

# Sweet Incense on Your Altar: Do you Stink?

Bishop Ron Libby

## *Introduction*

Notes

Moses is told by God to make sweet incense, given a specific set of instructions he had to precisely follow.

When God instructed Moses to make this incense, He had expectations and rudiments that were demands Moses had to carry out, without much explanation from God. We will demonstrate how these commands translate into new testament worship. These, when followed, showcased Moses' obedience and worship to God. More importantly, they are types and components that ought to be part of our worship today.

The perfume or sweet incense had a specific purpose. It was to be put before the testimony in the tabernacle of the congregation, also known as the tent of meeting (Exodus 30:36); the place where Moses met God.

Like many of the practices of the Old Testament, the sweet incense is a "type", an analogy or a shadow for new testament truths and revelations. Truths that many Christians have often overlooked and are therefore clueless about. Let's remember that the New Testament is about God transforming both our inward and outward selves, so we return to reflecting Him; an image that was disrupted when sin entered into the world. It is not solely about changing an outward disposition, like the Old Testament encourages.

However, the old testament still retains relevance today. In fact, what often happens in the OT in the physical translates into the spiritual in the NT. When we get clarity about this principle, the old testament will burst with truths as you have never seen before.

For example, after a battle against the Philistines, the victorious Samson stands on top of the rock Etam (Judges 15: 7-8). Little after this encounter, Samson finds himself infatuated with a woman in the "valley of Sorek" named Delilah, who will eventually be one of the main architects of his downfall (Judges 16: 4, 16-21). He disregarded the obvious pattern pointing to Delilah's repeated betrayal, because he was off the rock and the object of his affection was from the valley. Like Samson, we are called to be a people separated from the world and unto God. As such, we ought to be careful not to love the world (I John 2:15-17), we should be sober and vigilant (I Peter 5:8), and to take heed to ourselves (Luke 21:34); so we

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do not endure in the spiritual what Samson fell victim to in the physical. If you are off the "Rock", **Get Back on It!!**

In the context of our passage, Moses is a type of God and the tabernacle is a type of the new testament church. Let's dive into this "rich pool" of symbolism together and we will discover who we are in Him! Sadly, we often pitifully and ignorantly overlook the old testament and its truths because we think it lacks relevance, when in fact it contains a copious amount of truths that all point us to Jesus. Without knowing and studying what the old testament expressed to us, we only get a cursory understanding of the new testament, making us rather shallow. Let's unearth and uncover our true "self".

## *The Holy Incense*

Exodus 30:34 (KJV):

*"<sup>34</sup> And the LORD said unto Moses, Take unto thee sweet spices, stacte, and onycha, and galbanum; these sweet spices with pure frankincense: of each shall there be a like weight:"*

The verse points out the fact that all spices are of "like weight". Everything is balanced and all the spices are of equal weight.

**I. Stacte** (nataph). Stacte is the finest myrrh. It comes from a root of the word meaning "to distil".

- English definition of "distill": to purify, to extract the essence of something by heating it up.
- The synonyms of "distill" are purify, refine, filter, treat, to process.

An in-depth look into the root of the word "stacte", yields the verb to "purify". It is what we refer to as a "type". Stacte has no inherent spiritual and purification properties; it tells us things about what we ought to do. God was showing us the value of purification for worship in the new testament church. Stacte is symbolic of both purification and separation from the world, and unto God.

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Men and women of old were purified when obeying these specific commands, we in turn get purified when we are born again and continue to walk, grow and develop into increasingly Christ-like individuals.

***Separation is a Concept that is Prevalent across both the Old and the New Testament!***

Ezra 6:21 (KJV)

*"And the children of Israel, which were come again out of captivity, and all such as had separated themselves unto them from the filthiness of the heathen of the land, to seek the LORD God of Israel, did eat,"*

2 Corinthians 6: 17-18 (KJV)

*"<sup>17</sup> Wherefore come out from among them, and **be ye separate**, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you. <sup>18</sup> And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty."*

- The Greek definition of separation is to mark off from others by boundaries, to appoint, to set apart for some purpose.

