

Stand Firm

2 Thessalonians 2:15—17

Paul has been assuring the Thessalonians that even though they are experiencing tribulation, they are absolutely not going through the seven-year Tribulation. They were badly shaken by a false letter, claiming to be from the Apostle Paul, stating that they had missed the Rapture and were now experiencing the Tribulation. Paul reassured them that they could not be in the Tribulation because the antichrist had not yet been revealed (2 Thessalonians 2:3—5). He reminded them that he had told them these things when he was with them a few months previous to this (2 Thessalonians 2:5).

Hold to the traditions (verse 15)

The Thessalonians were fairly young in the faith. They had made some good progress in a very short time, but their lack of spiritual maturity caused them to waiver in what they believed. They had sat personally under Paul's teachings and had his first letter (1 Thessalonians) to reference and study. They nevertheless were drawn to believe teaching that was contrary to what Paul had originally taught them. They were easily moved to believe a lie because they took their eyes off of Paul's teaching (as given to him from Jesus Christ) and, I believe, were influenced by their experience of being persecuted.

To correct their error and give them back the hope they had lost, Paul emphasizes his former teachings, given to him by God (1 Thessalonians 2:13). It's from God's word that they not only received their faith, but also are able to grow up in their faith. It's through His word that they learned to love and care for one another and were able to put those things into practice through the power of the Holy Spirit. It's through their understanding of God's word that they had the hope of a future with Him in heaven without fear of having to go through the Tribulation. This is why it is critical for all believers to study and understand God's word, rightly divided. There are many who try to get closer to God through some emotional experience but shun getting to know Him through His word, the Bible. While creation reveals that there is a God, Scripture specifically tells us who God is and what He expects. Those who claim to have heard extra-biblical revelation are either deceived, or deceiving.

So, what are these traditions that Paul told the Thessalonians to hold to? In today's usage, traditions are generally thought of as customs that have been handed down. Many things done around Christmas time are customs that have been handed down from generation to generation. Many churches observe special occasions because they have traditionally been done that way. Often, church traditions evoke a negative connotation, especially among more "conservative" Christians. However, the modern usage of the word tradition is a little different than how the Bible uses the word.

The word "tradition" comes from the Greek word *paradoses* (G3862) and is interpreted as the English words tradition or ordinance. It has the idea of teaching that has been delivered. Scripture often uses this word in a negative sense, such as when referring to the traditions of the elders (Matthew 15:2—6; Galatians 1:14) or the traditions of men (Mark 7:8—9; Colossians 2:8). The Apostle Paul is the only one who uses this word in a positive manner. 1 Corinthians 11:2 says that they were to keep the ordinances, which is almost the same wording Paul used when to the Thessalonians in this lesson's Scripture passage (also see 2 Thessalonians 3:6). These traditions he's referring to are the teachings that he delivered to them, the very things he personally received from Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:1; 11).

This same admonition, to hold on to the traditions (teachings) of the Apostle Paul, is just as important for us today as it was for those in Thessalonica almost 2,000 years ago. The key for

living a life firmly and properly grounded in faith requires that we know Scripture, infuse ourselves in Scripture and apply Scripture in all aspects of our life. God uses His word and the power of the Holy Spirit indwelling us to live a life pleasing to the Lord (Colossians 1:9—10). Our whole Christian walk and life are completely dependant on Him working through us as we assimilate and apply Scripture to everyday living. Scripture is powerful because it IS the word of God, not that it contains the word of God as some teach. If only some of the Bible were God's word, then we would need to determine which part was God's and which was man's. Fortunately, we don't need to do that because it is all God's word.

The word "Scripture" (literally: writings) is often used as a synonym for "God's word." It specifically refers to God's written word, distinct from His other words that were given to various prophets but not written down. Jesus often refers to the Old Testament as Scripture (Matthew 22:29). We know that all Scripture is inspired by God (literally God breathed. It can be thought of as coming from the mouth of God; 2 Timothy 3:16) through the prophets (2 Peter 1:21). Notice that by comparing 2 Timothy 3:16 with 2 Peter 1:21 that the Holy Spirit is God.

Just as the Apostle Paul needed to assert his authority as an apostle and defend his ministry to the Gentiles, he also affirmed that the words he spoke were God's words. Peter agreed with Paul stating that Paul's writings are considered Scripture (2 Peter 3:16). 1 Corinthians 14:36—37 shows Paul saying that what he is writing is from God and those who are prophets or are spiritual will recognize that they are from God. He said this after giving instructions to the church at Corinth about how to properly speak in tongues and how women need to act in the church. These were instructions from God, not Paul.

The same can be said of Romans 10:17 where Paul said that faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. In order for people to believe, they need to hear the gospel, which is God's word. Although Paul is not directly saying here that his writings are God's words, he implies that they are. Obviously faith cannot come by hearing something other than God's word. It's interesting to note that Paul speaks of the word of Christ instead of the word of God (also see Colossians 3:16). This is a confirmation as to the deity of Jesus Christ. It also hints at the idea that he received these words directly from Jesus Christ, as promised to him when Jesus Christ came to him on the road to Damascus (Acts 26:15—18) and confirmed in Galatians 1:1 and 11.

In Colossians 1:25 Paul once again asserts that he is preaching the word of God, just as he was doing among the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 4:15). These passages show Paul was preaching the words that God gave him. The word he received from God is the sound doctrine that he passed on to faithful men who were able to teach others also (2 Timothy 2:2). He is forceful in declaring he is teaching and preaching God's word because there were others who were teaching things that were contrary (1 Timothy 1:3—7). These men were clueless when it came to spiritual things because they were not believers and didn't have the indwelling Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:12—13). Believers, on the other hand, are to be good servants or ministers (literally deacons) of Jesus Christ by being nourished in the words of faith and of good doctrine (1 Timothy 4:6). Notice that we are not to be seeking a good experience or seeking a particular ecstatic feeling, but we are to immerse ourselves into Scripture. This is how we grow closer to Christ. Paul never tells us to feel or experience God, but many times tells us to know Him and to study His word (1 Corinthians 1:5; 2:9—13; Ephesians 1:17—18; 3:3—4, 19; 4:13; Philippians 3:8—10; Colossians 1:9—10; Colossians 3:10; 2 Timothy 3:10—14). Those who seek a special experience from God do so because they either lack knowledge or the indwelling Holy Spirit (Romans 10:2).

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