

## Why Men Commit Evil Acts

### What Motivates Muslim Terrorists, Mass Murderers, and Destructive Anarchists, and How Do We Stop Them?

By Stephen McDowell

#### “Why do they hate us so much?”

This question was asked by many in Belgium after Islamic terrorists bombed the airport and subway in Brussels on March 22, 2016, killing 31 and wounding 270. Similar questions have been asked after other recent acts of terror, including the events on 9-11, the terrorist attacks in Paris, and the shooting in San Bernardino. Leaders, the media, and citizens ask, “Why would people commit such atrocities?”



Muslim terrorists bombed Brussels, March 22, killing 31 and wounding hundreds.

Such questions followed the riotous acts in Ferguson and Baltimore and after mass killings in the theater in Colorado and the church in Charleston. What could provoke people to act this way? What is their motive? Why do terrorists and mass killers commit such despicable acts?

To secular humanistic thinkers, who believe that man is basically good, there must have been some external situation or action of others to cause these people to do what they did. Thus, America and the capitalistic West, by their unjust and oppressive behavior, must have provoked Muslim terrorists to blow up the Twin Towers and shoot Americans. Blacks in Ferguson and Baltimore rioted and destroyed property because they are oppressed by the whites or the “man in authority.” Workplace violence occurs because someone is unfairly treated. If a deranged person goes on a shooting spree, it must be easy access to guns that caused it.

Yet, why would Muslims attack tolerant France and peaceful Belgium? Why would they blow up Brussels, the city that is the seat of the world court, the highest attainment of humanistic man, the example of utopia to the world? After all, humanistic man loves everyone and only wants peace for all. Socialist France, Belgium, and Western Europe have opened their doors to the oppressed Muslims to show them how tolerant and loving these statist nations are. Why, then, would men do such things?

Lacking a Christian view of man prohibits a correct answer to their question of motive. Why do men commit evil acts? Biblical Christianity provides a clear answer to this question.

#### 1. Man is sinful and his heart is deceitful and desperately wicked.

The Bible teaches that man was created in the image of God (Gen. 1: 26), communed with Him, and had the capacity to obey Him completely (Gen. 1-2). Yet man disobeyed God (i.e. he sinned), which separated him from God and corrupted his heart (Gen. 3; Rom. 3:9-18, 23). Thus after man sinned his nature changed, from having an obedient pure heart toward God to having a rebellious evil heart – as the Bible informs us, “the intent of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Gen. 8:21).

Since “every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (Gen. 6: 5), “the earth was filled with violence” (vs. 11). The external violence that flowed out of man’s evil, sinful heart was so bad

that God sent a flood to wipe out all but eight people, with whom he started anew. Yet even so, man remained in a fallen, sinful condition. His heart remained darkened, deceitful and desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9).

Ever since the Fall, man is born in sin and is unclean (Job 14:4; Ps. 51:5). He has a darkened heart (Rom. 1:21). This Biblical truth reveals the primary reason why men commit evil acts.<sup>1</sup> Such belief was ubiquitous throughout most of America's history. John Adams, second President of the United States, said that "the Word of God ... informs us, the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked."<sup>2</sup>



John Adams

Man's sinful and deceitful heart produces all kinds of evil actions. The Bible says wars, fights, quarrels, and murders occur due to sin, envy, selfishness, and lust (James 4:1-2).

## **2. There is a devil who hates God and His children and who seeks to destroy His Kingdom.**

Satan, the devil, has opposed God from the beginning. He tempted Adam and Eve and led them astray (Gen. 3). Because of sin, man is by nature evil. The devil works in and through the sons of disobedience (that is, all men before salvation) to carry out his nefarious deeds. He works via the wicked heart of man to kill, steal, and destroy (John 10:10; Eph. 2:1-3).

As a means of attacking God, the devil seeks to destroy man, God's highest creation, and in particular the children of God, the redeemed. He also seeks to thwart God's plan in the earth. He does not like the fruit of the kingdom of God which is liberty, righteousness, peace, prosperity, justice and joy, whether manifested in individual lives or society at large.<sup>3</sup>

False ideologies and wicked rulers are some of the tools Satan has used to seek to destroy man and God's kingdom. The false religion of Islam has especially been an instrument of oppression, destruction, and death.

## **3. Sinful men, with Satan's encouragement, embrace demented ideas that cause them to commit evil acts.**

All individuals, being created in the image of God, have a conscience that convicts them when they act contrary to God's standards (Rom. 2:14-15). However, fallen men through continual disobedience can sear their consciences and carry out atrocious acts of evil.

Sinful men also set up many false religions that teach bad ideas leading to evil actions. Islam is the most destructive of these false, man-made and demonically inspired religions – confirmed by a brief examination of its history.<sup>4</sup> While not a classical religion, statism is another man-made ideology that has brought great destruction to mankind.<sup>5</sup>



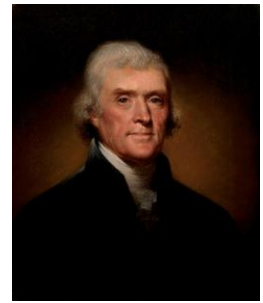
Islam's history and doctrines contradict the idea that it is a religion of peace.

