

Sūrah 58: al-Mujādilah

Period of Revelation

There is no hadith to tell as to when this incident of pleading and arguing took place, but there is a hint in the subject matter of the Sūrah on the basis of which it can be said with certainty that it happened some time after the battle of the Trench (Shawwal, 5 A.H.). In Sūrah al-Ahzab, God while negating that an adopted son could be one's real son, had just said this and no more; "And God has not made those of your wives whom you divorce by zihar your mothers." But in that Sūrah there was nothing to the effect that to divorce a wife by zihar was a sin or a crime, nor anything about the legal injunction concerning it. Contrary to it, in this Sūrah the whole law relating to zihar has been laid down, which shows that these detailed injunctions were sent down some time after the brief reference to it in Sūrah al-Ahzab.

Subject Matter and Topics

In this Sūrah instructions have been given to the Muslims about the different problems that confronted them at that time. From the beginning of the Sūrah to verse 6 legal injunctions about zihar have been given, along with which the Muslims have been strictly warned that it is contrary to their profession of the Faith. That they should still persist in the practices of ignorance after they have accepted Islām, that they should break the bounds set by God, or refuse to abide by them, or that they should make their own rules and regulations contradictory to them. For this there is not only the punishment of disgrace and humiliation in the world but in the Hereafter too there will be strict accountability for it.

In v. 7-10 the hypocrites have been taken to task for their secret whisperings and consultations by which they conspired and intrigued against the Prophet, and because of their hidden malice and grudge greeted him, like the Jews, in a manner as to wish him ill instead of well. In this connection, the Muslims have been consoled, as if to say: "These whisperings of the hypocrites can do no harm to you; therefore, you should go on doing your duty with full trust in God." Besides, they have also been taught this moral lesson: "The true believers, when they talk secretly together, do not talk of sin and transgression and disobedience to the Messenger if they have to talk secretly together they should talk of goodness and piety."

In v. 11-13 the Muslims have been taught certain manners of social behavior and given instructions to eradicate certain social evils which were prevalent among the people then as they are today. If some people are sitting in an assembly, and more people arrive, they do not show even the courtesy as to squeeze in so as to make room for others, with the result that the new-comers have to keep standing, or to sit in the door-way, or to go back, or seeing that there is enough room yet start jumping over the people's heads to find room for themselves. This often used to be experienced in the Prophet's assemblies. Therefore, God gave the instruction, as if to say: "Do not behave selfishly and narrow mindedly in your assemblies but do accommodate the new-comers also with an open heart."

Likewise, another vice found among the people is that when they go on a visit to somebody (an important person, in particular), they prolong their sitting and do not mind at all that encroaching upon his time unduly would cause him hardship. Then, if he tells them to leave, they mind it; if he himself rises up from their assembly, they complain of his lack of manners; if he tells them indirectly that he has some other business also to attend to, for which he needs time, they turn a deaf ear to his request. The Prophet himself also had to experience such misconduct of the people, who in their earnestness to benefit by his teaching did not at all see that they were wasting his precious time so badly needed for other important works. At last, God in order to eradicate this bad manner, enjoined that when the people are asked to rise up from an assembly, they should rise up and disperse.

Another vice prevalent among the people was that each person wished to have secret counsel individually with the Prophet without any real need, or would like that he should approach him during an assembly and

whisper something to him. This was not only embarrassing for the Prophet but also annoying for the people who sat in the assembly. That is why God imposed the restriction that anyone who wanted to consult him in private, should first give away something in charity. The object was that the people should be warned of this bad manner and made to give it up. Thus, the restriction was kept in force for a short while, and when the people had corrected their behavior, it was withdrawn.

From verse 14 to the end of the Sūrah members of the Muslim society, which was a mixture of the sincere Muslims and the hypocrites and the waverers, have been told plainly as to what is the criterion of sincerity in Islām. One kind of Muslims are those who are friends with the enemies of Islām: they do not hesitate for the sake of their interests to be treacherous to the religion which they profess to believe in; they spread all sorts of doubts and suspicions against Islām and prevent the people from adopting the Way of God. But since they are part of the Muslim community their false profession of Faith serves them as a cover and shield. The second kind of Muslims are those who, in the matter of God's Religion, do not care even for their own father, brother, children, and family, to say nothing of others. They do not cherish any feeling of love for the person who is an enemy of God and His Messenger and His Religion. God in these verses has explicitly stated that the people of the first kind, in fact, belong to Satan's party however hard they may try to convince others of their Islām by swearing oaths. And the honour of belonging to God's party is possessed only by the Muslims of the second kind. They alone are the true Muslims: they alone will attain to true success, and with them alone is God well pleased.

