

Sermon Draft for November 9, 2025

Text: 2 Thessalonians 2:1–8, 13–17

Sermon: “Traditions”

Trevor and Jenny had the first argument of their marriage. It happened around Christmas and had to do with family traditions. 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, and neither of them wanted to try something new.

The first year, because they couldn’t reach 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. They were exhausted. Christmas didn’t flow naturally for either of them.

It wasn't until after they relocated 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.

Looking back, they are surprised at how stubborn they both were and how deeply angry they were with each other. They had expressed a selfish love of their own traditions rather than a humble willingness to try a different way of expressing love.

Perhaps you have had this kind of argument. It might not be about Christmas. It could be about how to celebrate a birthday, how to discipline children, or how to plan a family vacation. And it affects not only families. It can affect an entire church. Traditions are important in our lives together. Traditions are ways in which we have learned to experience and share the love of God with one another. And yet, sometimes, these traditions of love can become too important. Rather than celebrating traditions of love, we find ourselves loving our traditions and losing our way. Ironically, we find ourselves angry and fighting over how we show love.

To such a church, God has a message today in our Epistle reading. God encourages us not to leave our traditions, nor to Love our traditions, but to practice traditions of His love.

In our text, Paul is working with a church that is trying to figure out its traditions. Thessalonica had a rough beginning as a church. On Paul's second missionary journey he visited Thessalonica, preaching in their synagogue, but he was only able to stay a short time. Opposition arose, and Paul needed to leave because of persecution. Paul was deeply concerned about this church start (Acts 17:1–9; 1 Thessalonians 2:17). Did they have the teaching that they needed to survive persecution? Had Paul been there long enough to share with them the traditions of the faith?

Paul has heard that they have been tempted to believe that Christ has already returned. Rather than hold on to the teaching that Paul had given them, they were leaving that teaching behind. It's easy to understand their confusion.

Paul had traveled and taught in their midst, and now someone else had either spoken or written a letter with a new teaching (v 2).

Rather than hold on to their teaching and tradition, they were leaving it behind.

For this reason, Paul not only recalls his teaching for them but also calls on them to hold on to his teaching and the traditions (v 5). Paul knew that Christians, then and now, need to hold on to the teachings and practices of the faith rather than leave them behind.

While some people can leave traditions too easily, others can hold on to them too closely. God's people have struggled throughout their history with loving their traditions more than God.

Throughout the history of Israel, God corrects his people when they love their traditions more than they love him. In the opening chapter of Isaiah, God calls Israel to repentance for believing that all God desired from them was the performance of their traditions.

“Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates,”
God declares. “Seek justice, correct oppression; bring justice to
the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause” (Isaiah 1:14, 17). God’s people had become so focused on their traditions of worship that they failed to engage in the life of his kingdom, caring for the oppressed and the suffering and the widows.

In the ministry of Jesus, we see a similar situation. Jesus often corrected the religious leaders when they loved their traditions more than God (Mark 7:1–13). That correction, however, was met with resistance. God’s people loved their traditions and, ultimately, they did love their traditions more than God. One Passover, the religious leaders sought a way to kill Jesus. Imagine that. They are gathering in Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, and yet they are also planning to kill Jesus. They are keeping the tradition of Passover but they are murdering their God. In this way, one could say that Jesus died because of our love of tradition.

But that is not the end of the story. Jesus also died and rose because of God's love for us. On Passover, God the Father sent his Son, Jesus, 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. After rising from the dead, Jesus ascended into heaven, and now he sends the apostle Paul to encourage us to participate in traditions of his love. God encourages us not to leave our traditions, nor to love our traditions, but to practice traditions of his love.

In our text, Paul offers God's people that better way. As Paul concludes his teaching about the second coming of Christ, he encourages the Thessalonians to ***“stand firm and hold on to the traditions”*** that they were given through his ministry and his letters (v 15). As Paul makes an appeal to the Thessalonians, notice how he surrounds that appeal with testimonies of God's love.

Paul assures them that God the Father chose them for salvation, and this calling happened through the proclamation of the Gospel among them.

Not only that, but God the Spirit is working to set them apart in holiness and to strengthen them in the faith. And not only that, but God the Son has been raised from the dead to his eternal rule in glory, and he will work to comfort their hearts and establish them in every good work and word. The triune God is at work for the salvation of his people, and one of the ways in which God works is through the word and the traditions of Paul.

We all know people our we have ourselves lost loved ones. It's difficult to transition to a new life without them, especially if you have been together for many years. It's like I waking up one morning and someone has removed one of our limbs. It's difficult to live without a limb, but we go forward.

Bud lost his wife. 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, he never spent time reading devotional books.

That was her tradition, what she did in the morning after breakfast. He wasn't opposed to it. It just didn't work for him. But now, he has begun to follow 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. He doesn't know it, but he may be beginning what will become a tradition for him, a tradition filled with love.

As the apostle Paul's life set an example for the Thessalonians: so, too, our lives have the possibility of becoming for others a tradition of love. It may be how 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.

As we remember the past and prepare for the future, there are traditions we cultivate over time. At the heart of these traditions is the love of God poured out for all people in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

When that is at the heart of our traditions, we will avoid the problem of loving our traditions more than God. Instead, we will be a living witness of the love of God among us, because we hold fast to traditions of love.

Amen