

## **A New Fragrance**

I travelled to the United States of America some years ago, and was surprised at some of the cultural differences.

The one that stood out most to me, however, was their seeming obsession with personal hygiene.

Every second advertisement on television seemed to deal with this.

I saw ads where people travelling on crowded peak hour transport would reach up to grab a hand hold and everyone around them would promptly faint – presumably because their body odour was not all it should be.

Others depicted judges leaning forward across court benches, rapping their gavels with great authority and shouting for order.

The result was silence, but only because the members of the court room were frozen in place, shocked and wide-eyed.

Apparently bad breath was the killer on trial here.

I had a good laugh, thinking that Americans were clearly over the top, obsessed with hygiene.

However, when I returned to Australia, I couldn't help noticing how many billboards and advertisements here were devoted to exactly the same sorts of things.

A trip to any supermarket will show that personal hygiene and health care are easily the largest sections.

Just take a moment to run a mental inventory of your own household.

Do you have soaps of different types and fragrances, shampoos, conditioners, body wash, exfoliants, cleansers, toners, moisturisers, face masks, body sprays and powders, foot powder, eye cream, foot cream, hand cream, body lotion, tooth paste, tooth whiteners, mouth wash, breath fresheners, acne treatments, mousse, gel, perfumes – including cream, spray, concentrates and eau de toilette – pre shave lotion, after shave lotion and colognes?

Now multiply your list by the number of people living in your home.

Do you have pets, especially dogs, because they no doubt come with their own range of anti-smell items.

And what about your house itself?

Do you use disinfectants, air fresheners, or deodorisers for your rooms, carpets, shoes, bins, toilet and dishwasher?

Do you notice a pattern? What's going on?

We have friends who ministered to indigenous people in a very remote part of Australia for a number of years.

For the first few months they were discouraged by the local people's apparent reluctance to have anything to do with them.

Finally they were able to break the silence with one of the men who told them that the people were afraid of them because they smelt like death.

They felt somewhat offended until they were given more information.

It seems that among the particular tribal group they were living with, it is the custom to anoint bodies only as part of the preparation for burial.

During the rest of their lives they choose to smell completely natural, believing that this is honouring to Mother Earth.

Small wonder they were suspicious of our friends' use of toiletries and cosmetics.

Only when our Western friends were willing to abandon all attempts to cover the smell of their humanity, were they able to build a bridge to the people they were trying to reach.

There's a lesson here for us.

We are all human, and as a consequence, we are all corrupted by sin.

Whether we like it or not, our sin stinks to heaven.

There is nothing we can do to overcome it, or to disguise its odour.

Sin follows us everywhere like, well, like a bad smell!

Only God has come up with a way to not only deodorise sin, but to eliminate it all together.

Isa 64:6 But we are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags; we all fade as a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.

Because Jesus, God's son, chose to allow His life to be taken in exchange for ours, and because God the Father accepted His sacrifice and opened His arms to us, we can be completely free of the stinking rags which is all our best efforts at righteousness amount to.

God gives us the invitation to come to Him, but we have to humble ourselves, and acknowledge the stench of our sinful human state.

Only then can we be transformed into a sweet fragrance for the Lord.

As we take this cup and this bread together, it reminds us of how much we need Jesus to cleanse us every day.