

## Love, Traditions and Truth

22<sup>nd</sup> Sun. after Pent. – 11/09/25 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: 1 Thessalonians 2:1-8, 13-17 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 15 [Literal translation from the Greek – Paul says,] **“Therefore then, brothers, stand firm and grasp strongly the truths handed down that you were taught either through our word or through our letter.”**

### **Introduction**

- ✧ Trevor and Jenny had the first argument of their marriage. It happened around Christmas and had to do with the traditions handed down through each of their families’ generations. Trevor’s family celebrated Christmas on Christmas Eve. They had a huge family dinner, opened presents, and then went to the midnight candlelight service.
  - ➔ Jenny’s family celebrated Christmas on Christmas Day. They got up early, opened presents, went to church, and then had a generous Christmas brunch.
  - ➔ Both of them remembered their family traditions with deep love, which meant that neither of them wanted to try something new.
- ✧ So, their first Christmas as husband and wife, because they couldn’t come to an agreement, they tried to satisfy both families. They opened some gifts on Christmas Eve and some on Christmas Day. They had a huge family dinner with Trevor’s family and a huge family brunch with Jenny’s family.
  - ➔ In the end, they were exhausted. Christmas wasn’t satisfying for either one of them because it seemed like they spent just as much time in between the families as they did at either one.
  - ➔ It wasn’t until after they moved for Jenny’s job that they began to fall into a pattern of their own; an early Christmas Eve service, a family dinner, and then gifts.
  - ➔ As they later looked back, they shook their heads at how stubborn they both had been and how deeply angry they were with each other. They realized now that each one had selfishly loved their own manmade traditions, and that had kept them from being able to properly love the truth of Christ’s birth as well as their love for each other.
- ✧ I suspect that you have all had some variation on this kind of argument as well. It may not have been about Christmas, but perhaps it was about how to celebrate a birthday or how to discipline children or how to plan a family vacation.
  - ➔ Of course these things affect more than just individual families. Similar difficulties find their way into the family of Christ and often affect His entire church in dramatic ways.
- ✧ Look, traditions – those practices that we pass down from generation to generation are important in our lives together. Traditions are often the ways that we learn to experience and share God’s love with one another.
  - ➔ But sometimes, those manmade traditions of love can become too important; so important, in fact, that we find ourselves loving the traditions more than we love the truths that those traditions are supposed to be teaching to us. And then ironically, we get angry and we end up fighting about a tradition to the point that we lose or turn away from our love for the truth of Christ.
- ✧ It is to this type of church family that God brings His message today in our Epistle reading. God encourages us not to leave His handed-down truth because of our deep love for manmade traditions, but instead to love His truth so that we practice traditions that are filled with His love.

### **I. Don’t leave God’s handed-down truths.**

- ✘ In our text, Paul is working with a newly formed Christian church that is trying to figure out its traditions. The church in Thessalonica had a rough beginning.
  - ➔ It was on Paul's second missionary journey that he visited Thessalonica; preaching in their synagogue. But he was only able to stay for a short time, because the Jews in that town became "jealous" of Paul's teaching about Jesus (Acts 17:5). So he had to leave for his own safety. Still, Paul was deeply concerned about this church start. Had he been able to hand down enough of God's truth for them to survive the persecution they faced? Was Paul there long enough to help them establish faithful traditions of the faith?
- ✘ You see, Paul heard that they were being tempted to believe that Jesus has already returned. Paul had taught them what to look for; what had to happen before Jesus could return when he was there in their midst. That's why in verse five he says, "Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?"
  - ➔ But instead of holding on to Paul's teaching, they were leaving it behind. It's easy to understand their confusion, because verse two says that someone else had either "prophesied" or taught or written a letter to them – making it seem like it was coming from Paul with a new teaching. This led them to be "quickly shaken in mind or alarmed" (v.2) so that they were letting go of the true Christian teaching and tradition Paul had given them.
- ✘ So Paul writes them here in his second letter and he calls on them not to be so easily swayed from the handed down truths of Jesus, but instead to hold on to the established truths and practices; those teachings and the traditions he had given them (v 5). Paul knew how important it is for Christians, then and now, to hold on to the teachings and practices of the faith rather than leave them behind.

