

***Question: Would Jesus endorse efforts to oppose religions like Islam that are different from Christianity by book burnings and public protests like some people have done?***

Jesus warned his disciples not be deceived by the words and works of false prophets, but he did not endorse or encourage methods used by some people in today's world. Burning the Koran and protesting against Muslims as "infidels" is inconsistent with the life and teachings of Jesus and the Bible. This kind of misguided zeal often stirs up hatred instead of promoting the gospel of love. Doing the right thing in the wrong way is unacceptable. We need to look more closely at the life of Jesus.

For example, James and John, two of Jesus' closest disciples, wanted to call down fire upon a Samaritan village that did not welcome Jesus. But he "turned and rebuked them" (Luke 9:52-56). The word translated "rebuke" is a word that indicates strong disapproval. Instead of reacting with anger and violence to people who were different from them, Jesus taught his disciples to be peacemakers (Matthew 5:9). Jesus would endorse the words of the apostle Paul: "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:18-21).

The preacher in Florida who wanted to burn copies of the Koran may have had in mind a book burning that occurred in the ancient city of Ephesus (Acts 19:19). However, a careful reading of the Bible reveals that people who were formerly sorcerers had become believers in Jesus and were burning their own books of sorcery, not books that belonged to other people. Neither were they attempting to gain some kind of notoriety by their book burning. They did this only to show that they had now repented of sorcery and no longer needed these books.

Some people have also made the mistake of assuming that we can identify America with Israel of the Old Testament, but America is not Israel. The church that Jesus built constitutes the New Testament people of

God and not the United States or any other earthly kingdom. Thus, we have no biblical justification for Christians attacking other religions to keep the land safe. The church is called upon to keep *itself* pure and to declare the good news of Jesus Christ before our world. It was never commanded to force itself upon other peoples. For example, the New Testament instructs Christians not to associate with *any brother in Christ* who is “sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler” (1 Corinthians 5:11). Yet, the apostle Paul made it clear that he did not mean we must disassociate with unbelievers who sinned. In that case, we would need to go out of the world entirely (1 Corinthians 5:9-11). He stated: “What business is it of mine to judge those outside the church? Are you not to judge those inside? God will judge those outside” (1 Corinthians 5:12-13).

We need to understand that God’s ways are not always the same as our ways (Isaiah 55:8). For example, Jesus did not come into this world as a conquering hero but as a humble Galilean who taught things like “love your neighbor” (Mark 12:31) and “If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all” (Mark 9:35; cf. Luke 9:48). While zeal for the Lord is good, it needs to be guided by the knowledge of the loving and gentle Jesus revealed in the Bible (Romans 10:2).

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