With this definition in mind, we see that the verse we just read is a call for separation; one to be set apart from the world and unto God's kingdom and service.

Separation always comes at a "pseudo-cost"; which is really shedding a lifestyle that is not pleasing to God. The same separation yields invaluable benefits. In fact, if we appropriately respond to God's call to be separated, He promises us fatherhood. (2 Cor 6:18)

Far from being mere obedience to a list of rules, separation encompasses a lifestyle and a mindset of pleasing God and recognizing the preeminence of Jesus in our minds, attitudes, priorities, and in all facets of our lives. It goes beyond blindly following laws and precepts, principles and guidelines, without heartfelt commitment and willful obedience. In fact, in the old testament, most God-loving (and fearing) people lived lives dictated by rules. They could not be born again, and as such were subjected to following God-given commands only, without inner strength. It's all they could do. (see Romans 8:3-4)

Romans 8:3-4 (NKJV)

*"<sup>3</sup> For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, <sup>4</sup> that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."*

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Galatians 3:21 (NKJV)

*"<sup>21</sup> Is the law then against the promises of God? Certainly not! For if there had been a law given which could have given life, truly righteousness would have been by the law."*

In the new testament, a love for God yields a desire to receive His spirit, which empowers us to submit to His precepts and commands. We seek to be pleasing to God, in our walk with Him, out of love for Him and not out of submission to forceful domination. We do submit, however, both willingly and joyfully, recognizing that 1) it is the only path to the separation Jesus is calling us to and that 2) we can only do that through the power of God given to us during the new birth experience.

## ***Seeking Godly Maturity***

Like a newborn who develops and later matures into a man or a woman in the physical realm, let's not forget the crucial nature of seeking maturity in the spirit. When that does not happen, when men and women who have been born again do not mature, there is a problem. The new birth experience calls for maturity. "Babes" in Christ should eventually grow and develop into seasoned Christians.

<sup>1</sup> Peter 2: 1-2 (KJV)

*"<sup>1</sup> Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, <sup>2</sup> As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:"*

<sup>1</sup> Peter 2:1-2 (AMP)

*"<sup>1</sup> So put aside every trace of malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander and hateful speech; <sup>2</sup> like newborn babies [you should] long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may be nurtured and grow in respect to salvation [its ultimate fulfillment],"*

Lack of commitment, worldliness, anger issues could make you dwarf-like in the spirit. Lack of love will stunt your growth. Lack of prayer, of sensitivity and of compassion will do the same. A natural dwarf did not previously make choices that resulted in his/ her current short stature. Christians, on the other hand, have

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the privilege to choose their level of maturity... If you do not have the sweet spice of purity/ separation (**stacte**), you will indeed be a spiritual dwarf.

***Jesus Reminds Us that Growth and Fruitfulness are Imperative for our Salvation.***

John 15: 1-2 (KJV)

*"<sup>1</sup>I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. <sup>2</sup>Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit."*

John 15: 1-2 (AMP)

*"<sup>1</sup>I am the true Vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. <sup>2</sup>Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that continues to bear fruit, He [repeatedly] prunes, so that it will bear more fruit [even richer and finer fruit]."*  
The branch does not just fall away. **He takes it away!** God detached, unfastened or disconnected from the vine. You were in Christ, given the spirit of adoption. You had a chance; but you blew it! What is the imagery of "taking it away"? In other words, a branch that's not bearing fruit is dying, useless, draining the whole vine therefore must be cut off. You're dying because you are not bearing fruit. Something is wrong if you aren't.

That speaks to growing, submitting to God and dying to self. This is the way we express obedience.

**II. *Onycha*** (sheheleth): from the root of the word meaning a claw or a hoof.

When I studied this, it kind of baffled me. What would the type be? Why would God want to type this as a claw?

