

Responses to Blasphemy

Text Mt 12:22-32

Sermon by O.S. Asaolu (asaolu@yahoo.com) at Church of Christ, Akoka Sept 16, 2012

Introduction: The past week has been awash with riots and demonstrations in Muslim populated countries in protest against a movie said to be anti-Islam. The film; *'Innocence of Muslims'* was supposedly based on life in the Egyptian desert about 2000 years ago, at least that was the script given to the cast. Afterwards, it was allegedly edited to depict the life of Mohammed the founder of Islam with overlays and voice-overs. It is said to be sponsored by a group of Jews and produced by Egyptian Coptic Christians who go under the name 'Basile.' The film was premiered in the USA to an almost empty theater, was found to be cheap and technically deficient in many respects. The producer has expectedly gone underground since the furor started. It is available on You-Tube where many have seen a 12-minute trailer. It has led to the death of FOUR AMERICANS in Libya including their Ambassador, FOUR YEMENIS, THREE SUDANESE, ONE LEBANESE among others. In Nigeria, the Police and security agencies were put on red-alert mid-week, with troops deployed around flash-points and Mosques last Friday. Fortunately, protesters were curbed and restrained in Jos and Kano. For me it was a sorry sight that Police vans had to be stationed at the national mosque in Nigeria based on the expected reaction of some religious adherents to events which originated recently in USA, due to the *artistic* depiction of 7th century events in Saudi Arabia. Most western-inspired Constitutions guarantee *'freedom of expression,'* but such liberty should not be abused. Free speech can become very costly when presented before the ignorant and the intolerant. Why do some react the way they do to perceived blasphemies? Last week, Bro. Fabunmi admonished on and alluded to the *Satanic Verses* written by Salman Rushdie in 1988. How are Christians supposed to respond to blasphemies?

Definitions:

- **Response** means reply, answer or reaction,
- **To** means towards or in the direction of
- **Blasphemy** is an anglicized form of the Greek term *blasphemia*, from two roots, *blapto*, to injure, and *pheme*, to speak. It connotes 'injurious speech against someone, especially God.' It is often accompanied with malicious action against the interests of divinity or Sacrilege. It includes profane speech, lies against God or His messengers, cursing the LORD, destruction of places of worship, intentionally depicting the Godhead in false representations, etc. The word in its various forms (as verb, noun, adjective, etc.) appears some fifty-nine times in the New Testament. It has a variety of renderings, such as, "blasphemy," "reviled," "railed," "evil spoken of," "to speak evil of," etc. It is evident from these that blasphemy is a sin of the mouth, a "tongue-sin." All New Testament writers except the author of Hebrews use the word. Furthermore, Jesus defined the term when, after referring to blasphemy, He used the phrase "speaks a word against" in Matthew 12:32.

Responses to blasphemy means the various ways of reacting to or confronting the uncouth speech and misdeeds of people towards God, his messengers, worshippers and their place or items of worship. There are THREE broad response possibilities:

1. Avenge God by killing the blasphemer. This was advocated in Judaism and currently by Islam
2. Pray for and if possible try to teach the blasphemer in love - advocated by Christianity
3. Allow God to defend Himself & deal with the blasphemer the way He deems fit – advocated by Humanists & Atheists.

What the Bible once Taught

Leviticus 24:10-16 And the son of an Israelitish woman, whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the children of Israel: and this son of the Israelitish woman and a man of Israel strove together in the camp; And the Israelitish woman's son blasphemed the name of the LORD, and cursed. And they brought him unto Moses: (and his mother's name was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan:) And they put him in ward, that the mind of the LORD might be shewed them. And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Bring forth him that hath cursed without the camp; and let all that heard him lay their hands upon his head, and let all the congregation stone him. And thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel, saying, Whosoever curseth his God shall bear his sin. And he that blasphemeth the name of the LORD, he shall surely be put to death, and all the congregation shall certainly stone him: as well the stranger, as he that is born in the land, when he blasphemeth the name of the LORD, shall be put to death.

This abrogated law of Moses was a serious one with the death penalty inflicted by the populace starting with the witnesses. It was used to execute:

- a) the sinful Egyptian-Israeli in the wilderness
- b) Naboth wrongfully by Ahab and Jezebel in 1 Kg 21:1-16
- c) Jesus wrongfully because His affirmation that He is the Son of God was considered blasphemous. He was crucified because the Jews were under the Romans and could not carry out executions unilaterally –Mt 26:62-66: *And*

the high priest arose, and said unto him, Answerest thou nothing? what is it which these witness against thee? But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death.

