



“They read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading” (Nehemiah 8:8).

The Bible in Worship

Central Truth: Reading and applying Holy Scripture are acts of worship.

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There are many elements of worship: music, meditation, prayer, giving, praising, etc. But an essential act of worship in the church is centered in hearing God speak through His Word. Therefore, the reading and teaching of the Bible should have a major place in each worship service.

An amazing thing about this book is that it is always up to date and applicable to every person who reads it. This “old, old story” is ever new. It is equally appropriate for the Old Testament Jew, the New Testament Jew, the heathen Gentile, and the Christian of every age. It was current in the Dark Ages and is so in our enlightened civilization. Written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek in its original manuscripts, it is equally true and valid in the languages of today. It is as new as the latest book fresh off the press or the latest scientific discovery. The Bible has stood the ages of testing and is the anvil upon which the hammers of opposition have been worn out while it has stood.

The Bible contains principles which tell us how to relate to God and other people. It tells us what to believe and how to behave. Its teachings relate to every area of life, private and public, secular and religious. We need the Bible. That is why the Bible is the central book of our faith.

That is why we have a study on the place of the Bible in worship.

I. DESIRE THE BIBLE

From all the countryside the people came to Jerusalem. They assembled with one accord in the street before the water gate of the city. And they came with one desire. *“They spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded to Israel”* (Nehemiah 8:1). They had traveled for miles, at great inconvenience and probably great expense, just to hear the reading of Holy Scripture. Most of the people did not have copies of the Bible in their homes, as is so common today; so they went to where they could hear it read. Oh that we might see such a hunger for the Word of God today!

People will desire the Word when they understand its importance. God permitted ancient Israel to run out of water and food in their exodus from Egypt in order to teach them that *“man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live”* (Deuteronomy 8:3). Those who exert such energy to gain material wealth but who neglect the Word of God need to learn what the ancient Hebrews learned.

Have you seen an infant when he gets hungry? He will squirm and grunt. If his needs are not satisfied, he will cry out. If he is not fed, he will kick his feet and wave his arms and sound out a furious cry of protest. God says that is the way Christians should act when they are not fed the pure milk of the Word (I Peter 2:2). Do you have such a hunger?

The psalmist wrote of the Word of God, *“How sweet are thy words unto my taste! yea, sweeter than honey to my mouth!”* (Psalm 119:103). A certain church had an early morning meeting with the men of her congregation before they went to work. A light breakfast was served, the Scriptures were read and discussed; then the men prayed and went to work. When the series of meetings had ended one man said, “In the early morning I find myself hungry for the Word, just as I am for my breakfast.”

How great is your desire for the Bible? Would you discipline yourself to take time each day to read and meditate on it? Would you gather your family and read the Bible with them? Would you give up reading the daily paper, or watching another hour of television, to have time to meet God in His Word? We make time to do what we really consider is important. Ask God to help you develop a hunger for the Bible. Meet Him in Bible study and prayer each day.

II. SHARE THE BIBLE

What a beautiful picture is described in Nehemiah 8:2-5! Ezra the priest brought the law of the Lord (the Bible) before the assembled throng. All

who were able to hear with understanding (children and adults, including both men and women) waited expectantly to hear the Word of God. For half a day the Scriptures were read and explained. And the people stood and listened attentively the entire time! (Imagine someone complaining today if the sermon is over thirty minutes long!) Ezra and his assistants stood on a wooden platform so they could be seen and heard by all the people. When the book of God's law was opened, all the people stood up in respect of God's book; and so they were instructed in the things of God.

How can we share the Bible today? (1) We can share it in the home by reading it at a family altar and by talking of it in casual conversation. (2) We can share it with our associates by carrying a New Testament in our pockets and bringing it into conversation when an opportunity presents itself. (3) We can share it in our churches in both study periods and worship periods. (4) We can share it on the printed page by supporting Christian publications. (5) We can share it via radio and television (such as LifeWord Broadcast Ministries, Conway, Arkansas). Thank God that we can have a part in spreading the Word.

