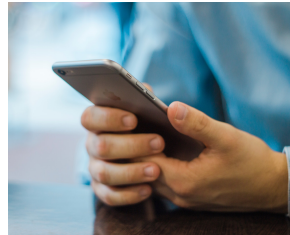


Why a “Paper” Bible is Better than a Bible App at Church Meetings

Steve Burchett

Technology is useful in the church. For example, I Skyped in recently to my congregation’s Sunday gathering when I was too sick to attend. I was strengthened by what I heard, and they happily avoided my virus.



But technology is not valuable in every circumstance. I’m thinking particularly about the use of Bible apps on cell phones or tablets. Sure, it’s convenient to utilize a digital Bible in numerous settings—like reading (or listening) just before you fall asleep at night, or when you unexpectedly want to look up something during a discussion. But in a church meeting (Bible studies, Sunday’s gatherings, etc.), I strongly recommend using a “paper” Bible for four reasons.

First, the context and content of the Scripture being studied is more easily observed in a paper Bible.

Recently, I was leading a group of men through a study of Acts 17. We discovered that Acts 17 falls within the telling of Paul’s 2nd missionary journey, covering nearly three chapters. I wanted the men to “see” the entire journey essentially at the same time by skimming quickly through it. This was a simple task for the men with paper Bibles who could survey the journey forwards and backwards with a page turn or two. The men “flicking” through a digital Bible, however, could only observe smaller sections at a time.

Even the content of a single passage can be difficult to observe all at once via a Bible app, especially if the passage is large. In Acts 17, Paul and his team proclaim the gospel in three different cities—Thessalonica, Berea, and Athens. Interestingly, in each location Paul evangelizes in the “synagogue.” A Bible student could certainly note this on an electronic Bible, but it is much easier in a paper bible to quickly scan the chapter (34 verses) and see the cities and spot the repeated use of “synagogue.”

Second, cross-referencing is quicker and usually more effective in a paper Bible.

Imagine studying through the section in Acts 1 about selecting a man to replace Judas (verses 15-26). Verse 20 quotes from two different psalms. The teacher says, “Let’s look at both Psalm 69:25 and Psalm 109:8 and see if these verses and the psalms in which they are located give us any more insight about Peter’s use of these verses in Acts 1.” If the discussion alternates between Acts 1 and those two psalms, it will be much more manageable with a paper Bible. Once

the locations are secured, our fingers easily hold their location in place—allowing us to flip back and forth efficiently. A Bible app takes more maneuvering, and time.

Third, there are far less potential distractions within a paper Bible.

I once watched a man who was leading the Sunday morning meeting at a church sit down in the front pew (during the offering) and pull up his Facebook page on his phone. Then, while we were singing, he was checking his email! I’ll give him the benefit of the doubt—perhaps he had an urgent situation in his life and Facebook or email were going to be the avenue of gaining new information. I’m being too kind! The reason I know better is because I have, shamefully, done the same thing this man was doing.

Devices that ding or vibrate when the next email, tweet, or post is upon us are incredibly distracting, especially when the device where this is happening is your “Bible.” C’mon, you know it’s true! Oh, sure, I’ve been distracted by the “extra-biblical” content of a paper Bible as well. But the table of weights and measures, concordance, and maps (even if they are in color) have significantly less magnetism than the world wide web!

Fourth, a paper Bible can become very precious to you in ways that a Bible on a device never could.

If I accidentally deleted the Bible app from my device, I would just download it again. If I was to lose my paper Bible in a fire or a flood, yes, I would survive. It’s the Scripture that ultimately matters, not my marks or notes. But oh how devastating it would be!

Why do I treasure my wide margin Bible so much? I have spent innumerable hours reading it, meditating on portions of it, marking words and phrases, and writing notes in it. I can tell you what side of the page certain books and chapters and even some verses are located. I can take you to whole chapters and walk you through the content and meaning with the aid of an outline I have created and written in the margin. I can also show you a few places where I thought I had something figured out, wrote it down, and then changed my mind—resulting in scribbles through my old interpretation (which actually locks in my mind what I now believe even more).

Your paper Bible could be precious and useful to you in ways that a digital Bible never could. Make it a habit to take it with you to church meetings and wear it out. You’ll see what I mean.

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