



# COLOSSIANS

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**“Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,”** Colossians 2:21

The words here have no connecting particles. They are sent out in rapid-fire succession in order to show the urgency of the commands by those who would forbid another person from doing what they believe is wrong to do.

However, the first word translated as “touch,” and the last word translated as “handle,” should be switched. It should read, “Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch.” Both words are very close in meaning, but the last phrase means a less deliberate touch than the first. What is happening is the person doing the warning is making a climax of prohibitions. In essence, they are saying, “Don’t handle such a thing! No, don’t taste such a thing! And don’t EVEN TOUCH such a thing!”

This is referring to the Judaizers who would warn against something like eating pork, a meat considered unclean according to the Law of Moses. Here comes such a person into this group of Gentiles who have been sanctified by the blood of Christ which was shed in fulfillment of the law. And what do they do? They urgently reapply the precepts of that obsolete law to the lives of these already purified souls. “Hey, what are you doing? That’s bacon! That bacon comes from an unclean animal! Don’t handle such a thing! No, don’t taste such a thing! And don’t EVEN TOUCH such a thing.” Bam! Bam! Bam! They fire off their legalistic warnings.

But Paul tells them otherwise, and he will explain it more fully in his words to come. Not to leave the verse hanging though, if you smell that delightful waft of bacon, feel free to pick it up, snack on it, and enjoy it. It cannot make you any less saved, and it cannot defile you in any way. The law is fulfilled in Christ and it is finished. It is nailed to the cross. Thank God for the freedom we have in Him!

And as a side note, this set of prohibitions doesn’t just apply to the dislikes of the Jews, but of anyone who would come to you and say the same about any other tradition or teaching of man. As Paul says in Romans 14:14 –

ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν διὰ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ, τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν·

“I know and am convinced by the Lord Jesus that *there is* nothing unclean of itself; but to him who considers anything to be unclean, to him *it is* unclean.”

Life application: If there is a food you find nummy, then nom nom away. You are free from guilt, even if you are not free from some type of stomach troubles because of how much you eat.

**...which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men?** Colossians 2:22

“Which” is referring to the words, “Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” of the previous verse. The error of those who attempt to reinsert the prescriptions of the Law of Moses, or some other group who would mandate their own traditions or customs which are contrary to the finished work of Christ, is that they fail to see that these “concern things which perish with the using.”

The words “with the using” come from the Greek words, *té apochrêsis*. This word, *apochrêsis*, found only here in the Bible, gives the idea of “using up,” and thus being consumed. Combined with the word “perish,” which gives the idea of corruption through decomposition, we are given the correct idea of what Paul is speaking of. When someone eats something, regardless of what it is, it breaks down into something else. The very eating of the thing destroys it. In other words, it is what Jesus was speaking of in Mark 7:18-23 –

So He said to them, “Are you thus without understanding also? Do you not perceive that whatever enters a man from outside cannot defile him, <sup>19</sup> because it does not enter his heart but his stomach, and is eliminated, *thus* purifying all foods?”<sup>20</sup> And He said, “What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. <sup>21</sup> For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, <sup>22</sup> thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. <sup>23</sup> All these evil things come from within and defile a man.”

Life application: The food regulations which are fulfilled in Christ, along with all of the law, are nullified. Any such teaching now is no longer of God, but is “according to the commandments and doctrines of men.” The New Covenant is now in place, and thus the Old is set aside. And so if anyone says to you concerning that tasty pork chop, “Don’t touch, don’t taste, don’t handle!” You can tell them, “Take a turn off the heresy highway, and onto the road of righteousness. I am purified not by my own deeds, but by the work of Christ.” And then go enjoy your dinner.

**These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, *false* humility, and neglect of the body, *but are* of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.**

Colossians 2:23

ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν διὰ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ, τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν·

“These things” refers to what Paul has been speaking of in the previous verses – things like circumcision versus uncircumcision, partaking or not partaking in certain foods, participating in certain religious festivals, worshipping angels, and so on. He lumps them into this one thought and says, “These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion.”

