

The Public Reading of the Scriptures, 6 pgs

Paul exhorts Timothy ... *devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture ... (1 Tim.4:13)*. This practice has roots in the OT. Just prior to Israel's crossing the Jordan River to begin conquest of the land promised to the descendants of Abraham, *Moses commanded that the Law of God be publicly read once every 7 years in the year for canceling debts [Dt.15], during the Feast of Tabernacles to all in Israel - men, women and children, and the aliens living in your towns (Dt.31:10-12)*. Some churches have applied this as a regular practice in worship services. I attended one church that had adopted this practice the reading was from the book of **Job**. They read a portion without explanation. That was strange because the passage consisted of part of Elephaz's criticism of Job and it was against Elephaz and his friends that the Lord expressed anger *because you have not spoken of Me what is right as My servant Job has (Job.42:7)*.

Paul's exhortation to Timothy goes further ... *devote yourself to the [public] reading [aloud] of Scripture, to the exhortation, to the teaching [thereof] (1 Tim.4:13)*. This was understood and practiced in accompaniment of the public reading. **Neh.8** is an account of such an event. *The Levites ... instructed ... [all who were able to understand, v.3] in the law ... They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read (v.7-8)*. In addition, *the heads of all the families along with the priests and the Levites gathered around Ezra the scribe to give attention to the words of the Law (v.13)*. I attended another church that had adopted this practice where a designated reader **first gave a summary of the passage with comments** and then read an entire chapter from **John**, a sermon before the sermon.

The practice of publicly reading a portion of Scripture was continued in New Testament times. When Jesus returned to Galilee after being tempted by the devil in the desert. He taught in the synagogues. On the sabbath in the synagogue in Nazareth he read out loud from the scroll of **Isaiah 61 verses 1-2** about which He commented as being fulfilled. Paul did something similar (**Acts 13:13-52**). Paul also instructed that His letters be read out-loud and that they be passed around the churches (**Col.4:16; 1 Thes.5:27**).

DROPPING OUT

It seems strange to me that Christians take things like this and make a practice out of them without (apparently) thinking them through. Since for the most part, the people referred to in the above historical survey didn't have personal copies of the Scriptures, so even if they could read Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic, they had no Bible broken down into chapters and verses to cross reference. Hence, *the public reading and explanation was necessary and appropriate then*.

Today, everyone in the US has access to all manor of translations and a plethora of Bible tools (ie Vine's Expository Dictionary of NT Words) as well, both written and recorded. Most of us can follow such an oral reading as long as it tells a story or gives a sequence of events (historical account). But *as soon as the reading hits the doctrinal sections, few of us can stay with it for more than 3 sentences*. One person commented to me that they have had 3 Bibles and haven't been able to read any of them. They try every now and then and always end up quitting after a short time. Any public reading or reference to Scripture logically should include some explanation of it's context or framework.

Scripture doesn't reveal everything. In fact often what we are interested in discussing is exactly the point where it is silent and so we speculate. That is ok as long as we don't miss what God is emphasizing by what He does reveal. In our Sunday school, we were interacting around the topic, How were people in OT times [before Christ's resurrection] saved? The discussion naturally moved to what people knew at the time. Someone brought up the fact that Abel and Cain knew to offer sacrifices and brought them according to some knowledge. How explicit was their knowledge? Did both brothers have the same understanding? Did Cain know what to offer and deliberately bring something else? This seems unlikely. We simply don't have much information to go on.

What God does address in **Gen.4** is Cain's reaction to having his offering rejected while his brother's was accepted. God reasoned with Cain, talking to him about what was really happening, how he was being manipulated by sin [personified as his adversary] and warned him of the consequences. Cain was being given a chance to correct his error and turn from the path of anger he had begun [see Short Course: Temptation]. Since this is the part that Scripture discusses, it is what God intends for us to contemplate.

What would you find out about reading the Bible if you could get an accurate account from people attending your church and those who have dropped out or haven't attend in a long time. Did they find it got monotonous - were they bored or what? Do they find it intellectually fulfilling, stimulating, or interesting? Why not design a survey [not as simple as you'd think] and find out? I think you'll find that some people like the worship meetings, teaching, perhaps small group discussions, and maybe certain activities, yet many don't really read the Bible or know how to. It helps to have a good framework that organizes the various themes. There are a number of books on this subject [God's Big Picture by Vaughn Roberts is a good one].

Among those who do read the Bible regularly, how many **study** it? Is it serving people who do not regularly read the Word and meditate on the Scripture themselves to have someone read it to them? Can it be that none of these - handing people the Bible, reading it to them, explaining it to them, or even giving them applications is the best way to educate Christians? Remember the old adage that says *Give a man a bag of grain and he will eat for a month - teach him to grow it as well, and he will be able to feed his family from then on.* [see Living Between the Lines ... What to Teach; War ... Reading and Discussing Scripture]

SUGGESTIONS

Instead of reading through the Bible as a regular part of worship, it might be more beneficial in the long run to train people how to reason through the texts, figure them out, and consider the lessons in terms of their own lives. Ultimately, each of us wrestles with God and faces trials to his faith inside of his own head and heart. For this very lonely struggle one must be sure of what he knows and convinced that what he knows is true.