See previous accusations in Mt 9:2-8 (healing and forgiving the paralytic) and Jn 10:32-36 (attempted stoning for claiming to be Son of God). For Christians, we live under a better covenant –Heb 8, Gal 2-5.

What The Bible Teaches Now

We are to pray for those who spitefully use us, who mock our God and defend our faith with reason and scriptures not physical weapons -2 Cor 10:3-5, 1Pet 3:15. We have several examples;

- Christ was blasphemed at His trial and crucifixion but He prayed for the opposers –Mt 27:39-44 & **Lk 23:34-37**, this prayer resulted in the salvation of many from the day of Pentecost.
- Stephen was reviled and stoned by those who always resist the Holy Spirit, who discountenanced Stephen's message and miracles yet he prayed for them. The Lord answered and saved many including Saul who was a blasphemer –Acts 7-9, **Acts 26:11**
- Paul the apostle handed blasphemers unto God to deal with Himself whenever they resisted his teaching, he did not engage in physical violence - **Acts 18:5-6 & 1 Tim 1:19-20.**

Actually, God is able to take care of His own business if anyone insults Him. He dealt with:

- Pharaoh said, “*Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go.*” in Exodus 5 - 14
- Sennacherib, king of Assyria who asked “*Who are they among all the gods of the countries, that have delivered their country out of mine hand, that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem out of mine hand?*” in 2 Kg 18:31-19:37
- King Darius who used the vessels taken from the Jerusalem temple to drink wine with his concubines in Daniel 5
- King Herod who gave Him not the glory but reveled in the peoples acclamation that his voice is that of a god in Acts 12:20 - 23

He will deal with other unrepentant sinners who are presently blaspheming in one way or another -2 Thess 2:3-10 & Rev 16:9-11. Christ teaches that all kinds of blasphemies will be forgiven except the one against the Holy Spirit which His opposers were in danger of during His ministry. Many scholars believe that *the Unpardonable Sin* can no longer be committed today for the conditions necessary are unavailable (no one can now see Jesus perform a miracle and attribute it to Satan –Mk 3:28-30, Lk 12:10), *the important thing is that pardon or judgment is God's prerogative, not man's.*

Conclusions

Since the nineties, some Americans have produced movies depicting Jesus as a Rock-star, a gay, as well as a lover and husband to Mary Madgalene. Does it not amount to blasphemy of the Christian's God **when one deny that Jesus is the Son of God** or that He was crucified or resurrected? (**1 Jn 5:10**). *Christians do not violently protest, attack, maim or murder anyone for any or all of these blasphemies.* No one should over-react when others say that a religious founder is not a true prophet of God because his message and life-style contradicts the New Testament of Christ. ***Religion should be advanced by reason and love NOT by force, sword and bombs. Faith must be personal and is based on beliefs which may afterall be true or false.*** Laws are for crude people (1 Tim 1:9-10), God is now gracefully seeking worshippers not compelling man. He has abolished the law of Moses and is appealing to our consciences via the gospel –Acts 17:24-32.

Jehovah commanded the Israelites. “*You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain...*” – Exodus 20:7. He was referring to the reputation for which they became responsible because they wore God's name. As Christians, those who wear the name of Christ, we take upon ourselves the responsibility of bringing glory and honor to that name -1Peter 4:14-16. To speak and live in a manner that brings shame on us is to take the name of Christ in vain. The apostle Paul wrote, “*Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through Him*” -Col 3:17. Furthermore, Jesus teaches in Mt 5:33-37 that we should not invoke the Lord's name frivolously or swear; our words and action should be honorable and reliable. We should STOP blaspheming via murmurings and filthy communication (**Col 3:8**) and not give occasion for unbelievers to mock God because of our conduct –Romans 2:24, 1 Tim 6:1, Titus 2:5. When one speaks evil of the church, he or she is blaspheming the body and bride of Christ. When you fabricate malicious speech or rumours against a brother or sister, you are blaspheming him or her. Check your gossip meter for in many words we offend. Do not try to justify yourself when exposed, rather repent and apologize. If you or your God were to be blasphemed, “*Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.*” - Romans 12:19