

Top ten rules in the Quran that oppress women

By [James Arlandson](#) Source:

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Islam in its purest form honors and elevates women, we are often told. But does it?

All too often, textual reality (the Quran) matches up with the historical reality of seventh-century Arabia. Gender inequality and oppression in the Quran reflect the culture of seventh century desert nomads. If Allah and Muhammad improved on this patriarchy, then they did not go far enough for a religion with a claim to universality.

Here are the top ten rules in the Quran that oppress and insult women.

10. A husband has sex with his wife, as a plow goes into a field.

The Quran in Sura (Chapter) 2:223 says:

Your women are your fields, so go into your fields whichever way you like . . . (MAS Abdel Haleem, *The Qur'an*, Oxford UP, 2004)

We should make no mistake about this verse. It includes sexual positions. In a footnote to this verse, Haleem says that Muslims in Medina heard from the Jews that 'a child born from a woman approached from behind would have a squint.'

The hadith are the reports of Muhammad's words and actions outside of the Quran. Two reliable hadith collectors and editors are Bukhari (d. 870), Muslim (d. 875). The hadith come only second in importance and sacredness among the vast majority of Muslims around the world. Since the hadith is explicit, the readers are invited to click [here](#) and read for themselves, at their own discretion: Muslim nos. 3363—3365. See these parallel hadith [here](#) and [here](#).

We should have no doubt that the husband controlled their sex life. If a woman does not want to have sex, then angels curse her.

. . . 'If a man invites his wife to sleep with him and she refuses to come to him, then the angels send their curses on her till morning.' ([Bukhari](#))

[Here](#) is a back—up article, and another is [here](#).

9. Husbands are a degree above their wives.

The Quran in Sura 2:228 says:

. . . Wives have the same rights as the husbands have on them in accordance with the generally known principles. Of course, men are a degree above them in status . . . (Sayyid Abul A'La Maududi, *The Meaning of the Qur'an*, vol. 1, p. 165)

Gender inequality shows up in a theological context. This hadith shows that the majority of the inhabitants of hell are women.

The Prophet said, 'I looked at Paradise and found poor people forming the majority of its inhabitants; and **I looked at Hell and saw that the majority of its inhabitants were women.**' ([Bukhari](#), emphasis added; see also these parallel traditions [here](#) and [here](#))

This parallel [hadith](#) explains that the majority of the inhabitants of hell are women because they are ungrateful and harsh towards their husbands. There is no word about the husbands' ingratitude and harshness. See this [article](#) for details on women in Islamic hell.

Muhammad was also superstitious (see [here](#) and [here](#) for the evidence). This hadith says that women are part of an evil omen.

I heard the Prophet saying. 'Evil omen is in three things: The horse, the woman and the house.' ([Bukhari](#))

More detail can be found [here](#). This [article](#) also supports this ninth point.

8. A male gets a double share of the inheritance over that of a female.

The Quran in Sura 4:11 says:

The share of the male shall be twice that of a female (Maududi, vol. 1, p. 311)

For how this religious law works out in early Islam, see hadith [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

Malik (d. 795) is a founder of a major school of law. He composed a law book that is also considered a collection of reliable hadith: *Al—Muwatta of Imam Malik ibn Anas: The First Formation of Islamic Law* (rev. trans. Aisha Bewley, Inverness, Scotland: Madina Press, 1989, 2001). Malik [writes](#):

The generally agreed upon way of doing things among us . . . about fixed shares of inheritance (*fara'id*) of children from the mother or father when one or the other dies is that if they leave male and female children, the male takes the portion of two females.

This Islamic law is regressive. In the US, for example, inheritance is divided equally among all siblings, regardless of the gender. No religious law prohibits this from happening. So American secular law fits into a modern context better, where women have more economic opportunities and freedom. This online [booklet](#) has a short explanation on women's inheritance 'rights.' Click on Chapter 15.

