

Things Handed Down II Thessalonians 2:13-17

Introduction

The *Da Vinci Code* - - was a huge bestseller work of fiction written by Dan Brown [2003 / sold 80 million copies] [turned into a movie directed by Ron Howard – starring Tom Hanks]

However – many Christians were not particularly impressed with Dan Brown’s novel - - - because of its misrepresentations of the Christian faith and attacks on the bible

Brown’s novel invents fictional characters - - but then interweaves them with various conspiracy theories about church history and the figure of Jesus

Perhaps his most outlandish suggestion was that ‘the real’ Jesus got married to Mary Magdalene - - and they had children

The *Da Vinci Code* made this statement about the bible which portrays the sentiment of many skeptics and atheists:

Da Vinci Code [Leigh Teabing]: 'The Bible is a product of man, my dear, not of God. The Bible did not fall magically from the clouds. Man created it as a historical record of tumultuous times, and it has evolved through countless translations, additions and revisions. History has never had a definitive version of the book.'

Brown - here refers to something that has been called the ‘phone game argument’ - points to hundreds of years of history and argues - - countless revisions / transmissions - - - we have no reason to trust the bible

David Cross takes this view of the bible seriously

David Cross: 'The bible was written, and then rewritten, and then edited, and then re-edited, and then translated from dead languages . . . then given to kings for them to take their favorite parts out, then re-edited, then re-translated . . . then given to the pope for him to approve . . . then re-written, re-translated, re-edited . . . all based on stories that were told orally thirty to ninety years after they happened to people who didn't know how to write. So, I guess what I'm saying is the bible is literally the world's oldest game of telephone.'

The telephone game - - one person whispers a sentence or brief story to the person next to them - - he passes it on to the next - - - on to the next – around the circle - - and then – by the time you get to the last person -- you find out how the story has changed in the transmission process

The telephone game displays the shakiness of oral communication – or word of mouth

Kurt Eichenwald [Newsweek 2014]: "No . . . preacher has ever read the Bible. Neither has any evangelical politician. Neither has the pope. Neither have I. And neither have you. At best, we've all read a bad translation—a translation of translations of translations of hand-copied copies of copies of copies of copies, and on and on, hundreds of times."

However – we have to ask: ‘Is this an accurate understanding of how the Bible has come to us?’

We come this morning – to Paul’s 2nd letter to the Thessalonians – he writes:

II Thessalonians 2:15 - 'Brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.'

Does Paul not realize how garbled oral communication can get over time?

Did God really speak to us thru the apostles - - - but then allow His message to become so corrupted that we have no reason to believe in the integrity of the product we hold in our hands - - - some 2000 years later?

Important issues

There are two important areas in which the way the Bible has been transmitted to us - - breaks completely with the telephone game – one is that there were numerous lines of transmission taking place – from the body of truth as it was revealed

Jesus didn’t choose one disciple - - - or even two or three - - - He chose twelve

Mark 3:14 - 'He appointed twelve, that they might be with Him, and that He might send them out to preach.'

Jesus didn’t whisper spiritual truth to one person – and send them out with the message - - - he told it openly to twelve - - - often in the presence of numerous others

Of course – part of the reason He called the disciples - - - was so that they themselves could be eye-witnesses of the events recorded in the gospels

God has given to the church - 4 Gospels – or accounts of the life of Christ / and numerous doctrinal epistles from Paul / Peter / James / John - - - and the author of Hebrews

So – multiple lines of transmission / eye-witness testimony

Also – [another very important difference] the game of telephone only works – if you are not allowed to go back and check with earlier people in the chain of transmission - - - in the game of telephone - - - if you are number 25 - - - you don’t get to go back to number 2 or 3 and ask what they heard

With the transmission of the biblical truth - - - people do just that

When genuine bible scholars set out to produce a reliable English or German translation today - - they don't pull out the Revised Standard Version – and get started - they don't go back and begin with the Latin Vulgate – which was a 4th century Latin translation - - - or even early Coptic Egyptian translations – they might be consulted - - - but what they are really interested in are the Greek manuscripts – the language of the original

We have in our possession 2 complete Greek New Testaments from the 4th century – called the Codex Sinaiticus / and Codex Vaticanus which dates to around 300 AD

We also have literally tens of thousands of partial manuscripts from even earlier periods

P 46 [Papyrus] - - contains most of Paul's letters - - - is dated to the 2nd century

One scholar has pointed out – that even if we had zero Bible manuscript evidence from the first 500 years of church history - - - the writings of the church fathers – would go a long way in reconstructing the bible - - - because they quoted it so much – and a comparison of their quotes - - - takes you back to the original [Letters of Clement / Irenaeus / Tertullian / Origen]

So – the outcome of all this is - - - God did not leave the transmission of His truth - - - to the hazards of unreliable methodologies

God has spoken divine truth - - - and has made provision for that authentic message to come down to us yet today

Satan may slander and say: 'Yea – hath God said . . .?'

