

Who Killed The Bible Reading? **By: Keith R. Keyser**

Believers that seek to meet according to the New Testament pattern for assembly gathering have been blessed with a long succession of gifted teachers over the past one hundred and eighty years. Men like John Nelson Darby, William Kelly, C.A. Coates, Henry Soltau, Edward Dennett, John Gifford Bellett, Frederick W. Grant, and Charles Henry Mackintosh helped their own generation, as well as subsequent generations through their spiritually sound writings. Many of their works originated in public “conversational Bible readings” that were held throughout the English-speaking world. These meetings consisted of a gifted brother leading the study, coupled with the contributions of other exercised brethren. The study leader would typically introduce the passage to be studied, and then allow time for questions and comments by other Christians. While there are many other viable formats for corporate Bible studies, this method allows for different believers to exercise their gifts (in keeping with the spirit of passages like 1 Cor.14:26-35.) Furthermore, it generates interesting and edifying discussion, bringing out the many faceted depth of the scriptures. Bible readings were once a fixture in the meetings of God’s assemblies throughout North America. In recent times, however, many assemblies have abandoned them in favor of regular preaching services. While these preaching meetings are biblical and valuable, it is the author’s firm conviction that there is still a valid place for the Bible reading in our gatherings.

It would no doubt be instructive to ask ourselves why the Bible readings have been forsaken by numerous assemblies. Certainly part of the reason must be that the discussions among the participating brethren often degenerated into meaningless debates on various controversial subjects; alas, in many cases this has been the case. Two solutions would help avert such theological quagmires. First, the brother who leads the study should ideally be a seasoned man of God, adept in the Word and diplomatic in his dealings with others. With such a leader, arguments could quickly be dispensed with, and the study could be kept moving at a decent pace. Secondly, if a brother is a consistent disruption to the study, he could be gently approached about refraining from controversial subjects that would hurt the saints (if he refuses this admonition, Scripture gives clear instructions for how he is to be dealt with. E.g. 2 Tim.2:24-26; Titus 3:10.)

The ill-preparedness of the brethren of the assembly is another malady that has aided in the near extinction of the Bible reading.¹ Long pauses, disjointed comments, and tangents that are unrelated to the text are all symptoms of the failure of many of the brethren to come prepared for the study. In some instances, brothers read lengthy sections from commentaries in lieu of making their own comments. While commentaries are helpful tools, they are no replacement for informed remarks from Christians who have diligently studied a passage. It is evident that not all brethren are gifted in teaching. Nevertheless, there are some brothers who do have this gift, but choose not to develop or exercise it as they should. Perhaps the most troubling factor of the death of the Bible reading is that it indicates a low appreciation for the Word and failure to seriously study it among the brethren of the assemblies. Let us pray for wisdom and diligence in studying the Scriptures that meetings such as the useful Bible reading may be recovered and revitalized in our gatherings.

¹ Undoubtedly the prayers of the sisters also go along way in preparing the assembly for the Bible reading.