

Should We Observe Lent?

Lent is not in the Bible. It was not something that God told Israel to observe. It was not something that Jesus told His followers to observe, and it is not something that Paul was told, by Christ, to tell the Church, the Body of Christ, to observe.

Many churches observe a 46-day period of time before Easter known as Lent. It starts on a day known as Ash Wednesday, 40 days (not counting Sundays) before Easter. The 40-day period represents Christ's time in the wilderness, after His baptism, where He fasted and where Satan tempted him.

Does God want believers today observe Lent?

Paul reminds us again and again that as members of the Church, the Body of Christ, are no longer under law to prove our righteousness.

Romans 10:4

For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

Today there is no law we must follow for our salvation. We must simply believe that the Lord

Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again from the dead to save us from our sins, and we are saved by God's grace and God's grace alone!

Romans 6:14

For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

As soon as we believe, we are sealed with the Holy Ghost in our hearts. Since we are led by the (Holy) Spirit, we are not under law.

Galatians 5:18

But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.

Paul makes it very clear. We are not under law, so there is nothing that is unlawful for us! Should we do things that are not pleasing to God just because we can? Paul reminds us that we need to be careful because some things can overpower us if we do them.

1 Corinthians 6:12

All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.

He also reminds us that some things we do are not good for other members of the body of Christ (do not edify.)

1 Corinthians 10:23

All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not.

What would Paul say about observing Lent? Take fasting, for example, or not eating meat on Fridays.

We know that we are not under law and believe that we may eat all things. Others are weaker in their faith and do not eat meat. Since God has received us, who are we to reject each other for our choices.

Romans 14:1-3

Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations. For one believeth that he may eat all things: another, who is weak, eateth herbs. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth: for God hath received him.

Many churches expect members to fast during Lent. Paul says that we are no better if we eat and no worse if we don't eat. The word "meat" in the following passage is "food," not just the flesh of animals

1 Corinthians 8:8

But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse.

But, Paul cautions us that even though we know we have the liberty to eat or fast as we see fit, we should be concerned about the people who Paul calls "weak." They do not understand that Christ's death has freed them from the law.

Paul says we (believers who understand this liberty) “hast knowledge.” But, if we tell someone (who is weak) that we are not going to fast, we may cause him to do the same and violate his conscience.

1 Corinthians 8:9-10

But **take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.** For if any man see **thee which hast knowledge** sit at meat in the idol's temple, **shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols;**

When we (the believers who understand that we are not subject to the law) cause someone who is weak to do something that he thinks is sin, we sin against Christ.

1 Corinthians 8:12

But **when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ.**

Paul concludes that if what he eats/drinks or doesn't eat/drink causes others to commit what they think is sin, he will not do (even though he knows it is not sin) what others think is sin.

1 Corinthians 8:13

Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.

On the other hand, Paul reminds us of the liberty that we have because Christ has freed us. We should not allow others to cause us to act like we are still in bondage (to sin.)

Galatians 5:1

Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

We cannot allow others who are still trying to live under the law to judge us and cause us to doubt our Christ-given liberty.

Colossians 2:16

Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days:

Paul is very clear that we are not under any obligation to observe specific days or seasons. He doesn't even want to associate with people who do these things. He tells the Galatians that he is afraid of them because the time he has spent teaching them about being freed from the law has been wasted!

Galatians 4:10-11

Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.

Paul asks, very logically why people who have been freed from God's law would choose to now follow the commandments of men.

Colossians 2:20-22

Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, (Touch

not; taste not; handle not; Which all are to perish with the using;) **after the commandments and doctrines of men?**

Paul acknowledges that some of these commandments of men appear to be wise and can even make us feel that we are humble and worshipping God because we deny our flesh (fasting, for example.) But, it is all a show.

Colossians 2:23

Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.

Paul says that whatever we decide to observe or not observe anything, we should always make our decision based on giving the Lord thanks.

Romans 14:5-6

One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he

doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.

As for our obligations to our weaker brethren, Paul says that no one lives only to himself or dies only to himself, we believers live and die to the Lord, for we are His.

Romans 14:7-8

For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, **we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.**

Since we are the Lord's and we live to the Lord, we should be sensitive that we don't judge others or "trip them up" by encouraging them to do things that they feel are sin.

Romans 14:13-15

Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his

brother's way. I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean. **But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.**

We are to try to be at peace with each other and edify each other. If we eat things or do things that others think are sinful, we are doing them with offence. We should not do things (even if we know there is nothing wrong with doing them) if it causes others around us to stumble or fall.

Romans 14:19-23

Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another. For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence. It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak. Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that

condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

Bottom line is that it is fine for you to observe Lent if you want, and it is fine for you decide not to observe Lent. We who know that we are no longer under the law have to be careful not to force our knowledge on those who are weak in the faith. Others may feel that something is very important, maybe even to their salvation, because they have been taught that it is. If we encourage them to go against their conscience, for them it is sin.

Paul sums it up for us. We are to be concerned about others' consciences but not let our liberty be limited by them. If we are giving thanks to God for the liberty we have in Christ, we do not have to be concerned about others who may speak evil of what we are doing.

Whatever we do, we are to do to the glory of God because we are concerned about saving as many people as can be saved by our service. That

means that we are not supposed to offend anyone on purpose by our actions.

1 Corinthians 10:29-33

Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other: for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience? For if I by grace be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks? Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God. Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God: Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

Galatians 5:13-14

For, **brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh,** but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; **Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.**

Yes, everyone's sins are forgiven, but if we cause someone to commit what he thinks is a sin, even though we know it is not, have not edified our

brother. We can always witness to our friends and family, but if they think we will cause them to sin, we are an ineffective witness and will not be able to help them understand that they are no longer under law, but under grace alone.

Romans 6:14

For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

