

SURAH 60 (AL-MUMTAHANAH)

FAITH: Islam | TEXT: The Holy Qur'an | VOLUME: The Meaning of the Holy Quran | AUTHOR: Rashad Khalifa (Translator/Commentator)

OVERVIEW

Surah 60, titled 'Al-Mumtahanah' (The Woman Tested), addresses a community in transition, grappling with the tension between natural familial affection and religious loyalty. Revealed in a context of conflict between the early Muslims and the Meccan pagans, the text demands a decisive emotional and social break from 'enemies of God.' It explicitly forbids extending love or secret friendship to those who oppose the message, citing Abraham as the supreme exemplar of disavowal (Al-Bara'), who declared 'animosity and hatred' toward idolaters until they believed in God alone. However, the text introduces nuance, distinguishing between active persecutors and those who have not fought the believers, permitting kindness toward the latter. A significant portion of the text provides legalistic frameworks for dealing with refugee women: they must be 'tested' to verify their faith, their marriages to disbelievers are annulled, and financial compensations (dowries) are regulated. The Surah concludes with the 'Pledge of the Women,' a covenant of moral behavior and obedience to the Prophet. Theologically, it enforces a strict 'Us vs. Them' dichotomy based on monotheistic allegiance, placing the burden of loyalty testing directly on the community.

KEY FIGURES

GOD (Allah), Abraham, The Prophet (Muhammad), Believing Women (Refugees), Disbelievers (The Enemy)

DOCTRINES ANALYZED

1. AL-WALA' WAL-BARA' (LOYALTY AND DISAVOWAL)

Assertion: Believers must completely sever ties of affection and loyalty with those who oppose God, declaring animosity until they believe.

"We disown you and the idols that you worship besides GOD. We denounce you, and you will see nothing from us except animosity and hatred until you believe in GOD ALONE." (Surah 60:4)"

Evangelical Comparison: While Evangelicalism teaches separation from sin and idolatry (2 Corinthians 6:14), it simultaneously commands active love, prayer, and missional engagement toward the 'enemy' (Matthew 5:44). This text institutionalizes 'animosity and hatred' as a virtue of faith modeled by Abraham. In contrast, the Christian ethic is grounded in the imitation of Christ, who died for his enemies (Romans 5:8), establishing that spiritual warfare is against spiritual powers, not flesh and blood people (Ephesians 6:12).

2. THE TESTING OF FAITH

Assertion: The community is responsible for testing the sincerity of converts (specifically women) before accepting them.

"O you who believe, when believing women... ask for asylum with you, you shall test them." (Surah 60:10)"

Evangelical Comparison: The Quranic instruction to 'test' implies a human capacity to verify spiritual status for legal/social integration. In Evangelical theology, while the church exercises discipline and looks for the 'fruit of the Spirit' (Galatians 5:22), the certainty of salvation is an internal witness of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:16), and the Lord alone 'knows those who are His' (2 Timothy 2:19). The text places a burden of judicial verification on the community that the Bible reserves largely for God.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Divergence Status: Yes

Theological Gap: The fundamental gap lies in the treatment of the 'enemy.' Surah 60 commands animosity and hatred as a spiritual discipline modeled by Abraham. Evangelical Christianity teaches that God loved us while we were His enemies (Romans 5:10) and commands believers to do likewise. Furthermore, the text's soteriology is works-oriented ('struggle in My cause,' 'seeking My blessings') and lacks any concept of substitutionary atonement. The 'God Alone' phraseology in Khalifa's translation is a polemic against the Trinity, positioning Jesus not as the divine Son but implicitly as a prophet whose followers (Christians) may have strayed if they associate partners with God.

Shared Values:

Monotheism (rejection of idols); Moral prohibitions against stealing, adultery, and infanticide; Importance of prayer; Care for the integrity of marriage (within the faith)

Friction Points:

1. [Critical] Christology / Ethics – Replaces the ethic of 'Love your enemy' (Christ) with 'Animosity and hatred' (Abrahamic interpretation).
2. [Critical] Theology Proper – Strict Unitarianism ('God Alone') denies the Trinity and the Sonship of Christ.
3. [Major] Sola Fide – Salvation and community acceptance are contingent on 'testing,' 'struggling,' and moral pledges rather than faith alone.

Semantic Warnings:

"Believer"

In Text: One who submits to Allah, follows Muhammad, and disowns enemies.

