

The Public Reading of Scripture: Some Practical Thoughts.

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Until I come, given attention to the public reading of Scripture (1 Tim 4.13). The Apostle Paul gave this regulation to young Timothy as he would lead and shepherd the flock of God as a minister of the gospel. Thus, every minister of the gospel must make it a priority to take time in every corporate worship gathering to feed the flock of God and allow God Himself to speak through the public reading of the Bible.

But in the public reading of Scripture, one may ask, how ought it to be done? This essay provides some helpful, clarifying, instructive, and practical thoughts to ensure this is done excellently.

1. Passionately

Read the Bible as though you really *believe* it. In other words, do not read it as if it were a dead book. Do not be as the stoic men who read boring books as if they are lifeless. The Bible is alive, so read it with life! The Bible is living, so read it as if it will change, transform, and convert even *in* the act of reading. To the reader (lector), read it with faith, with passion, with zeal, with fire, with life!

2. Clearly

The Bible clearly conveys its message because it is lucid. Thus, when the Bible speaks, God speaks. In reading the Bible, God Himself reveals His thoughts to His creatures. When the man stands up to read the Word, he must read the Word clearly by utilizing the proper methods of verbal oratory and reading: he should pause when there is a comma, he should raise his voice when there is an exclamation point, he should pause with deliberateness after a period. He should read with clarity and with deliberateness so that all the hearers clearly understand God's truth. The ultimate key for clarity is *preparation* beforehand. The reader should read (and re-read) his passage privately *before* he ascends to read it in public. He should know the words that are hard to pronounce and he should work hard ahead of time to ensure that he can speak clearly when he stands publicly to read the Scripture.

3. Slowly

Communicating clearly requires one to speak slowly, especially in public. Often the tendency for some readers is to read the text quickly, without any variation of pitch, speed, tone, volume or life. Furthermore, just standing in front before a gathering of people stirs up anxiety and nerves and thus the reader swiftly and speedily reads the passage. It should rather be the case that the reader comfortably reads the Word with a proper speed, in a proper tone, with proper fluctuation of voice, and with proper pauses. This comes with time, with practice, and with *preparation* beforehand.

4. **Confidently**

Reading the Bible means that the very voice of God is speaking aloud to His people. Opening the Bible and reading it means that God Almighty is present and is proclaiming His mind to the audience through the Word. Thus, the reader should read with confidence. To read the Bible passively and in a tone that almost appears to question the text is to malign the solemnity of the moment. The lector should read with confidence and with authority. This authority comes *not* from the reader but from the Scripture. The reader himself has no inherent authority but every Word of Scripture carries all divine authority. So then, the lector should confidently, boldly, and assuredly read every word in his passage. He should skip over nothing, he should not be ashamed of God's Word, he should not apologize for any word of Scripture. Read it with a strong voice and with a confident heart.

5. **Articulately**

To mispronounce some words, city names, or personal names, sadly, can be such a distraction that one finds it hard to overcome this. The word should come alive in the reading. It should be read carefully and articulately. Great care should be taken in preparation for the reading and in the public act itself of the reading. The lector must be intentional in articulating the text before him so that every word is carefully read, intentionally vocalized, and articulately uttered. The man reading the Scripture in public may choose to read the text ahead of time before a mirror so that he can watch himself as he reads, as he pauses, as he looks up, as he monitors his pace, and as he pronounces words. Let the reader who takes the Word endeavor to articulate every word in God's Word so that every hearer hears exactly what God has revealed in the text at hand.

6. **Carefully**

What a sad reality that some read the Word and carelessly skip over or laugh at certain names, words, or events in the text of Scripture. O that God's men would read the word with such care as if God had just spoken into their ear and told them to relay His message to the audience. The lectors should read with deliberateness and with care as if God Himself opens His mouth, raises His voice, and utters Omnipotent truth to His people. God cares not only *that* His Word is read but he cares also *how* His Word is read. Read it with care, with precision, with intentionality, and with concern for every word, every syllable, and every punctuation mark. It is, after all, God's very Word.

7. **Reverentially**

Nothing in all the world is as important as the public reading of the Word when it is taking place in the corporate assembly. O the sad reality that some read the Word and almost stand, as it were, ashamed of the things that he reads (names, city names, events, wars). Even worse, how tragic that some men would read the Word and smirkingly laugh because of an event, an odd Hebrew name, or the ongoing repetitions found in some places in the Word. There is nothing shameful or

laughable about the public reading of God's Word. The man should stand to read it as an act of worship. He should revere the Word with the same degree of honor that God deserves since the text is in fact the very, perfect, inerrant, eternal word of God. As men of old have stated: we owe the same honor for Scripture that we owe to God since the Scripture is the very spoken word of God. Read it worshipfully. Read it honorably. Read it reverentially. Read it with a prophetic-like, serious voice.

8. Instructively

The Word is profitable for instruction. So when the man rises with the Word of God, he should consider that he instructs the people of God from the Word of God. He shares not just some opinions or some new philosophies or cultural ideologies but rather he imparts divine truth, from God Himself, from the pages of Scripture. Thus, he should read with the goal of instructing the people of God with the very power they need in the Word to convert them, to change them, to conform them to Christ, to catapult them toward more holiness, and to enflame their heart with a greater love for Christ. The Word instructs the mind and it engages the will. It convicts the conscience and it woos the heart. It burns in the hearts of His people with power, with life, with zeal, and with truth. Let every reader of Scripture remember the instructive element inherent in the public reading of the Scriptures.