***The Claw tills the Ground.***

God is going to soften you up. He does so by prompting you to "claw away" at the "hard soil of your heart" and work it into fertile ground. You have to dig into the ground, till it, so that when planted, the seed can penetrate it, then bear fruit. The seed has to be planted deep in order to sprout and later thrive as a plant. It is an arduous process whose first step requires us to "till".

Similarly, God calls us to "deepen", so He can plant the seed. If we obey this process, the seed can later germinate. Failure to ready the soil by "clawing" at it will cause the seed to be washed away by the elements. It will cause

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unfruitfulness. God calls you to dig up that old, tough, packed up and trampled up dirt into fructuous (full of producing a great deal of fruit) ground.

As you might have gathered already, God uses these spices because they translate into new testament truths. To Moses, it was just a command to follow, we on other hand understand the typology of it.

## **Break Up Your Fallow Ground.**

Jeremiah 4:3-4 (KJV)

*"<sup>3</sup>For thus saith the LORD to the men of Judah and Jerusalem, Break up your fallow ground, and sow not among thorns. <sup>4</sup>Circumcise yourselves to the LORD, and take away the foreskins of your heart, ye men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem: lest my fury come forth like fire, and burn that none can quench it, because of the evil of your doings."*

We have to do the "tilling", because God doesn't want resistance. We have to deal with the fallow, hard, unfertile, unusable and untilled ground. If we don't, He won't, and as a result, when seeds are attempted to be sown in us, they will not penetrate us. **WE** have to break up the hardness of our hearts. **WE** have to humble ourselves, submit to the Lord and spiritual authority, repent regularly and constantly self-reflect to check on the hardness of our heart. Since our carnal nature regularly gets in our way, we have to "till often". Do you get my drift???

Tillage is the preparation of soil by mechanical agitation. **It is a violent practice.** Farmers have to disrupt and uproot the ground like a plow does so the seed can infiltrate it. My grandfather tilled the ground with a mule. He had to go in a straight line deterring the ground wherever the plow came in contact with the soil. God is calling us to tillage (and is willing to help you do so), so he can do something with us. It is hard work, and as a Christian this work should be embraced, or we will suffer serious consequences (Jeremiah 4:4). **Dig it up or God will tear you up!!**

Our human nature defaults to the "easy"; we look for the easy way. We want quick fixes. Many passages in both the old and new testament warn us about being lazy. Conversely, it's not easy to be striving. It is work.

Luke 13:24 (KJV)

*"Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."*

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Greek Definition of Strive: to contend with adversaries, fight, to contend, to struggle, with difficulties and danger.

In this passage, God calls us to repentance, or should I say spiritual tillage. True repentance "is not simply a matter of saying the right words (Jeremiah 3:21-25) but a matter of transformation of the heart." (The Apostolic Study Bible). It involves turning away of the heart and submission to the right path. We have to dig down and soften. This passage gives us an imagery of our responsibility to self-examine and to seize our ever-present opportunity to repent.

Hosea 10: 12 (KJV)

*"<sup>12</sup> Sow to yourselves in righteousness, reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground: for it is time to seek the LORD, till he come and rain righteousness upon you."*

There has to be that digging up in your life. Break up the hard places of your heart on a regular basis. For every level you want to go in "deeper", you have to dig through another layer. Make sure to let go of self in the process or it won't work.

## **Sow Not Among Thorns**

When seeds are sown among thorns, they cannot properly germinate. The thorns will choke the fruit of the seed. These thorns need to be dug up. It is harsh but valuable that we dig into our own souls to break up our natural resistance to God. (Matthew 13:7; 22)

Jeremiah 4:3-4 (AMP)

*"<sup>3</sup> For this is what the LORD says to the men of Judah and to Jerusalem, Plow your uncultivated ground [for a season], And do not sow among thorns. <sup>4</sup> Circumcise (dedicate, sanctify) yourselves to the LORD And remove the foreskin [sins] of your heart, Men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem, Or else My wrath will go forth like fire [consuming all that gets in its way] And burn and there will be no one to quench it, Because of the evil of your acts."*

## **Remove the Foreskins [Sins] of Your Heart"**

You have to cut away the natural corruption of your heart. Our heart "is overgrown with thorns and weeds, which are the natural product of the corrupt heart... Let us entreat the Lord to create in us a clean heart, and to renew a right

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spirit within us." Matthew Henry. Carnality is our greatest enemy, because it is within us. We cannot get it out of us; instead we die out it by submitting ourselves to the spirit.