The vast majority of terrorist acts in the world today are conducted by Muslims. According to them, their religion is the motive for their acts. While moderate Muslims rightly condemn such mass killings, the actual teachings of Islam promote such behavior.

Naïve, humanistic men wonder why radical Muslims hate and kill them when they have done them no harm and have only wanted to help them. Thomas Jefferson wondered this same thing over two

centuries ago when he met with the Muslim ambassador from Tripoli to seek to negotiate peace between the newly established United States and the Barbary Coast nations of North Africa who were attacking American ships in the area, demanding they pay them tribute.

In May 1786, Ambassadors Thomas Jefferson and John Adams met in London with the resident Tripolitan ambassador, Sidi Haji Abdul Rahman Adja, to try and negotiate a treaty to end the threat from the Barbary Pirates. They asked the ambassador why the Muslim states were so hostile to the new American republic that had done nothing to provoke such animosity, assuring him “that we considered all mankind as our friends who had done us no wrong, nor had given us any provocation.” Ambassador Adja answered, “that it was founded on the law of their great Prophet: that it was written in the Koran, that all Nations who should not have acknowledged their Authority were sinners: that it was their right and duty to make war upon them wherever they could be found, and to make slaves of all they could take as prisoners; and that every Mussalman who should be slain in battle was sure to go to Paradise.”<sup>6</sup> Jefferson had a Koran in his library and likely used it to learn for himself if it really taught this strange oppressive doctrine. He discovered it did.<sup>7</sup>



President Thomas Jefferson directed America’s first war against Muslim terrorists.

Jefferson argued the best long-term solution was to establish a navy, writing, “I very early thought it would be best to effect a peace through the medium of war.”<sup>8</sup> He pointed out that the cost of establishing and maintaining a navy “would amount to little more than we must pay, if we buy peace,”<sup>9</sup> that is, pay the tribute demanded by the pirates.<sup>10</sup> By the time he became President in 1801, the navy had been built up to sufficient strength such that continued attacks by the Muslim terrorists prompted Jefferson to declare war. Our victory in 1805 ended hostilities against America and delayed Muslim atrocities for a while.

Having good intentions toward such deceived, evilly-thinking men is not sufficient to stop them.

## What Can Be Done?

Men commit evil acts because men are sinful. The world is full of evil people who think and act wrongly. Understanding the nature of fallen man and the history of mankind caused Martin Luther to write, “the world is nothing but a mass of evil people.”<sup>11</sup> If this is so, do we have any hope of stopping the unlawful action of evil men? Thankfully, yes. Our hope rests with the liberating work of Jesus Christ. Christ came into the world to redeem men and destroy the works of the devil. The Bible, God’s revealed Word to mankind, presents Christ’s atoning work but also gives us principles and precepts for dealing with the evil acts of sinful men. The Bible provides a blueprint for advancing liberty and suppressing evil. That blueprint includes:

### 1. Preach Christ to change the sinful heart of man.

When we repent of our sins, have faith in Christ’s redemptive work, and follow Him as Lord, He makes us a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17). He gives us a new heart and nature that seeks to obey him and live rightly (Rom. 3, 6; Heb. 8). Regenerated believers seek to preserve life, not destroy it.

Only God through Christ can transform man from within. No other religion or belief system does such a thing. Since only Christ can change the heart, only Christianity can effectively deal with the consequences of the evil intents of sinful men’s hearts, which are violence, wars and conflicts. The more that Christ is preached and believed, the more that violence is diminished.

## 2. Teach truth to combat the lies of Satan.

Luther wrote “the world is ... a mass of evil people” about 500 years ago. At that time the ratio of regenerated Christians to total world population was maybe 1 in 99. Thankfully, because of God’s grace and plan for man, and because of men like Luther, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of Christians. Today 1 in 3 people in the world identify as Christians, with perhaps 1 in 7 being regenerated believers.

His kingdom has expanded greatly in the past five centuries. There are therefore more people who have become new creations in Christ, with a new nature and desires. They seek to live rightly. They do not seek to do evil but good.

The expansion of God’s kingdom in history has not only changed hearts, it has also changed minds. Where Biblical ideas have advanced, liberty, prosperity, justice, and virtue have advanced as well. These principles have changed nations and benefited all men, not just Christians. Biblical truth has exposed tyrants and oppressors in government and religion. It has provided a great contrast between true religion (Christianity) and the false religions of man. Having access to the teachings of Jesus, and comparing them with the teachings of Mohammad, is turning Muslims to the Lord today in unprecedented numbers.<sup>12</sup>

Although Christianity is advancing rapidly today, there are still billions of evil people in the world. However, the more we teach the liberating principles of the Christian faith, the more this will serve as a deterrent to evil behavior, since such teachings will bear witness to the Godly conscience of all men.

## 3. Work to place Godly leaders in government who understand the nature of man.

Saving grace transforms individuals, giving them a nature of obedience to God. Teaching more Biblical truth guides converted men to acts of lawfulness and promotes a culture of Godly morality that helps abate evil actions of all citizens. In addition to preaching Christ and teaching truth, God has given us another means of dealing with evil, which is the divine institution of civil government. We are to overcome evil in the heart of man by the truth of the Gospel (Romans 12). We are to overcome evil in society by Godly civil government (Romans 13:1-4).

The Biblical purpose of government as presented in Romans 13:1-4, 1 Peter 2: 13-14, and 1 Timothy 2:1-2 can be summarized by, **The Five P’s of Government:**

1. Protect the righteous
2. Punish evildoers
3. Promote Biblical justice
4. Praise those who do right
5. Provide peace

To be effective, government leaders must understand the nature of evil and the Biblical purpose of government. They should execute justice in a swift manner (Eccl. 8:11) and punish criminals in accordance with Biblical penalties.<sup>13</sup> Doing so will help create an atmosphere of peace and lawfulness. They should also deal with militant Muslims in such a manner as to suppress their evil actions.<sup>14</sup>



Civil government is a divine institution, intended by God to protect the righteous, punish criminals, and provide peace so that we might carry on the work of His kingdom.

God's plan and desire is to bring His kingdom (government) to earth as it is in heaven. When His kingdom is established, first in the heart of man and then in society at large, His order, rule, and peace will advance and evil will diminish.

Since Jesus came into the world (and especially since the time of Luther), Christ's kingdom has expanded and hundreds of millions have been converted. Civil governments have become less tyrannical and have done a better job at protecting the righteous. This has especially occurred in the Western world due to the spread of the Gospel in those nations. Evil has diminished as more people have become Christians and been instructed to follow God's moral law.

Where Christianity has had less impact in men's hearts and society at large (like in Muslim, Hindu, pagan and atheistic nations), there tends to be more evil. As America and the West are becoming more secularized, there is a growing evil in the hearts of men. As they have cast aside a Biblical view of man and government, civil authorities have become less effective at restraining evil in society and violence has increased.

To effectively deal with the actions of terrorists and evil-doers, we must understand what motivates them. Here, as with all areas of life, Biblical Christianity shows us the way. We should heed this wisdom from above.

---

<sup>1</sup> While man's sinful heart is the primary motive for evil action, there are numerous secondary reasons that may provoke some men to commit crimes and atrocities, including bad company, evil environment, and corruption. However, one's external circumstances are never justification for sinful and criminal behavior (as God defines criminal). Changing the external circumstances, no matter how bad, are not sufficient to deal with the source of evil behavior.

<sup>2</sup> John Adams, *The Works of John Adams*, Charles Francis Adams, editor (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1856), Vol. 6, *A Defense of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America*, "Chapter First. Marchamont Nedham. The Right Constitution of a Commonwealth Examined."

<sup>3</sup> To learn about the advance of Biblical fruit in history see Stephen McDowell, *Monumental: Restoring America as the Land of Liberty*, Libertyman Studios, 2013, and Mark Beliles and Stephen McDowell, *America's Providential History*, Charlottesville: Providence Foundation, 2010. Both can be ordered from the Providence Foundation at providencefoundation.com

<sup>4</sup> See Stephen McDowell, *The Threat of Islam to Liberty and Christianity*, Charlottesville: Providence Foundation, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> Statism is the belief that man via the state is the ultimate authority in the earth. There are many forms of statism including communism, socialism, Marxism, democratic socialism, etc. Statist governments killed over 100 million of their own citizens in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century alone. To learn more about statism see, Stephen McDowell, *Rendering to Caesar the Things that Are God's*, Charlottesville: Providence Foundation, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> "The American Peace Commissioners to John Jay, 28 Mar. 1786," Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-01-02-0569> [update: 2015-03-20]). Source: this is an Early Access document from The Adams Papers.] And Joshua E. London, *Victory in Tripoli, How America's War with the Barbary Pirates Established the U.S. Navy and Built a Nation*, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2005, p. 23-24.

<sup>7</sup> For some of the militant teachings of Islam see McDowell, *The Threat of Islam to Liberty and Christianity*, pp. 29 ff.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Jefferson, Letter to John Adams, July 11, 1786, *The Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, Andrew A. Lipscomb and Albert Ellery Bergh, Editors, Washington, DC: The Thomas Jefferson Memorial Association, 1903, 5:364.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 5:366.

<sup>10</sup> Jefferson believed the American people agreed with him, writing: "From what I learn from the temper of my countrymen and their tenaciousness of money, it will be more easy to raise ships and men to fight these pirates into reason than money to bribe them." (Letter to Ezra Stiles, December 24, 1786, *Writings*, 6:25.)

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in John Eidsmoe, *Historical and Theological Foundations of Law*, Powder Springs, Ga.: American Vision Press, 2012, Vol. 3, p. 1003.

<sup>12</sup> See McDowell, *The Threat of Islam to Liberty and Christianity* for a comparison of Christianity and Islam, and also to learn of the great revival occurring among Muslims today.

<sup>13</sup> See Stephen McDowell, *Crime and Punishment: A Biblical Perspective*, Charlottesville: Providence Foundation, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> See McDowell, *The Threat of Islam to Liberty and Christianity*, p. 44-47, for some ideas on how to fight the war against Muslim terrorists.