More information can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

7. A woman's testimony counts half of a man's testimony.

The Quran in Sura 2:282 says:

And let two men from among you bear witness to all such documents [contracts of loans without interest]. But if two men be not available, there should be one man and two women to bear witness so that if one of the women forgets (anything), the other may remind her. (Maududi, vol. 1, p. 205).

The foundational reason for having two women witnesses is that one of the women may 'forget' something. This verse goes to the nature of womankind, and implies that a woman's mind is weak.

This hadith removes any ambiguity about women's abilities in Sura 2:282:

The Prophet said, 'Isn't the witness of a woman equal to half of that of a man?' The women said, 'Yes.' He said, '**This is because of the deficiency of a woman's mind.**' ([Bukhari](#), emphasis added)

More information can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

6. A wife may remarry her ex—husband if and only if she marries another man, they have sex, and then this second man divorces her.

The Quran in Sura 2:230 says:

And if the husband divorces his wife (for the third time), she shall not remain his lawful wife after this (absolute) divorce, unless she marries another husband and the second husband divorces her. [In that case] there is no harm if they [the first couple] remarry (Maududi, vol. 1, p. 165)

The finally and absolutely divorced couple is not permitted to remarry each other unless she marries another man, they have sex, and he divorces her. Sura 2:230 engenders a divorce on the road to a possible reconciliation. Why have the intervening step of a second marriage and divorce before the first couple can work out their differences and get back together?

To see this tragedy in real life, go to [this](#) question and answer feature at a traditional Muslim fatwa website. Apparently, a Muslim husband pronounced divorce three times, the divorce is final, and now he regrets his decision made in haste and anger. The cleric or scholar says that they are allowed to reconcile only if she follows the Quranic steps of her marrying someone else, consummating that marriage, and then his divorcing her. As for divorce generally,

This [article](#) analyzes the ethics behind Quranic divorce procedures and contrasts them with the New Testament. This very short [article](#) at a Muslim website shows concern for the divorce rate

in Islam. This short [page](#) at a Muslim website explains divorce. This short [article](#) at a Muslim website also gives an overview on divorce, under the larger [section](#) on women.

This [news report](#) says that problems emerge in the modern world during the Islamic divorce proceedings. This [news report](#) says that Malaysia permits 'text messaging' divorce. At this Muslim website an Islamic scholar [answers](#) the question of a Muslim who wrote in about divorce. [Here](#) is a fatwa (legal decree) on divorce from a Muslim website.

These links can yield only one conclusion: Islamic divorce favors the man.

More detail can be found [here](#). This [article](#) replies to a Muslim polemicist. It analyzes the differences between Christianity and Islam on divorce.

5. Slave—girls are sexual property for their male owners.

The Quran in Sura 4:24 says:

And forbidden to you are wedded wives of other people except those who have fallen in your hands [as prisoners of war] . . . (Maududi, vol. 1, p. 319).

Sayyid Maududi (d. 1979), a highly respected traditional commentator and scholar, says in his comment on the verse that it is lawful for Muslim holy warriors to marry women prisoners of war even when their husbands are still alive. But what happens if the husbands are captured with their wives? Maududi cites a school of law that says Muslims may not marry them, but two other schools say that the marriage between the captive husbands and wives is broken (note 44). But why would a debate over this cruelty emerge in the first place? No marriage should take place between prisoners of war and their captives, married or not. In fact, no sex should take place between women captives and their Muslim overlords.

Islam allows deep immorality with women who are in their most helpless condition. This crime is reprehensible, but Allah wills it nonetheless—the Quran says so. For more information on this Quran—inspired immorality, see this short [article](#). See also Suras 4:3; 23:5—6; 33:50; 70:22—30, all of which permit male slave—owners to have sex with their slave—girls. Suras 23:5—6 and 70:22—230 allow men to have sex with them in the Meccan period, during times of peace before Muhammad initiated his skirmishes and wars in Medina.

The hadith demonstrate that Muslims jihadists actually have sex with the captured women, whether or not they are married. In the following hadith passage, *Khumus* is one—fifth of the spoils of war.

Ali, Muhammad's cousin and son—in—law, had just finished a relaxing bath. Why?

