

BRINGING BIBLES TO CHURCH

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Indeed, it wasn't after the invention of the printing press that Bibles began to find their ways into people's homes. For most of the church's history people have listened, rather than followed, the reading of Scripture – although they have also been able to look at Bible stories depicted in glass, stone or wood. But in an age when, every Christian has a Bible at home, should church members be encouraged to bring their Bibles to church? This was the issue which we debated in our church meeting recently.

Some argued that there was no need to bring a Bible to our church. For as the Scriptures are read, they are beamed up onto the screen for everybody to follow. And later in the sermon, relevant phrases or verses are likewise put up onto the screen. Bringing a Bible to church may therefore be viewed as a redundant act. This was the view of an archivist, used to dealing with paper. For her, taking a Bible to her weekly home group made sense – for there people were studying the Bible together. Whereas she felt a sermon calls for a different form of engagement with the text, which does not involve the personal use of a Bible. Another person felt that having a Bible in church was a distraction – for people were then tempted to look at other Bible passages, rather than focus on the passage in question! Others felt that the bringing of a Bible was a hindrance to fellowship after the service – its not easy holding a mug of coffee at the same time as holding a Bible. It was acknowledged that people could put down their Bibles, but then they ran the risk of forgetting them (a similar argument, of course, applies to bringing umbrellas to church!)

Others saw things differently. If the Bible is our basic text-book, we should bring it to church. Indeed, one young teacher said that just as she would not begin a lesson if the children did not have the right books with them, so ministers should not begin to preach, if the congregation did not have their Bibles with them! She had a point: the Bible is our basic text-book. Another person felt that a Bible was necessary for the congregation to 'test' the truth of the sermon. Yet another felt that the mere fact of bringing a Bible to church was an act of witness.

Some people are deterred from bringing a Bible to church because they find it confusing when the Scripture is read from one version when they are trying to follow it in another version. But this difficulty can be overcome by the church agreeing to use one 'standard' version for worship.

For my own part, I have always found bringing a Bible to church helps the learning process. Whenever a particular word or phrase jumps out of the text as the Scripture is read, I mark my Bible – with the result that when I next come to the passage, I am reminded of how God spoke to me on that occasion. And yet should I expect others to have find such a practice helpful? What do you feel?

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