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A1128 – July 10, 2011 – 2 Thessalonians 2:15-17
Stand Firm & Hold The Truth

I made an announcement last week that it is my conclusion from watching what has been going on at this Church the last 6-8 months that we are facing satanic attacks and/or trials, which often go hand in hand and are hard to distinguish. And then people wanted to know during the week what was going on. I don't know who you are, I don't know your names, but I do know it was going on. And here's what I have to say about it. It's not your business what's going on. It's the peoples' business that are involved in these things, whoever they may be, and that's not public information. If it was public information I would have shared it; it's private information and I'm not going to violate their privacy to satisfy your little desire to know. My point was to alert you to the fact that we are facing satanic attacks and/or trials on a number of fronts. And I want you alert so you don't bite somebody's head off and start more problems. I'm trying to keep unity in this church body so little things don't turn into big things that can cause a church to split. I have taught the word at this church for seven years and I intend to keep teaching it. And as your teacher I am asking you to do what the word of God says, keep unity, make every effort to preserve unity in the bond of peace, do good to all men, walk by the Spirit, solve problems by the word of God, pray and so forth. So if you are not involved in any of these circumstances that's good, be glad you're not involved and don't get involved, mind your own business, but don't go around like a busybody trying to pry into everything. Your job isn't to pry, your job is to pray and if you have some spirituality that's what you'll do. And I don't want to hear that stuff coming to me anymore. That's baby stuff, grow up.

Now we are trying to finish 2 Thess 2. Error had crept into this congregation and Paul is correcting that Error. Paul actually was very concerned about correcting doctrine because Paul actually realized what most modern idiot

believers do not realize, that doctrine is essential to application. Most people see no connection and it's evidenced by the fact of how many times you have heard people say, it doesn't matter what you believe it's how you live. Paul would have laughed his head off at such a notion. Paul actually used his brain and if you use your brain you can see that any action can be traced back to the circuitry of beliefs in your mind. Everyone has doctrine, everyone has a set of beliefs and Paul is evidencing here that it is extremely critical that we have the right doctrine, the right set of beliefs, otherwise he wouldn't waste 12 verses correcting this Error.

Now what Error was he correcting? The error that the day of the Lord had come and the Thessalonians were in it. Now if that were the case then you would get the reaction Paul mentions in verse 2: you would be shaken and disturbed because the day of the Lord is God's extreme wrath. It is the most horrible time of judgment coming upon the world and now these believers think they are in it. So yes, they are very disturbed by this teaching. So Paul in verse 3 reassures them that they are not in the day of the Lord because the *apostasia* must come first, that is the Rapture, the departure of all church age believers. That's the heart of Paul's correction. You can't be in the day of the Lord because the Rapture has to come first, then the day of the Lord will come upon the world of unbelievers. He then develops that argument on down to verse 12 and then in verse 13 he reminds them that we should give thanks to God that we are believers and will not enter that time and the reason is because God has saved us to the utmost. This is perhaps the single greatest passage on salvation so far as breadth of things God has done for us. He tells us what God has done for us before time, what He has done for us in time and what He will do for us in future time. Let's read. **But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth; it was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.** Look at how he just cascades very rapidly through the whole series of salvation truths. This is a marvelous order of salvation presented here. It starts in the before time election of God, God chose some to reveal His mercy. He did not choose others, He just left them so as to reveal His justice, it moves to the in time setting apart by the Holy Spirit, how He worked in your life pre-salvation through this person and that event and another person, all preparatory work that brought you to faith in the truth,

and then it moves to the ultimate purpose of the in time work of the Spirit, it was for this He called you through our gospel, through gospel preaching, which is entirely significant, for this ultimate goal, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. That very clearly is Paul's way of depicting our resurrection at the rapture. We should give thanks to God for this so great salvation.

People don't think about it but do you realize that if you are a believer here today you were forever in the mind of God intimately associated with Him? And did you realize that while that is wonderful it was not enough? God wanted to create a historical world through which He would create you and set you apart unto Him by the Holy Spirit and that He, as the first gospel preacher, sent people to preach the gospel to you by which He would call you to Himself? And He did this so as to clothe you with radiant light in resurrection? That is what our God has done for us. And don't ever forget it! Chalk this up as a great passage to memorize for the doctrine of salvation. It gets you God oriented, it gets the idea of I have my works here and I'm going to impress God with my works all out of the way and it brings the object of our salvation in focus, God.