The Prophet sent Ali to Khalid to bring the *Khumus* [of the booty] and . . . Ali had taken a bath [after a sexual act with a slave—girl from the *Khumus*].

What was Muhammad's response to the person who hated Ali for this sexual act?

Do you hate Ali for this? . . . Don't hate him, for he deserves more than that from [the] *Khumus*. ([Bukhari](#))

This [hadith](#) shows that Muhammad was intimate with his slave—girls.

Moreover, jihadists may not practice *coitus interruptus* with the women they capture, but not for the reason that the reader may expect. While on a military campaign and away from their wives, Muslim jihadists 'received captives from among the Arab captives and we desired women and celibacy became hard on us and we loved to do *coitus interruptus*.' They asked the Prophet about this, and it is important to note what he did not say. He did not scold them or prohibit any kind of sex whatsoever. Rather, he invoked the murky, quirky doctrine of fate:

It is better for you not to do so [practice *coitus interruptus*]. There is no person that is destined to exist, but will come to existence, till the Day of Resurrection. ([Bukhari](#); also go [here](#) and [here](#))

That is, these enquiring Muslims should stop doing *coitus interruptus*, but instead go all the way with the enslaved sex objects. Fate controls who should be born.

It is one thing for some soldiers in any army to strike out on their own and rape women. All armies have criminal soldiers who commit this wrong act. But it is quite another to codify rape in a sacred text.

This [article](#) quotes the Quran and many hadith passages on sex with prisoners of war. It also analyzes modern Islamic scholars on the topic. They support this practice. In Appendix One, the author answers a Muslim charge that the Old Testament allows this practice. This [article](#) provides further details on Muhammad's encouragement to his soldiers to 'just do it.' In addition to the two previous links, more information can be found [here](#) and [here](#).

4. A man may be polygamous with up to four wives.

The Quran in Sura 4:3 says:

And if you be apprehensive that you will not be able to do justice to the orphans, you may marry two or three or four women whom you choose. But if you apprehend that you might not be able to do justice to them, then marry only one wife, or marry those who have fallen in your possession. (Maududi, vol. 1, p. 305)

The clause 'marry those who have fallen in your possession' means slave—girls who were captured after a war. Men may 'marry' them because slaves do not incur very much expense, not as much as free women do. This means that the limit on four wives is artificial. Men could have sex with as many slave—girls as they wanted.

Maududi paraphrases the verse: 'If you need more than one [wife] but are afraid that you might not be able to do justice to your wives from among the free people, you may turn to slave girls because in that case you will be burdened with less responsibilities' (note 6) (See Sura 4:24). However, Muhammad would not allow polygamy for his son—in—law Ali, because an extra

wife would hurt Muhammad's first daughter Fatima, by his first wife Khadija. Fatima was married to Ali.

I heard Allah's Apostle who was on the pulpit, saying, 'Banu Hisham bin Al—Mughira have requested me to allow them to marry their daughter to Ali bin Abu Talib, but I don't give permission, and will not give permission unless 'Ali bin Abi Talib divorces my daughter in order to marry their daughter, because Fatima is a part of my body, and I hate what she hates to see, and what hurts her, hurts me.' ([Bukhari](#))

Muhammad's special marriage privileges

Moreover, it seems that Allah gave Muhammad special permission to marry as many women as he desired or take them as slaves or concubines, just as in the pre—Islamic days of ignorance.

The Quran in Sura 33:50, a lengthy verse, grants Muhammad wide latitude in his marriages:

O Prophet, We have made lawful to you those of your wives, whose dowers you have paid, and those women who come into your possession out of the slave—girls granted by Allah, and the daughters of your paternal uncles and aunts, and of your maternal uncles and aunts, who have migrated with you, and the believing woman who gives herself to the Prophet, if the Prophet may desire her. This privilege is for you only, not for the other believers (Maududi vol. 4, p. 111, emphasis added).

