

# SURAH 58:1-22

FAITH: Islam | TEXT: Surah 58 (Al-Mujadila) | VOLUME: The Meaning of the Holy Quran | AUTHOR: Rashad Khalifa

## OVERVIEW

Surah 58, titled 'Al-Mujadila' (The Pleading Woman), opens with a specific legal ruling regarding 'zihar'—a pre-Islamic practice where a husband estranges his wife by declaring her forbidden like his mother's back. The text affirms that God hears the complaints of the marginalized, abolishing this practice as a lie and establishing a rigorous system of works-based expiation (freeing slaves, fasting, or feeding the poor) for reconciliation. The text then shifts to a broader polemic against the 'hypocrites' in Medina who hold secret counsels to oppose the Messenger. It asserts God's absolute omnipresence and omniscience—He is the 'fourth' in a meeting of three—to warn conspirators that nothing is hidden. The Surah concludes by defining the ultimate polarization of humanity: the 'Party of the Devil' (those who oppose the Messenger and befriend God's enemies) versus the 'Party of God' (those who remain loyal to the Messenger, even over their own kin). This creates a theological framework where salvation is intrinsically tied to political and social loyalty to the Prophet and strict adherence to ritual law.

## KEY FIGURES

GOD (Allah), The Messenger (Muhammad), The Pleading Woman (Khawla bint Tha'labah - implied), The Estranging Husband (Aws bin As-Samit - implied), The Hypocrites (Munafiqun), The Party of the Devil, The Party of GOD

## DOCTRINES ANALYZED

### 1. WORKS-BASED EXPIATION (KAFFARAH)

**Assertion:** Sin (specifically zihar) creates a debt that must be paid by the sinner through specific acts of penance before reconciliation is possible.

"Those who estrange their wives... shall atone by freeing a slave... If you cannot find a slave to free, you shall fast two consecutive months... (58:3-4)"

**Evangelical Comparison:** In Evangelical theology, the debt of sin is paid fully by Christ (Colossians 2:14), and reconciliation is a gift of grace received by faith. In Surah 58, the mechanism for removing the stain of sin is 'Kaffarah'—a penalty borne by the sinner. The text explicitly links the resumption of marital relations to the completion of these works ('before resuming their sexual relations'). This establishes a transactional view of forgiveness where human suffering (fasting) or financial loss (freeing a slave/feeding poor) acts as the currency of redemption.

### 2. THEOLOGICAL POLARIZATION (WALA' WAL BARA')

**Assertion:** True faith requires total dissociation from those who oppose the Messenger, superseding blood ties.

"You will not find people who believe in GOD... befriending those who oppose GOD and His messenger, even if they were their parents, or their children... (58:22)"

**Evangelical Comparison:** While Jesus taught that loyalty to Him takes precedence over family (Matthew 10:37), the New Testament instructs believers to maintain love and honor toward non-believers, seeking their salvation (1 Peter 3:1-2). Surah 58:22 frames this separation as a definitive mark of the 'Party of God,' implying that affection for those opposing the Prophet negates one's faith. This doctrine creates a binary worldview where social segregation is a requirement for spiritual validity.

### 3. DIVINE PANOPTICISM

**Assertion:** God is physically/knowledgeably present in every secret conversation to record and judge.

"No three people can conspire secretly without Him being their fourth... GOD has recorded everything, while they have forgotten it. (58:6-7)"

**Evangelical Comparison:** The Bible teaches God's omnipresence often as a source of comfort to the believer (Psalm 139:7-10) or conviction of sin. In Surah 58, this doctrine is weaponized specifically against 'secret conspiracy' and dissent against the Messenger. The emphasis is on the recording of deeds for the purpose of

'informing them of everything they had done' at the judgment, reinforcing a theology of strict accountability without the covering of an advocate (1 John 2:1).

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: Surah 58 presents a fundamental incompatibility with the Gospel regarding the solution to sin. In this text, sin (zihar) is a legal infraction requiring a human payment (fasting/money) to satisfy God's requirement. In the Gospel, sin is a condition of death requiring a Savior. Furthermore, the text defines the community of God through political loyalty and exclusion of 'opposers,' whereas the Church is defined by union with Christ. The 'Party of God' here is achieved through striving; the Body of Christ is entered through grace.

Shared Values:

God's omniscience and omnipresence; Concern for the rights of women (in the context of the hearing of the complaint); Condemnation of perjury and false oaths; Importance of charity and prayer

Friction Points:

- 1. [Critical] Sola Fide (Faith Alone) – Verses 3-4 mandate specific works (fasting, feeding) to atone for sin before restoration is possible.
- 2. [Critical] Christology (Sufficiency of Christ) – The text assumes humans can and must pay the price for their own sins, rendering Christ's sacrifice unnecessary.
- 3. [Major] Nature of God (Love/Grace) – God's favor is contingent on social severance from 'enemies,' contradicting the unconditional love of God demonstrated in Christ (Romans 5:8).
- 4. [Critical] Justification – Justification is forensic based on the 'record' of deeds (v6), not imputed righteousness.