Now today in verse 15 we come to the inference. They used to teach logic. I'm not sure they do that anymore, they're too busy teaching sex education to twelve year olds and then providing means through Planned Parenthood, but they used to teach people logic. And here we have an inference in the Greek text. An inference is a logical conclusion that can be drawn from a set of premises. The premises may be true or false, in this case they are true, and the premises are in vv 13-14, the logical inference is v 15. So the premises are the set of truths related to God's so great salvation, all that He has done for you from beginning to end. And the logical inference is that we ought to stand firm and hold on to the truth. Put another way, if God has done such great things for you then you ought to stand firm on His truth, you ought to hold on tight to the traditions which you were taught. It's not a little thing God has done for you; it's a magnanimous thing He has done for you. It's the biggest thing anyone has ever done for you or ever will do for you.

So therefore, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us. In contrast to verse 2, the words and letters *as if* from us Paul now refers to the

words and letters actually from us. There is always false teaching and there is always true teaching, there is always false letters and there is always true letters. The Thessalonians had some of both. And Paul is commanding them to stand firm and hold on to the traditions why they were taught orally and in written form by Paul, Silas and Timothy. So this refers to anything Paul, Silas and Timothy taught by way of lecture, they taught in Thessalonica for about 21 days, and it refers to the letter of 1 Thessalonians. And he's saying stand firm and hold on to all of that teaching which he calls **traditions**.

Now for **tradition** - since that word bothers people. First of all there is nothing wrong with tradition. The Bible is not against tradition. That may shock you but if the Bible were against tradition then how could verse 15 say stand firm and hold to tradition? To see another passage that is pro-tradition turn to 1 Cor 11:2. Many Christians are outright against tradition but the Bible is not. And as we go through these verses you'll see why. Verse 2, "Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you." So again, nothing wrong with tradition, Paul praises them for holding firmly to them. The Bible is not them. And if you drop down to verse 23, "For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread;" and here you don't see the noun tradition but you see the verb. What's the main verb? "I delivered," *paradidomi*, that's the action and it means "to hand something down," that's what the verb means, and if you go back up to verse 2 now you'll see both the verb and the noun, "Now I praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions," there's the noun, "just as I delivered them to you." There's the verb. The noun *paradosis* just means "the thing handed down," "some content handed down," the verb is the actual handing down or delivering of the content. So content can be handed down that is right. And this is what we are to hold on to. These are all pro-tradition verses.

But now let me show you some anti-tradition verses. So our second point is that the Bible is against some tradition. Turn to Mark 7. Mark records a confrontation between the Pharisees and Jesus. In verse 3 you see that the Pharisees "observe the tradition of the elders" and they're upset because Jesus' disciples don't observe the tradition of the elders. So they're going to be a collision over this point. And it goes into all these little do's and don'ts and you better wash your hands with your left arm behind your back and all the

other baloney they legislated. And notice verse 6, this is how Jesus preached sermons, “Rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites,” how’s that for an opener. I guarantee you Jesus didn’t learn that in homiletics class. “as it is written: ‘THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME.’” Verse 7, ‘BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME, TEACHING AS DOCTRINES THE PRECEPTS OF MEN.’ So now we’re seeing a divide, verse 8, “Neglecting the commandment of God, you hold to the tradition of men.”⁹ He was also saying to them, “You are experts at setting aside the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.” They were well-trained in the nuances of language and they knew how to put a spin on the text. They were all lawyers, ivy league lawyers and the game was we can’t keep the OT Law so Jesus says, you set aside the word of God and replaced it with the tradition of men. A sharp rebuke. This passage shows there are passages that are anti-tradition.

To see another one turn to Col 2:8. One of the great verses of the NT. “See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ.” So again, tradition is cast in a negative light, do not be taken captive through seductive philosophy, this passage really has to do with the dangers of thinking in terms of the categories erected by humanistic thought rather than the categories firmly established by Jesus Christ in hypostatic union. Jesus Christ Himself is the Creator and creature in one person, without confusion forever, He is the basis for proper categories of human thought. So again we are warned against the tradition of men.