To this end [training people to mine the truths of the Bible for themselves and distinguish truth and error], it might prove better practice to work through passages from categories. This is a form and method of clarification. Admittedly, it involves a brief lesson before the sermon and may be more appropriately dealt with in Sunday school or other meetings. TIPS - don't read long passages or other statements - give background, summarize, read short excerpts, tell the story and quit.

Using cross references, take people through the process of looking up OT passages, occurrences, or situations cited in the NT to explore why it is referred to and what it is getting at. There are a lot of passages like this. For example – **Rom.11:1-5 << 1 Ki. 19:1-18. Rom.10** ends by giving a good reason for God to reject Israel as a whole. Nevertheless Paul makes the case that God hasn't rejected the Hebrews as a people, after all Paul himself is a Jew whom God has saved. In support of his argument, he refers to the great prophet **Elijah** who served the Lord during the reign of the wicked king Ahab over Israel. Elijah prayed and the Lord stopped the rain for over 3 years and brought famine on the land. It was Elijah who cried to the Lord for the widow's dead child and God restored his life. He stood against 450 prophets of Baal and had them executed for worshipping false gods. He prayed again and the Lord sent rain on the land. But when Ahab's wicked wife, Jezebel, heard of the execution, she threatened Elijah, and he fled. Out of his disgust with himself for being afraid and thinking that his zeal for the Lord had accomplished nothing – exhausted, discouraged, and depressed, Elijah asked God to take his life. Instead, the Lord sent an angel to strengthen him in his flight.

God exhibited His presence to Elijah not in the mighty display of judgment against Israel (powerful wind, earthquake, or fire) as Elijah's indictment called for, but in a most unspectacular way. Elijah in the bitterness of his heart had been blind to God's unseen work - His intent to demonstrate His sovereign power over people and nations, but in His own way and time. Paul's point in referencing Elijah is that God is at work regardless of how things appear. Just as it seemed to Elijah that he was the only one in Israel who remained faithful to God, so it looked like God had abandoned His ancestral people in Paul's day. Not so, we don't know what God is doing because His ways are secret, quiet. He reserved to Himself a loyal remnant in Elijah's day and He was saving a remnant in Paul's. As we find ourselves feeling dissatisfied like Elijah, let us remember that God is good and faithful to His promises. We, like Elijah, need to persevere in trusting our heavenly Father. Since we don't know the details of God's working, let us resist prejudging Him and others as the events and circumstances of life unfold. [This can be applied more specifically to other areas such as witnessing. see Means of Grace]

Discuss the meaning of Bible hymns, songs, and literature

an Interpretive Analysis https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ez5Kti_hvxU

(v.1) **Rock of Ages** [figure of God in the OT as a safe-haven (**Ps.18:2**) here referring to Christ] cleft for me [split open], let me hide myself in thee [take refuge, **Ex.33:21-22**]; let the water [for washing away the stain and guilt of sin] and the blood [for appeasing the wrath of God], from thy wounded side that flowed [**Jn.19:34**], be of sin the double cure, save from wrath [propitiation] and make me pure [clean, expiation].

Propitiation [lit. to make favorable] describes the satisfaction of God's justice and appeasement of his anger [turning aside of his wrath]; our sin is covered and remitted thereby turning aside God's wrath and restoring us to his favor [The God Who Is There, D.A. Carson, **p.178-9**]; depicted by the goat sacrificed on the Day of Atonement (**Lev.16:7-10**; Beginning At Moses, Michael Barrett, **p.291**) [Christ] had to be made like his brethren in all things in order to become a merciful and faithful high priest ... to make propitiation for the sins of the people, **Heb.2:17**; The love of God was manifest in that God sent his only begotten son into the world that we might live through him. God loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins, **1 Jn.4:9-10**; [In both the tabernacle and later

the temple the book of the law resided behind the curtain inside the ark and the lid that covered it was the place of propitiation, aka the mercy seat.]

Propitiation involves appeasing the wrath of an offended person and being reconciled to them. We were reconciled to God while we were enemies ... **Rom.5:10**; We [now] have peace with God, **Rom.5:1**. ²⁵God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished [Paul anticipates that God's justice might be called into question at this point] — ²⁶he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus, (**Rom.3:**). [Paul answered that God looked forward to the cross of Christ where the full payment for the guilt of sin would be made.]

