

Church Leadership (Part 1: Public Bible Reading)

Because the church is the pillar and ground of the truth (I Timothy 3:15), God commands the public reading of scripture in the Lord's house, saying, "give attendance to reading" (I Timothy 4:13). The reading of the word of God has always been an indispensable element of the corporate service of God. Men such as Moses (Exodus 24:1-7) and Josiah (II Kings 22-23) read the whole of the written revelation which they received to all the people of the Lord. Apparently, God-fearing synagogues had a practice of reading the OT scripture too, in "the reading of the old testament" (II Corinthians 3:14). Such "synagogues of God" (if they may be called such; Psalm 74:8) maintained a practice of "the reading of the law and the prophets" (Acts 13:15). Well on into the New Testament era, this tradition was only intensified among the disciples of Christ, as Paul wrote to the church at Colosse that every church should read every epistle of his (Colossians 4:16).

I Thessalonians 5:27: "I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren."

Public Bible Reading Examples

The Public Bible Reading of Jesus

The Lord Jesus not a few times took up the honor of reading the scripture in the hearing of many people. Jesus was a good preacher, at least in part because he was a good Bible reader (Luke 4:20-21). As his message and the events leading up to it in Luke chapter 4 demonstrate (vv.16-22), the Word made flesh knew best how to read the word made letter.

1. ***Jesus habitually practiced reading the Bible out loud in the congregation.*** Jesus had a "custom" of reading the Bible before the assembled Jews weekly in Nazareth (Luke 4:16) throughout his entire childhood when he "increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man" (Luke 2:52). Of course, to be able to perform as only the Christ could in this capacity, Jesus must have practiced and learned these "letters" (John 7:15) assiduously and regularly at Joseph's home so that he could be effective in his Father's house.
2. ***Jesus valued reading the Bible in the congregation.*** Christ did not allow the regular readers to do the work of reading, but elected himself and stood up "for to read."
3. ***Jesus knew how to read and navigate the Bible in the congregation.*** Jesus in many ways was the master of reading; he who spoke the words before could read them then. Note: (a) Jesus was familiar with every book (here, Isaiah; Luke 4:17), (b) Jesus could find anything he wanted to in a given book of scripture (here, Isaiah 61), (c) Jesus understood everything the Bible says (Luke 4:21), and (d) Jesus was distinguished from his less zealous earthly family because of his Bible abilities (Luke 4:22).

The Public Bible Reading of Ezra

Thankfully, the churches of Christ in the New Testament have the church of God in the Old Testament as an example of how public reading should proceed in the great congregation. Ezra (Heb., *helper*) is in this practice a helpful model reader (Nehemiah 8:1-8).

- 📖 Read **PROFESSIONALLY** (Nehemiah 8:1-2): Congregational reading should be done by a professional reader. Ezra was a "ready scribe in the law of Moses" (Ezra 7:6), with impressive Biblical wisdom (Ezra 7:14, 25). When the pure words of God are read, there ought to be a qualified individual doing so—not a *novice* (who does not know how to read), a *charlatan* (who pretends to know how to read), nor a *congregation* (who might not know how to read). Only an Ezra who can

“bring the book” should read the book (Nehemiah 8:1); the people do best if they are there to “hear” (Ezra 8:2).

- 📖 Read **MUCH** (Nehemiah 8:3): Congregational reading should be of a significant portion of scripture. Not a mere verse, but a sizable amount of God’s words should be read in the assembly. Ezra and the Levites read “from the morning until midday” (Nehemiah 8:3), and, although we do not necessarily have to copy his hours-of-reading program for this special feast day event, a precedent of reading a greater amount of the Bible among much people is here set (i.e., a whole chapter).
- 📖 Read **LOUDLY** (Nehemiah 8:4): Congregational reading should be audible. Lifting his person up on the pulpit of wood, and his voice to the gathered persons, Ezra read (Nehemiah 8:4). A public reader of scripture reads best who reads loud, lifting up his voice with strength (see Isaiah 40:9).
- 📖 Read **AUTHORITATIVELY** (Nehemiah 8:5-6): Congregational reading should be done with respect and confidence. Per the account, it is most proper to stand up for the reading of God’s word (Nehemiah 8:5). The seriousness of the reading should be felt by the churchgoers (Nehemiah 8:6). If the fat Eglon can rise to hear a secret (Judges 3:19), and youth can rise before the elderly (Leviticus 19:32), we should not hesitate to stand before the eternal and wise word of God. Moreover, when one errs in their reading, not knowing or focusing on the scripture, they should not apologize or make much of themselves, but speedily correct their mistake (if significant) and move on.
- 📖 Read **ACCURATELY** (Nehemiah 8:7-8): Congregational reading should be done correctly. The Bible says that “they read in the book in the law of God distinctly” (Nehemiah 8:8). A distinct and appropriate reading of scripture bears the following qualities:
 - i. It is *Faultless* (pronunciation): word-perfect and sound-perfect.
 - ii. It is *Interesting* (modulation): with emphasis, inflexion/articulation, and characterization.
 - iii. It is *Perceivable* (tempo): not too fast or too slow, with proper pauses and fitting rushes.

Tips for Becoming a Good Public Bible Reader

Tip #1: Read the Bible More. When one reads “therein all the days” of their life in devotion (Deuteronomy 17:19), they shall have gained the training to read therein some of the days of their life in service. Daily Bible reading is not only the one needful thing to a productive spiritual life (Luke 10:42), it is also the one needful thing to a profound congregational reading ability. Regular reading causes a person to form an acquaintance with the stories and writings, the flow of the scripture, and its vocabulary. Those linguistic Ephraimites who can but frame to say “Sibboleth” have not spent ample time in the Gilead of God’s word (see Judges 12:1-6). The more it is read, the more the Bible becomes plain so that a man “may run that readeth it” (Habakkuk 2:2).

Tip #2: Read the Bible Out Loud When You Read it. Like the Ethiopian eunuch who was reading his Isaiah scroll aloud in his chariot (Acts 8:28, 30), so should all of God’s people learn to read their Bible, when possible. The benefit is forthright—those that read with their voice when alone may be able to do so when they are before others, but those who read in their head will find it a challenge to vocalize the gilded page in the church. Good Bible readers can keep their place without using their hand, finger, or a paper. As God guides us with his eye (Psalm 32:8), so also we can guide ourselves along the burning book in like fashion, anointing our eyes with the eyesalve of practice, “that thou mayest see” (Revelation 3:18).

Tip #3: Listen To/Read With a Good Audio Bible Reader (e.g., Alexander Scourby). Shadow reading after the professional reader can loosen the tongue of the stammerer to read plainly, and listening to the pronunciations of the expert can greatly improve one’s talents in accurately reading.

Tip #4: Read the Bible in Other Language(s). Excellent Bible readers like Jesus were literate in several languages. The more foreign languages one knows and uses, the more they know their native tongue.