

A walk with Mr O (40)

It is written!

Mr O, there have been quite a few changes in my church recently. Most of them are positive. But there has been one change which has left me feeling really uneasy, and I don't know whether I should feel like that.

Tell me about it.

In our church services the Bible reading has always been done by the preacher himself, or by one of the church officers. But now lady church members are quite often asked to do it. They are godly women, so why I am I feeling so troubled?

You shouldn't feel uneasy or troubled. You should be shocked and heartbroken.

That's a strong reaction, Mr O! What are you driving at?

It is written, 'I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man' (1 Tim 2:12).

I think that you've misunderstood me, Mr O. These women haven't been asked to teach or have authority. They've simply been asked to do the Bible reading.

If the public reading of Scripture is not teaching, what on earth is it?

Is the reading of the inerrant and infallible Word of God a lesser thing than the fallible explaining and applying of that Word? Theological liberals may hold that view, but we Evangelicals don't. No! No! The public reading of Scripture is the principal and highest way of teaching the faith. It always has been. And it always will be.

Go on, Mr O, I'm hearing you out. You're coming at things in a way that I've never heard before.

The public reading of Scripture can take place without the text being explained or applied. But the explaining and applying cannot take place without the public reading of that text. This is why Paul wrote to Timothy, 'Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching' (1 Timothy 4:13 NIV). The order is important!

The public reading of Scripture is greater than the teaching of it. If women are forbidden to the lesser, how can they be legitimately permitted to do the greater? The very idea is monstrous.

You seem to be basing a lot on one passage. Are there any other Scriptures that are relevant to this subject?

Yes; it is also written, 'It is shameful for women to speak in church' (1 Cor 14:35). Here the inspired apostle appeals to a divinely-revealed universal principle and then applies it to a particular situation. He goes on to underline that all godly people recognise that this universal principle is in fact a divine command. He concludes by declaring that people who do not recognise this are not to be recognised – that is, their credential as Christian leaders are fake.

Mr O, are you actually saying that people who encourage women to do the Bible reading in church services are disqualified as church leaders?

What I personally say is of no importance. But that is exactly what the Bible is saying! I didn't write the Bible. But people who attempt to re-write it are certainly disqualified as Christian leaders.

The whole issue can be summed up like this: when it comes to women publicly reading the Word of God in a mixed assembly, the Head of the Church says 'NO'. So, who, then, will dare to say 'YES'?

So, what do you think I should do? Should I just grin and bear it, and not disturb the peace of the church? Or what?

I think you should go and see your pastor and church officers all together. If possible, go with another church member who is as heartbroken as you are. Go over the Scriptures that we have mentioned and lovingly appeal to them to go back to their previous practice. Be tender. Be patient. Be firm.

But what if they won't budge?

If they won't budge, then go home and lay it all before the Lord. Wait on Him, and keep waiting until it is clear what you should do. I suspect that before long you will leave your church as peaceably as you can, and that you will be led to join a church which takes the Bible seriously.