Sūrah 58: al-Mujādilah¹⁵²⁶

In the Name of God, the Most Compassionate,
the Most Merciful

1. Certainly has God heard the speech of the one who argues [i.e., pleads] with you, [O Muhammad], concerning her husband and directs her complaint to God. And God hears your dialogue; indeed, God is Hearing and Seeing.
2. Those who pronounce *thihār*¹⁵²⁷ among you [to separate] from their wives - they are not [consequently] their mothers. Their mothers are none but those who gave birth to them. And indeed, they are saying an objectionable statement and a falsehood. But indeed, God is Pardoning and Forgiving.
3. And those who pronounce *thihār* from their wives and then [wish to] go back on what they said - then [there must be] the freeing of a slave before they touch one another. That is what you are admonished thereby; and God is Acquainted with what you do.
4. And he who does not find [a slave] - then a fast for two months consecutively¹⁵²⁸ before they touch one another; and he who is unable - then the feeding of sixty poor persons. That is for you to believe [completely] in God and His Messenger; and those are the limits [set by] God. And for the disbelievers is a painful punishment.
5. Indeed, those who oppose God and His Messenger are abased as those before them were abased. And We have certainly sent down verses of clear evidence. And for the disbelievers is a humiliating punishment.
6. On the Day when God will resurrect them all and inform them of what they did. God had enumerated it, while they forgot it; and God is, over all things, Witness.
7. Have you not considered that God knows what is in the heavens and what is on the earth? There is in no private conversation three but that He is the fourth of them,¹⁵²⁹ nor are there five but that He is the sixth of them - and no less than that and no more except that He is with them [in knowledge] wherever they are. Then He will inform them of what they did, on the Day of Resurrection. Indeed God is, of all things, Knowing.
8. Have you not considered those who were forbidden from private conversation [i.e., ridicule and conspiracy], then they return to that which they were forbidden and converse among themselves about sin and aggression and disobedience to the Messenger? And when they come to you, they greet you with that [word] by which God does not greet you¹⁵³⁰ and say among themselves, "Why does God not punish us for what we say?" Sufficient for them is Hell, which they will [enter to] burn, and wretched is the destination.

¹⁵²⁶ *Al-Mujādilah*: The Arguing (or Pleading) Woman.

¹⁵²⁷ The saying by a husband to his wife, "You are to me like the back of my mother," meaning unlawful to approach. This was a type of divorce practiced by the Arabs before the prophethood of Muhammad.

¹⁵²⁸ See footnote to 4:92.

¹⁵²⁹ Through His knowledge of them and their secrets.

¹⁵³⁰ This is in reference to the Jews who would greet the Muslims with the words "Death be upon you," rather than "Peace."

9. O you who have believed, when you converse privately, do not converse about sin and aggression and disobedience to the Messenger but converse about righteousness and piety. And fear God, to whom you will be gathered.
10. Private conversation is only from Satan that he may grieve those who have believed,¹⁵³¹ but he will not harm them at all except by permission of God. And upon God let the believers rely.
11. O you who have believed, when you are told, “Space yourselves” in assemblies, then make space; God will make space for you.¹⁵³² And when you are told, “Arise,”¹⁵³³ then arise; God will raise those who have believed among you and those who were given knowledge, by degrees. And God is Acquainted with what you do.
12. O you who have believed, when you [wish to] privately consult the Messenger, present before your consultation a charity. That is better for you and purer. But if you find not [the means] - then indeed, God is Forgiving and Merciful.
13. Have you feared to present before your consultation charities? Then when you do not and God has forgiven you, then [at least] establish prayer and give zakāh and obey God and His Messenger. And God is Acquainted with what you do.
14. Have you not considered those who make allies of a people with whom God has become angry? They are neither of you nor of them, and they swear to untruth while they know [they are lying].
15. God has prepared for them a severe punishment. Indeed, it was evil that they were doing.
16. They took their [false] oaths as a cover, so they averted [people] from the way of God, and for them is a humiliating punishment.
17. Never will their wealth or their children avail them against God at all. Those are the companions of the Fire; they will abide therein eternally
18. On the Day God will resurrect them all, and they will swear to Him as they swear to you and think that they are [standing] on something.¹⁵³⁴ Unquestionably, it is they who are the liars.
19. Satan has overcome them and made them forget the remembrance of God. Those are the party of Satan. Unquestionably, the party of Satan - they will be the losers.
20. Indeed, the ones who oppose God and His Messenger - those will be among the most humbled.
21. God has written [i.e., decreed], “I will surely overcome, I and My messen-

¹⁵³¹ The reference may be to the sinful type of conversation, as mentioned in the previous verses, or to the practice of two persons speaking in confidence in the presence of a third, which might lead him to assume that he is the subject of their conversation. Such behaviour was prohibited by the Prophet in narrations of al-Bukhāri and Muslim.

¹⁵³² In His mercy, in Paradise, or in everything good.

¹⁵³³ To prayer, to battle, or to good deeds.

¹⁵³⁴ They assume that their lies will be believed and they will escape detection as they did in worldly life.

gers.” Indeed, God is Powerful and Exalted in Might.

22. You will not find a people who believe in God and the Last Day having affection for those who oppose God and His Messenger, even if they were their fathers or their sons or their brothers or their kindred. Those - He has decreed within their hearts faith and supported them with spirit¹⁵³⁵ from Him. And We will admit them to gardens beneath which rivers flow, wherein they abide eternally. God is pleased with them, and they are pleased with Him - those are the party of God. Unquestionably, the party of God - they are the successful.

¹⁵³⁵ i.e., “that which gives life,” explained as the guidance of the Qur’ān or victory over their opponents.