

A Strong Plea to Bring Your Bible To Church (Not the Phone, but the Book)

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When the post-exilic people of Israel gathered at the Water Gate after they had returned to the land and resided there for some time, they asked Ezra the scribe to “Bring the Book” (Neh 8:1). This is a strong plea not only for every preacher to bring the Book, open the Book, and preach the Book, but it also is a strong piece of pastoral encouragement to bring your Bible to church. By bringing your Bible I’m referring to your paper Bible, the document, the Book. We all have our smartphones and our Bible Apps. We have plenty of translations and gadgets on our phones to aid and enhance our studies. But as I continue to preach week by week, I still remain convinced that there is great benefit to having your Bible open and on your lap when you hear the Word preached. Here are a few reasons why I strongly encourage you to bring your Bible to church.

1. To turn to cross references.

Bring your Bible to church so that you can easily turn to the cross references with your pastor as he preaches. Perhaps someone who is savvy on the electronic devices can search and find other Scriptures quickly, but it seems to be that, more often than not, those with paper Bibles are doing the Scripture examination as we go to different texts in the sermons. Also, having a paper Bible encourages you to know the order of the Books of the Bible so that you can turn in your Bible to different texts quickly. Thus, I think that having your Bible with you as the Word is preached is beneficial so that you can -- and should! -- turn to the various Scriptures that your pastor references in his sermon so that you can learn more, engage well, and understand the truths being heralded.

2. To minimize distractions.

Bring your Bible to church as this may help minimize distractions. Don’t get me wrong, I understand that there are myriads of distractions in church. But with the phone or the iPad, it seems to me that more distractions may be readily available. As the pastor is preaching and someone follows along on the Bible App on their phone, what happens when a text message pops up, or a new email arrives, or a calendar reminder shows up, or an ESPN alert catches your eye? This is not to say that there are no distractions for the person with their paper Bible, but it seems that distractions can be minimized by having your Bible open, on your lap, and pen out eager to take notes.

3. To teach the youth who are watching.

Bring your Bible to church because people are watching, especially our young people. Our young people idolize media and electronics. They have the phones, they see people on their phones, and they spend way too much time on their phones. And when our young people (children and teens) are with us in corporate worship, they’re watching. They see the people of God. They

look around and observe how people are singing, praying, and listening to the Word. So, what do they see? Do they see men and women with their Bibles open, prizing and prioritizing the Bible above all else? Do they see people with a well-worn, a well-used, a marked up Bible? They see people all day every day stand and wait, who walk and travel incessantly glued to their phones. Does it have to be this way at church too? Can we show our young people and our children just how much we prize and prioritize God's Word by shutting off the phone and having our Bible open during the sermon? And let us not forget that what our young people see us doing, they will do, but they won't have the measure of self control that we do. So, if you read the Bible on your phone, they will do the same. But don't be surprised if they start scrolling through social media and tuning out during the preaching of God's Word.

4. To make notes.

Bring your Bible to church because I think it is easier to take notes when you can see the text in front of you, make comments, jot down outlines, and cross references in your Bible (or in a notebook/bulletin) so you can refer to it later. I fully understand there are very effective ways to take notes on the electronic devices as well. But for me, in my Bible, I can't overstate the importance of making notes *in* my Bible, underlining, highlighting, circling a word, drawing an arrow connecting repeated concepts, or jotting down an outline for future reference.

All in all, may we be people of the *Book*. Just as the people of God beckoned Ezra to Bring the Book (Neh 8.1), so I also want to encourage God's people in our day who have Bibles to "Bring the Book!"