

*2 Thessalonians 2:15-17***PREFACE**

I have just finished a biography of Benjamin Franklin, and during his long life he held to one overriding principle—that there was no principle above compromise. In our hallowed group of national forefathers Franklin was the great compromiser; no position held by anyone was above negotiating a middle-ground with another position. During heated debate in the Second Continental Congress and the writing of the Declaration of Independence, the peace negotiations with Britain, and the Constitutional Convention of 1787 to formulate the nation's Constitution, Franklin was the one who—to put it into our vernacular—would say, “Can't we all just get along?” Franklin was the reliable conciliator during the many negotiations to establish this union of disparate states, as well as establish the brand new United States of America in the rest of the world.

Thus it should not be surprising that Franklin had no firm convictions regarding faith. He had, over his lifetime, what the recent biographer Walter Isaacson calls an “amorphous faith in a benevolent God” For him practical benefits always took precedent over spirituality, and this comes out in “his final summation of his religious thinking...the month before he died.”

“I believe in one God, Creator of the Universe. That he governs it by his Providence. That he ought to be worshipped. That the most acceptable service we render him is doing good to his other children.” [When buttonholed by the specific question regarding] whether he believed in Jesus, he answered that the system of morals that Jesus provided was “the best the world ever saw or is likely to see.” But on the issue of whether Jesus was divine, he provided a surprisingly candid and wry response. “I have,” he declared, “some doubts as to his divinity; though it is a question I do not dogmatize upon, having never studied it, and think it needless to busy myself with it now, when I expect soon an opportunity of knowing the truth with less trouble.”

In less time than he may have anticipated—less than a month—that opportunity arrived for Franklin. And I have no doubt that in the end “knowing the truth” caused him more trouble than he had expected.

In v15 of our passage in this session the apostle Paul takes a different position. Those who call themselves Christians cannot compromise with the things of this world; they cannot compromise with other belief systems, other faiths. Followers of Jesus Christ—the Christ whom Benjamin Franklin realized just moments after he closed his eyes for the last time was indeed divine—are to stand firm on the precepts of their faith. There can be no “getting along.”

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:15.

I can think of no command by Paul more pertinent to our time. This society demands not just compromise, but that *Christians* be the ones to always bend, to change, to adapt to someone *else's* belief system. So v15 has direct application to our situation today.

So then, brethren, stand firm

"Stand firm" (*steko*) means just that: literally (be stationary, standing upright) or figuratively (standing fast, not bending, persevere). Paul states it even more forcefully in his first letter to the Corinthians.

Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong.
(1 Corinthians 16:13)

Think of standing in a river against a strong current, and leaning into it to remain where you are, rather than giving into the flow and being carried downstream.

stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught

Paul adds to "stand firm," *krateo*, which means to seize or retain something; it can mean seizing to arrest, used in the narrative of Christ's apprehension in the garden. Behind it is the idea of using strength. Put together we have a picture of strong, active resolve to stand for faith in Christ.

Notice that Paul in this letter, however, does not say that; he says that they are to "stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught." And then he defines for them which traditions he refers to.

the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.

Sidebar: All but the KJVs add either "by mouth" or "spoken" (ESV) because *logos* (word) is typically used to refer to something *said*.

Now I think it is necessary to translate "traditions" from our vernacular to that of the first century Greek. Probably the first thing that comes to mind for any of us when we hear the word "traditions" is *the way we've always done things around here*. Most of us at one time or another have done battle with traditions—more accurately, *traditionalism*—in the church. It can be a hot-button word.

Back in the mid-eighties, when I first sat in on a planning meeting for a church musical, and began offering some of my own ideas, I remember to this day one of the women there expressing in no uncertain terms that "That's not how we do it here."

That's not what Paul is saying; that is not what "traditions" means here.

traditions = *paradosis* (par-ahd'-oh-sis) = from <G3860> (paradidomi); **transmission, i.e. (concrete) a precept**; specially the Jewish traditionary law :- ordinance, tradition.

The key to understanding how the word "traditions" is being used is right here in our text, beginning with "traditions which you were taught." The word *paradosis* means something handed to another, as a teacher hands knowledge to a pupil.

Adam Clarke: The word *paradosis*, which we render tradition, signifies anything delivered in the way of teaching; and here most obviously means the doctrines delivered by the apostle to the Thessalonians; whether in his preaching, private conversation, or by these letters.

The word also implies on the part of a teacher that he is not expressing his own ideas, but is delivering or handing over a message received from someone else, such as what Paul explicitly states in 1 Corinthians and is typically stated when we take Communion.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:23.

He says it again in Chapter Fifteen.

Read 1 Corinthians 15:3.

In his letter to the Galatians Paul clarifies more explicitly his source.

