

2 Thess 2:1-17 Correction for Misunderstanding the Parousia, part 4

We finally come to part 4 of our study in 2 Thess 2, where Paul is correcting some misunderstandings of the Parousia—i.e., the details regarding the 2nd Coming of Christ. Thus far we've seen...

- I. The Parousia should not cause anxieties. (2:1–2) There is no need to be “shaken in mind” or “troubled” about these things. The Day of the Lord has not yet come and it is not “at hand.”

We know that because...

- II. The Parousia will be preceded by apostasy. (2:3–12) There will be a great falling away and the man of sin/son of perdition (Antichrist) will be revealed. In response to unbelief, God will send unbelievers a strong delusion so that they believe the lies of the Antichrist. Jesus will destroy the Antichrist with his word when he returns in glory.
- III. The Parousia should produce steadfastness (2:13–17)

A correct understanding of the Parousia should bring stability and commitment to Christ. The Thessalonian believers must retain their faith in spite of the persecution and false teaching that had been plaguing them.

Last week we considered Paul's admonition to ...

- A. .13-14 Be steadfast in salvation.

God's love is evident toward the Thessalonian believers because God chose, sanctified, and called them. They responded by believing the truth of the Gospel.

Since believers demonstrate their faith through steadfast loyalty to the truth, Paul exhorts his readers to ...

- B. .15 Be steadfast in biblical traditions.

“therefore” (ἀρα οὖν) means “Accordingly then.” In light of God's love, sanctification, calling, and future glory with Christ, believers must stand firm in the faith.

Here is the human responsibility in response to what God has done in salvation—stand firm in the faith. Firmly and steadfastly retain the teaching they had received.

1. .15 They had received “the traditions.” (τας παραδοσεις)

A tradition is something handed over from one to another. In the ancient world, passing on traditions was very important. One's identity was often tied to his family and cultural traditions.

In this case, the traditions in view are the central truths of Christianity—the Gospel, the Christian faith. This is the teachings of Jesus and the apostles that Paul had taught them.

We are aware that the Bible sometimes uses the word “traditions” in a negative sense. E.g.,

Matthew 15:3, 6 *[Jesus] said to them, “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition? ... you have made the commandment of God of no effect by your tradition.*

Colossians 2:8 *Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, ... and not according to Christ.*

So some traditions can be a hindrance to the Gospel.

But Paul uses the word “tradition” in a positive sense here.

- a) Paul exhorts them to keep the traditions he had taught them (ἀς ἐδίδαχθητε) while he was there.
- b) .15b “by word” – Paul had spoken (δια λόγου) these things to them in person while he was there.

2 Thessalonians 2:5 *Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?*

- c) .15end “our epistle” – Paul had written letters to them (δι ἐπιστολης ἡμῶν) regarding these traditions.

Paul often exhorts us to retain his teaching.

Colossians 2:7 *rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.*

Titus 1:9 *holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.*

The NT tradition is made up of teachings that come directly from Jesus, one of the apostles, or associates of the apostles (e.g., Mark, Luke). Those are the only traditions that were given by inspiration and thus are authoritative. We base our faith and practice on these traditions and no others.

App: Our responsibility is to hold on to what we have been taught—as long as what we have learned is truly biblical and right. We hold on to biblical traditions.

Churches typically have various traditions. Some have lots of them; others have fewer. Some churches intentionally try not to multiply traditions. Virtually every church has some of them.

Illus.: We were in a church recently (for a piano recital) that had a cross and candles up in front of the pulpit.

How do we know which traditions are valuable? What traditions do we retain? Mostly, we retain those that come down to us through Jesus and the apostles. I.e., we keep the most biblical traditions. E.g., worship services, Bible reading and preaching, prayer, singing, baptism, LS. Other traditions—e.g., times of service, seasonal activities, programs, placement of a cross, etc.—are not necessary or authoritative.

We are obligated to retain the traditions that Jesus and the apostles passed down to the church.

Two viewpoints/models of how to handle traditions:

Regulative Principle of Worship

Normative Principle of Worship

Paul urges the Thessalonians to stand fast and hold on to the traditions that he had taught; that implies that our traditions ought to have biblical warrant. We should be able to validate our practices by appealing to the teachings of Jesus and the apostles.

Thus, unbiblical traditions, i.e., those that have no direct connection to biblical teaching—are not necessary. E.g., vestments, order of service, times of service, building arrangements, etc. – these have no apostolic authority.

2. They should stand fast (στηκετε) in those traditions that Paul had taught them. That means that we retain them tenaciously—firmly, steadfastly, without compromise.

We are morally obligated to know what the Bible teaches and keep on believing and practicing that way.

