

The Bible in the Church

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A special paper on this theme was commissioned but could not be completed because of illness. Our picture would be incomplete, however, without a brief consideration of the matter.

It is the claim of Christian Brethren that we base our entire practice on the Bible and nothing else. Thus Henry Soltau stated in 1863 with regard to the movement that

In no other instance has the Word of God (free from all tradition) been taken as the guide of those who have sought a revival in the church of God.

This doubtless is the governing principle still. But how far does our practice square with it? We will not consider here whether our traditions have grown to a place of competition with Scripture, so as virtually to nullify it (cf. Mark 7:8). Rather our focus is, how far does Scripture and its exposition receive attention in our regular church gatherings? We have developed a system wherein we have a Sunday morning service devoted to the Lord's Supper, with a brief appendix of ministry of the Word, usually quite unco-ordinated. The Sunday evening service is directed to challenging the outsider from a fairly narrow range of passages. At a mid-week meeting, some attempt is made to teach the Bible, sometimes on a systematic scheme, though only a small proportion of the membership attends. This brief and over-simplified summary will serve to highlight a conviction that few of our church members receive anything like an adequate diet of biblical teaching in the assembly. Moreover, we tend to be guided by a totally unbiblical concept of the leading of the Spirit, when in fact Paul lays it down quite clearly that the elders have a responsibility to feed the flock (see Acts 20:27f.).

Paul further states that we should 'attend to the public reading of Scripture' (1 Tim. 4:14) *inter alia*. Cranmer took this seriously in his first lectionary (1549) and provided for the Old Testament to be read in public services once a year and the New Testament thrice. Do we approach this ideal?

As to the coverage of the full scope of truth, *CBRF Journal No. 20* has some useful suggestions, not least a syllabus of teaching for two years. Surely this should be done more widely?

Elders should ensure that over a reasonable period, every major doctrine is taught and every book of the Bible expounded. Our current tendency to invite a minister to take a month's meetings results in the shorter books, with four or five chapters, receiving some attention, but the longer ones being ignored. How long since is it that Isaiah, say, was expounded in your church?

Recently, it was reported that Dr. R. T. Kendall delivered twenty-seven addresses on the book of Jude in Westminster Chapel, London. Have we men of comparable ability among us — and do we give them similar opportunity? The answer to both questions is probably negative. Why have we not the men? Because they have gone elsewhere? We are prone to boast that most of the best ministers of the Word have their roots in the Brethren, whereas we ought to enquire why they left. And the answer may turn out to be that they saw no opening for their gifts among us. We should be considering this brain drain and how it may be halted. And we should see to it that regular in-depth exposition of the Word is done in our meetings.

However high a view we take of the authority and inspiration of Scripture, it has no practical significance unless our preaching is firmly based on the entire Bible. Let us see to it that this is done.