

Colossians 2:20-23

20 If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— 21 “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch”

22 (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? 23 These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

The world is impressed with holiness, just not biblical holiness. It is impressed with the trappings of holiness, the veneer, but few comprehend holiness to the core. That's why the Pharisees impressed so many in their day, but Christ often went without much fanfare. They had made up all sorts of extra rules they could keep to set themselves apart, so that the Pharisee, unlike the tax collector, could list his virtues in prayer in the temple, while the tax collector merely beat his breast and begged for mercy. But the Pharisees holiness was no holiness at all. In fact, it was indulgence of the flesh. It was a source of pride, and it reveled in praise. It was the tax collector who truly praised God, recognizing Him as the One who must show holiness. And it was the tax collector who went home justified, qualified by God's verdict to stand in the Lord's eternal presence. The Pharisee's praise for God, in the end, was in reality thinly-veiled praise of self.

Christ has set us free from such holiness. We don't have anyone to impress. No, God's Spirit has impressed upon us the seal and guarantee of our salvation, so that we need nothing so shallow as hollow accolades. We have been set free to be what we could only pretend to be before: holy. And we are able to be that, not because we no longer wrestle with the flesh and sometimes stumble into sin, but because God's Holy Spirit dwells within us and through Christ's death and resurrection we have been declared possessors of what we in practice daily grow in: holiness. Holiness is first and foremost what we have received, and only in so far as we have received it and recognized that fact are we able to reflect it, not for praise from God, but in praise to Him, not to get our neighbor's attention, but for our neighbor's benefit. In that way the flesh is indeed stopped as the old Adam must answer to the new Adam and do battle with the new creation that we are in Him. Let us hold to that Christ, then, the new Adam, live in Him, and find in Him true holiness, so that we are no longer deceived by the superficial holiness of the world or enamored with the world's trivial praise.