The believing church can confidently and wisely reply – 'Yes – the Lord has spoken - - - and we will follow'

II Thessalonians 2:15 - 'Brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.'

I. Calling of God - vv. 13-14

Paul turns from eschatology - - - and turns to the reality of the spiritual lives of the Thessalonians - - - what they have in Christ

Paul says that He gives thanks to God – because they have been chosen by God from the beginning for salvation thru sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth

He said something similar in I Thessalonians

I Thess. 1:4 - 'Knowing brethren beloved by God, His choice of you.'

This points to the idea that God has done something to make them a part of the church

*** What is it that leads to a person becoming a Christian?

What caused you to become interested in the Bible – instead of believing silly arguments like the phone game?

Why do you have a love for the truth?

Paul begins with God's choice and God's calling

MLJ: 'We should approach this by saying to ourselves something like this: "Here am I in this house of God while there are thousands of people who are not, and who are in their beds reading their Sunday newspapers or perhaps listening to the radio. Why am I different, what has made me different, why am I interested in these things, why bother myself about them at all - why am I a Christian? Seriously consider what it is that has separated you from those others, what has put you into a different category.'

Christians often can look back over their lives and see traces of God's hand in their lives

A gospel presentation here / maybe a friend who was a Christian influenced you / a ss teacher who encouraged you / perhaps even a question someone asked you

Francis Collins – is molecular geneticist – who directed the Human Genome Project - - - was a third year medical student - - - [atheist] when he was treating a woman who had a terminal heart condition

She was at peace with knowing where she was going

One day - she asked him what he believed about what happens after we die

He was embarrassed - - - he didn't really think about it much

That set him on a quest - - - read C.S. Lewis – 'Mere Christianity' - - - it began with a simple question

For Lydia – God's hand can be traced back to an eventful day

Acts 16:14 - 'And a certain woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God was listening; and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul.'

The reality – if you are a Christian – you know that God opened your heart / opened your eyes to see these things

John 6:37 - 'All that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out.'

On the other side of the equation:

The blame for unbelief always falls squarely on the unbeliever

His problem is a love of sin / hardness of heart / lack of interest in spiritual matters

Truth comes - - - but he gives it no welcome – he pushes it to the side / He looks back longingly to Sodom / He gains the world but forfeits his own soul / he's on the broad road to destruction – and he will stay there / he is a willing victim of deception

John 3:19 - 'this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil.'

God scatters the gospel seed – on the four kinds of soil – same seed

The gospel seed says:

Romans 10:13 - 'For whoever will call upon the name of the Lord will be saved.'

Revelation 22:17 - '... let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost.'

God invites – He says – 'come to the wedding feast – don't make excuses' – Matt. 22

The sinner – like Lot's wife - - - is too captivated by the world - - - to welcome the Savior into his heart - - he loves the world and forfeits his soul

II. A Solid Foundation - v. 15

Paul moves on to this call to stand firm – v. 15

There is a body of doctrinal truth they are to hold to / we are to hold to

We don't change the faith – we receive it

I Cor. 15:3, 4 - 'For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.'

Paul didn't come up with the gospel on his own - - - it was given to him - - It is God's gospel
- - - Christ crucified for sinners

The gospel is something that was handed down to us

Jude 3 - 'I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.'

Paul here [v. 15] – is not referring to the traditions of men - - - but sayings of Jesus and the apostles

Most of the NT books were not yet written at this time

We hold to the apostolic traditions – recorded in Scripture!

When the Scriptures were complete - - - oral traditions were no longer necessary

RCC – uses this verse to argue for the validity of their own extra-biblical traditions – such as Mary as a co-redemptrix / the sinlessness of Mary / papal infallibility

An Encyclical from Pope Pius XII – [1943] – says that Mary was sinless personally – free from all sin – both original or personal

What do we do with that?

Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for allowing their traditions to overturn the clear word of God

Jesus points out - - - it's the Word of God that needs to be followed - - not your unbiblical traditions

Matthew 15:1-9

They are saying – 'our traditions / our traditions'

Jesus says: 'Word of God'

We are to keep a firm hold on the truth given

FF Bruce: 'When face to face communication was not convenient, the teaching was imparted in written letter. We in our day must be thankful that the latter course was so often necessary; the spoken words have gone beyond recall, but the letters remain, preserving the traditions for our instruction and obedience.'