The Bible should have a major place in church. Let the Sunday School teacher use the Bible, not a writer's comments about the Bible, as the textbook in class. Let the churches place a Bible in each hymnal rack on the church pews for those who do not have a copy to use in worship. Let Bible reading have a major place in the public worship of God. And let all teaching and preaching be an exposition of Holy Scripture. The Bible is not a treasure to be hoarded but a message to be declared.

III. RESPECT THE BIBLE

“Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up: and Ezra blessed the LORD, the great God. And all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with lifting up their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground. . . . And the people stood in their place” (Nehemiah 8:5-7).

That is a beautiful expression of respect for the Book of God. How do we show respect for the Bible? Consider these ways. (1) We show respect for the Bible by taking care of the book (2) We show respect by not entering the worship service or classroom while the Scriptures are being read. (3) We show respect by standing for the reading of the Word, not sitting slumped as if it were just another ordinary book (4) We show respect for the Bible by following in our own Bibles while the text is being read. (5) We show

respect by keeping open minds with the spirit which says, “*Speak, LORD; for thy servant heareth*” (I Samuel 3:9). (6) We show respect for the Bible by applying its principles to life and obeying its precepts in daily conduct.

The Bible is God's book. To show respect for it is to show respect to Him. To disregard the message of the Bible is to reject the Word of God.

Take your Bible with you to Sunday School and worship meetings of your church. Help your church to be a “people of the Book” Instill in your children, grandchildren, or others whom you may influence a respect for the Bible and its message. To respect (“all the people stood up”), affirm (“all the people answered, Amen, Amen”), surrender (“lifting up their hands”), show humility (“bowed their heads”), reverence (“worshipped the LORD with their faces to the ground”), comprehend (“caused the people to understand the law”), hunger for more (“the people stood in their place”), and repent (“all the people wept”) is the proper way to show your respect for God and His Word.

IV. UNDERSTAND THE BIBLE

The apostle Paul wrote, “*The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: . . . because they are spiritually discerned*” (I Corinthians 2:14). That means no one can understand the truths of Holy Scripture without divine aid. God has given us certain of His children who have a spiritual gift of teaching. He can communicate truth through any of us, but He teaches in a special way through His gifted saints.

Ezra had twenty-six persons who are named, plus unnamed Levites, who assisted him in reading and explaining the law of God to the assembled Hebrews. They would read and discuss the Scriptures for half a day at a time. All the people stood in their places and remained attentive to the book of the law. The Bible reports, “*So they read in the book of the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading*” (Nehemiah 8:8). Three things were involved in that occasion. (1) They read the law as Moses had written it. (2) They explained the meaning of each principle. (3) They showed how that principle applied to daily life among the people. That is what biblical preaching and teaching is supposed to do today! It was an awesome experience for the people. They understood for the first time (for many of them) what the mind of God was for them, how they had erred from God's intended way, and the guilt which they had incurred as a consequence. So they wept before the Lord. That is often the appropriate response to understanding the Word of God. It reveals our sins that we might repent and receive God's grace in forgiveness. Their

experience might be your experience also.

V. OBEY THE BIBLE

James warns us, “*Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving you own selves*” (James 1:22). That means it is never enough to listen attentively to the Bible teacher or preacher. It is not enough to know the principle. Principle must be applied to practice. What we know must be translated into what we do. Anything less than that is self-deception, which leads on to greater sin.

One characteristic of our generation is lack of commitment. That is why marriages break up so often, for instance. That is why someone will make a promise to follow the Lord or to serve in the church only to fall by the way. But there must be no lack of follow through upon a commitment to obey the principles God has set forth in the Bible. Learn the Word for the purpose of being able to obey God. That is our highest goal in life.

Let us center in on the emphasis of this study. We are concerned about the place of the Bible in worship. Reading, understanding, and applying the Bible to life is an act of worship. It says that the God who gave the Bible is worthy of our efforts to understand it and obey it. As you go from Sunday School class to worship on the Lord's Day, observe how you use the Word of God to aid your worship.

Questions

1. What are some of the parts of a typical worship service?
2. Why is Bible study a vital part of worship?
3. How can you cultivate a desire for the “milk of the Word” in your worship?
4. How central is the Bible in the worship service of your church?
5. How can the Bible receive a greater emphasis in worship?