

LSB 2 Thessalonians 2:13 - 17

13 But we should always give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you as the first fruits for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth. 14 It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. 15 So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us. 16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, 17 encourage your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.

One of the things that changed rather drastically in my lifetime was the workplace safety industry. We all laughed at pictures of an OSHA cowboy and horse. The horse with training wheels and a safety net in case you fall off. It has a wagon for horse emissions control and headlights. It's pretty cute and we all had a good laugh, but then we found out these guys were not messing around, and the penalties are draconian.

Large corporations discovered it was cheaper to comply with all of the rules than to pay fines. These days if you want to be the first guy hired and the last guy laid off, become a safety professional.

There's a parallel in the Bible on a spiritual level. God designed the world so that maximum thriving and happiness and contentment are found in obedience to God's laws. It's built into His design that way like gravity.

God chose Israel to be His own people, His own possession and the most loving thing God purposed to do for Israel and for Jacob's blessing was that He gave them, through Moses, the law of God.

You say, that doesn't sound like love. That sounds odious. Wrong on both counts. It was absolute love and grace and kindness that revealed to us in our fallenness that what seems right to us leads to destruction, and what seems difficult leads to thriving.

There is a way that seems right unto a man, but the end thereof is destruction. Pr. 14:12 The path that *seems* right, goes over a cliff. The path that seems difficult and unattractive leads to sweetness and wellbeing. God didn't have to tell us the right way to thrive, but He loves us, so He did.

The law of God, like OSHA laws, is in place for our wellness, our good. And continuing with the metaphor, the safety professionals were the priests. The prophets. In the Old Testament, and in the NT, the overseers, the shepherds, the pastors and teachers. Shepherds given by God to care for and protect His flock, His own possession by guiding them into paths of wellbeing.

Listen to a rather lengthy passage from the prophet Hosea. Within this passage, in it's context, is the oft quoted (from this pulpit at least) verse that equates lack of knowledge with destruction.

For lack of knowledge, my people are destroyed. But listen in the full context to whom God delivers the blame.

*1 Listen to the word of Yahweh, O sons of Israel,
For Yahweh has a contention against the inhabitants of the land,
Because there is no truth or lovingkindness
Or knowledge of God in the land.
2 There is swearing of oaths, deception, murder, stealing, and adultery.
They break forth in violence so that bloodshed follows bloodshed.
3 Therefore the land mourns,
And everyone who inhabits it languishes
Along with the beasts of the field and the birds of the sky,
And also the fish of the sea disappear.
4 Yet let no man contend, and let no man offer reproof;
Indeed, your people are like those who contend with the priest.
5 So you will stumble by day,
And the prophet also will stumble with you by night;
And I will destroy your mother.*

*6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge.
Because you have rejected knowledge,
I also will reject you from ministering as My priest.
Since you have forgotten the law of your God,
I Myself also will forget your children.*

The rebuke falls to the priests whose job it was to help the people know and understand God's pathway to health and thriving, His laws. God says, your own mothers are slated for destruction because you've failed to instruct in His laws. He says, it's so bad in Israel that the people are living better than the priests. They've traded places so the people should instruct the priests instead of vice versa.

And destruction came. Israel in the north was taken into slavery by the Assyrians, and a few years later Judah was taken into captivity by the Babylonians. Because they abandoned God's law, and because those whose charge it was to instruct in the law were worse than the people they were to be in charge of.

Paul has just handled a crisis in the new church at Thessalonica. A false teacher had upset them and caused a disturbance, a disruption, a crisis of faith in that young church with doctrines that undermined both God's integrity of promises, but also undermined Paul's authority as an apostle.

"Paul got it wrong. God won't rapture you out of harms way before the events of the tribulation time. In fact we're already in the day of the Lord."

False teachers complete with false credentials. The Thessalonians very faith was based in the gospel message delivered by the Apostle Paul. Undermine Paul and that fragile foundation under them gives way to nothing. But wise shepherds in Thessalonica quickly dispatched men to find Paul and get an answer. And Paul's response is very thorough.

Paul gives a biblical response first of all. Prophecy is a linear line of events. Someone told you you're here on the line. That's impossible and

you should know it's impossible because these events given by the prophets would need to precede where they told you you're at. They haven't.

