

"Handle Not, Nor Taste, Nor Touch"

Having urged Colossians to "let no man judge you" (Col. 2:16); Paul cites some things we are to allow no man to judge us in, meats, drinks, feast days, new moon, sabbath. Then shortly follows the following words: "If you died with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to ordinances, handle not, nor taste, nor touch, (all which things are to perish with the using), after the precepts and doctrines of men?" (Col. 2:20-22).

Many misunderstand the phrase "handle not, nor taste, nor touch." They regard this as a command from Paul to neither handle, taste nor touch the ordinances of men. Such is true, of course, but not the thrust of the apostle's instructions. By saying, "handle not, taste not, touch not" he identifies the ordinances he warns the Colossians against.

Since he had the law in mind when he wrote "having blotted out the bond written in ordinances which was against us," first application to the ordinances of men would be applied to things the law forbade: unclean meats, touching dead bodies, etc. The Hebrew writer said: "being only (with meats and drink and divers washings) carnal ordinances imposed until a time of reformation" (Heb. 9:1). Still, these instructions have to have reference to the regulations the Pharisees and Sadducees added to the ordinances required by the law. We are assured that all these ordinances will perish "after the precepts of doctrines of men." Doctrines of men may flourish and prosper for a time, but will ultimately come to naught as will all who teach and follow such precepts (Mt. 15:9).

Then Paul adds, "which things have indeed a show of wisdom in will worship; and humility and severity to the body, but are not of any value against the indulgences of the flesh" (Col. 2:23).

We think of many such rituals which would fit Paul's statement. Making "the sign of the cross" when in presence of danger or trying circumstances, as though such would protect one from danger, would be one. What earthly or spiritual value does such provide? It might show will worship and humility, but what spiritual strength does it promote?

On frequent visits to the Philippines I have occasionally seen persons who, for the sake of their religion, have carried a heavy cross on their back for several miles. Some, upon reaching their determined destination, even allow themselves to be impaled to the cross they carried. Such acts

do reflect humility and severity to the body, but what profit comes to such worshippers in aiding them to resist temptation to drink, lie, steal, commit adultery or any other flesh desires? None, whatsoever. Are we therefore free from observing all ordinances, then? What are ordinances? The word is defined as "an opinion expressed authority..." Ordinances are requirements or laws. Are there no ordinances we must submit to? What about God's "ordinances"? We must certainly yield to these. Some of these would be water baptism, keeping the Lord's supper, singing. All these are essential because Christ requires them. But none of these things have value solely because of the observance of them. If they did, one would not read such accounts as Acts 19:4 where certain men, baptized with John's baptism, were baptized again with Christ's baptism. Were there benefit solely in the act itself, whatever motive (or lack of it) would make no difference. Thus "infant baptism" or the "baptism of the saved person" (practiced by denominations) would be acceptable. Baptism, as well as all other acts of obedience, must be an act of faith. If there is not "heart action" all outward acts of obedience are mere formalisms and differ not one whit from the spirit of the Pharisees!

Jim McDonald