

## **Forbidding Wrong**

*Javed Ahmad Ghamidi*  
(Tr. Asif Iftikhar)

One of the necessary requirements of faith is that people be exhorted to do good and to abstain from wrong. Both the exhortation and admonition should be done with sagacity and benevolence in the manner of suggestion and advice. The righteousness or deviation of people is a matter that is in God's hands. He is aware of those who have deviated from His path as well as of those who will be guided. Therefore, in calling people to truth and justice, no one should play the keeper of morals or decree Heaven or Hell for any of his or her addressees. It is obvious from the Qur'ān that, in his role of calling people to the truth, none of the messengers of God was allowed to go beyond effective and clear communication or exhortation and reminding. God Almighty says:

Your task is to admonish; you are not responsible for their supervision.<sup>1</sup>

However, matters are different in the domain of authority. For example, on attaining maturity, a man may become a husband to a wife and, as a consequence of this relationship, a father to his children. Nature and religion entail that a certain degree of authority be granted to him in both these roles. Similar is the role of institutions and governments. When they are formed, their heads are also granted a certain degree of authority. It is regarding the ambit of this authority that the Prophet (sws) is reported to have said:

He amongst you who sees a wrong should redress it by hand; if

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1. Q. 88: 21-22.

he does not find in himself the strength to do it, then by his tongue; and, if even that is not possible, he should despise the wrong in his heart -- and this is the lowest level of faith.<sup>2</sup>

The Arabic word used here for “wrong” is *munkar*. It doesn't refer to sins of purely religious nature; instead, it refers to those wrongs that all humankind, regardless of religion or creed, regards as evil. Theft, perjury, dishonesty, misappropriation, embezzlement, fraud, adulteration, violation of others' rights, indecency, causing injury to life or damage to property or honour, and other violations of these kinds fall within the category of *munkar*. This statement attributed to the Prophet (sws) also relates to these wrongs. It is an offshoot of the Qur'ānic directive of *amr bi'l-ma'rūf* (commanding right) and *nahī 'an al-munkar* (forbidding wrong). The Prophet (sws) has warned that, if, in the realm of one's authority, one does not even regard these wrongs as evil, one falls below the lowest level of faith.

The words in *lam yastāṭi'* also need to be properly understood. They do not refer to the kind of ability that entails responsibility. The reason is that in the absence of this kind of ability, a person does not remain accountable and therefore does not fall in the levels of faith. In this reported statement, the words connote “strength” and “courage” that may increase or decrease with the level of one's faith. It is therefore only in the sphere of one's authority that one might be considered as having fallen to lower levels of faith if one does not remedy a wrong by hand. The reason for this difference is that, in this latter case, the person does not make the required endeavour to eradicate evil despite having the right and the authority to do so. The moral imperative here does not at all mean that, for achieving a higher level of faith, people have the right to gather their followers on their own and go out as vigilantes to end wrong. Such steps, if taken, translate into the worst kind of disorder, which has no sanction at all in religion. All directives in religion are given in relation to one's ability and authority. *Lā yukallifu Allāh nafsān illā wus'ahā*<sup>3</sup> is an unequivocal principle that is kept in consideration in all the directives of religion and the Divine law. It is this principle that should be kept in

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2. Muslim, No: 177.

3. Q. 2:286: [In His directives,] God does burden any soul with what is beyond it.

consideration to understand the Prophet's statement regarding the prohibition of wrong.

*(Translated by Asif Iftikhar)*

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