Semantic Warnings:

"Party of God (Hizbullah)"

In Text: Those who obey the Messenger, perform rituals, and sever ties with enemies of Islam.  
Evangelical: No direct equivalent, but 'Children of God' are those born again by faith (John 1:12), not defined by political/military allegiance.  
Example: In Surah 58:22, being God's party requires disowning family who oppose the prophet; in Christianity, one remains a child of God even if family relations are strained, but love is never withdrawn.

"Forgiveness"

In Text: Conditional upon repentance plus expiation (works) or charity.  
Evangelical: Unconditional upon repentance/faith, based on Christ's prior payment.  
Example: In 58:12-13, forgiveness is linked to offering charity or, if unable, God's mercy allows repentance followed by ritual performance.

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Victory (winning), admission into gardens (v22), and avoiding the Fire (v17).  
How Attained: By believing, obeying the Messenger, performing Salat/Zakat, and strictly separating from the 'Party of Satan.'  
Basis of Assurance: Assurance is corporate ('The Party of God are the winners') rather than individual. It is based on the promise of victory to the loyal group.  
Comparison to Sola Fide: Explicitly rejected. Verse 13 lists repentance, Salat, Zakat, and obedience as the mechanism for acceptance, contrasting with Ephesians 2:8-9.

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

- 1. Do not estrange wives via zihar (v2)
- 2. Perform expiation (slave/fasting/feeding) if zihar occurs (v3-4)

3. Make room for others in assemblies (v11)
4. Rise/move when asked in assemblies (v11)
5. Give charity before private consultation with the Messenger (v12 - noted as 'better')
6. Do not befriend those who oppose God and His Messenger (v22)

**Implicit Obligations:**

1. Maintain constant awareness of God's surveillance of private conversations
2. Report or disassociate from family members who oppose the faith
3. Accept the Messenger's political and social decisions as binding divine law

**Ritual Requirements:**

1. Fasting two consecutive months (conditional penance)
2. Feeding sixty poor people (conditional penance)
3. Observe contact prayers (Salat) (v13)
4. Give obligatory charity (Zakat) (v13)

**EVANGELISM TOOLKIT**

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**Discovery Questions:**

1. In verse 1, God hears the woman's whisper. How does it make you feel to know God listens to the marginalized? How does that compare to how He handles her sin vs. her suffering?
2. Verse 4 requires fasting two months to atone for a specific sin. If you fail on the 59th day, do you have to start over? How do you handle the anxiety of knowing your atonement depends on your performance?
3. Verse 22 speaks of not befriending those who oppose the Messenger, even parents. How do you balance this with the command to honor your father and mother?
4. If God records everything (v6) and we forget, what is your hope for the sins you have committed but can no longer remember to repent for?

**Redemptive Analogies:**

1. The God Who Hears (Al-Sami) – Just as God heard the desperate plea of the woman in her marital distress, God hears the cry of the sinner. However, God's answer wasn't just a new law, but His own Son. [Psalm 34:17-18, Hebrews 4:15-16]
2. The Need for Expiation – The text admits that sin (zihar) requires a payment (freeing a slave) to restore relationship. The Gospel agrees a price must be paid—a slave must be freed. Jesus took the form of a slave (Phil 2) to free us from sin. [Mark 10:45, Philippians 2:7]

**Spiritual Weight:**

1. Performance Anxiety / Debt [Severe] – The believer carries the burden of paying for their own sins through arduous physical tasks (60 days fasting). There is no 'finished work' to rest in, only the anxiety of potential failure in the repayment process.
2. Social Isolation / Emotional Conflict [Severe] – The command to emotionally detach from family members who oppose the faith (v22) creates immense psychological dissonance and sorrow, forcing a choice between natural affection and religious loyalty.
3. Paranoia / Surveillance [Moderate] – The emphasis on God as the 'fourth of three' recording every secret word creates a spiritual panopticon, where the believer fears not just action, but private thought and conversation.

**EPISTEMOLOGY**

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**Knowledge Source:** Revelation through the Messenger; Empirical observation of the 'defeat' of opposers.

**Verification Method:** Adherents are told to observe the historical pattern that those who oppose God are 'committed to defeat' (v5) and that God's party always wins (v22).

**Evangelical Contrast:** Biblical epistemology relies on the Spirit bearing witness with the Word (1 Cor 2:13). This text relies on the threat of judgment and the promise of temporal/eschatological victory as proof of truth.

## **TEXTUAL CRITICISM**

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**Dating:** Medinan period (approx. 625-627 AD), post-Battle of the Trench.

**Authorship:** Attributed to Muhammad via Gabrielic revelation; Khalifa translation (1978) claims to restore the 'original' meaning.

**Textual Issues:** Khalifa's translation is generally idiosyncratic, often translating 'Allah' as 'GOD' and minimizing Hadith context, though this Surah is heavily dependent on Sira context (Khawla's story) to make sense.