Expiation [lit. to make pious] refers to removal of the sin and cleansing [purifying] of the guilty conscience. It is depicted by the scapegoat set free into the wilderness on the Day of Atonement (**Lev.16:7-10**). Under the law almost everything is purified [cleansed] with blood, and without the shedding of blood [death of the sacrifice] there is no forgiveness of sins, **Heb.9:22** ... [Christ] has appeared ... to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself (**v.26**); Jesus Christ gave himself [his life] for us, to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself [expiate] a people for his own possession ... **Tit.2:14**; As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove [expiate] our sins from us, **Ps.103:12**

(v.2) *All the labors of my hands cannot meet thy law's demands [no matter how hard I try I fail to measure up]; could my zeal no respite know [never slacken or diminish], could my tears [of sorrow over my sin] forever flow, all [labor, zeal, tears] for sin could not atone [make up for my sin, make things right with God, save me]. Thou must save and thou alone.*

Elaborating on certain verses at the exclusion of others doesn't mean the rest aren't valuable. The rest are left for you to work on.

God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen [gives us a clue to the original meaning with a comma after Merry. God rest you is not pronouncing a blessing on merry-making upon people celebrating but is comforting them "rest easy, don't be perturbed" - The next phrase clarifies] *let nothing you dismay, [means don't be troubled by current events, but take comfort in this:] remember Christ our savior was born on Christmas day, to save us all from Satan's pow'r when we were gone astray [deliverance from our greatest enemy and the shame of our sin]; O tidings of comfort and joy. [Then follows the story of the celebration of Christ's birth in the sky and of the shepherds who saw it.] From God our heavenly Father, a blessed angel came; and unto certain shepherds brought tidings of the same ... Fear not, then, said the angel, let nothing you affright; [Because of this Good News!] this day is born a Savior ... to free all those who trust in him from Satan's pow'r and might. O tidings of comfort and joy.*

Day by Day is another great hymn to investigate. Some hymns contain doctrinal errors to watch out for.

excerpt from my article: **John the baptist calls for repentance**
What is John's call to repent?

Is it an invitation? Jesus said, *Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens [What burden is greater than the load of guilt we bear?] , and I will give you rest ... (Mt.11:28)*

A warning? *[We saw that it was in Jn.3:10-20; 35-36.]*

A command? Paul, standing before the Areopagus in Rome said ... *we shouldn't think of God as an idol designed by craftsmen from gold or silver or stone. God overlooked people's ignorance about these things in earlier times, but now he commands everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and turn to him. (Acts 17:29-30)*

Billy Graham always closed his crusades with the following hymn. It is an appropriate response to John's invitation addressed to Jesus.

Just as I am, without one plea [guilty: no defense, no excuse] but that Thy blood was shed for me, and that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee, O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am, and waiting not to rid my soul of one dark blot [It's impossible for us to remove the stain of sin], to Thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot, O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am, tho' tossed about with many a conflict, many a doubt [in turmoil and conflicted], fightings and fears within, without, O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am, poor, wretched, blind [in terrible condition]: sight, riches, healing of the mind, yea, all I need in Thee to find, O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am, Thou wilt receive, wilt welcome, pardon [propitiation], cleanse [expiation], relieve [take care of all my real needs]; because Thy promise I believe, O Lamb of God, I come.

Just as I am, Thy love unknown hath broken ev'ry barrier down [a curtain in the tabernacle and temple separated people from God]; now to be Thine, yea, Thine alone, O Lamb of God, I come.

Jesus guarantees ... *whoever comes to me I will never cast out ... Jn.6:37 [In the OT, God always remained apart from the people. The curtain in both the tabernacle and later the temple isolating the most holy place assured this. But Immanuel, meaning God with us, has come and walked among us. Upon the death of Jesus God tore that heavy veil in two opening the way for Mankind to approach.]*

Study Christian literature such as John Bunyan's allegory, The Pilgrim's Progress, and the fantasy series, The Chronicles of Narnia, by C. S. Lewis.

Work through paradoxes – Obtained the promise(s) ... or not, **Heb.6:13-15 >< Heb.11:13 & 39**

Tackle places where the NT actually changes the language of the OT. **Rom.4:13 >> The Israel of God p.25-26**

Clarify metaphorical references, hyperbole, and other linguistic devices – David referring to Christ the son of David (**Ezek.34; 37:15-28**)

Explore statements that seem to contradict orthodox Christian doctrine. – *striving to enter that rest, Heb.4:11a <> salvation is founded upon the finished work of Christ - by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.*

Consider incidents and teachings that may have been tied to a particular cultural context – the

covering of the head in worship, **1 Cor.11:3-16**

Correct common misconceptions and muddy thinking exhibited by misuse of biblical phrases such as *This is the day that the lord has made ... (Ps.118:24) ... the truth will set you free (Jn.8:32)* [see, *Bible Studies – holiness...the impact of truth*], etc.

Examine explanatory notes and articles. – **naturalistic** speculative notes in Zondervan NIV at **Ex.7:-17; 8:3, 13** >> **Covenant theological article** in the ESV Reformation Study Bible, God's Covenant of Grace; Infant Baptism >> **Dispensational note** at **Rev.20:2 NASV** The Ryrie Study Bible, etc.