The apostasy has not happened. And the final Antichrist has not been revealed. So what those men told you is impossible from a purely scriptural context. Paul takes a very literalist approach to scripture. $X + Y$ has to equal Z .

We do the same thing today. Some guy teaches that we are actually living in the millenium right now. And my response is quite literal. Really? When did the skies roll up like a scroll and the entire earth view first utter darkness and then the heavens split open so that God on His terrible throne is in view and Jesus coming lights up the sky from east to west.

How did I miss that memo?? It's the exact approach Paul used. We believe the prophecies as literal future events. No apostasy. No rapture. No Antichrist revealed. No temple. No interruption of jewish offerings in a rebuilt temple.

None of the events that Jesus and the old testament prophets described very literally. Therefore I reject statements like what the false teachers told to the Thessalonians and what the A-millennial folks are teaching today as we speak.

We've downgraded that particular false teaching today to something less than heretical because unlike the false teacher who was upsetting Thessalonica, the current crop is not undermining the Pauline foundations of everything. Bad eschatology wipes out about a third of your scriptures but real salvation can stay intact.

Paul's second argument is a reminder to the Thessalonians, in vss 13 and 14 that what they are experiencing is a very real salvation that is the result of God choosing them in love and then separating them out of this world by His Spirit to belong to Him.

Paul's gospel brought something real. Something tangible. They are purchased out of this world and now belong to God who has given them His Holy Spirit inside their hearts, the downpayment of their future inheritance.

Election, selection, possession, separation, sanctification, affection. Salvation is real. Regeneration from death to life is real. Knowing God, through His indwelling Spirit, intimately and personally is real. Those tangible things came by Paul's gospel, not by false teachers who would tear it down.

Paul says in vss 13 and 14 we're thankful because what God did in your midst is both real and durable. Your first crisis of faith came, it upset you and caused you some damage, but the proof of your durability as something distinct and real is, you're still standing.

Then in vs 15, our main focus this morning, Paul gives an outline of how we are to stand and withstand Satan's onslaught of false teachers, after Paul is gone. We can't dispatch men to go find Paul and ask him what's right. Paul died within a few years of this initial crisis of faith, this hindrance brought by false information.

Paul may be gone, but we are actually far less vulnerable than the Thessalonians were. We have the complete collection of writings of not only Paul, but also of Moses and the prophets, the wisdom of David and Solomon and other Hebrew poets, and then we have the gospel accounts of Jesus with all that He spoke and did, and finally we have the collected writings of the Apostles. God's revelation is complete. We have every word.

And Paul's method, Paul's safety net for the church's thriving is unpacked for all time in this single verse that he tells the Thessalonians. In the future, live within these parameters, and you will not only be preserved safe, you will thrive. Let's look at Paul's formula for christian thriving and safety in any crisis;

15 So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.

I want to unpack this important verse as best I can this morning, because the threat level has not diminished since Paul addressed this crisis at Thessalonica. The threat level has actually risen. We are in far greater peril this morning than the saints at Thessalonica.

But in like manner, as I already alluded to, we also have far more defense mechanism at hand than those folks had. We have the written canon of revealed truth at our fingertips. Moreso than ever.

15 So then, brothers, stand firm

The first thing Paul tells these brothers is; Stand firm. Be immovable in the truth. It is a recurring theme in scripture.

Some men came to Jesus to ask about John the baptist. Part of Jesus reply was that John had this quality. He was a rock. Immovable. Jesus said; *“What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? 8 But what did you go out to see? A man dressed in soft clothing? Behold, those who wear soft clothing are in kings’ palaces! 9 But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and one who is more than a prophet.”*

Paul uses this same imagery in speaking to the Ephesians about being built up in the faith. Here is how God has designed safety in storms for His saints.

*11 And He Himself gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, 12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the **building up** of the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the full knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which*

belongs to the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming, 15 but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, that is Christ,

The way to avoid being tossed about by the waves and winds of false doctrine, is that we are to be built up into a mature adulthood by knowledge of the truth. God gave gifts to the church to make stable maturity possible. Apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers. Shepherds who teach and rebuke and protect the sheep by teaching God's truths.