This verse says that besides those women whose dowery Muhammad paid, he may marry slave—girls—that is, he may have sex with them (see this [article](#) and this [one](#) for more information on this Quran—inspired immorality). Maududi references three slave—girls taken during raids, and Mary the Copt, a gift from an Egyptian ruler. Muhammad had sex with her, and there does not seem to be a political need for this. Second, Muhammad may marry his first cousins, and Maududi cites a case in which this happened. Third, if a believing woman offers herself to Muhammad, and he desires her, then he may marry her (Maududi vol. 4, note 88).

This hadith [shows](#) that Muhammad was intimate with his slave—girls.

But the capstone of these 'special' marriages occurs when Muhammad also marries the ex—wife (Zainab) of his adopted son (Zaid). His son—in—law divorced her with the Prophet standing in the background. In fact, early Islamic sources say that Muhammad catches a glimpse of his daughter—in—law in a state of [undress](#), so he desired her. Once the divorce is final, Allah conveniently reveals to him that this marriage between father—in—law and daughter—in—law is legal and moral in Sura 33:36—44.

This [hadith](#) says that Muhammad used to visit nine (or eleven) wives in one night. See the parallel hadith [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#). This [article](#) explains why Christians do not accept polygamy. This [page](#) in an online index explains polygamy. For a more thorough analysis of polygamy in the Quran, go to this online [booklet](#) and click on Chapter 12.

See this [article](#) on the number of wives and human sexual property Muhammad allowed himself. [Here](#) is yet another article. At the end, it links to more articles on the marriage and divorce of Zainab and Muhammad.

3. A husband may simply get rid of one of his undesirable wives.

The Quran in Sura 4:129 says:

It is not within your power to be perfectly equitable in your treatment with all your wives, even if you wish to be so; therefore, [in order to satisfy the dictates of Divine Law] do not lean towards one wife so as to leave the other in a state of suspense. (Maududi, vol. 1, p. 381)

Maududi provides an interpretation of the verse (vol. 1, pp. 383—84, note 161). He writes:

Allah made it clear that the husband cannot literally keep equality between two or more wives because they themselves cannot be equal in all respects. It is too much to demand from a husband that he should mete out equal treatment to a beautiful wife and to an ugly wife, to a young wife and to an old wife, to a healthy wife and to an invalid wife, and to a good natured wife and to an ill—natured wife. These and like things naturally make a husband more inclined towards one wife than towards the other.

This means that wives are the source of a man's inability to treat all of them equally. One is beautiful, while another is ugly. How can Allah demand from a husband super—human strength under changing circumstances in his wives?

Maududi continues:

In such cases, the Islamic law does not demand equal treatment between them in affection and love. What it does demand is that a wife should not be neglected as to be practically reduced to the position of the woman who has no husband at all. If the husband does not divorce her for any reason or at her own request, she should at least be treated as a wife. It is true that under such circumstances the husband is naturally inclined towards a favorite wife, but he should not, so to say, keep the other in such a state of suspense as if she were not his wife.

Maududi says here that the wife should not be suspended between marriage and divorce. If the husband stays with the no—longer desirable wife, then he should treat her fairly and provide for her.

More detail can be found [here](#). This [article](#) (see 'the unpleasant truth behind divorce in Sura 4:130') demonstrates that Muhammad wanted to divorce one of his wives because she was overweight and old. Instead of a divorce, she gave up her turn in the 'rotation' with the Prophet, who gladly agreed with her proposal. See these three hadith [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)

2. Husbands may hit their wives even if the husbands merely fear highhandedness in their wives (quite apart from whether they actually are highhanded).

The Quran in Sura 4:34 says:

4:34 . . . If you fear highhandedness from your wives, remind them [of the teaching of God], then ignore them when you go to bed, **then hit them**. If they obey you, you have no right to act against them. God is most high and great. (Haleem, emphasis added)

The hadith says that Muslim women in the time of Muhammad were suffering from domestic violence in the context of confusing marriage laws:

Rifa'a divorced his wife whereupon 'AbdurRahman bin Az—Zubair Al—Qurazi married her. 'Aisha said that the lady (came), wearing a green veil (and complained to her (Aisha) of her husband and showed her a green spot on her skin caused by beating). It was the habit of ladies to support each other, so when Allah's Apostle came, 'Aisha said, 'I have not seen any woman suffering as much as the believing women. Look! Her skin is greener than her clothes!' ([Bukhari](#), emphasis added)

This hadith shows Muhammad hitting his girl—bride, Aisha (see rule no. 1, below), daughter of Abu Bakr, his right—hand Companion:

'He [Muhammad] struck me [Aisha] on the chest which caused me pain.' ([Muslim no. 2127](#))

See this [article](#) for fuller details on wife—beating. It clarifies many translations of the verse. At the end, it has many links to modern interpretations of Sura 4:34 and to arguments for wife—beating today. This [article](#) is a shorter version. This [article](#), though long, offers a clear analysis of wife—beating, examining the hadith and other early source documents, as well as refuting modern Muslim polemics.

This mid—length [article](#) answers a Muslim defense. This [article](#) is a superb analysis of the subject, giving various translations of Sura 4:34. It cites the hadith and classical commentaries and refutes modern defenses. Finally, this [article](#) is thorough in examining the Quran and hadith and Muslim polemics.

1. Mature men are allowed to marry prepubescent girls.

The Quran in Sura 65:1, 4 says:

65:1 O Prophet, when you [and the believers] divorce women, divorce them for their prescribed waiting—period and count the waiting—period accurately . . . 4 And if you are in doubt about those of your women who have despaired of menstruation, (you should know that) their waiting period is three months, and **the same applies to those who have not menstruated as yet**. As for pregnant women, their period ends when they have delivered their burden. (Maududi, vol. 5, pp. 599 and 617, emphasis added)

Maududi correctly interprets the plain meaning of verse 4, which appears in the context of divorce:

Therefore, making mention of the waiting—period for girls who have not yet menstruated, clearly proves that it is not only permissible to give away the girl at this age but **it is permissible for the husband to consummate marriage with her**. Now, obviously no Muslim has the right to forbid a thing which the Qur'an has held as permissible. (Maududi, vol. 5, p. 620, note 13, emphasis added)

Divorcing prepubescent girls implies marriage to them. So the fathers of prepubescent girls may give them away, and their new husbands may consummate their marriage with them. If Islam ever spread around the world, no one should be surprised if Quran—believing Muslims lowered the marriage age of girls to nine years old.

This is precisely what happened in [Iran](#) after the religious revolution of Ayatollah Khomeini. A girl's marriage age was lowered to nine years.

Why should this surprise us? After all, Muhammad was betrothed to Aisha when she was six, and he consummated their union when she was only nine.

The hadith says:

. . . [T]hen he [Muhammad] wrote the marriage (wedding) contract with Aishah when she was a girl of six years of age, and he consumed [sic, consummated] that marriage when she was nine years old. ([Bukhari](#) ; since this is a serious issue, see the parallel hadith [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#))

This hadith demonstrates that Muhammad pursued Aisha when she was a little girl.

The Prophet asked Abu Bakr for 'Aisha's hand in marriage. Abu Bakr said 'But I am your brother.' The Prophet said, 'You are my brother in Allah's religion and His Book, but she (Aisha) is lawful for me to marry.' ([Bukhari](#); see this [hadith](#) that shows Muhammad's dream life in regards to his pursuit of little Aisha, and this [one](#) and this [one](#))

This hadith recounts the fifty—plus—year—old Muhammad's and the nine—year—old Aisha's first sexual encounter. She was playing on her swing set with her girlfriends when she got the call.

. . . [M]y mother, Um Ruman, came to me while I was playing in a swing with some of my girl friends. She called me, and I went to her, not knowing what she wanted to do to me. She caught me by the hand and made me stand at the door of the house. I was breathless then, and when my breathing became all right, she took some water and rubbed my face and head with it. Then she took me into the house. There in the house I saw some Ansari women who said, 'Best wishes and Allah's Blessing and a good luck.' Then she entrusted me to them and they prepared me (for the marriage). Unexpectedly Allah's Apostle came to me in the forenoon and my mother handed me over to him, and at that time I was a girl of nine years of age. ([Bukhari](#); see a parallel hadith [here](#))

This hadith describes Muhammad counseling a Muslim man to marry a young virgin for the extra thrill it gives him to fondle her, and she him.

