

## What about the reading of Scripture and prayer?

Should Scripture reading be restricted to ordained ministers only as Hart argues per the Westminster Standards (With Reverence and Awe, 105-112)? Directory: Reading of the word in the congregation, being part of the publick worship of God, (wherein we acknowledge our dependence upon him, and subjection to him,) and one mean [s] sanctified by him for the edifying of his people, is to be performed by the pastors and teachers.

1A. The argument (restricts both *reading and prayer* in public worship to ordained elders)

Hart: We need to note the bond of reading and prayer as we listen to the argument and comment on it in our evaluation.

WLC 156: “all are not to be permitted to read the word publicly to the congregation.”

Some think this goes against the priesthood of believers. Hart replies: this does not apply to worship but to everyday life.

The Westminster divines emphasized the role of ministers in leading worship.

The church is not a democracy with every member as ministers (as in the *Purpose Driven Church*: the only difference between pastoral staff and members is that the former do the administrative duties while the latter do the real work of ministry, evangelism, 108).

Ephesians 4.11-12 (<sup>11</sup> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ) teaches that Jesus appointed pastor-teachers to do three things: equip the saints, do the work of ministry, and build up the body (not build up the saints so the saints can do the work of ministry). Pastors are to do the work of the word and prayer with authority to do so from the authority of Christ. That authority belongs to the minister and it extends to the duties of the word and prayer. Thus, leading worship by reading and prayer are functions of the authoritative office and can be performed by ministers only.

2A. A reply

Respectfully appreciating the argument that Hart (with co-author Muether) makes, there are some counter-balancing points to add to the picture. They at first seem like scattered pieces that do not belong to the puzzle, but once in place, they give the picture truth, clarity, and depth.

1B. Jesus commanded audible prayer for new temple worship

“Our Father” (Mat. 6.9) indicates audible prayer by all who gather.

2B. Holy men are to lift their hands in prayer: (1 Timothy 2:8 I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling). Silence of women in context does not have prayer in view. Public prayer is not restricted to elders; here it is at least open to women.

3B. Women prayed and prophesied in the apostolic church (1 Corinthians 11:4-5 Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, <sup>5</sup> but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head- it is the same as if her head were shaven).

In the post-apostolic church, by good and necessary inference, women may pray and give forth Scripture, now by reading. Neither back then (prophetically giving God’s word) nor now (reading God’s word) did they exercise teaching authority.

If women can read Scripture, then so can men, just as both can pray audibly, even though there is an accent on men lifting holy hands in prayer.

4B. On priesthood

What demands that we restrict the priesthood of believers to the private context totally? Granted, all believer-priests are not ministers, but why should we think that reading by men who are not ministers somehow infringes on the work of ministers? This does not make all believer-priests into ministers.

5B. On Eph. 4.11-12

Pastors are to build up the church and they do that by the word and prayer, but how can we conclude from that that this includes public reading in an exclusive way? (cf. “pastors are to exhort” and “all are to exhort” does not make all pastors).

6B. Worship as assembly (Kuyper, *Our Worship*, 105-06) points to involvement by all.