

BRING BACK THE BIBLE!

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Strange to say, the more 'Bible-believing' a Baptist church might claim to be, the less Scripture will have a place. Indeed, I shall never forget one children's Sunday morning service led by members of a Scripture Union beach mission team which failed to include even one verse of Scripture! This children's service may have been an exception – or is it? I have the feeling that at many a so-called family service the reading of Scripture tends to be an unwelcome add-on. But family services apart, even in ordinary straight-forward worship services, Scripture reading is often kept to a minimum. There are many Baptist churches, who happily declare that the Bible is their guide in all matters of faith and practice, which have only one Scripture reading a service – and what is more, in my experience that Scripture reading could often only be a few verses in length. In comparison with the more liturgical churches, our churches are starved of Scripture. By contrast in your average Anglican church at a Sunday service there will be normally three readings – from the Old Testament, the Epistles and the Gospels. This does not include any Psalms that may be sung, nor the Ten Commandments that might be read. . It is no exaggeration to say that the normal Anglican service of worship is literally peppered with Scripture, whereas in the average Baptist church Scripture is marginalised. True, the average Baptist sermon may be considerably longer than the average Anglican sermon, but that does not mean that we Baptists therefore somehow make up for the lack of Scripture reading. We need to get our priorities right, remembering, as John Wesley put it, that "Although there may be chaff in the pulpit, there is always good grain at the lectern". My own practice is to ensure that there are always two main Scripture readings in every service: one from the Old Testament, and one from the New. In addition, the 'call to worship' normally takes the form of some verses from one of the Psalms; and before we come to sing a clutch of contemporary worship songs the worship-leader will always read an appropriate passage, which links in to the theme of these songs. So, one way or another, we seek to lace our services with Scriptures of various kinds. Furthermore, precisely because I believe that if we are to live up to our calling, then we Baptists must root our life-together in Scripture, I encourage people to bring their own Bibles to church. Because some people are put off by the present variety of versions, we have standardised Bible-reading by using just one version of Scripture. Although I personally prefer the New Revised Standard Bible (it is the most accurate English version and therefore the preferred English-language text of university theological faculties), we have opted for the Good News Bible on the ground that it is the most accessible of modern versions. We want to be a 'Bible-using' and 'Bible-friendly' church!

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