are abomination to the LORD.” KJV

Proverbs 28:9 “He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be abomination.” KJV

Deuteronomy 22:5 “A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment, for all who do so are an abomination to the LORD your God.”

This abomination is striking because it shows God doesn’t view cross-dressing as some harmless peculiarity of disturbed individuals. A man dressing like a woman and a woman dressing like a man is an abomination before God. This comes from the word *abomination* that means *disgusting*\(^3\) or *detestable*. This idea is supported in the New Testament in I Corinthians 11:2-16 and in I Corinthians 6:9 where we find the “effeminate\(^4\)…will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

One of the questions that we have to ask ourselves as we make this study applicable is: if something is an abomination in the Old Testament—if it is disgusting and detestable, if it gives off a foul odor from God’s perspective in the Old Testament—will it give off a pleasing aroma in the New Testament? We know better! We find in Revelation 21:27 the following warning, “And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb’s book of life.” KJV

The word abomination is used much more sparingly in the New Testament—only six times in fact. But, these instances teach some very significant lessons! Perhaps the most striking is Jesus use of it in Luke 16:15, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God.” Folks, just because someone or something is highly valued and respected among men does not mean that it should be so among the people of God. In fact, Jesus says here that such issues should have the opposite effect on us.

\(^2\) A bracket [ ] within quotes is used to note words added that are not in the original quote.

\(^3\) Abomination: OT:8441 “Something disgusting (morally), i.e. (as noun) an abhorrence;…” (Biblesoft’s New Exhaustive Strong’s Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright © 1994, 2003, 2006 Biblesoft, Inc. and International Bible Translators, Inc.)

\(^4\) EFFEMINATE -, “NT:3120, ‘soft, soft to the touch’ (Lat., mollis, Eng., ‘mollify,’ ‘emollient,’ etc.), is used (a) of raiment, Matt 11:8 (twice); Luke 7:25; (b) metaphorically, in a bad sense, 1 Cor 6:9, ‘effeminate,’ not simply of a male who practices forms of lewdness, but persons in general, who are guilty of addiction to sins of the flesh, voluptuous.” (from Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words, Copyright © 1985, Thomas Nelson Publishers.)
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There is good news behind this message—the best news of all, in fact. That is, the stench of sin can be covered with the **fresh fragrance of forgiveness**.

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*Sermon delivered by evangelist Brett Hickey over “Let the Bible Speak”*

June, 2010

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PDF, 3/31/2011