“Bound or Free?” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Pentecost 22
November 9, 2025

I. **2 Thessalonians 2:15** – [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.

II. **Traditions are a wonderful blessing**, but sometimes they cause problems.

a. Whenever I do pre-marital counseling, I talk with the couple about all the things that need to come together as they leave their mother and father and cleave to one another… especially when it comes to being bound by their individual family traditions.

b. Here’s an example you might be able to relate to:

i. A couple I will call Mike and Sarah were married in the summer, and their first Christmas was coming up soon.

ii. Mike’s family was all about Christmas Eve… including a big family dinner, opening presents, and the midnight candlelight service.

iii. Sarah’s family was all about Christmas Day, as they got up early, opened presents, went to church, and then had a Christmas brunch.

iv. Mike and Sarah got into an argument as each one pleaded their case for why their family’s tradition was best.

v. So, that first Christmas they decided to do both... as they opened a few gifts on Christmas Eve and the rest on Christmas Day… they had a family dinner at Mike’s before the midnight candlelight service, then early church, followed by more presents and a big brunch the next day with Sarah’s family.

vi. Christmas with family was not the wonderful experience they remembered… it became a burden… it was overwhelming.

vii. The next year they moved to a new area for their jobs and celebrated Christmas as a couple, which turned into their new tradition… a family dinner and gifts on Christmas Eve, followed by a church service at an earlier time.

viii. As they looked back, both Sarah and Mike thought it was a little immature to get so mad about how they would celebrate Christmas… it was about being bound to their own traditions with a selfish love.

c. I’m sure at some point in your life an argument or disagreement has come up about traditions too.

i. Christmas and Thanksgiving are usually the big ones, but it might be birthdays… or how to raise kids… or where you go on vacation… and you might feel bound to these ways of life for different reasons.

ii. And it’s not in the family circle alone… disagreements about traditions can affect the entire church.

iii. Traditions are an important part of our connection… traditions can be very meaningful… a source of great joy and comfort.

iv. However, traditions can also turn into the “most important thing” as we begin to love our traditions at the expense of relationships.

d. We can become so bound up in our love for traditions that the love of God is set aside in order to carry them out…

III. **The Thessalonian church was dealing with traditions**… both new and old.

a. As a new church, Paul was setting them up with the proper teaching and traditions that were based on God’s love.

b. Unfortunately, he had to leave because of persecution, so he wrote these letters to encourage them, and as a follow-up to help them keep growing.

i. You see, they would face persecution too… they would also have many questions about the end times and the resurrection… and they were new to the Christian faith and living in a Christian community.

ii. Paul even heard that some of them were being taught that Jesus had already come back… so somewhere along the line, a false teacher was around them, and Paul encourages them to go back to their original tradition and teaching that he gave them rather than depart from it.

iii. As Christians, we don’t let go of the teaching and traditions that point to Jesus and express God’s love… however…

IV. **The Jewish people bound themselves to many traditions**.

a. In the years leading up to Jesus, and even after His death, many of the Jewish people loved their traditions more than God.

b. On the one hand, some people drop traditions without a thought… while others bind themselves to traditions at the expense of God and others.

c. As you look back on the history of the Jewish people, God frequently calls them out for putting too much emphasis on tradition while spending no time loving others.

i. In Isaiah chapter 1, God makes it clear that just keeping traditions is not the point, “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)

1. You see, it wasn’t that traditions were bad, because God commanded them in some cases… but it was being bound to traditions while ignoring problems of justice, oppression, and support for those around them.

ii. Jesus even quotes Isaiah chapter 29 to the Pharisees, as He says, “This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me.” (Mark 7:6)

1. The traditions of men had become more important than actually caring about people, and Jesus knew the traditions that became a huge part of life were lacking love.

2. In fact, when you think about it, on the Passover – a great tradition of remembrance of Isreal’s deliverance from slavery in

Egypt – the religious leaders got together to figure out how they could murder Jesus… the very Son of God.

3. In a strange way, you might say that tradition and the love for tradition is what got Jesus killed… as these leaders were so bound up in tradition, they forgot the source... they forgot love.

d. But as I always say in my Lambs' Lessons… Jesus died, but He didn't stay dead… He rose to life again out of pure love for us.
   i. Not only did Jesus become the perfect sacrificial Lamb on Passover in our place, but He would also rise from the dead… just like each one of us will rise from our graves through faith in Him.
   ii. The ultimate gift of love is the death and resurrection of Jesus, because we faced an eternity without God… but the Father sent His Son to redeem us… the love of God set us free.
e. God is the true source of love, and we are not bound by traditions…. We are free in them to love Him and our neighbor.

V. **We are people who are free to practice traditions… of love**.
a. The point is not the traditions themselves, but in practicing them we stop to consider <u>their purpose</u>… are they selfish? Are they loving? Do they encourage us to show love? Do they have purpose for God?
b. Remember, Paul is pointing to God's Word as the source of teaching and traditions, so in practicing them we can be confident that what we're doing matters and is based on love for God and others.
c. The blessing comes when our traditions of love encourage and open the door for others to follow as an example.
d. I read a story about a woman who lost her husband.
   i. She found the adjustment difficult, just like so many who lose their spouse after many years of marriage.
   ii. She mentioned that the pain of that separation was like losing a part of the body… as what God put together was separated by death.
   iii. She remembered her husband's tradition of getting up in the morning, having a cup of coffee, and reading his Bible in their breakfast nook.
   iv. She was never all that interested in reading the Bible, but now, she was following her late husband's tradition.
      1. And without knowing it, she began a tradition for herself… she freely began a tradition with love at its source.
e. Just as Paul was an example for the early Church… our traditions may become an example for others that turn into traditions of love.
   i. Maybe it's how you treat others at work, or the way you raise your kids, or how you take the time to pray for others, maybe it's your faithful giving, or visiting people who are lonely… who knows what traditions of love might come from your freedom in Christ?
f. As long as our traditions point to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, they will not bind us in selfishness but free us in love.

i. We are free… even in our traditions… to express the great love of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen