

Islam

Should Christians Burn the Quran?

By Dr. Paul M. Elliott

The Christian who is truly in the front lines of the warfare will confront the Muslim not with a flaming Quran, but with the message of the Cross.

The Controversy

In the late summer of 2010, the world witnessed heated public debate over plans by media-described "Christians" to publicly burn copies of the Quran. These burnings were planned as part of observances of the anniversary of Muslims' September 11, 2001 attacks on targets in the United States.

The storm started when Florida pastor Terry Jones announced plans to hold an "International Burn a Koran Day" on 9/11 and to burn hundreds of copies at his church. Media pundits and religious leaders of all stripes soon weighed in with varying opinions, and President Barack Hussein Obama called on Jones to cancel his plans. Few facts are known about Terry Jones, his church, or its theology. According to his church's website they are charismatic, and Jones takes the title of "Apostle" with a capital A. Some in the media have made much of the fact that Jones was a high school classmate of talk show host Rush Limbaugh.

Throwing God's Book Out the Church Window

In September 2010, Jones did desist. But not for long. Jones and his followers at the Dove World Outreach Center in Florida declared March 20, 2011 to be "International Judge the Koran Day." They held a "trial" of the Quran, found it "guilty" and then burned it. Jones' church website stated, "The Koran is accused of inciting murder,

rape and terrorist activities. It is under suspicion of the direct or indirect murder of millions of people around the world."

The simple fact is that God's Word teaches that human beings commit sin, not inanimate objects. But denying this essential of God's law (and thus distorting the Gospel as well) did not seem to matter to Jones and his followers as they set themselves up as judge and jury over a book. They simply threw God's Book out the window. According to one published report:

After a six-hour trial on Sunday that featured a Christian convert from Islam as a prosecuting attorney and a Dallas imam as a defense lawyer, a jury of 12 church members and volunteers made the judgment, Jones said.

He said the punishment — burning the book after it had been soaked in kerosene for an hour — was determined from four choices on his organization's Facebook page. He said "several hundred" were polled and voted for burning over shredding, drowning and facing a firing squad.¹

"Burn, Baby, Burn"?

The Internet blogosphere was electrified by the possibility of Quran-buring six months ago, and no doubt will be again. Many self-described Evangelicals spoke strongly in favor of Quran burning. Bob Campbell of American Grand Jury.org wrote this:

"Burn baby burn" is my motto...I have just about had it with my so-called Christian brothers and sisters that say turn the other cheek. These are...armchair Christians..."²

A Pastor made a statement yesterday on our website. He said, "People are afraid of confrontations with Muslims. Islam is a bully belief system. It's [sic] followers act as spoiled little children/brats that can't take the truth." I will leave

you with that final thought and emphasize I believe he is right. Muslims are basically bullies. The surest way to take down a bully is to fight back.³

Some bloggers and pastors are reported as saying that Christians have a mandate from the Old Testament to burn the Quran.

What is Islam's View of the Quran and the Bible?

Should Christians burn the Quran? To answer that question, we need to have solid Biblical authority. The place to begin is to put the Quran in Biblical perspective. Just what is it – in the eyes of the followers of Islam, and more importantly, in the eyes of God?

Islam teaches that the Quran is a holy book, and alleges that it is inspired. Islam claims that the angel Gabriel revealed the text of the Quran to Mohammed over a twenty-three year period during the seventh century A.D. If that were true, it would mean that God is a liar – that He sent Gabriel over five hundred years after John penned Revelation, to give man a completely different book that totally contravenes the message of salvation in Christ Jesus, and the entire system of doctrine, that He gave in the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments.

The Quran itself speaks thus of the Bible:

It is He [Islam's false god Allah, not Jehovah of the Scriptures] Who sent down to thee (step by step), in truth, the Book [that is, the Quran], confirming what went before it; and He sent down the Law (of Moses) and the Gospel (of Jesus) before this, as a guide to mankind, and He sent down the criterion (of judgment between right and wrong). – Surah 3.3

The Quran teaches that it is the last and greatest religious book, and that it stands in a place of superiority to, and authority over, the Old and New Testament Scriptures.

God's View of the Quran

What does the Bible say about the Quran? It says that there is no other holy book but the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments:

You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God which I command you. (Deuteronomy 4:2)

Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; you shall not add to it nor take away from it. (Deuteronomy 12:32)

Every word of God is pure; He is a shield to those who put their trust in Him. Do not add to His words, lest He rebuke you, and you be found a liar. (Proverbs 30:5-6)

God puts a gigantic PERIOD on the end of the canon of Scripture:

For I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds to these things, God will add to him the plagues that are written in this book. (Revelation 22:18)

The Quran is a book that elicits a fiercely emotional, willing-to-kill-for-it loyalty among over a billion lost Muslim souls, blinded by the evil one. But what is the Quran, in the eyes of God? It is but one of the many human books that man dares to place in authority over God's Word, and that Satan uses to blind men's hearts to the truth.

The Quran's Counterparts in Other Religions

In these terms, what are some of the Quran's counterparts in other religions? Perhaps the most ancient one still in common use is the Jewish Talmud – the rabbinical commentaries on the Old Testament Scriptures that are held to be the central texts of Judaism. The Talmud consists of two parts. The first is the Mishna, which is based on

the oral traditions that were built up over the five centuries before Christ and were held in esteem over Scripture by the Pharisees. The second is the Gemara, consisting of additional rabbinical commentaries composed and collected after the time of Christ on earth. Jesus condemned these writings when he said to the Jews, "Well did Isaiah prophesy of you hypocrites, as it is written: 'This people honors Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men' " (Mark 7:6-7).

Another equivalent of the Quran is the collected pronouncements of the Roman Catholic Magisterium. Rome claims divine authority and even inspiration for them, and says that the Bible is subordinate to them. The books of the cults, such as Christian Science's *Science and Health With Key to the Scriptures* (whose author, Mary Baker Eddy, they claim to have been divinely inspired), also fall into this category. The fanciful, fantastic, factually false *Book of Mormon* also falls into it.

In our time, Rick Warren's *The Purpose-Driven Church* and its companion *The Purpose-Driven Life* (combined, over forty million copies sold) also fall into this category. These too are human books that are being placed in authority over Scripture. In the opening pages of *The Purpose-Driven Church*, Dr. Gary MacIntosh of Talbot School of Theology says that this (not the Bible?) is "*the* book for churches desiring to grow and prosper in the 21st century." Thom Rainer of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary says that "every student in the Billy Graham School of Missions and Evangelism will be required to read it." Robert Schuller says of *The Purpose-Driven Church* that "every pastor must be corrected by it" - and all along I thought it was God's Word alone that was given for "correction" (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Despite its vast and blindly loyal following, the Quran is, in the eyes of God, no different in principle from any other writing that men vainly seek to place in authority over His inspired, inerrant Word. The Quran, like the rest, is the commandments of

men substituted for the commandments of God (Mark 7:6-7). It is the so-called wisdom of men to whom the message of the cross is foolishness (1 Corinthians 1). It is the same kind of pagan writing against which Paul warns the Colossian church: "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power" (Colossians 2:8-10).

Does the Bible Give a Mandate for Book Burning?

What does the Bible say about book burning? Is there, as many Evangelicals insist, a mandate for Christians and churches to burn the Quran?

Some say that Christians have such a mandate based on God's commands to Israel for cleansing the land of Canaan from all the elements of paganism when they took possession of it. But this argument ignores two vital things.

First, this argument for Quran-burning ignores the reason for God's command to Israel. He commanded Israel to cleanse the land of paganism (a task in which they abjectly failed - see for example Ezekiel 23:6) because the place where He would walk among His chosen people Israel was to be a holy place (e.g., Exodus 29:45-46, Leviticus 26:12, Deuteronomy 23:14, Joshua 3:10). Christians have no such land-mandate today. We ourselves are the temples of the living God (2 Corinthians 6) and He walks among His true church. America isn't Israel, and it isn't the Promised Land.

Secondly, this argument for Quran-burning ignores the truth about the nature of the warfare in which Christians are engaged:

Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here." Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king

then?" Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." (John 18:36-37)

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:43-48)

Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. (Ephesians 6:10-13)

For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ, and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled. (2 Corinthians 10:3-6)

A 21st-Century Crusade?

What many Evangelicals are proposing today is a 21st-century version of the Crusades of the Middle Ages, with Quran-burning as its symbol. War against Islam, they say, will save the world, save America, and save the Holy Land for the Jews. This may be conservative politically, but it is not theologically. It is a debasement of the word "save". The Bible speaks of only one kind of salvation, and that is personal faith in Jesus Christ. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the only thing that will defeat Islam. War will not.