Stand firm. Stand firm because of a foundation. Truth. The Word of God. Maturity. Don't be children. Grow up. It doesn't happen without the book.

The words of God, revealed to us, are the foundation that holds us to the earth in every deceitful storm Satan will hurl at us. It requires some work towards maturity though. Swaying side to side to praise tunes might be fun, it might make you feel good in the moment, but it doesn't add concrete to the foundation that holds you down to earth in storms. Doctrine does that.

We are like little boats on the sea in this world where Satan is ruler at this time. The word of God is the keel under water that has enough weight and mass to tip us back upright when the hurricanes would tip us over.

We stay upright in a storm of false doctrine because of God's words dwelling in us. And the way we do that is to hold tenaciously to the clear truths of this book. *So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions*

Hebrews 10:23 says;

Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;)

The reason we hold fast, hold with determined tenacity to the truths of this

ancient book is because the one who gave us these words and promises is faithful. The source of these words in this book is Creator God. Lord of everything.

Jude takes standing firm a step further. He goes from defense to offense like Paul also does in Ephesians 6. Jude says;

3 Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you exhorting that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.

Don't just stand firm. Fight back. Earnestly contend for the once for all delivered to the saints faith. Fight to keep that faith. Why, Jude continues

4 For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.

Finally, while we consider standing immovable in the storms of Satan, Paul tells the Ephesians,

*10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the might of His strength. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you **will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil.***

Make no mistake. The person who came and disturbed the Thessalonians was an attack straight out of hell. Schemes of the devil. Knock you out of balance. A blow to the gut that leaves you gasping for your next breath.

But a solid foundation in doctrinal truths of this book will find you not only recovered, still standing, but able to go on the offense and fight back. Paul begins in vs. 15 to these brothers by telling them to stand firm, and hold fast to solid doctrine, and then he tells them how;

15 So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.

Hold to the traditions. What are the ***traditions***? The traditions are what Jude called "*the once for all delivered to the saints faith.*" Inspired and revealed God breathed truths.

We have to be careful in our definitions here. In Jesus day He went on the offense against the traditions of the jews. They had buried the clear simple revealed words of God in something called the traditions of the elders.

So in that system, the word of God is secondary, lost, subject to traditions that actually override the original intent until it is lost. They had built up all of these man made traditions until God's intent was lost in the layered rubble of traditions.

Likewise, in the church age as time went by, the church magisterium, the traditions of the Roman church, the catholic church overrode and buried the once for all delivered to the saints faith.

The pope and the sacramental works righteousness system went far beyond the simple truths of the revealed word. That's why the reformers in the 16th century came up with the 5 sola's. Sola is the latin for ONLY

Sola scriptura. Only the Bible. We reject the traditions of centuries of popes and church magisterium. Christians are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, as revealed by Scripture alone, to the glory of God alone.

So, twenty centuries removed from Paul, and with the completed Canon of scriptures we are careful to define what Paul meant by the traditions here in this verse. We could clarify the intent of the original languages and say;

15 So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the God breathed doctrines which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.

The traditions Paul directs them to were his gospel, his teachings, and his model to them while he was with them. Paul was a living model of a regenerated Holy Spirit indwelt christian in their midst that they could copy. That's part of the tradition he speaks of here. His gospel, plus his model of holy living is his tradition he calls them to.

Jesus gave us boundaries for the future. The tree will bring forth good fruit. You'll know the tree by it's fruits. Paul lived a holy life in their midst. He was a class act. A model christian to pattern your life in the Holy Spirit by. Through Paul's gospel the Holy Spirit called a real church our from and separated from the world. Good fruit.

If your prophet can't keep his pants on, that's a sign. If your prophet is more interested in fleecing you of your wealth than building you up in your faith, that's a sign. If your prophet can't keep order under his own roof, that may be a sign.

The traditions Paul is talking about is the tradition of godly living modeled by Paul as he taught them his gospel and explained to them the scriptures.

Twenty centuries later, the tradition continues. We teach the words of this book in exegetical fashion and endeavor to live in alignment with the holy scriptures just like Paul.

