

Written Copy: Hold firm to the Traditions-2 Thessalonians 2:15-17

Proper 27-22nd Sunday @ Pentecost

Sunday, November 10th, 2019

Text: 2 Thessalonians 2:15-17

¹⁵ So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our letter. ¹⁶ Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, ¹⁷ comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.

Exegetical Statement

Paul is urgently requesting the Church at Thessalonica to view the promised 2nd coming of Christ through the truths that Paul had taught them before and not the false notions purported to be from him or his colleagues that Christ had already come. They are not to let their minds be disturbed or agitated or their hearts be deceived. Before Christ comes again the apostasy within the Church will come followed by the man of lawlessness (the anti-Christ) who will oppose the work of the Church and place himself above all else and receiving the worship that is only due to God alone. While the mystery of his office is already at work the anti-Christ himself is being held back until the opportune time for his uncovering and display of lawlessness. When the Lord Jesus Christ returns, He will put an end to the anti-Christ and all his work will be abolished at Christ's glorious appearance. Paul is moved to give thanks to God for these believers whom God had chosen from before Creation and had called to faith through the Gospel message. His Spirit is at work confirming their salvation and growing their faith to make them more like their Savior by strengthening their faith. Through the Gospel they are acquiring the glory of Jesus Christ. Therefore, they are to stand firm against the work of lawlessness and hold fast to the traditions they learned from Paul and from Scripture even as Christ who has sacrificially loved them is giving them each personal comfort, encouragement and hope through every good work done and good word spoken.

Focus Statement:

Christ has come to save us from being enslaved by our sins and from being swept away by the false lies and miracles of the anti-Christ. He has given us the Scriptures to make us wise to our salvation. He has given us His Spirit to grow us in faith and true knowledge and to world to keep us in faith protecting us from the lies of the devil and from being confused and deceived. He grows, confirms, protects our faith until the day He returns in all His glory

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

The false teaching that is the Rapture can serve to promote the office of the anti-Christ. When he ascends to the throne and claims the worship due only Christ those who believe in the rapture will assume they missed Jesus' secret return, but here He is ruling on earth for the millennium. Exchanging the truth of Scripture and Jesus return for a lie they will fall away into lawlessness worshipping the anti-Christ.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Continue to learn and hold fast to the Scriptural principals found in the Small Catechism and the Lutheran Confessions. Hold fast in faith to Christ's promise to return one more time in glory in the Last Day. Live out our lives with one eye expectantly heavenward for His return.

Subject Sentence: Jesus confirms/conforms faith against Antichrist

In today's Epistle Lesson we see Paul talking about "the man of lawlessness" and "the son of destruction". Paul describes him as one (**2 Thessalonians 2:4**) "**who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God.**" The Apostle John also mentions a similar person who he calls "The Antichrist". Now when I mention that name what comes to mind? Perhaps the movie "The Omen" which came out in 1976 and had a couple sequels in the 80's and 90's. It was about the child named Damien who was the spawn of Satan in human flesh: The Antichrist. Maybe you picture some kind of half human half devil creature with the number "666" carved into his forehead. One ready and waiting to carve that number into your forehead too or in some other way mark you as belonging to the devil. But the fact that Paul in 2 Thessalonians Paul refers to him as the "man" of lawlessness and the "son" of destruction we can be pretty sure that this Antichrist is a human being, albeit one in service of the devil himself.

Paul goes on to say in **2 Thessalonians 2:7a** "**For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work**" Luther saw this work already being done through the office of the Pope. Here was a man who claimed to speak with the authority of Christ himself. He claimed the authority to forgive sins for any and all who purchased one of his indulgences. These could even shorten one's stay in purgatory: a place that is not told of in Scripture but was taught by Popes and councils who had come before that all who died without earning the necessary grace must go there. Even to this day the Catholic Church holds masses for the deceased in order to garner additional grace from saints who allegedly have some to spare in order to shorten the deceased time in purgatory. None of this is supported by Scripture. Yet here was a man who claimed the power to exalt himself above what Scripture teaches and declare the Gospel according to his own design. A man who claimed the power to forgive sins which Scripture teaches only comes from Christ **1 John 2:2** "**He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.**" **Ephesians 1:7** "**In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,**" and **Acts 4:12** "**12 And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.**"

Paul tells us he will not be someone outside the church but will come from within. In **2 Thessalonians 2:3** **“Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,”** Paul warns of the rebellion: the defection from faith, the apostasy, all describe a falling away from within the church by those who once had faith but have given it up in order to follow lawlessness. It makes sense that the man who will lead in this rebellion comes from inside the ranks of the Church. As the Apostle John warned in **1 John 2:18-19** **“¹⁸Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour. ¹⁹They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.”** They went out from us, acting as if they were a believer, but they really weren’t one of us as they lacked faith.