For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. For I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. (Galatians 1:11-12)

[Back to the Thessalonian letter.](#)

So when Paul, as in v14, refers to “our gospel,” it is not something he dreamed up on his own, but the gospel—good news—given him by Christ to deliver to the Gentiles. And, in his instance, it could be in one of two forms:

- **by word of mouth** Here he refers to his personal teaching of them while in Thessalonica.
- **by letter from us** His first letter, as well as the one he is writing at the moment and any subsequent correspondence. Note the distinction between “letter from us” (KJVs, “our epistle”) and what he wrote in v2 about “a letter *as if* from us” (emphasis added).

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2.

Others had been writing letters to the Thessalonians with spurious “traditions” while falsifying Paul’s name.

After the long passage describing the horror of the Tribulation, how millions would be fooled—even deluded by a spirit from God—into believing the lies of the Antichrist, Paul now calls upon the Thessalonians to stand firm on the truth from God that he had and is delivering to them.

And notice how we got from standing firm in the traditions Paul taught to standing firm in their faith in Christ. Paul received his traditions from Christ himself, so the two are synonymous. What He taught *was* Christ.

w16-17

(For those who are of the opinion I spend way too much time on brief passages, let it be known that the late, great Charles Haddon Spurgeon—the nineteenth-century “Prince of Preachers”—delivered five separate sermons on these last two verses of Chapter Two. Be comforted that my typical verbosity will not reach that extent.)

Paul closes this second chapter with an earnest prayer—I would call it a benediction.

Read 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17.

Verse 16 is to whom the prayer is addressed; v17 is the entreaty. The emphasis in vv13-14 was on the centrality of God in all things: *He* chose us, *He* called us that we would “gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Verse 15 is Paul’s command to the Thessalonians—that is, what *they* are to do: Stand firm! But in vv16-17 Paul returns to the earlier theme, that ultimately it is all of God—*He* is the one who has loved us, given us comfort and grace, and who strengthens our hearts.

The Address

Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father,

As is typical for many scholars and commentators, some have tried to make something of the fact that here Paul mentions Christ Jesus first, when in the first letter he reversed the order.

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:11.

But the evidence is that throughout his letters Paul writes it both ways, and I don’t believe there is reason to over-analyze this. The Father and the Son are One, and I would only note that but for Christ, we could not even call God our Father.

who has loved us

As Lange puts it, “The root of all is the unmerited love of God.” And Paul subtly expresses the oneness of the Father and Son, as the grammarians among us will have noticed, with the singular “has” (if he saw the Son and Father as two distinct entities he would have used “have”). But this is not a moment to be pedantic. The text declares that God *loves* us!

Spurgeon: I cannot help repeating my frequent remark that the love of God is a theme more fit for the solitary contemplation of each person than for public utterance or explanation. It is to be felt, but it never can be uttered. Who can speak of love? In what language shall we sing its sweetness? No other word, nor set of words, can utter its meaning. You may go round about and make a long definitions, but you have not defined it—and he who never felt his heart glow with it will remain an utter stranger to it—depict it as you may. Love must be felt in the heart. It cannot be learned from a dictionary. “God has loved us.” I want you not so much to follow what I shall have to say upon that wonderful fact as to try and think over this thought for yourselves. God has loved us! Drink into that Truth of God! Take the Word, lay it under your tongue and let it dissolve like a wafer made with honey till it sweetens all your soul. God has loved us!

and [who has] given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace,

Still describing our Savior and God, and what He has done for us, Paul writes that we have received eternal comfort and good hope by grace. Again, "The root of all is the unmerited love of God" (Lange).

We are not just comforted now and then; children of God have an *eternal* comfort—the word means "perpetual, everlasting, since the world began." And our hope is not just good in the sense that it is the opposite of bad, but it is blessed, it is a kindness, it is generous and overflowing. The child of God can spend every day, every waking moment being comforted and encouraged by the hope, the promise he or she has for this very moment—He is *with* us, right now—and the future—He is preparing a home for us to be with Him for all eternity (John 14:2-3).

The Plea

[may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father] comfort and strengthen your hearts in every good work and word.

I would like to close this by deferring to the venerable Matthew Henry (early 18th century) for his thoughts on the entreaty part of Paul's benediction.

Matthew Henry: It is observable how comfort and establishment are here joined together. Note therefore, 1. Comfort is a means of establishment; for the more pleasure we take in the word, and work, and ways of God, the more likely we shall be to persevere therein. And, 2. Our establishment in the ways of God is a likely means in order to comfort; whereas, if we are wavering in faith, and of a doubtful mind, or if we are halting and faltering in our duty, no wonder if we are strangers to the pleasures and joys of religion. What is it that lies at the bottom of all our uneasiness, but our unsteadiness in religion? We must be established in every good word and work, in the word of truth and the work of righteousness: Christ must be honoured by our good works and good words; and those who are sincere will endeavour to do both, and in so doing they may hope for comfort and establishment, till at length their holiness and happiness be completed.