We look down through history and wherever we see real fruit, fruit that only God can bring, we find men who modeled their lives after the tradition of Paul and the rest of the apostles, who followed Jesus, unbroken from the first century until now.

15 So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.

How is the church doing with that in 2022? If standing firm is requisite on holding to a knowledge and practice of the God breathed inspired doctrines

delineated in this book, how is the church today? Are we on solid ground? Will we be found standing when a 100 year storm hits us broadside? A 1000 year storm?

I think we've just seen a couple of stress tests. Covid was one. And the whole "woke" church thing is another. A war on two fronts. The government claiming it has authority to define when and how christians can worship. Ceasar not Christ is head of the church.

And a second front that's coming at the church that says cultural requirements trump what the book clearly says. The books authority stops at modern culture's definitions. On that front the question is do men have authority to define what scripture is authoritative and what scripture isn't?

There's cross-over. Because the government is right on the verge of defining what churches can and cannot believe. We just passed an ammendment in Nevada that was designed by Satan to cause mischief.

As of this morning we're still breathing easy. No one is challenging us, telling us what we can and cannot say and or believe. Writing down our license plate numbers to report who is gathered. But when that day does come, if standing firm upon the truths of this book is what will be required, I've got little confidence. Most evangelicals don't have a clue about the crystal clear doctrines contained in this book.

Paul closes this section with a prayer for protection. He's shown them every combat method to deal with Satan's broadside attacks. Knowledge of the words of the book. Head on rebuttal with the facts from an ordered eschatology.

Assurance of position because God has chosen you and saved you and lives inside of you. Confidence based in God's word. And finally, prayer.

Paul models a prayer that we should be praying for each other daily. One of our pieces of armor is prayer. In fact prayer is not a defensive part of our

armor, it is offensive. Listen to Paul's benedictory prayer for these folks to be able to stand in severe trials.

16 Now may our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and God our Father, who has loved us and given us eternal comfort and good hope by grace, 17 encourage your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word.

Prayer is the final part of the armor of God given in Ephesians 6. Most of the armor is defensive. Designed to keep you alive. But at the end there is armor that is offensive. We actually have the equipment to fight back. Listen carefully to that important section of scripture in Ephesians 6:10 - 19

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the might of His strength. 11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. 13 Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. 14 Stand firm therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace. 16 In addition to all, having taken up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one, 17 also receive the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God, 18 praying at all times with all prayer and petition in the Spirit, and to this end, being on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints, 19 as well as on my behalf, that words may be given to me in the opening of my mouth, to make known with boldness the mystery of the gospel—

Most teachers say there is just a single defensive armor. The sword. The Word of God. But the sword goes hand in hand with prayer.

In 1st Samuel 17 David delivers his prayer out loud to the philistines;

Then said David to the Philistine, Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield: but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied.

David gave them a little lesson in doctrine while he seated the first round stone in his sling. I may be small and insignificant as the world defines small and insignificant, but your war is actually with the armies of God.

He prayed out loud so that when Goliath fell, those other soldiers understood they were massively outnumbered and ran for their very lives.

Our book is our defense and also our offense.

Yesterday at the teaching session our teacher posed a question. Actually it was on the hand out sheet but I don't remember him covering it. But my mind landed on it anyways.

- **Abiding in the Word. What does this look like in your life now?**

This is actually Paul's whole point. Abiding in the word means that the words and doctrines of this book are available in your memory. Knowledge of the book in your memory banks, available to be called up.

As you watch and listen to every other voice coming at you non stop in this world, at home, at work, on the internet, and informational overload, you sift all of it, every bit of it in the doctrines of this book.

The authority of God breathed inspired truth is the standard against which every other information bit that gets hurled at you all day long is measured and either approved or rejected.

That's impossible if you don't have a working knowledge of what the book says! Yet Jesus commanded it. In John 8:31 and John 15, clearly. *If You Abide in My Word, You Are Truly My Disciples*

Our safety net, our survival is dependent on having a knowledge base of the words and doctrines of this book with which to draw from. Without that, your keel in your boat has no weight, and the first little storm will blow you over and sink you.

If the church's survival is dependent upon a working knowledge of the doctrines of this book, I have to say, the church in the USA is ripe for the picking.