

# **2nd Opinion: Christians should support freedom for all faiths and for no faith**

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Americans overwhelmingly are concerned about religious liberty. That's good. What's troubling, but perhaps not surprising, is they are less enthusiastic about protecting those liberties for some religions.

According to a recent poll by the Associated Press and the University of Chicago's National Opinion Research Center, 82 percent said religious liberty protections were important for Christians, compared with around 60 percent who said the same for Muslims and the religiously unaffiliated.

Yet religious freedom is not merely an important issue. It is our "first freedom."

What Americans, especially Christian Americans, must understand is this: Religious freedom for some is not religious freedom for long.

LifeWay Research data might help explain the lower enthusiasm for the religious freedom of Muslims. About 40 percent of Americans believe Muslims are a threat to religious liberty. However, that does not explain why Mormons, who are not seen as a threat to religious liberty, get lower favorable responses in polls.

Partly, it may be that religious freedom means different things to different people. Another reason may be that these faiths are smaller and less mainstream.

**Clarify "religious freedom"**

Yet we must be clear about religious freedom, its definition and value to our nation. Regardless of people's faith, or lack thereof, it is important for Christians, Hindus, atheists, Muslims and everyone in between to work for religious freedom for all.

So, what do we mean when we talk about religious liberty?

For some, it brings to mind a Kentucky clerk not signing a same-sex marriage certificate or Hobby Lobby not providing certain contraceptives.

Many may believe the religious freedoms of Jews and Christians are beneficial to the "Judeo-Christian" nation but think granting those same freedoms to others would endanger our safety. I get it: Working for the religious freedom of someone else may appear to be endorsing their beliefs.

### **Pursue freedom**

This is a faulty line of thinking. We must pursue religious freedom for all. Here's why:

*1. The First Amendment does not protect certain faiths, but all faiths and people of no faith.*

It's a dangerous idea to let majorities and government decide whose religious freedom is worth protecting. Historically, U.S. Christians have recognized this. A well-known agitator pushing for what would become the First Amendment was a preacher named John Leland. He made it clear: "All should be equally free—Jews, Turks, Pagans and Christians." And for what it's worth, Turks were Muslims.

*2. Minority faiths, like minority viewpoints, are the ones that need most protection.*

Those in the majority rarely see their liberties curtailed legally and culturally. Minority faiths, often misunderstood by others, need additional

protection from the inherent power of the majority.

We see a similar reality with freedom of speech. Popular opinions do not need protection. This is why freedom of the press and freedom of religion both are mentioned in the First Amendment.

*3. When those of us who identify as Christians allow the government to pick whose freedoms are recognized, we undermine our own religious liberties.*

As an evangelical, whose beliefs increasingly are out of touch with the majority culture, I defend religious freedom now, because I may need those protections later.

The majority of Americans and Protestant pastors believe religious liberty is on the decline in our nation. We should recognize we can prevent those erosions by standing for the religious freedom of others.

As a Christian confident in my faith, I want freedom of religion because I believe the gospel will advance in a free and open market of religious ideas. I want all to hear the gospel, even those who think I should not share it. But as an evangelical, I believe all are made in the image of God and, as such, all must have the freedom to choose their faith or to change their faith.

### **A better way ...**

Yes, religion has been—and is—used to promote and condone violence, and we would be naïve not to see the link between Islam and Islamist radicalism. But we can address such issues in any faith without undermining the general founding principles of our nation. The actions of a minority of Muslims do not mean the entirety of that faith should forfeit religious freedom. Most Americans see that.

Around the world, nations often deny religious freedom. So, let's show the world a better way—one our Founding Fathers laid forth.

When Christians demand religious freedom for ourselves and do not speak up for others, we miss the teaching of Jesus, “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the law and the prophets” (Matthew 7:12).

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