

# Islam and American Values: Freedom of Religion and Speech

The beliefs and values of the United States were expressed in our founding documents. Are the doctrines of Islam compatible with these beliefs and values? Let's take a look at two of the core American beliefs that were expressed in the first Amendment to the United States Constitution.

## Amendment I

*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech...*

The first core value expressed is the idea of freedom of religion. Is there freedom of religion under Islam?

The Koran states that apostates from Islam can be killed:

Chapter 4, Verse 89

*...But if they turn back (from Islam), take (hold of) them and kill them wherever you find them...*

Muhammad said that those who left Islam deserved to be killed:

*It was narrated from Ibn 'Umar that 'Uthman said: "I heard the Messenger of*

*Allah say: 'It is not permissible to shed the blood of a Muslim except in three cases: ...one who apostatizes after having become Muslim, in which case he deserves to be killed.'"*

*Sunan An-Nasa'i, No. 4062*

*Narrated 'Ikrima: 'Ali burnt some people and this news reached Ibn 'Abbas, who said, "Had I been in his place I would not have burnt them, as the Prophet said, 'Don't punish (anybody) with Allah's punishment.' No doubt, I would have killed them, for the Prophet said, 'If somebody (a Muslim) discards his religion, kill him.'"*

*Sahih Al-Bukhari, No. 3017*

So according to the Koran and Muhammad, once a Muslim, always a Muslim. If someone decides to leave Islam, the penalty is death.

What about freedom of religion for non-Muslims? Muhammad said he had been commanded to fight until everyone became a Muslim:

*It has been narrated on the authority of 'Abdullah b. Umar that the Messenger of Allah said: I have been commanded to fight against people till they testify that there is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, they establish the prayer, and pay the Zakat. If they do it, their blood and property are guaranteed protection on my behalf except when justified by law, and their affairs rest with Allah.*

*Sahih Muslim, No. 22*

In the Verse of the Sword the Koran commands Muslims to besiege, ambush and kill non-Muslims (*Mushrikun*); the only way the non-Muslims can save themselves is to convert to Islam:

Chapter 9, Verse 5

*Then when the Sacred Months have passed, then kill the Mushrikun wherever you find them, and capture them and besiege them, and lie in wait for them in every ambush. But if they repent [by rejecting Shirk (polytheism) and accept Islamic Monotheism] and perform As-Salat (the prayers), and give Zakat (obligatory charity), then leave their way free. Verily, Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.*

However, in Chapter 9, Verse 29, there was a third option given to Jews and Christians: in addition to death or conversion to Islam, they could choose to pay protection money (*Jizyah*) to the Muslim government.

These two verses are from Chapter 9 of the Koran, and as was noted in the brochure *Abrogation: The Key to Understanding Islam*, Chapter 9 was the last complete verse to be "revealed" to Muhammad. Consequently, Verses 5 and 29 are the final commands from Allah to the Muslims in these particular matters.

What about freedom of speech?

The Koran states that once Allah and Muhammad have decided on a matter, a Muslim is not allowed to disagree; for example:

Chapter 33, Verse 36

*It is not for a believer, man or woman, when Allah and His Messenger, have decreed a matter that they should have any option in their decision. And whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger, he had indeed strayed into a plain error.*

Chapter 4, Verse 115

*And whoever contradicts and opposes the Messenger (Muhammad) after the right path has been shown clearly to him, and follows other than the believers' way, We shall keep him in the path he has chosen, and burn him in Hell - what an evil destination!*

Muhammad did not like to be criticized or reviled. He ordered the killing of a number of people who had criticized or mocked him:

‘Asma’ Bint Marwan, a poetess who used her poetry to insult him and to vilify Islam – March 624.

Abu ‘Afak, who was about 120 years old. Abu ‘Afak had refused to become a Muslim and had ridiculed Muhammad after the battle of Badr – April 624.

Ka’b bin Al-Ashraf, a Jewish poet in Medina who had criticized him and written poetry offensive to Muslim women – August/September 624.

This attitude of Muhammad’s was best summed up in a letter written after the Muslim conquest of Mecca in January 630. It was sent to the poet

Ka'b bin Zuhair, who used to satirize Muhammad, from his brother:

*Allah's Messenger killed some men in Makkah who used to satirize and harm him, and the poets who survived fled in all directions for their lives. So, if you want to save your skin, hasten to Allah's Messenger. He never kills those who come to him repenting. If you refuse to do as I say, it is up to you to try to save your skin by any means.*

*The Sealed Nectar*, p. 521

Muhammad even said there was to be no punishment for the killing of anyone who reviled and/or criticized him:

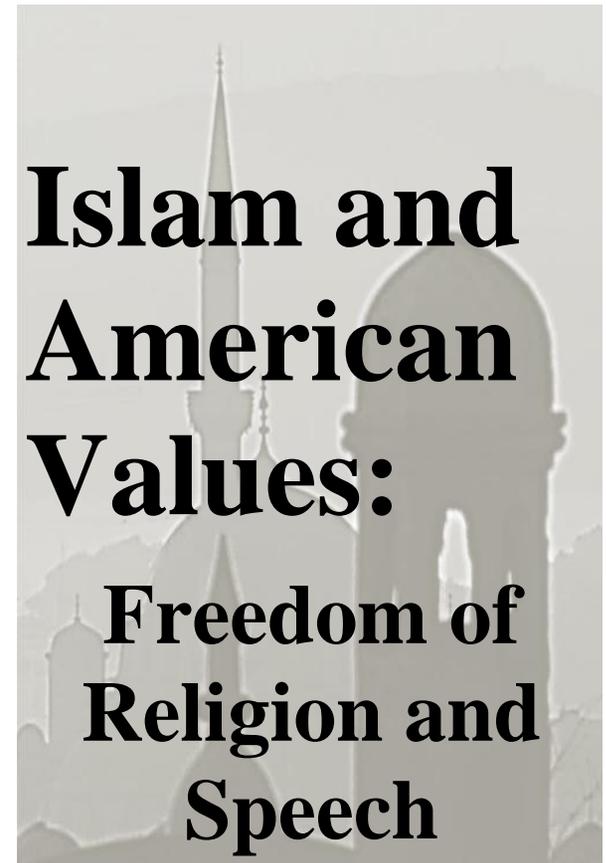
*It was narrated from 'Ali that a Jewish woman used to revile and disparage the Prophet. A man strangled her until she died, and the Messenger of Allah declared that no recompense was payable for her blood.*

*Sunan Abu Dawud*, No. 4362

So we can see that the doctrines of Islam do not allow either freedom of religion or freedom of speech.

For an in-depth look at the conflict between Islamic Doctrine and the 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment, see my book: *Islamic Doctrine versus the U.S. Constitution: The Dilemma for Muslim Public Officials*.

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Part of a series on Islam

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