MORE PRAISE FOR PAPER BIBLES

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More reasons to use a paper Bible.
Category: Observations

A couple of weeks ago, I wrote a post which considered the fact that I could read a Wycliffe Bible which was over 600 years old, but I can't read a Bible on a ten year old CD-ROM. In this post, I'd like to consider a couple of other reasons why paper Bibles have an advantage over digital ones.

As a preacher, I am used to starting my sermons by asking the congregation to open the passage of Scripture that I will be speaking from. For years, I would then wait for the rustle of pages to subside so that I knew that everyone had found the passage and it was time to start speaking. These days, you may here one or two pages, but most people will be staring at their smart phone. You can't actually tell whether they have actually found the right passage or perhaps they are just looking at Facebook or Twitter, who knows? Whatever the personal advantages of having the Bible on your phone, I would like to suggest that there is a lost communal experience when we are all looking at different apps.

The second and more serious concern was raised by Chris Wright in an email which he sent in response to my earlier post. The concern which Chris raised makes perfect sense to me, though I had not previously considered it.

The Bible is a narrative and the way that we understand a passage depends on its place within the overarching story. To take a simple example, Psalm 23 is a beautiful poem, but it takes on a deeper sense when we read it in the light of Jesus' teaching about him being the good shepherd. However, the need to understand things in context runs much deeper than this. It matters whether a passage comes from the Law, the Prophets, the Gospels or whatever.

Using a paper Bible helps to place what you are reading in a context. The way that the book opens and the position of the passage in the whole book is literally a tangible indication of where in the narrative it falls. To be honest, I don't think I need these reminders now, I know where things are in the Bible and how they fit into the narrative. However, that's because I've been reading and studying the Bible regularly for decades and I had "sword drill" and other competitions to find passages as a kid. But for generations who are growing up without paper Bibles, I think this is a concern. The whole nature of digital Bibles is that any passage is a disconnected screen, it is not obvious how the passage links to anything else, nor where it occurs in the overall structure of the Bible.

Of course, it is possible to teach the narrative of Scripture using digital Bibles, it's just that it adds a level of difficulty which was not there for a previous generation. People teaching the Bible, should consider putting extra effort into helping people see how the overall narrative works and how the various sections and types of literature fit into the picture.