English definition of carnality: pertaining to the flesh or the body, its passions and appetites.

Our carnality chokes, defames, leads down the wrong road; and if not checked with repentance, and the dying of the Lord Jesus; we have to die in our flesh and deny it. (Romans 8:10)

Psalms 51:10 (KJV)

*"Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me"*

This is a classic example of "denying flesh", by asking God for new desires. Let's take measures to "crucify" ourselves.

Psalms 73:1 (KJV)

*"Truly God is good to Israel, even to such as are of a clean heart"*

Do you want God to be "good" to you? You have to cleanse the carnality through fasting and denial to get a good heart.

Matthew 5:8 (KJV)

*"<sup>8</sup> Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."*

Acts 15:9 (KJV)

*"<sup>9</sup> And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith."*

For personal study: Matthew 13: 24-30; 36-43

**III. Galbanum** (Helbenah): A plant-based bitter aromatic resin or gum.

It is said that this spice was to add pungency to the other scents. It was valuable. It made the whole perfume pungent (according to The IVP Bible background Commentary)

The synonyms of "pungent": strong, powerful, pervasive and penetrating.

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God wanted them to exude a strong smell, so he can be known in the pungency of the smell of his people. We on the other hand should exude the right smell, in abundance, and in such a way that others can clearly identify your "smell."

2 Corinthians 2:15

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

**IV. Frankincense:** it is a white resin burned as fragrant incense. When burned, frankincense gives a very aromatic "smell".

## ***What do you smell like?***

In the natural, smells can speak to the cleanliness of our bodies. In the spiritual, a smell pertains to the purity of our worship.

We can infer, from the context of the nativity story, that Frankincense was a highly valuable commodity. Just like the wise men brought the best presents to the risen savior, we have to bring a sweet smell before our God. We should not approach God without "frankincense". Bring copious amounts of it to your God. Our God considers the sweet-smelling concoction of pure worship, pleasant.

- Definition of Perfume: incense, smoke, odor of (burning) sacrifice, sweet smoke of sacrifice.

... Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus...

All these spices are representations of how we live, without malice, prejudice or condemnation towards each other; lifting one another up rather than pushing each other down, being pure and doing no harm. We ought to lift others up and partner with others in spiritual and practical ways, as Jesus would. There needs to be a sweet offering to God in worship, in praise, in attitude and actions. The incense is a reflection of the new testament believer's make-up. Let's offer pure and sweet offerings unto our God. We must lift up "holy hands, without wrath" (1 Timothy 2:8)

**What do you smell like??** Have you ever smelled "foul," dirty and unclean? Have you exhibited a bad attitude or spirit? Have you condemned, criticized, ridiculed or thought less of someone because they weren't of your social and economic

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status? When was the last time you lifted someone up? When was the last time you intensely prayed for someone else? What do you smell like???

According to Isaiah 1:12-15, if we do not renounce iniquity in our lives, God will not hear us. (The Preacher's Homiletic Commentary)

Isaiah 1:12-15 (KJV)

*"<sup>15</sup> And when ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood. <sup>16</sup> Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil;"*

We should "perfume" our inner lives and ensure that we do not project anything ill-smelling. We are to be pure with the spices of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness and temperance (Galatians 5: 22-23); pouring it on our altar to God. This fragrance is pleasant to God. Even when we are wounded by others in or out of the church, we still strive to please our Lord with our "aroma", praising and worshiping Him despite the love or lack thereof by others. We are **not allowed** to retaliate in order for us to remain pure. It's not so easy but is a blessing to God and us. As Moses ministered to God, we as priests, cultivate the fruit of the Spirit and use it to create a sweet-smelling concoction unto our Lord Jesus Christ regardless of our circumstances.