Turn to Gal 1:14 to see one more passage that is interesting and casts some light on the issue. This is Paul recapitulating his history. Paul had an interesting life and we all know he spent his earlier life training in Judaism. In verse 13 he says, “For you have heard of my former manner of life in Judaism, how I used to persecute the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it;¹⁴ and I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.” So evidently, whatever these traditions were they were hostile to the traditions of Christianity! And we know Paul was a Pharisee, or studying to be one, and some people think he was already on the Council of the Sanhedrin which was the top 70 rabbi’s. So he would have been directly

opposed to Christ in Mark 7 and Christ would have been directly opposed to Paul and his ancestral traditions. But he converted to Christianity and adopted a new set of traditions and he in fact is writing some of those traditions as we find in 2 Thess 2:15.

So let's turn back to 2 Thess 2 and we'll review what we have said. We have said the word *paradosis*, tradition, refers to "content or instruction handed down." It may be oral, it may be written, and the means doesn't matter. It may be good content it may be bad content. 9 times in the NT it is bad content (Matt 15:2, 3, 6; Mk 7:3, 5, 8, 9, 13; Gal 1:14; Col 2:8), 4 times it is good content (2 Thess 2:15; 3:6; 1 Cor 11:2, 23). What are we to conclude? We are to conclude that *the value of tradition lies in the source of the content*. This shouldn't be too hard. Think about journalism; what's the issue in good journalism? You have to have a good source. If you have a bad source then you get bad information and somebody sues you and you go out of business. Source is everything. So before you publish you better ask yourself, is this source reliable? And naturally that question involves another question. Is the source an authority on the subject? Are they an expert? So *underlying the value of source is the authority of the source*. Are they an authority or are they conjurer? So the ultimate issue is the question of authority.

Now very clearly from the NT evidence I think we can conclude that the tradition that is the word of God has the authority of God behind it and therefore has positive value, but tradition that is of man has only the authority of man behind it and therefore has negative value, indeed it even negates the word of God. And it is very dangerous. It is dangerous to follow the doctrines of men because they manipulate, twist, distort and finally negate the word of God. That is what we can conclude from the NT. What can we extrapolate down into our own time so far as application is concerned? I think we can say that if the word of God was negated by the traditions of the Pharisees then the word of God is negated by the traditions of Roman Catholicism.

See, right here is the basic difference between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism; authority. We want to capitalize on this. This is a major difference. As Loraine Boettner puts it, "the age long controversy between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism comes to a head regarding the question of authority. Right here... Is the basic difference between

Protestantism and Roman Catholicism..." What does this mean? It means that Rome has two authorities and Protestantism only has one. Rome has the Bible and tradition, Protestantism has only the Bible. Rome "maintains that alongside of the written word there is also an unwritten word, an oral tradition, which was taught by Christ and the apostles but which is not in the Bible, which rather was handed down generation after generation by word-of-mouth. This unwritten word of God, it is said, comes to expression in the pronouncements of the church councils and papal decrees. It takes precedence over the written word and interprets it." A very important sentence, that last sentence is vital. Understand what this means, "It [traditions of Rome] takes precedence over the written word and interprets it." What do you mean it interprets it? Roman Catholics hold that there are two sources of authority: Scripture and developing tradition, with the church being the judge of Scripture and therefore able to say authoritatively what the right interpretation of Scripture is. "This, in effect, gives three authorities: the Bible, tradition, and the church. The primacy is in the hands of the church since it controls both tradition and the interpretation of Scripture. This, therefore, is the basis on which the Roman system rests... In actual practice, the traditions of the church at any time are what the church says they are, Scripture means what the church says it means, and the people are permitted to read the Bible only in an approved version and within the limits of a predetermined interpretation." By this it "becomes an instrument in the hands of the clergy for the control of the people... The Roman church in reality places tradition above the Bible, so that the Roman Catholic is governed, not by the Bible, nor by the Bible and tradition, but by the church itself which sets up the tradition and says what it means..." That is vital. The church is in the final analysis the authority because the church pronounces what the Scriptures say. Any non-approved interpretation is cast aside as heresy as Martin Luther and many others learned.