We don't know anybody that can say – I heard so and so who listened to so and so - - - all the way back to Jesus

Some people could in the 2nd century

Irenaeus who in the 2nd century – pointed to a relational line from himself to Polycarp to the Apostle John

Irenaeus: 'I distinctly recall the events . . . I can tell the very place where the blessed Polycarp used to sit as he discoursed, his goings out and his comings in . . . how he would tell of his conversations with John and with the others who had seen the Lord, how he would relate their words from memory; and what the things were which he had heard from them concerning the Lord, His mighty works, and His teaching, Polycarp, as having received them from eyewitnesses of the life of the Logos, would declare in accordance with the Scriptures.'

We can't do that today - - - but we can go back to Scripture - - - to Paul / Peter - - - Jesus

Calvin points out that this is exactly why God had the apostles develop a written body of truth – in the gospels / epistles

Calvin: 'Suppose we ponder how slippery is the fall of the human mind into forgetfulness of God, how great the tendency to every kind of error, how great the lust to fashion constantly new and artificial religions. Then we may perceive how necessary was such written proof of the heavenly doctrine, that it should neither perish thru forgetfulness nor vanish thru error nor be corrupted by the audacity of men.' [Inst., p. 72]

i.e. – Man is so prone to forgetfulness of God – so prone to every kind of error – how great the lust to fashion new and artificial religions

God has given us a written Word to – re-check the message

We are to hold to the Scriptures – the Word of God – the faith handed down to us thru the apostles

The world will attack the bible - - - that should not surprise us

Why? Because of the natural hostility of sinful man towards God

Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban – made an interesting discovery

She was a thorough secularist in the field of anthropology – did not believe that we should ever impose our constructs of morality on other cultures

She was working in Africa and saw the terrible oppression of women taking place there - - - so she tried to tell the leaders of the African societies that this was wrong. Their response: 'Don't impose your values on us – you're imposing your religious beliefs on us.'

Carolyn was dumbfounded - - she responded that she was not religious – she did not believe in God

But – it then struck her – that they exposed an essential truth - - - she had no grounds to assert human rights – cross culturally – without appeal to a higher authority over all [God]

Many Nazi's used a form of that argument at Nuremburg – 'You are judging us by your laws - - - but we were obeying our laws' – different culture / different laws

Why is it wrong to oppress / mistreat / abuse others?

The moral law of God – Ten Commandments - - - Golden Rule – 'Do unto others . . .'

Human rights are values derived from Scripture / man is a creature made in the image of God / etc.

When we see societies / nations push God to the side - - - basic rights always deteriorate / moral behavior declines / freedoms erode

As Christians – as we hold to the Scriptures given us - - - our faith is strengthened / our character is transformed / our values and judgments become more aligned with God's truth - - - and we gain wisdom in knowing how to live in a world antagonistic to God

III. Prayer to the Father and the Son - vv. 16-17

Paul closes this section with a prayer for the Thessalonians

Many note the reference to both Jesus and God the Father as being the ones who answer prayer

Why do we believe in the Trinity? [Father / Son / Holy Spirit]

Because it's taught in the Bible

A weak conspiracy theory of liberal theologians in relation to the Trinity - - - is that the early disciples did not believe in the deity of Christ - - - that the doctrine came along much later for political reasons

Richard Phillips: 'Liberal scholars have argued that the doctrine of Christ's deity was invented long after the age of the apostles by church power-brokers. This notion was popularized in the best-selling novel, *The Davinci Code*, which alleged that Jesus' deity was invented by the Roman emperor Constantine three

centuries after Christ's life. The fictional character Leigh Teabing explains that until the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325, "Jesus was viewed by his followers as a mortal prophet . . . a great and powerful man, but a man nonetheless, a mortal." "Not the Son of God?" asks his fictional pupil. "Right" Teabing replies.'

Paul's statements here refute that idea - - - show an early recognition of the deity of Christ

The deity of Christ / and the doctrine of the Trinity was reflected from the earliest days of the church

I John 2:23 - 'Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father; the one who confesses the Son has the Father also.'

II Corinthians 13:14 - 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.'

Conclusion

God calls us to love the truth

John 10:27 - "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.'

Have you heard the voice of the shepherd in the Scriptures?

Have you welcomed his truth into your heart?