

Title: "I Have Forbidden Oppression"

Original Title: شرح الأربعين النبويه

Author: Muḥammad Ibn Ṣāliḥ al-'Uthaymīn

"I Have Forbidden Oppression"¹

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The Ḥadīth

عَنْ أَبِي ذَرٍّ الْغِفَارِيِّ (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ) عَنِ النَّبِيِّ (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) فِيمَا يَرُوهُ عَنْ رَبِّهِ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ أَنَّهُ قَالَ: « يَا عِبَادِي إِنِّي حَرَّمْتُ الظُّلْمَ عَلَى نَفْسِي، وَجَعَلْتُهُ بَيْنَكُمْ مُحَرَّمًا، فَلَا تَظَالَمُوا »

Abū Dharr al-Ghifārī (رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ) reported that the prophet (صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) narrated that his lord (عَزَّ وَجَلَّ) said: **"Oh my servants, I have forbidden oppression even for myself, and I have made it forbidden among you as well, so do not oppress one another."**²

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The Explanation

Allah says, **"Oh my servants, I have made oppression forbidden even for myself,"** and he (عَزَّ وَجَلَّ) may make something forbidden upon himself because the decision is

¹ This article is taken from selected parts of Muḥammad Ibn Ṣāliḥ al-'Uthaymīn's explanation of ḥadīth twenty-four of the famous forty-two ḥadīth collection by Imām an-Nawawī known as "al-'Arba'īn al-Nawawī" or "Nawawī's Forty (Ḥadīth)."

² This ḥadīth is actually much longer but only this portion is explained herein for brevity and for the article's focus on the topic of oppression.

³ Recorded by Muslim (no. 2577), Aḥmad (5/153, 160, 177), al-Tirmidhī (no. 2495), and Ibn Mājah (no. 4257).

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his. As for us, we make nothing forbidden for him, but he may forbid something upon himself as he wishes just as he may obligate and decree something upon himself. Read the statement of Allah (تَعَالَى)::

﴿ قُلْ لِمَنْ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۗ قُلْ لِلَّهِ ۗ كَتَبَ عَلَىٰ نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةَ ﴾

Say, "To who belongs whatever is in the heavens and earth?" Say, "To Allah." He has decreed upon himself mercy.⁴

And he pledged upon himself:

﴿ إِنَّ رَحْمَتِي سَبَقَتْ غَضَبِي ﴾

"My mercy surpasses my anger."⁵

Allah has also made oppression forbidden among us as he says, "And I have made it forbidden among you as well." This includes a person oppressing himself or others. However, the second meaning is more apparent as he then says, "So do not oppress one another." Meaning: None of you may oppress another individual. Still, it is known that oppression may occur against oneself or against another; Allah says:

﴿ وَمَا ظَلَمْنَاهُمْ وَلَكِنْ ظَلَمُوا أَنفُسَهُمْ ﴾

⁴ The Quran, Sūrah al-An'ām, 6:12.

⁵ This is a ḥadīth qudsī recorded by Muslim, al-Bukhārī, al-Nasāī, and Ibn Mājah. In the text of Muslim, the prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said:

﴿ لَمَّا خَلَقَ اللَّهُ الْخَلْقَ كَتَبَ فِي كِتَابِهِ ، فَهُوَ عِنْدَهُ فَوْقَ الْعَرْشِ : إِنَّ رَحْمَتِي تَغْلِبُ غَضَبِي ﴾

When Allah created the creation, he pledged upon himself in his book which is with him over his throne, "My mercy certainly overcomes my anger."

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And we did not oppress them, but they oppressed themselves.⁶

The Arabic word for oppression, ظُلمَ (*ẓulm*), often revolves around failing to give someone else his or her rights or it could linguistically mean "shortcomings" as in the following verse as Allah says:

﴿ كَلْتَا الْجَنَّتَيْنِ آتَتْ أُكُلَهَا وَلَمْ تَظْلِمِ مِنْهُ شَيْئًا ﴾

Each of the two gardens produced its fruit and did not *fall short* thereof in anything.⁷

This understanding of oppression—failing to give others their rights—is of two types: 1) refusing to fulfill an obligation to another person, and 2) unlawfully forcing another person to do something which he should not have to do.

An example of the first type would be if you were to refuse to repay a debt to someone or to even postpone payment based on the prophet's statement (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ):

« مَطْلُ الْغَنِيِّ ظُلْمٌ »

A rich person's (one with means to repay) postponement (of repaying) is oppression.⁸

⁶ The Quran, Sūrah Hūd, 11:101.

⁷ The Quran, Sūrah al-Kahf, 18:33.

⁸ Recorded by al-Bukhārī (no. 2166) and Muslim (no. 1564).

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And an example of the second type would be if you claimed someone owed you something and you deceitfully produced evidence of the claim so that the individual was forced to pay – this is oppression.

Question: By Allah's command, "So do not oppress one another," is there any exception to this order?

Answer: No, oppression is forbidden under all circumstances, no exceptions.

Question: Is it permissible for us to take the wealth or possessions of the *Muā'had*?⁹

Answer: No, it is neither permissible for us to take the wealth and possessions of those with whom we have an understood agreement of peace, nor is it permissible for us to take their blood. The prophet (صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ) said:

« مَنْ قَتَلَ مُعَاهِدًا لَمْ يَرِحْ رَائِحَةَ الْجَنَّةِ وَإِنَّ رِيحَهَا تُوجَدُ مِنْ مَسِيرَةِ أَرْبَعِينَ
عَامًا »

Whoever murders a *Muā'had* will not even smell the fragrance of Paradise although its fragrance can be smelled from forty years away.¹⁰

We ask Allah for his help.

By this, we know the extent of the aggression, oppression, and utter misguidance of those arrogant individuals who hostilely transgress in taking the wealth and possessions

⁹ **Translator's Note:** *Muā'had* refers to non-Muslims with whom Muslims have a stated or understood agreement of peace. This may be in the form of official documents (such as entry visas into one another's countries) or the lack of any official, government-sponsored declaration of war. Thus, the actions of today's Muslim terrorists, as they declare whole groups or nations of non-Muslims as enemy combatants as they see fit, are neither Islamic nor are they in conjunction with the ḥadīth above (and many other Islamic texts), and Allah knows best.

¹⁰ Recorded by al-Bukhārī (no. 3166).

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of Muā'had unbelievers regardless of whether they are non-Muslims living peacefully with you in your land or if you were in their lands. We hear of some youths in non-Muslim lands claiming there is nothing wrong with taking wealth or ruining the possessions of disbelievers. You find them breaking street lights, destroying shops, and smashing cars. This is impermissible in Islam. Glorified is Allah! A nation of people accepts you as guests into their lands, you are under their authority and their agreement of trust and yet you betray them. This is the severest form of misrepresenting and dishonoring Islam; it is slandering and disgracing Islam.

But the dishonor and disgrace is not actually against Islam. Rather it is against those individuals themselves – those who claim ascription to Islam. For that, it is incumbent to know that the wealth of non-Muslims under a trust or agreement of peace is sacred regardless of whether they are living peacefully among you or you with them in their lands. It is forbidden to show aggression and hostility against them because that is oppression.