When I got married, Allah's Apostle said to me, 'What type of lady have you married?' I replied, 'I have married a matron.' He said, 'Why, don't you have a liking for the virgins and for fondling them?' Jabir also said: Allah's Apostle said, 'Why didn't you marry a young girl so that you might play with her and she with you?' ([Bukhari](#)) See parallel hadith [here](#) and [here](#).

This hadith describes Muhammad's and Aisha's ill—timed sexual encounters:

Narrated 'Aisha:

The Prophet and I used to take a bath from a single pot while we were Junub. During the menses, he used to order me to put on an Izar (dress worn below the waist) and used to fondle me. While in Itikaf, he used to bring his head near me and I would wash it while I used to be in my periods (menses). ([Bukhari](#))

For more evidence on this most outlandish of Muhammad's domestic acts even for seventh—century Arabia, readers should refer to this [article](#). This [article](#) responds to Muslim defenses of this indefensible Quranic permission. This [summary](#) of a news reports reveals Pakistan lowering the marriage age to twelve for a girl.

Conclusion

The nightmare must end for women in Islamic countries.

But the political and legal hierarchies in the Islamic world do not seem ready to reform on women's rights. Here is a 1998 [interview](#) with Shirin Ebadi, one of the first female judges in Iran. She correctly sees abuses in Iranian law, which favors men. However, what has been done about these abuses?

Zohreh Arshadi 'was a practising lawyer in Iran prior to her forced exile to Europe. She is currently an advocate in France and is active in human rights and especially of the rights of women. She has been especially active in defence of the rights of women in Iran.' She [reports](#) on the inequities in Iranian law as it pertains to women:

The Islamic punishments have encouraged a culture of violence against women, especially within the family and has spilled into violence against children. This has been commented upon by many within the country . . . The fact that men receive a lighter punishment if they commit a violence against women undoubtedly encourages such violence. We saw how women could be killed with impunity during alleged adultery. Stoning to death for adultery, although technically admissible for both sexes, has also been carried out mainly against women.

Though these two examples come from Iran, they could multiply throughout the Islamic world. However, the legal hierarchies understand the cost of reform: abandoning many verses in the Quran and many passages in the hadith, and this they cannot do.

A sign of hope? The [Iraqi Constitution](#), so far, says that 25% of the seats in the Parliament are specified for women. So maybe reform can be strongly encouraged in a fledgling democracy.

But if Islamic nations, especially those who follow sharia (Islamic law) closely, refuse to reform, then the second best strategy must be played out. Islam must never be allowed to impose its sharia system of 'justice' anywhere in the West and around the world. No sharia courts should be permitted outside of the Islamic world. The Quran—the ultimate source of sharia—oppresses women and people generally.

The Islamic holy book is too patriarchal and culture—bound to be relevant to the new millennium.

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Supplemental Material

Readers may go to these three sites for other translations of the Quran: [this one](#) has multiple translations; [this one](#) has three; and [this conservative translation](#) is subsidized by the Saudi royal family.

[Here](#) is the website for the online hadith.

A good online resource for the historical context of a sura is [here](#), where Maududi provides excellent background material.

If readers would like to see many links to women's issues, they should go to this [article](#) and scroll down to the end. It has modern views in the Islamic world on wife—beating. This [webpage](#) has a number of links to women's issues, as well. This is a superb [overview](#) of the Quran and hadith on women's inferior status in Islam. This online [booklet](#) explores the differing ideas in Islam and Christianity on the place of women.

This short [article](#) reviews Jesus' attitude towards women. This short [chapter](#) has an excellent overview on the differences between Islam and Christianity and women's role in each.

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