Sadly, many Christians in many churches are virtually ignorant of biblical traditions. They cannot even define the basic teachings of the Bible. They are very shallow in their understanding of the faith. Or they are seriously mistaken about the Christian faith.

App: We as a church must teach and stand fast in the biblical, apostolic teaching. We must learn it, adopt it, hold on to it, and teach it without changing it.

3. .15 They should hold (κρατεῖτε) the traditions—keep your grip on them.

Christianity is a received faith. That is, we do not make up new doctrines or new goals. We hold on to what we received. “If it’s true, it is not new. If it’s new, it is not true.”

The NT demands that we hold fast/hold on to/retain the doctrines and the practices passed down to us.

2 Tim 1:14 That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.

2 Tim 3:14 But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, ...

Tit 1:9 Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.

Quote: The intent of the apostle was to encourage the church to hold to established apostolic instruction and not be confused, alarmed, or (worst of all) won over by contradictory teachings.¹

App: Commands like this tell us that some traditions are very important. We hold biblical traditions so tenaciously because they came down to us from Jesus and the apostles. We do not have the right to change or modify the central teachings of the NT.

¹ D. Michael Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 33, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 257.

Note: Some churches hold traditions that are *not* rooted in the Bible. For example, the RCC uses this text to claim that Paul had given the church oral traditions not contained in the Bible, and the RCC has maintained these traditions over the centuries. They claim that some RC teaching is not found in the Bible but is a part of tradition. They claim that such traditions are just as authoritative as the Bible is.

The RCC and other churches believe in doctrinal development. That is, they say that the church should expect to adopt new doctrines and practices over time. New traditions develop, and the church authorizes these practices and beliefs.

E.g., the traditions pertaining to Mary: the immaculate conception of Mary, the ascension of Mary, Mary as a mediator between God and man—they have no basis in Scripture, but they crept into the church slowly and eventually became authorized tradition. RCs adopt these new teachings as doctrine/dogma.

We simply do not believe such claims. We do not put any stock in supposed oral traditions passed down from the apostles without being written down. We do not expect doctrinal development. All of our beliefs must be soundly rooted and grounded in the Bible. If doctrines and traditions have no biblical basis, then we simply do not grant them divine authority; they are not inspired or required.

The church might recover or rediscover biblical teachings that have been neglected over the years. The church might reform and get back to those biblical doctrines that have been corrupted through neglect or error. But the goal is always to observe and believe the traditions handed down to us from Jesus and the apostles.

Those traditions rooted in biblical truth are permanent and valuable. We must retain them closely and continue doing them. We must stand fast in the teachings of the NT and hold on to them without apology.

And we must pass them down to the next generations. That's what we do with authoritative traditions—we pass them down. We hold on to them tenaciously during our lives and make every effort to pass them down to the next generation.

We should all be striving to learn the NT teachings, adopt them, understand them, hold on to them, and teach them to the next generations. That requires that we know the Bible and retain our commitment to what it teaches.

We do that as a church, and we ought to be doing that as families as well.

C. .16-17 Be steadfast in grace and work.

Paul finishes the chapter with a prayer that God would grant them the comfort of God's love, hope, and grace. God's love and grace should establish us in every good word and work.

Vs. 16 is a good Trinitarian passage; it shows quite clearly the distinctions between two of the Persons of the Trinity. We see here both the unity of the two Persons and the distinctions between them. The two Persons are plural, but the pronouns and verbs are singulars. That strongly implies the Trinitarian nature of God.

.17 The Thessalonians were shaken in mind and troubled, but if they understand the truth of what Paul is teaching them, they should find comfort and stability.

.17 Paul's main focus in the prayer is that God would encourage and strengthen them for "every good word and work."

A proper understanding of eschatology should ease our minds and motivate us toward good words and good works. We have the strength for good words and deeds as we stand fast and firm in the clear teaching of God's word.

Quote: Paul did not pray for the elimination of the wicked who afflicted the church. ... But in the midst of wickedness, error, and opposition, he prayed that the church would persist in "every good deed and word."²

² D. Michael Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 33, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 260.

Like the original readers of this letter, we must also stand fast and hold on to the traditions that we received from Jesus and the apostles. That tradition is essentially, the NT.

The threat for us is not persecution; our threat is apathy, neglect, and false teaching. The threat is that we would drop biblical traditions or that we would corrupt the tradition. Churches commonly preach another gospel; they do not retain what Jesus and the apostles passed down to us. That is a great danger, and we must “stand fast and hold” the biblical traditions we have been taught. And we do that by continually searching the Scripture to see if what we believe is true (Acts 17:11).

Every generation has to receive the biblical traditions, hold on to them, and pass them down to the next generation. Those traditions give us stability; they prevent us from being shaken in mind and troubled. As we stand fast and hold the traditions passed down to us, God will comfort our hearts and establish us for every good word and work.