People who participate in dietary restrictions, for example, seem to be more pious than others. Ascetics look at their self-denial as leading them to a state of holiness. The observance of religious festivals certainly attracts attention. Those who participate in them appear to be observing them in order to be more holy. And so forth. But is a person more holy by not eating pork or by observing a Passover Seder? No! Christ fulfilled these things. By placing one’s faith in Christ, they skip over the shadow and obtain the substance of what the shadow only pointed to.

Why put a beanie cap on your head when praying if you were never a Jew in the first place? Such is “*false* humility.” In the end, it doesn’t add to personal holiness at all. The “neglect of the body” is specifically speaking of ascetic practices that he had just referred to – “Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle.” But again, such things are, as he says, “of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.”

In the end, these things which are seemingly pious are actually prideful. They are “works to impress” God, but God does not need to be impressed. He came out of His eternal realm, donned garments of flesh, and fulfilled everything necessary to reconcile fallen man back to Himself. What God looks for is faith in that, not in self. An attitude of self-righteousness is completely opposed to trusting in Christ for imputed righteousness.

Paul’s words are clear and direct, and they ask us to put away externals as a means of seeking God’s favor. We are to be purified in our hearts, filled with faith in His provision, and trusting in His ability to complete our salvation to lead us back to Himself.

Life application: As always, the Bible shows us that faith in what God has done, is doing, and will do which is pleasing to Him. When we put aside faith, and begin trusting in our own actions to merit His favor, or to increase our standing before Him, we are saying that we don’t need Him. “It’s OK God, I can handle it from this point on.” This is why, even after salvation, we are to continue to trust Him for our walk towards holiness. As Paul says in Galatians 3:2-4 – “This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? <sup>3</sup> Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh? <sup>4</sup> Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed *it was* in vain?” Hold fast to Christ, and Christ alone!

**If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Colossians 3:1**

ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν διὰ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ, τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν·

Starting in verse 2:11, Paul began his explanation of what it means to have died with Christ. He explained what that means in relation to the law, what that means for us in our daily lives, and how to avoid being trapped by those who look at Christ's death as being insufficient for their passage to heaven. He carefully explained that it is all-sufficient, and that we are freed from the basic principles of the world.

Now, at the beginning of chapter 3, he moves from what the death of Christ means to us, and he focuses on what it means to be raised with Him. He begins with, "If then you were raised with Christ..." In verse 2:12, Paul said that we were "buried with Him in baptism," and he then said that we "were raised with *Him* through faith." The explanation of what being buried with Him means is done, and now he explains what being raised with Him means.

The word "if" is not one of doubt, but one of certainty. Just as a believer in Christ is united with Him in His death where they became dead to sin, and also dead to the basic principles of the world, then being raised with Him should bring the believer to a new state. Christ wasn't just raised to eternal life to live out an earthly life. Instead, He was resurrected to eternal life as the Lord of heaven and earth. In this state, He ascended to the Father with all authority and power in His possession. As He is now in heaven, then we who have been raised with Him are to "seek those things which are above."

This statement is well-explained by Paul in Philippians 3:12-21. We are to forget that which is behind (our earthly existence which died with Christ), and instead reach forward to those things which are ahead (our anticipated heavenly existence where Christ now is). This is what it means to seek those things which are above. It is to look to our heavenly home "where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God."

Of what value is it to fix our eyes, our hopes, and our attentions on what we have died to? It makes as much sense as watering flowers in a rain storm to go back to observing the law, feasts, dietary restrictions, and etc. Instead, we are to fix our eyes on Jesus who has overcome all of these things. Our hopes and hearts should be directed to spiritual growth and maturity in preparation for an eternity of dwelling with Him.

Life application: We are dead to the basic principles of the world. We are not bound to laws which bring only a reminder of sin, but instead we are alive in Christ. He has freed us from this body of death, and He has raised us to sit with Him in the heavenly places. As this is so, then why would we look back to the earthly, carnal life we once lived? We came to Christ to get away from that, not continue wallowing in it.

ἐν ᾧ ἔχομεν τὴν ἀπολύτρωσιν διὰ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτοῦ, τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν·