

Gay Student Suspended for Ripping Up Bible at School, Threatens Lawsuit

An openly gay student in Texas is threatening to sue his school district after he was suspended for ripping up a Bible on campus. The 18-year-old student says his actions were a form of protest because he was being bullied for his homosexuality.

Isaiah Smith, a senior at Birdville High School in North Richland Hills, Texas, was suspended last week after bringing a Bible to school and tore out pages from Leviticus in front of students he claims had teased him for being gay.

"At my high school, some kids like to say that being gay is a sin and that you can't be gay and Christian," Smith said in the *Star-Telegram*. "I wanted to bring my Bible to school and interpret the books of Leviticus and Romans, because they are often used to bully gay people."

Smith reportedly took his Bible into his first-period Spanish class Monday, Oct. 28, after classmates bullied him for his sexual orientation. He said students started teasing him, telling him he was going to hell, so he began to tear out pages from the book of Leviticus, explaining that other students often quote the Old Testament book when he is bullied.

"I think the Bible was a tool for Christians to use to guide them spiritually, emotionally and mentally," he said.

The teen was reportedly told by Vice Principal Glenn Serviente that he could bring his Bible to school, but he was not allowed to rip it apart in class. Smith carried around the torn Bible for the remainder of the day and on Tuesday without

incident but was called into Serviente's office on Wednesday and received a three-day suspension.

Smith said the assistant principal asked him how Muslims would feel if someone ripped up the Quran. Though Smith acknowledged they would not like it, he argued that he tore up his own Bible, not something that belonged to someone else.

The *Star-Telegram* reports that Smith's discipline slip said the nature of the problem was "distraction and disruption in class by tearing up Bible in class."

The American Humanist Association sent a letter to the Birdville School District asking to expunge Smith's record of suspension. Attorney Bill Burgess says the district is violating Smith's First Amendment rights.

"Isaiah's Bible was not the source of disruption; the bullying was," Burgess says. "Instead of reprimanding the bullies, the school punished Isaiah for offering an alternative viewpoint on the Bible."

District spokesman Mark Thomas told the *Dallas Observer*, "This is not related to the Bible."

Thomas wrote in an emailed statement, "Any recurring incident that disrupts the learning process is dealt with according to policy and appropriate disciplinary action is taken according to that policy."

He added, "I question the paper's reason for wanting to run a story on any general student discipline."

Smith has identified as a Christian but says he does not believe the Bible condemns homosexuality. He has a history of speaking out on gay rights, having appeared last year before the Keller City Council on the need for an anti-discrimination ordinance. He also believes the Pledge of Allegiance is a violation of the separation of church and state.