

RIGHT OR WRONG? What to do with worn out Bibles

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We have several old Bibles that probably need to be destroyed. We want to be respectful of God's word. What should we do?

This is a great question, particularly for Christians who have a high view of the sacredness of Scripture. Without being too facetious, it also is a great question, because it is nice to be reminded that there are worn-out Bibles.

Too often, our Bibles sit on shelves in pristine condition, rendering moot the question of how to dispose of them.

I am assuming the Bibles are worn past the point of giving them away to someone or donating them to a library, and thus they actually need to be destroyed.

The problem for Christianity is that there is no official designation of how to handle the disposal of Bibles. Islam provides very strict rules for disposing of copies of the Quran, as does Judaism with old Torah scrolls. Some of the difference comes with Christianity's view of Scripture.

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Most Christian traditions see the sacredness of Scripture in the meaning of

the text as the revelation of God. The value is in the revelation, not the physical ink and paper. Part of this distinction developed from the fear of breaking the commandment concerning worshipping an idol, even if it was a Bible. The Bible is the word of God, but it is not God. Christians worship the Word who became flesh, not the words written on paper.

Thus, there is nothing in Christian tradition or theology to keep you from simply placing the old Bibles in the trash. Let me make a comparison. Recently, as my church observed the Lord's Supper, we found that a box of the bread had become very, very stale. The wafers tasted absolutely horrible. Now, the Lord's Supper shouldn't make you wince when you take it. Therefore, we threw the bread away. No ceremony; we just pitched it in the trash. Were we being sacrilegious? Were we casting away the body of the Lord? Obviously not.

Neither are you destroying the Word of God when you throw away an old Bible. No individual Bible has that power. Let's face it; even the original manuscripts were destroyed long ago.

However, many, if not most, Christians are uncomfortable with that solution. Baptists, particularly after the last 25 years of arguments over the Bible, might even feel they had committed the unforgivable sin. Others would surely at least suggest it. So what is a viable alternative?

The most generally acceptable solution appears to be either burying or burning the old Bible.

One method would be to take the old Bible to a remote place and bury it where it will likely not be trampled on. Burning the Bible could follow the rules of respect for the destruction of an old American flag by burning.

An interesting idea might be to contact your church and see if the church would be interested in having a ceremony. The church could announce the ceremony and ask the congregation to bring all their old Bibles together

and have a time of celebration regarding the wonderful use these Bibles had served.

Done correctly, it could be a good time of worship and thankfulness to God for the blessing of his word.

Pray about your options, and then follow through as God leads you. Then buy a new Bible and wear it out too.

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Right or Wrong? is sponsored by the T.B. Maston Chair of Christian Ethics at Hardin-Simmons University's Logsdon School of Theology. Send your questions about how to apply your faith to btillman@hsutx.edu.

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