

Burning the Flag

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On July 4, 1776, a group of brave Americans boldly declared themselves and their country to be free from the tyranny of foreign rule. At that moment, however, they were not free at all. They had yet to fight a war in order to gain the freedom they had declared for themselves.

Sadly, instead of enjoying American freedom rightly, as freedom based on the restraint of law, some have insisted upon having *libertarian* freedom—the freedom to do as one pleases *without restraint*. In the 1960s and 1970s, this false concept of freedom reached a deplorable zenith.

Amidst the rampant drug use and open sexual immorality that characterized those two decades, few scenes were more disturbing than the televised images of American citizens burning the American flag.

The American flag itself makes no one free. It is only a symbol. But those who burn the flag are not merely attacking a piece of canvas. They are attacking the American system—the very system which, ironically, earned their freedom to attack it. That same system also provides them with military protection, the benefits of civil government, freedom to travel or relocate, political protection when they travel to other countries, and the liberty to worship as they please. Few of these traitors would ever think of *leaving* America. They are more than happy to stay and reap the benefits, even while harboring a deep-seated hatred for the *source* of those benefits.

In many ways, Americans burning the American flag is like the growing tendency among professing Christians to attack the Bible. I was recently in a religious setting on a Sunday morning with a group that gathers under the name “Christian.” In this particular setting, the Bible is generally viewed as only semi-relevant and technically flawed. As I contended for the reliability and unchanging relevance of the Bible, one woman looked at me, placed her hand on a Bible, and said with all sincerity, “I don’t care whether this is true or not. It does not affect my relationship with God.”

Shocked, I responded by asking her how she would have known about Jesus, His life, death, and resurrection, or the beauty of being saved by grace through faith, apart from God’s revelation in the Bible. She gave no substantive response, but steadfastly maintained her view that even though the Bible is filled with errors and is generally unreliable, her faith in God remains unaffected.

This woman was not original in her opinion. She was only reflecting what much of modern “Christian” scholarship has been teaching since the 19th century: that the Bible is filled with factual and textual errors; that much of the New Testament was largely edited by later writers who refashioned the religion to

suit their own beliefs instead of faithfully preserving “the apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42; cf. 1 John 4:6); that Paul did not actually write many of the letters that bear his name—and so on.

Don’t get me wrong; these folks are free to hold their opinions about the Bible. But in my view, they are being inconsistent when they call themselves Christians at the same time. The Christian faith, after all, is grounded on what is revealed in the Bible. It would not be strange to see a foreign terrorist burning a U.S. flag. Likewise, it would not be unusual to hear a Muslim or an atheist denouncing the Bible as untrue or unreliable. But for a professing Christian to do the same thing defies reason. It makes me think of the cartoon character sitting on a tree branch while sawing through that same branch—*between himself and the tree!*

A Christian is, by definition, a person who believes God (cf. John 5:24; Rom. 4:3-5; etc.). And God has revealed what we are to believe about Him in only one place—the Bible. There is no other factual basis for the Christian faith. If you do not believe the Bible, you do not believe God. And if you do not believe God, you are not a Christian. It really is that simple. Furthermore, to despise the Bible is to despise God Himself. And to despise God is to despise Jesus Christ, who is “the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature” (Heb. 1:3).

You cannot separate the Revealer from His revelation.

Speaking about similar conditions late in the 19th century, Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon described such professing Christians well when he said,

The Teacher [Christ] is spoken of in the most flattering style, and then His teaching is rejected, except so far as it may coincide with the philosophy of the moment. They talk much about Jesus, while that which is the real Jesus, namely, His gospel and His inspired Word, they cast away. I believe I do but correctly describe them when I say that, like Judas, they betray the Son of Man with a kiss. . . . I believe the Savior thinks their homage more insulting than their scorn would be.¹

One should not *pretend* to love America while burning the symbol of America. To do so is to make a mockery of what it means to be an American. Likewise, one should not *pretend* to be a Christian (a person who believes God and is saved through that belief) while *disbelieving* the very body of truth God requires him to *believe* if he is to be saved.

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¹ Charles Spurgeon, from his sermon entitled, “The Word, a Sword.”