

## Quran 42:36-43

### Introduction

In this module, we explore verses from the Quran that deal with the balance between forgiveness and other responses to wrongdoing, harm, and injustice.

### Orientation to the Text

The passage below comes in the latter half of a chapter in the Quran known as “Counsel,” named after verse 38, which mentions the positive value of mutual consultation.

Among other topics, the chapter deals with God’s relationship with human beings and God’s role as their sustainer and guide, various different responses people might have to God, and possible fates in the afterlife.

Most traditional Islamic commentators consider the bulk of this chapter to have been revealed by God to Muhammad in the period before the *hijra*. The *hijra* is the landmark event in 622 CE when Muhammad and his followers emigrated from Mecca to Medina, because they were being persecuted by Meccan polytheists. Some commentators think that some parts of the chapter – verses 39-41 or 38-40 – were revealed later, in the period after the *hijra*. During this later period, Muhammad and his companions continued to have conflict with “idolaters” from Mecca, as well as with polytheists elsewhere in the Arabian Peninsula.

## Getting Familiar with the Text

Read the short excerpt from the Quran printed below, then answer questions 1-3, which are designed to help you start getting familiar with the contents of the text.

### Quran 42:36-43 (translation: Abdel Haleem 2008)

<sup>36</sup> What you have been given is only the fleeting enjoyment of this world. Far better and more lasting is what God will give to those who believe and trust in their Lord; <sup>37</sup> who shun great sins and gross indecencies; who forgive when they are angry; <sup>38</sup> respond to their Lord; keep up the prayer; conduct their affairs by mutual consultation; give to others out of what We<sup>a</sup> have provided for them; <sup>39</sup> and defend themselves when they are oppressed.

<sup>40</sup> Let harm be requited by an equal harm, though anyone who forgives and puts things right will have his reward from God Himself – He does not like those who do wrong. <sup>41</sup> There is no cause to act against anyone who defends himself after being wronged, <sup>42</sup> but there is cause to act against those who oppress people and transgress in the land against all justice – they will have an agonizing torment – <sup>43</sup> though if a person is patient and forgives, this is one of the greatest things.

1. What actions are spoken of positively in the passage? Negatively?
2. According to the passage, what different responses are allowed when one is harmed or wronged, or against oppression and injustice? (See verses 39-42.)
3. What incentive does the passage offer for choosing to forgive?

## Digging Deeper

After thinking about questions 1-3, take some time to reflect more broadly on the following issues:

4. The passage says forgiveness is “one of the greatest things” (verse 43), but also allows for other responses to being harmed, wronged, or oppressed.
  - a. In what sorts of circumstances do you think it might be important to leave room for other possible responses to being harmed, rather than insisting people simply forgive? Why?
  - b. Would you answer question 4a differently depending on whether the harm was done to yourself or to someone else? Or to an individual vs. to a group or community?

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<sup>a</sup> In the Quran, God often refers to Himself using the so-called “royal we.” At other times, the noun “God” is employed.

5. For participants who are familiar with Jewish or Christian traditions and scriptures, does the Quranic emphasis on forgiveness strike you as similar to or different from those?
6. In this passage, the Quran does not give definitions for “wrong” and “harm,” and does not provide precise details about exactly what actions should be taken in response to what circumstances. What might be some of the challenges and benefits of the scripture’s being vague in this way?

### Further Reading

- Mohamed, Yasien (2020). “More than Just Law: The Idea of Justice in the Qur’an.” *Yaqeen Institute*. 7 Feb. Available at: <https://yaqeeninstitute.org/yasienmohamed/the-idea-of-justice-in-the-quran>.
- Murad, Abdal Hakim (Tim Winter) (n.d.). “Forgiveness and Justice: Meditations on Some Hadiths” Available at: <http://masud.co.uk/ISLAM/ahm/HadithsonJustice.pdf>.
- Dagle, Caner K. (2015). “Conquest and Conversion, War and Peace in the Quran,” in *The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary*. New York: HarperOne, pp. 1805-1818.

### Summary of Key Takeaways

- Forgiving is portrayed positively in the Quran and as a desirable response to being wronged. It is associated with God’s special favor.
- Taking other actions against oppressors and those who do harm is also permitted in the Quran.
- The Quran condemns wrong, harm, and oppression, associating such actions with God’s dislike and punishment.
- The Quran does not always provide precise details about exactly what actions should be taken in response to what circumstances.