Evangelical: One who trusts in the finished work of Christ for salvation (John 3:16).

Example: *In Surah 60:10, a 'believing woman' is one who has politically and religiously defected to Islam.*

"Friendship (Awliya)"

In Text: Alliance, protection, and deep affection/loyalty.

Evangelical: Can range from affection to covenant loyalty, but Jesus calls his followers 'friends' (John 15:15).

Example: *The prohibition on friendship in 60:1 is about political and spiritual allegiance, not just casual acquaintance.*

SOTERIOLOGY

Salvation Defined: Forgiveness of sins and protection from the Fire, attained through submission and dissociation from idolatry.

How Attained: By believing in God Alone, struggling in His cause, and obeying the Prophet's commands.

Basis of Assurance: There is no absolute assurance; believers pray 'forgive us' (v. 5) and hope for mercy. The Prophet prays for them (v. 12) but does not atone for them.

Comparison to Sola Fide: Radically different. Surah 60 requires a 'pledge' of works (v. 12) and social action (v. 1) to validate faith. The Bible teaches justification is a gift of grace received by faith apart from works (Ephesians 2:8-9).

MANDATES & REQUIREMENTS

Explicit Commands:

1. Do not befriend God's enemies (v. 1)
2. Disown idolaters (v. 4)
3. Test asylum-seeking women (v. 10)
4. Do not return believing women to disbelievers (v. 10)
5. Pay dowries to disbelievers if marrying their former wives (v. 10)
6. Accept the pledge of women who meet moral conditions (v. 12)

Implicit Obligations:

1. Monitor personal affections to ensure they align with religious loyalty
2. Financial compensation for marital dissolution due to conversion
3. Constant vigilance against 'secretly loving' those outside the faith

Ritual Requirements:

1. The Pledge (Bay'ah) for women entering the community
2. Prayer for forgiveness (v. 5, v. 12)

EVANGELISM TOOLKIT

Discovery Questions:

1. The text mentions Abraham declared 'animosity and hatred' toward his people. How do you reconcile that with the Abraham in Genesis who prayed for Sodom to be spared?
2. Verse 10 says to 'test' the women to see if they are believers. How can a human truly know the heart of another? How does God confirm your faith to you personally?
3. The pledge in Verse 12 lists many good moral requirements. Do you feel you have the power to keep this pledge perfectly on your own, or do you ever struggle with these sins internally?

Redemptive Analogies:

1. The Pledge (Bay'ah) – We all fail our pledges of moral perfection. This points to the need for a New Covenant where God writes the law on our hearts and forgives our iniquity. [Jeremiah 31:31-34]
2. The Test of Faith – We cannot pass the test of righteousness on our own. Jesus passed the test on our behalf. [2 Corinthians 13:5 (Examine yourselves), leading to reliance on Christ.]

Spiritual Weight:

1. Emotional Isolation / Policing Affections [Severe] – The believer is commanded to suppress natural affections for family members who are not believers. This creates immense psychological dissonance and guilt for feeling love toward non-Muslim parents or siblings.
2. Fear of Hypocrisy [Moderate] – Since God is 'fully aware of everything you conceal' (v. 1) regarding love for enemies, the believer lives in fear that their secret feelings disqualify them from the faith.
3. Performance Anxiety [Moderate] – The requirement to 'struggle in My cause' to seek blessings implies that God's favor is earned through effort and political allegiance rather than given freely.

EPISTEMOLOGY

Knowledge Source: Revelation given to the Prophet; Community consensus/judgment based on that revelation.

Verification Method: Obedience to the commands serves as verification of belief; the 'test' of women verifies their social status.

Evangelical Contrast: Biblical epistemology relies on the illumination of the Holy Spirit through the written Word (1 Corinthians 2:12-13), whereas this text relies on submission to the Prophet's orders as the evidence of truth.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Dating: Medinan period (approx. 628-630 AD), likely around the time of the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah or the Conquest of Mecca.

Authorship: Attributed to Muhammad (Divine Revelation); Khalifa translation (1978) imposes 'Quran Alone' ideology.

Textual Issues: Khalifa's translation often capitalizes 'GOD' and inserts 'Alone' to emphasize his specific anti-Hadith, strict monotheist theology. Verse 4 mentions Abraham's 'mistake'—a specific interpretation to deny the efficacy of intercession for disbelievers.