

2/11/2022

Dear G&P Family,

Although G&P has never observed Lent and its various practices, and although it has never been a matter of concern in the past, the Session has recently been asked by a member to inform the congregation as to why we do not observe this season.

Therefore, in the event that others may have similar questions the Session would like to make known its rationale to the congregation:

1. We understand that practicing Lent is currently in vogue, not only in Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, and Anglican communions, but also in mainline Protestant churches, broadly Evangelical churches, and in many Reformed circles as well. We also realize that the observance of Lent is a relatively new anomaly in Reformed worship.
2. We have no desire to condemn our brothers who have differing opinions. We also do not condemn those who choose to observe the season of Lent in their own homes and in their personal walk. We strongly believe that Romans 14:1-12 gives them the freedom to do so. We realize that well-meaning Christians may differ in their opinions.
3. We also believe that Romans 14:1-12 discourages Christians from forcing others to participate in rituals, ceremonies, and practices that are not taught in Scripture. (This is why when G&P has participated in services outside of the Lord's Day worship, such as Christmas eve celebrations, Good Friday, and Reformation services, we never insist that our people attend or participate. People are free to do so if they wish, but are under no obligation.) The Session believes that Lenten observance falls into this category. Consequently, to teach or promote this practice on the Lord's Day when people are expected to attend, risks violating the Liberty of Conscience taught in Romans 14 and the WCF XX:1-4.
4. The Session also believes that the historic position of those Reformers that rejected Lent was correct in that Lenten practices often confuse the very nature of the gospel. While we strongly encourage Christians to be conscious of their sin, to mourn over it, to mortify the deeds of the flesh, and to look to the cross of Christ as their only remedy, we believe this should be done on a daily and ongoing basis in the life of every believer. (To neglect this is unwise at best, and sinful at worst.) However, we do not believe that self-inflicted renunciation of things in the world that God has given us for thanksgiving is of any value in overcoming the indulgence of the flesh (Colossians 2:20-23). In the introduction to a devotional on Lent one popular Reformed writer risked doing exactly what Paul is warning against. The author states, "*we willingly and joyfully let go of things in this world that have too much of a hold on us.*"¹ If these things have such a hold on people, then they have become idols and should be repented of daily, not just during a 40 day period in the calendar year. If that is not the case, then there is no Scriptural reason to "*let go*" of them.
5. The Session believes that the practices of ritualistic self-denial often observed during Lent fall into the category stated by the apostle Paul in Colossians 2:23 - *These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body.* However, we also

1 Tripp, Paul *Journey to the Cross: a 40 day Lenten Devotional*

agree with the WCF XVI:1 that good works are only such as God has commanded in His holy word, and not those that are without the warrant of Scripture, but are rather devised by men out of zeal, and even out of good intention. Since we can find no place in Scripture for imposing such a practice upon the Church we, in good conscience, cannot impose them upon the congregation at G&PPC.

6. The Session realizes that no denomination, movement, session or individual is without sin and error this side of glory. We are capable of being wrong in this regard. However, we believe that Lent, Ash Wednesday, ritual fasting, etc is simply an unfortunate holdover from the corrupted practices of the Church prior to the Reformation. One example of this is an explanation of Lent by a Roman Catholic author who writes...

*“Though we were created lovingly by God to enjoy the goods of the earth, these goods can consume us, and even become the object of sinful pride, as our parents in the garden demonstrated. By temporarily renouncing these goods through fasting, we willingly suffer their absence in our flesh as a way to attack sin. Fasting hurts us, but, like the pain brought about by physical exercise, the more pain we endure for God, the more we gain in spiritual rewards”.*²

As noted earlier, Paul the apostle specifically warns against the very ideas being promoted by this statement. It confuses the gospel, and places our battle against sin, not in reliance on the work of the Holy Spirit or the sufferings of Christ, but in observance of a ritual. While we hope that most Protestants that observe Lent would not go as far as our Catholic friends, it is sometimes hard to steer clear of the dangers inherent in such practices. For this reason the Session again believes it best to avoid teaching this practice.

7. Another danger inherent in Lenten observance is that of pride or self-righteousness. Even though the author of the aforementioned book indicated that Lenten practices are a way to “*give ourselves to humble and thankful mourning*”, focusing on what one has given up has, in my experience, lent itself (no pun intended) to comparing one’s spiritual health to that of others. As for fasting, the Session believes it to be a biblical practice that is permitted, but not mandatory. It is also not something that should be done publicly or for others to notice (Matthew 6:16-18). (Too often Lenten observance has violated this principle.) The Gospels contain examples of people wanting to examine the practice of fasting in the lives of others (Matthew 9:14-17; Mark 2:18-20). Jesus does not seem to give them credence, even indicating (Matt.9:17) that fasting is “*inappropriate for the fullness of the kingdom that has now arrived*”³. Rather than upholding a biblical concept, Lent, and its many accessories, seems more apt to promote the spiritual pride of the Pharisee in Luke 18:12 who looked to his manner of fasting as a reason to boast in himself. Consequently, the Session is hesitant to promote Lenten practices that are not found in Scripture and are susceptible to much abuse.

8. Finally, the Session takes very seriously the vows of membership. The final item that each member agrees to exercise, and which the Session is charged to protect, is the purity and peace of G&PPC. This is nothing less than maintaining the unity of the body of which Paul speaks in his letter to the Ephesians. Since there are numerous people in our church who believe that Lent is not something they should be observing, we run the risk of disrupting the peace and unity of the congregation by introducing a ritual we cannot defend from the Scriptures. Therefore, the Session is in agreement that it would be unwise to promote or teach this practice to the congregation.

2 Quoted by D. G. Hart, “*Playing with Lenten Fire*”

3 The Reformation Study Bible, p.1375

In closing, the Session firmly agrees with the belief that sin should never be taken lightly, and that Christians should mortify sin and daily seek to live godly and dignified lives to the glory of God. We are convinced that the only remedy for our sinful condition is Christ alone whom we receive by faith that is worked in us through being born again by the Holy Spirit. We trust that the members of G&PPC will continue to live this out throughout the entire year. We also hope that this explanation of our position will find listening ears and open hearts.

On behalf of the Session of G&PPC,

TE Bill Mayk