"To cite but one example of what this means in actual practice, while the Roman Catholic Church in professing allegiance to the Bible must agree with the Protestant churches that there is "one mediator also between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus" (I Tim. 2:5), she introduces a host of other mediators – the Virgin Mary, the priests, and hundreds of saints and angels – which effectively sets aside the truths contained in Scripture statement." See how the game is played. It's the same game the Pharisees played. They created their tradition and their tradition negated the word of God. So what

Rome says, as at the Council of Trentin 1546, in response to the reformers they "declared that the word of God is contained both in the Bible and in tradition, that the two are of equal authority, and that it is the duty of every Christian to record them equal veneration and respect." But for that to be true, both the Bible and tradition have to agree. You can't rightly have the Bible saying there is one mediator between God and man, Christ Jesus and tradition saying there are hundreds.

Wherein do Protestants differ? Protestants do not reject all tradition, but rather subject it to Scripture. Is this tradition founded on truth? For instance we study the great formulations of truth encased in the early Church creeds and confessions, particularly those of the ancient church and of Reformation days. We give careful attention to the confessions and counsel decisions of the present-day churches, scrutinizing most carefully of course those of the denomination to which we belong. But in this procedure we always subject them to Scripture. Church leaders, scholars, pastors and councils can and do make mistakes, some of them serious. Consequently their writings must always be subjected to the authority of Scripture. If found contrary to Scripture they should be rejected.

The Bible is always first and never must tradition be elevated to the level of the Bible, for in doing so history has shown that the tradition will be given a status higher than the Bible and will stand in judgment over it.

It should be evident that Rome is a modern Pharisaism and were the Lord here today He would rebuke it in the same way, as negating the word of God and replacing it with the precepts of men. Where, for example, do you find the most prominent doctrines and practices of the Roman church, such as purgatory, the priesthood, the mass, transubstantiation, the immaculate conception, prayers for the dead, indulgences, pendants, worship of the Virgin Mary, the use of images in worship, holy water, rosary beads, celibacy of priests and nuns, the papacy itself, and numerous others? These are all based on tradition. If you search the Bible for confirmation of these doctrines you will find either absolute silence or a total negation. The Bible, for instance, has nothing to say about the pope or the papacy as an institution; and it is emphatic and uncompromising in its commands against the use of images or idols worship. It is natural that the Roman church does not want to give up

tradition. It cannot. If it were to give up tradition the whole system would fall to the ground.

As such we must conclude that what Paul speaks of in our passage as that tradition is nothing more or less than the word of God itself. But that conclusion raises a peculiar question. Was Paul conscious that he was writing Scripture? If Paul can pronounce the veritableness of his oral and written teaching, as he does here, then he undoubtedly considers them on the same level of authority as Scripture, even as Scripture itself.

Let's turn to 2 Pet 3:15-16. There are a few passages that give insight into this question. Was Paul cognizant he was writing Scripture? In 2 Pet 3:15, starting in the middle of the verse with Paul. "Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, ¹⁶as also in all *his* letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction." There's no question from the adjectival use of "the rest" as modifying the Scriptures that Peter recognized Paul's writings as Scripture. If Scripture is taken as referring primarily to the OT then Paul's writings in the NT are put on the same level of authority as Scripture, and as Scripture itself. It does seem that Paul was aware, along with Peter and the other apostles, that his writings were divinely inspired Scripture.

But how, how did Paul know this? And how did others come to know this? Turn to Acts 9, Paul's conversion on the Damascus Road. In Acts 9 Saul is still breathing threats of murder against the disciples of the Lord. He's on his way to destroy the disciples at Damascus. In verse 5-6 the Lord appears to Him and reveals to him early church truth; namely, that by persecuting Christians Saul is somehow persecuting Christ. And this gets into the truth of the church as the body of Christ, a very early proto-revelation of the body of Christ. In verse 6 he's going to be told what he must do. So the Lord Jesus Christ has a mission for Saul. Come on down to verse 15, Ananias is arguing with the Lord over commissioning Saul for this work and the Lord says, get out of here, "for he is a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; ¹⁶for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name's sake." So obviously Paul has a mission to fulfill, it's very broadly sketched here, but the Lord is the author of the mission.