He is someone who will sound like a faithful believer at first, but will begin to teach those things that stand against what we are to believe and confess is the truth of Scripture. These are things that will sound good: they will tickle the ear and appeal to the desires of our sinful heart as well as the broken logic of our sinful minds. He will gradually rise to a position of importance garnering a following. **2 Thessalonians 2:9** states **“The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders,”** He will do what appears to be miracles that rival those done by Jesus, yet these will not be true miracles but false signs and wonders done through the working of the master deceiver and liar-Satan himself. He will operate as **2 Thessalonians 2:10-11** states; **“¹⁰and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. ¹¹Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false,”** He will deceive those who refused to believe the truth, believe what the Bible teaches as truth such as there is only one name under heaven by which man must be saved and that name is not Allah, or Buddah, or Vishnu, Trump or Biden or Warren or Sanders. He will chip away at what seems like inconsequential doctrines that we can let slide, that don’t seem to attack our belief that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. But these inconsequential things are designed to

erode the underpinning of what the Gospel teaches. For the Antichrist's goal as the Apostle John tells us (1 John 2:22) **"Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son."**

Could the Antichrist attack from the Protestant side of the spectrum? There is a teaching that is prevalent in some Protestant denominations regarding how Jesus will return called the "Secret Rapture". These Christians believe that Jesus will return at some point in the future and rapture the Church out of the world. He will come in secret so that only the Church knows and he will take them in the air to return with Him to heaven. This will leave only unbelievers here on earth and things will begin to go to hell quickly. Not just because the Church's influence is gone but because a number of people have vanished into thin air with no readily explanation for it. The premise for this belief is that after 7 or so years of hell on earth Jesus will return and set up an earthly kingdom where He will reign in peace for 1000 years. This is the teaching that spawned the "Left Behind" series as well as Hal Lindsay's "Late Great Planet Earth". It is what is taught in a majority of Pentecostal Churches, some Southern Baptist Churches, as well as the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association. It is preached on radio and TV by the likes of Jack Van Impe.

Now what is the problem with this teaching? It is not what the Bible teaches but comes from a misunderstanding of the relationship between the Old Testament and the new Testament as well as a literal reading of Revelations. But those who believe in it still confess that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. So, we can let it slide right? But what if this man were to appear who is doing Christ-like miracles? What if he convinces you that you missed the rapture but he is now back to set this world gone to hell right again? That he is Christ returned to rule for 1000 years? Might he create confusion and lack of faith in other doctrines? It's interesting to note how similar this scenario is to what moved Paul to write this letter to the Thessalonians in the first place **2 Thessalonians 2:1-2** **"¹ Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, ² not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.** They too were afraid that Jesus had

already come when they needed to remain waiting patiently. But for those who fall into the trap of the Antichrist Paul says **2 Thessalonians 2:11-12** “**¹¹ Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, ¹² in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.**”

Gradually under the delusion they give up what they once confessed to be the truth of Scripture for a lie and end up being condemned to eternal condemnation without realizing what they’ve done.

Jesus Christ came to earth in order to provide us with protection from this ever happening to you or me. He does not desire that we join the ranks of those following the antichrist and suffer forever in the eternal flames. As Paul writes in **2 Thessalonians 2:13-14** “**¹³ But we ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers beloved by the Lord, because God chose you as the firstfruits to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. ¹⁴ To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.**” Before He had ever begun the work of creation, He had you in mind. He knew you would sin. And so the Lord planned from the beginning to send His only Son to be your sacrifice for sin and mine. He took upon Himself all the ways we fail to hold fast to His truth in Scripture so that we are forgiven for each and every one.

He sent His Spirit to you and to me through the Gospel message, that message of salvation that is tied to the water of Baptism through which we receive His Spirit into our hearts and lives. The Spirit who begins the life long process of sanctifying us-changing us to become more like our Savior. He is there confirming and growing faith in our heart so that we might trust more and more in the self-sufficiency of Christ’s sacrifice for you and for me. As the Spirit works to grow our understanding of what Jesus has to teach us He grows faith to hold fast to that teaching. He provides a study companion to your Bible which is Luther’s Small Catechism to help you in your study of Scripture. He has provided the Lutheran Confessions to guide pastors and teaches that we might teach faithfully what Scripture says and avoid teaching human reasoning and wisdom in place of those things Scripture is silent on.

What are you and I to do? **2 Thessalonians 2:15** “**So then, brothers, stand firm and hold to the traditions that you were taught by us, either by our spoken word or by our**

letter.” We are to hold fast to what we learn in Bible Study and what we read and hear preached in worship. But know that as you hold fast to His Word Christ is holding fast to you. . **2 Thessalonians 2:16-17** “**¹⁶ Now may our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God our Father, who loved us and gave us eternal comfort and good hope through grace, ¹⁷ comfort your hearts and establish them in every good work and word.**” He comforts you hearts and minds now and prevents you from succumbing to the lies of the Antichrist so that you will be with Him always, now and into the eternal comfort to come. He provides through His Spirit now strength to stand up to the temptations to believe the lies of Satan. He provides comfort and strength as you work out your salvation through the good works and good witness that He planned for you to do as the product of the faith He has given you.

Know that the work of the man of Lawlessness is already going on in the Church. It is evident in that the largest Lutheran Synod no longer considers Scripture to be the inerrant word of God but is willing to teach human wisdom alongside it. We can be tempted to go along with what may seem as innocent differences in how we understand Scripture while the forces of Lawlessness plan to use these things to undermine our faith in grace alone, by faith alone, in Christ alone. But standing against this work of apostasy is our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who came the first time to save us from our sinful doubting. And we know by faith He will come again. **2 Thessalonians 2:8** “**And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will kill with the breath of his mouth and bring to nothing by the appearance of his coming.**” Jesus will come and put an end to all the satanic forces that seek to tear us away from Him. And then, when He remakes our body and soul to be like His perfect body and soul, He will welcome us into eternal life where we will be tempted and suffer no more. He promises now never to leave us or forsake us. I leave you with the blessing Paul wrote to the Thessalonian Church in **1 Thessalonians 5:23-24** “**²³ Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.**” Amen