Is that to say that I do not believe America, Israel, or any other nation has the right of self-defense against Muslim nations who seek to destroy them? Of course not. But Islam is a religious culture with a multi-generational view. It says that if this generation of Muslims does not succeed in spreading Islam, by the sword if necessary, the next generation will take up the cause – and the next, and the next, and the next. Such a mindset can be beaten back militarily, but it will keep coming back. Burning the Quran will not "take down the bully", as the blogger quoted above asserted with naive bravado. The only thing that can possibly change the picture is the power of the Gospel.

Book-Burning in the New Testament

You do find book-burning in the New Testament - but certainly not where some present-day Evangelicals, by their logic, would seem to expect to find it. We don't find the Apostle Paul leading or advocating burnings of the Talmud in which he had been trained, after he came to Christ. We don't even find him calling for the burning of the religious writings of the pagans. We do find him "provoked" - burning with indignation within himself - when he saw all of Athens given over to idolatry (Acts 17:16).

But then we do find this, in the account of Paul's journey to Ephesus in Acts chapter 19. We read in verse 8 that Paul "went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God." Paul preached the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit. And then a few verses later we find that there was a moving of God among those in Ephesus who had made their living by practicing spiritism, the black arts. In verse 18, we read this: "And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. Also, many of those who had practiced magic [that is, spiritism] brought their books together and [they] burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver."

That was over 160 years' wages for the average laborer in that day - a phenomenal amount of money. At today's minimum wage rate, it would be \$2.9 million. For the average wage earner today, it would be over \$7 million.

Millions of dollars' worth of the most sinful kinds of books - burned in the fire. Burning these books meant that these people were giving up their livelihood; spiritism was a very lucrative profession in the Roman world. These people were giving it all up - a multi-million-dollar business, in modern terms. Turning their backs on it. What was happening? In the next verse, Luke under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit tells us exactly what was happening: "In this way, the Word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed" (19:20). God's Word – not the puny arm of man – "took down" the Satanic bully.

An Offense Against God

Here is the sum of things: For an individual Christian to burn the Quran for any reason other than as a renouncement of his own Muslim past, is simply contrary to Scripture. For a Christian church as an entity to hold a Quran-burning as a demonstration of

anti-Muslim sentiment is an offense against God. In conclusion, let me address some further points.

For a church to engage in Quran-burning is a grave disservice to the tens of thousands of brothers and sisters in Christ - in America and around the world - who are living in a Muslim home, seeking to bear humble witness for Christ. Our ministry has such people among its readership. In many cases these people are under threat of their lives for the faith. How dare the church worsen their plight?

Quran-burning causes the name of God to be blasphemed among unbelievers. The sin involved is the same in principle as that described in the verses surrounding Romans 2:24 — "For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written."

Today's Evangelical church needs to focus not on burning Qurans but on "burning" its own false books and false beliefs — its addiction to worldly philosophies and practices; its mad (truly insane, from a Biblical perspective) rush after every new church-growth fad; its growing delusion that morality doesn't really matter, only success and self-esteem do; the addiction of some among us to the idea that government — of the right kind — is the answer to mankind's problems. If God is to truly walk among the people of His church in power, we must become a holy people.

If there is to be any offense, Christ and the Cross are to be the offense (Galatians 5:11, 1 Peter 2:8) - nothing else.

It is incredible for a pastor to be so misguided as the one quoted earlier, who dismisses Muslims as "children/brats that [sic] can't take the truth." The waking nightmare is that these benighted people are possessed by the same spirit of antichrist that we observe at work in the pages of both the Old and New Testaments. Satan's human instruments have changed with the generations, but the Satanic spirit

is alive and well. Unmasking the villain does not reveal a spoiled child, but the very enemy of our souls – and one that cannot be fought by our puny human means, but only by the truth of the Gospel, breaking the chains of darkness and unbelief in which the destroyer of souls has Muslims bound.

What the Church Needs to Be Doing

The real "armchair Christians" are those who refuse to fulfill Christ's Great Commission, or think something else can take its place or must be added to it. The Christian who is truly in the front lines of the warfare will confront the Muslim not with a flaming Quran, but with the message of the Cross. Far be it from us to bring in "strange fire" of our own. There must be no contradiction between our message and our method. We must preach of the fire of which John the Baptist preached, when he preached of Christ:

And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire. (Matthew 3:10-12)

See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven." Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which

cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire. (Hebrews 12:25-29)

References:

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