

Chapter Eleven

ADJOINING GOOD AND FORBIDDING EVIL (Al-Amr bilma'rouf Wa An-Nahy an Al-Munkar)

To Adjoin good is to guide to what is true and beneficial according to the guidelines in the Qur'an and Sunnah. Ma'rouf means that which is correct and accepted by others as the norm. It implies being good to others and obeying Allah and His messenger and to be a good Muslim. In contrast Munkar means what is wrong, forbidden or shameful and must be avoided.

Translated into our language today this Qur'anic characteristic means encouraging and spreading good morals in the community, and it implies fighting immorality and wrong doing.

We will discuss the following concepts:

- 1- Guidelines that govern this trait
- 2- To adjoin good morals and fight immorality is a characteristic of the believers and it is their duty
- 3- The importance of this character and trait
- 4- What will happen if we fail in this duty and obligation

Guidelines that govern adjoining good and forbidding evil

- 1- We should start with ourselves and correct any wrong-doing we are engaged in before we advise others
- 2- We should be caring and kind, not harsh or severe
- 3- Different wrongs are corrected in different way. Some of the Prophet's sayings are misinterpreted
- 4- We must be sure that our opinion is right and should not attempt to change something that is controversial or involves different interpretation by the scholars

We should start with our own selves

People will not listen to advice coming from a person whom they do not respect or trust. If we have shortcomings or deficiencies we should work on our own problems first before we ask others to correct themselves. We cannot ask our children to pray if we ourselves are not punctual or devoted in our prayers. We must serve as good examples for them first. Similarly, unless we give in charity we cannot ask others to give. And unless we are good to our families we cannot act as family counselors.

Caring and kind attitude is more likely to be accepted

Contrast two people giving advice: one person is kind, gentle and caring. The other person is harsh and severe and orders others. Who is more likely to succeed and others are more willing to listen to? No one likes to be reminded in a harsh way or by someone who does not care or does not show respect for the feelings of others, or looks down at them. That is why the Qur'an starts by stressing the kind gentle nature of prophet Muhammad (PBUH) then asks him to forgive the faults and shortcomings of his companions, then to consult them in their mutual affairs. These steps are crucial:

- Kind gentle approach
- Forgiveness and passing over the faults of others
- Caring about them
- Talking to them and seeking their counsel and opinion
- Then making a decision and putting our trust in Allah

﴿ فِيمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ لِنْتَ لَهُمْ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًا غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ لَانفَضُّوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ فَاعْفُ عَنْهُمْ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ وَشَاوِرْهُمْ فِي الْأَمْرِ فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ الْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ ﴾ [آل عمران: ١٥٩]

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It is part of the Mercy of Allah that thou dost deal gently with them. Wert thou severe or harsh-hearted, they would have broken away from about thee: so pass over (their faults), and ask for (Allah's) forgiveness for them; and consult them in affairs (of moment). Then, when thou hast taken a decision, put thy trust in Allah. For Allah loves those who put their trust (in Him).

Al-Imran 3 : 159

Giving sound and sincere advice is the essence of religion, as prophet Muhammad (PBUH) told us:

(Religion is to give (sound and sincere) advice)

Narrated by Muslim

The Qur'an also relates to us the example of the faithful righteous person at the time of Pharaoh who advised his people:

﴿ وَقَالَ الَّذِي ءَامَنَ يَنْقُومِ اتَّبِعُونِ أَهْدِكُمْ سَبِيلَ الرَّشَادِ ﴾ [غافر: ٣٨]

The man who believed said further: "O my People! follow me: I will lead you to the Path of Right.

GHafir 40 : 38

﴿ يَنْقُومِ إِنَّمَا هٰذِهِ الْحَيٰوةُ الدُّنْيَا مَتَّعَ وَإِنَّ الْآخِرَةَ هِيَ دَارُ الْقَرَارِ ﴾ [غافر: ٣٩]

[غافر: ٣٩]

"O my people! this life of the present is nothing but (temporary) convenience: it is the Hereafter that is the Home that will last.

GHafir 40 : 39

Different wrongs should be corrected in different ways

It stands to reason that in many situations kind words are sufficient in guiding others to what is correct and proper. At other times, setting a good

example is the right approach. Taking matters into our own hands may not be the right way of correcting something wrong. Many Muslims hear the prophet's saying and misunderstand how it should be implemented:

(Whoever among you see something that is shameful, wrong or forbidden, he should change it with his hand; if he is unable to do so, then let him change it with his tongue; if he is unable to do so, let him change it with his heart. This is the lowest level of faith)

Narrated by Muslim.

This Hadeeth does not imply that every time a Muslim sees something wrong he should immediately intervene and put an end to it right away by force. Before this is done several questions must be answered:

- Is the intervention likely to cause more damage or more harm?
- Do I have the authority to effect a change?
- Can the change occur more effectively through conversation or setting a good example?
- Am I sure that my position is right and the other person clearly wrong?

Do not intervene in areas that are subject to interpretation

Many areas in Islam are clear and straight-forward. Other areas are less clear or more ambiguous and subject to interpretation. The scholars argued and differed in many peripheral issues. Therefore, it is not proper to impose our own opinion or interpretation if other interpretations are equally valid. We could be wrong, and the opinion of others could be right!

To adjoin morality and fight immorality is a characteristic of the believers

The Qur'an praises the Muslims because they possess three characteristics:

- 1- They adjoin what is good
- 2- They forbid what is wrong and evil
- 3- And they believe in Allah

﴿ كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ

وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ ﴾ [آل عمران: ١١٠]

Ye are the best of Peoples, evolved for mankind, enjoining what is right, forbidding what is wrong, and believing in Allah.