People we come in contact with (those who "smell us") should recognize the uniqueness of our "smell". We have to dedicate ourselves to producing a smell that lost souls can get a whiff of, be drawn to, and ultimately seek to exude it themselves. We can encourage brothers and sisters, using our "confection", for their edification and maturity in Christ. We imperatively need to be perfumed with the fruit of the spirit... so we can pour it unto the Lost. This is how we live our lives. No bitterness, anger, pride, carnality and other negative traits that aim to sever our relationship with God-

Do you stink? As a Christian you're not allowed to stink. God makes provisions so that you do not stink. What do you smell like?

## ***A Pure Heart is a Gift to God.***

Ephesians 5:2 (KJV)

*"<sup>2</sup> 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."*

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Ephesians 5:2 (AMP)

*"and walk **continually** in love [that is, value one another—practice empathy and compassion, unselfishly seeking the best for others], just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and sacrifice to God [slain for you, so that it became] a sweet fragrance."*

## **Beat It Small.**

Exodus 30:36 (KJV)

*"And thou shalt beat some of it very small, and put of it before the testimony in the tabernacle of the congregation, where I will meet with thee: it shall be unto you most holy."*

According to Matthew Henry, the incense burned upon the golden altar was prepared of sweet spices. When it was used, it was to be beaten very small; thus, it pleased the Lord to bruise the Redeemer, when he offered himself for a sacrifice of a sweet-smelling savor."

## **It is to be Holy.**

Exodus 30:37 (KJV)

*"And as for the perfume which thou shalt make, ye shall not make to yourselves according to the composition thereof: it shall be unto thee holy for the Lord."*

"The like should not be made for any common use. Thus, God would keep in the people's minds reverence for his own services and teach us not to profane or abuse anything whereby God makes himself known. It is a great affront to God to jest with sacred things, and to make sport with his word and ordinances. It is most dangerous and fatal to use professions of the gospel of Christ to forward worldly interests." Matthew Henry

## **V. Perverted Incense**

Galatians 5:9 (KJV)

*"A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."*

Galatians 5:9 (AMP)

*"A little leaven [a slight inclination to error, or a few false teachers] leavens the whole batch [it perverts the concept of faith and misleads the church]."*

Galatians 5:9 (MSG)

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It only takes a minute amount of yeast, you know, to permeate an entire loaf of bread.

We have to be pure through and through. We cannot harbor sin and think we will not be affected. Anything we leave unchecked will ruin us. It will eke out, contaminate other areas of our lives, and will not let up until we are wholly given to sin. "Sin is corrosive and will run rampant, unless you strive to truly sever its pull in your life," and admittedly, this task is not very easy to do.

In the tale of *The Tar Baby*, Br'er Fox constructs a doll out of a lump of tar and dresses it with some clothes. When Br'er Rabbit comes along, he addresses the tar "baby" amiably, but receives no response. Br'er Rabbit becomes offended by what he perceives as the tar baby's lack of manners, punches it and, in doing so, becomes stuck. The more Br'er Rabbit punches and kicks the tar baby out of rage, the worse he gets stuck, and the more entangled he becomes.

Along the journey, we get tempted and distracted by sin. We ought to keep our eyes on the Lord, because if we toil with sin, we eventually entangle ourselves with it so much that we get stuck. Sin wants to paralyze you and make you ineffective in the kingdom of God.

**God is calling you to have all these spices!!!**

**So how do you smell? Do you stink? Are you offering up a sweet incense to God? Think about it!**

1. Have you understood what you heard today?
2. Was it confusing to you?
3. Did you understand the typology of the new testament applications to what you heard today?
4. Could you write three things specifically that you thought spoke to your heart to become more Christ like?
5. Where are you going to start?
6. What does the word Onycha mean? What is it a type of?
7. Do you wish you hadn't come?