## II. Don't "love" manmade traditions

- ✘ But here's the thing: just as some people too quickly and too easily leave the passed-down teachings and truths of God, others can fall in love with and hold on too rigidly to the traditions of man. Paul shows us that God's people have struggled throughout history with loving their traditions even more than they love God.
  - ➔ Throughout the history of Israel, God corrects His people when they do this. In Isaiah, chapter one, God calls Israel to repentance for believing that all God expected of them was that they perform their earthly traditions. "Your new moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates," declares God. "Seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow's cause" (Is. 1:14, 17). You see, God's people had become so focused on their "traditions" of worship that they failed to actually engage in the life of His kingdom; not caring for the oppressed and the suffering and the widows as He taught them to do.
- ✘ In Jesus' day we see a similar situation. Jesus often corrected the religious leaders when they loved their Jewish traditions more than God (Mk. 7:1–13). And that correction was met with resistance. They refused to listen to Jesus' loving correction to the point that the religious leaders even looked for a way to kill Jesus.
  - ➔ Just imagine that: they're gathering in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover; what is supposed to be the holiest day of their faith and yet their selfish love for their own manmade laws and traditions corrupts them so that they are consumed with plans to kill Jesus instead. They may be keeping the tradition of Passover but all the while they are murdering their God. So, you could actually say that Jesus died because of our love of tradition.
- ✘ But that's not the end of the story. Jesus also died and rose because of God's love for you and me and all of His people. On that same Passover, God the Father sent Jesus, His Son, to take

our place under His judgment of sin, so that He could rise from the dead and bring us into new life in the kingdom under Him.

➔ And now in this letter from Paul to the new Christians in Thessalonica, we see that this same risen and ascended Lord now sends His apostle, Paul, to teach and encourage Christians in every generation to fully embrace and participate in the timeless truths and traditions of His Gospel love.

➔ It's not that God wants us to leave our Christian traditions – far from it. It's just that we are not to love our traditions more than we love God. Instead He calls on us to carefully practice the handed-down traditions in both His truth and love.

### **III. Hold Fast the Truths of His Love**

✧ Yes, in this text today, Paul directs God's people to a better; more faithful way. Rather than allowing themselves to be "so quickly shaken" and turned away from the established teaching that Paul handed down to them about the second coming of Christ, Paul directs the Thessalonians in verse 15, as we find it literally in the original Greek, to "stand firm and grasp strongly the truths handed down that you were taught either through our word or through our letter."

➔ The Greek word that many English Bibles have as "traditions" is "παράδοσις" (paradosis) and it refers to Christian truths and doctrine that was handed down from generation to generation. Theologians actually think that Paul is referencing here an early catechism that was based on the teachings of Jesus Himself.

✧ Paul makes a point in the surrounding verses of his call to the Thessalonians to emphasize God's unending love for these new believers in Christ.

➔ He assures them in verse 13 that God the Father "chose" them to be some of the "firstfruits" for salvation when He sent Paul to them to proclaim and pass on to them the Gospel of truth. Not only that, but he assures them that God the Spirit is working to set them apart from those who are rejecting Jesus and His saving work, by sanctifying and strengthening them in the one true faith.

➔ Still more, Paul reminds them again that God the Son has been raised from the dead to His eternal rule in glory, and that He will work to comfort their hearts and establish them in their Christian lives until the day when Jesus does actually return. It is still our Christian duty today; that we be "established ... in every good work and word," as verse 17 says.

➔ Just as the triune God worked through the word and traditions passed down through Paul, so He is still at work for the salvation of His people; of you and me today through the same Word and the same traditions of truth that we have received in and through His Church.

### **Conclusion**

✧ Bud's wife died two years ago. If you were to talk to him, he would tell you how difficult the transition has been to the way his life is now without her. "I'm a different person," he once said. "It's like I woke up one morning and someone had removed one of my limbs. I don't want to live without a limb, but it's the only way forward for me."

➔ One of the things that gets Bud through his day is his afternoon coffee and devotion. He sits in the chair his wife used to sit in, and he uses one of the many devotional books she had on the shelf. Before her death, Bud never read devotional books. That was *her* tradition; what she did in the morning after breakfast. He wasn't against it. It just didn't work for him. But now, he has picked up and follows her example. In the afternoon, he makes a cup of coffee and sits in her chair and reads one of her books and spends time in thought and prayer. Though he may not

realize it, Bud has picked up a “tradition” that his wife passed on to him; a tradition filled both with truth and love.

- ✘ Just as Paul’s life set an example for the Thessalonians, so your lives and mine have the possibility of becoming a tradition of truth and love for others. It may be the way you treat your coworkers at the office; it may be how you raise your children; it may be how you keep a list of people to pray for during the week or the way that you teach others about Jesus in your daily conversations.

➔ As you and I remember the past and prepare for the future, we all have certain truths and traditions that we cultivate each day. At the heart of our Christian traditions is the love that God poured out for all people in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

- ✘ My dear people, may Jesus always be at the heart of our traditions, so that we never love our traditions more than we love God and His saving truth. And just as Jesus holds fast to us in His saving grace, may you and I always “stand firm and grasp strongly the truths” and the traditions He has handed down to us in His Gospel of love. Amen.