Al-Imran 3: 110

The order came telling Muslims that they must stand up and shoulder their responsibility in adjoining good and forbidding evil. Such is the obligation of Muslims in each community:

﴿وَلْتَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْعُرْفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ﴾

[آل عمران: ١٠٤]

Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong: they are the ones to attain felicity.

Al-Imran 3: 104

The prophet's companions understood that an essential part of their faith is to give sound and sincere advice to every Muslim. Jaber Bin Abdullah said: (I gave my pledge to the prophet (PBUH) to establish regular prayer, and to give regular charity, and to give sincere advice to every Muslim)

Narrated by Bokhari & Muslim.

When giving advice Muslims should not be afraid of blame or threats. Ebada Bin As-Samit said: (We gave our pledge to Allah's messenger (PBUH) to hear and obey his orders at times of difficulty and at times of ease; when we are active, and when we are in distress and tired; and when we do not like it. And that we will not compete with those more deserving to rule over us; and to say the truth wherever we are, not fearful of blame from anyone when we are serving Allah)

Narrated by Bokhari & Muslim.

To speak against wrong may not be popular and others may criticize our actions or motives, citing things like "it is not your business", or "Everyone is free to do what he wants". But as Muslims we have a collective responsibility for standing up and pointing out what is right and what is wrong. We should respect the rights of others and we should not force our own view point on others who differ with us. At the same time, we should not fear criticism or blame.

An example of fighting immorality is exposing the hypocrites and their evil intentions and plots. At the time of prophet Muhammad (PBUH) there were people who professed Islam but their hearts were full of hatred and enmity towards the Muslims. They spread rumors, incited enmity and division among Muslims and caused a lot of damage to the Muslim community in Madina. The Prophet (PBUH) was patient and once they were exposed, they could no longer harm the Muslims. Our time is no different, for Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) warned us that hypocrites will exist in every Muslim community and that it is our duty to expose their danger and fight them. He said:

(Every prophet that was sent by Allah before me had close companions and friends who followed his example and obeyed his orders and lived their life according to his Sunnah (tradition). After them will come groups of people who do not apply what they say, and who will do things they were not commanded to do. Whoever strives against them with his hand is surely a believer; whoever strives against them with his tongue, he is a believer; and whoever strives against them with his heart, he is a believer. Beyond that there is no measure of belief left)

Narrated by Muslim.

We learn from this Hadeeth:

- We are commanded to follow the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and obey his orders. This way we know that we are guided and following the right path
- The believers confirm their belief with their deeds. In contrast, the hypocrites say things, then do the opposite to what they say
- It is the duty of Muslims to fight the hypocrites and expose their deceit and treachery, this way other people will not be deceived by them

The importance of adjoining good and forbidding evil

Such a duty is the collective responsibility of every Muslim in the community. If some members of the community undertake this responsibility it is then sufficient. However, if no one stands up adjoining good and forbidding evil, then the whole community will bear the sin of not acting responsibly. The Qur'an explains this collective responsibility:

﴿وَاتَّقُوا فِتْنَةً لَا تُصِيبَنَّ الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا مِنْكُمْ خَاصَّةً وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ

الْعِقَابِ ﴿٢٥﴾ [الأنفال: ٢٥]

And fear tumult or oppression, which affecteth not in particular (only) those of you who do wrong: and know that Allah is strict in punishment.

Al-Anfal 8 : 25

And:

﴿وَمَا كَانَ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ لِيَنْفِرُوا كَافَّةً فَلَوْلَا نَفَرَ مِنْ كُلِّ فِرْقَةٍ مِّنْهُمْ طَائِفَةٌ لِّيَتَفَقَّهُوا فِي الدِّينِ وَلِيُنذِرُوا قَوْمَهُمْ إِذَا رَجَعُوا إِلَيْهِمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَحْذَرُونَ ﴿١٢٢﴾

[التوبة: ١٢٢]

Nor should the Believers all go forth together: if a contingent from every expedition remained behind, they could devote themselves to studies in religion, and admonish the people when they return to them, that thus they (may learn) to guard themselves (against evil).

At-Tawba 9 : 122

This duty is a cornerstone in Islam and is the teaching of all of God's messengers. Allah allows Muslims to establish their authority and continues to support them and guide them as long as they are adjoining good and fighting immorality:

﴿الَّذِينَ إِنْ مَكَّنَّاهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ أَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَوُا الزَّكَاةَ وَأَمَرُوا بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَنَهَوْا

عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ عَاقِبَةُ الْأُمُورِ ﴿٤١﴾ [الحج: ٤١]

(They are) those who, if We establish them in the land, establish regular prayer and give regular charity, enjoin the right and forbid wrong: with Allah rests the end (and decision) of (all) affairs.

Al-Hajj 22 : 41

Yet, during our time most people understand adjoining good as establishing prayer. Similarly, most people understand forbidding evil as ordering others or forbidding women from leaving their homes unless they have Hijab (Islamic head cover). This superficial understanding belittles this important

cornerstone in Islam. Adjoining good and forbidding evil involves every aspect of our life and touches our behavior and interaction with others as well as our character.

What happens if Muslims do not adjoin good and forbid evil?

- Allah will no longer respond to our prayers
- Allah's punishment and wrath will befall such a community

Allah's messenger (PBUH) said:

(By the One holding my soul in his hand you will adjoin good and forbid evil, for if you do not do that Allah will send His punishment on you, then you will call on Him, but He will not respond to you)

Narrated by Termedhi

He also said:

(If a group of people see a wrong-doer and do not stop him and prevent him from doing wrong, then Allah will punish them all)

Narrated by Abou Dawood & Termedhi

He also said:

(Adjoin good and forbid evil before a time comes when your prayers to Allah will go unanswered)

Narrated by Ibn Majja

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