Turn to Gal 1:11. Years later we want to get Paul's commentary on what took place on the Damascus Road. He says in verse 11, "For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. ¹²For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but *I received it* through a revelation of Jesus Christ." So we learn that Paul received revelation directly from Jesus Christ. That makes Paul a prophet. He's getting direct, verbal revelation. We suspect he got much more, if you come down to verse 15, "But when God, who had set me apart *even* from my mother's womb and called me through His grace, was pleased" see Paul recognizes that God has a before time plan that He actuates in time. What was the plan? Verse 16, "to reveal His Son in me so that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with flesh and blood," now here Paul is knocking down some charges that had been leveled against him, Verse 17, "nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me; but I went away to Arabia, and returned once more to Damascus." What's his argument? I didn't get my message from men, I got it directly from the Lord Jesus Christ. Verse 18, "Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem to become acquainted with Cephas, and stayed with him fifteen days. ¹⁹But I did not see any other of the apostles except James, the Lord's brother." So it's all denying that the message he was preaching was sourced in man, he's arguing it was sourced in God.

Come on down to 2:2, Paul has a lot more to say, "It was because of a revelation that I went up;" that's up to Jerusalem, so now he's going up to the authorities in Jerusalem, "and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but *I did so* in private to those who were of reputation, for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain." So he goes in to Peter, James and John, he says, this is the gospel I'm preaching, do you have a problem with that? And they all said no, that's the same gospel we preach. They got it from the Lord Jesus Christ directly and Paul got it from the Lord Jesus Christ directly, so you have multiple avenues the Lord is revealing the gospel so as to confirm it in history, that this is the gospel and there is no other gospel. So we got all that clear, now come down to verse 11. Peter's not the first pope but if he was then the first pope was far from infallible because he got a lashing right here from Paul. "But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned." That means Paul got up in his face and took him to school. Peter was denying the gospel of justification by faith, he was the first pope that rejected the doctrine of

justification by faith, and he hasn't been the last. They all deny it for another gospel, which isn't really another, for there is no other. The point I'm trying to get at is that Paul was aware he was writing Scripture.

For the last and most compelling passage turn to 2 Cor 13:3. Now he's talking in the context of church discipline. Paul had some insight as to who was sinning in these congregations and he says when I return I'm going to spank you. It's really quite interesting. He has a very authoritative tone and there's no doubt in Paul's mind, but there may have been in others, so he says in verse 3, "since you are seeking for proof of the Christ who speaks in me," he says, you want proof that I'm speaking the word of Jesus Christ, when I get there I'll give you the proof. And evidently he did.

Alright, let's go back to 2 Thess 2:15 and we'll try to wrap up. It's very interesting that these guys knew they were writing the word of God, they knew they were vessels, yet they used their own vocabulary, they spoke out of their own background, but in the final analysis they wrote the very word of God. That's why he says in verse 15, **So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.** Because what he taught them was Scripture. It was the very word of God and he received it by revelation. So the **traditions** that he is commanding them to stand firm upon and hold tightly on to are not traditions of men, they are the Scriptures themselves that were coming through Paul. And not only Paul, notice he doesn't say they came from *me*, he says they came from *us*, that adds Silas and Timothy. I'm not sure how all theologians handle this so far as the canon of Scripture is concerned but I will make a few comments from F. F. Bruce who wrote the greatest work on the Canon of Scripture. He says, "Authority precedes canonicity; had the words of the Lord and his apostles not been accorded supreme authority, the written record of their words would never have been canonized." He's saying there that we would never have had this book if the lord and his apostles were not recognized as having absolute authority. It never could have happened. No other book, no other author in the history of the world has the kind of textual evidence that this book has, it's far and away all alone and by itself, nothing is even close. Stand firm on it, hold tightly on to it. Don't listen to all the frauds out there. Fraud's are a dime a dozen. The truth, this is it. We would say then that the authority that lay behind the source of the tradition that Paul speaks of in verse 15 is the

authority of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and is therefore accorded the highest status of all writings, the equivalent of all that God has accorded to preserve for us in the canon of Old and NT Scripture, the Roman apocrypha excluded.

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