

Al-'Irbād ibn Sāriyah narrated:

1

God's Messenger (peace be upon him) stood up one day and gave us a strong admonition, that made our hearts tremble and our eyes tearful.

2

People said: 'Messenger of God, this sounds like the admonition of one who is bidding farewell. Give us a lasting advice'.

3

He said: I urge you to maintain your fear of God

4

and to listen and obey even when the one to obey is an Abyssinian slave.

5

You shall witness after me much disagreement. Therefore, hold on to my Sunnah [i.e. my way] and the sunnah of the rightly-guided ones who succeed me. Hold on tight to it and make sure not to depart from it.

6

Beware of things introduced [into the religion], for each such introduction is a deviation, and every deviation leads astray.⁽¹⁾

1 Related by Abu Dāwūd, 4607; al-Tirmidī, 2676; Ibn Mājah, 42.

From the Qur'an

- ﴿Believers! Fear God as you rightly should, and do not allow death to overtake you before you have surrendered yourselves truly to Him.﴾ (3: 102)
- ﴿Believers, obey God and obey the Messenger and those from among you who have been entrusted with authority.﴾ (4: 59)
- ﴿As for him who, after guidance has been plainly conveyed to him, puts himself in contention with God's Messenger and follows a path other than that of the believers – him shall We leave to that which he himself has chosen, and shall cause him to endure Hell. How evil a journey's end.﴾ (4: 115)
- ﴿Whatever the Messenger gives you, take it; and whatever he forbids you, abstain from it. Remain God-fearing; for God is severe in retribution.﴾ (59: 7)

The Narrator

Abu Najīḥ al-'Irbād ibn Sāriyah belonged to the Sulaym tribe and was one of the people of al-Ṣuffah. He later moved to Syria and lived in Homs. He was one of those referred to in the Qur'anic verse that says: 'Nor shall those be blamed who, when they came to request you for transport and you said: 'I have no means of transporting you', turned away with their eyes overflowing with tears, sad that they did not have the means to cover their expenses'. (9: 92) He died in Year 75 AH 695 CE, but some reports suggest that he died earlier, during the conflict with Ibn al-Zubayr.

Summary

The Prophet (peace be upon him) gave his companions a strong emotional admonition. He then urged them to remain God-fearing and obey those in power, adhere to the Sunnah and beware of following any deviant creeds.



Message and Meaning

1

The Prophet (peace be upon him) one day gave his companions a highly effective admonition, warning them against incurring God's wrath and placing themselves in a position of liability that would incur His punishment. His admonition was so strong that their hearts trembled and their eyes were tearful.

2

One of his companions said to him that what he said went straight to their hearts, and it included all that is important to a Muslim of his life and religious affairs. It was similar to the recommendation of a departing person speaking to his family, pointing out everything they needed and giving them all its details and what they needed to know. He requested the Prophet to give some lasting and comprehensive advice.

3

The first thing the Prophet commended to them was fearing God (limitless is He in His glory). It means that a person should place a shield between himself and what incurs God's wrath. This can only be achieved by obeying God and following His Messenger (peace be upon him). Ṭalq ibn Ḥabīb defines it as follows: 'To be God-fearing means to obey God, under God's light, hoping to receive God's reward; and to abandon disobedience of God, under God's light, fearing God's punishment'.⁽¹⁾

4

The Prophet then highlighted the importance of listening to and obeying those in authority. Obeying them in what is permissible and reasonable is a duty. However, when any of them orders a person to do what is sinful, they forfeit the right to be obeyed. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'To listen and obey is binding on a Muslim in whatever he likes or dislikes, unless he is bidden to commit some disobedience of God. If he is ordered to disobey God, he must neither listen nor obey'.⁽²⁾

The Prophet adds that is binding 'even if the one to be obeyed is an Abyssinian slave'. Elsewhere, the Prophet recommends that the overall ruler should be free and belong to the Quraysh. The fact that he is here speaking about an Abyssinian slave is either to stress that such obedience even in a situation that is close to impossible might occur or because he was aware that, in time, things would go wrong to the extent that a ruler would be an unqualified person. Should this happen, Muslims are to listen and obey, as this would be the lesser evil, requiring the acceptance of such a ruler. Unless they did, matters could get much worse. Another possibility is that the Prophet's words refer to lesser ranking officials. In all such situations, the Prophet makes it necessary to obey those in authority and not to dissent except when such rulers order us to disobey God, or when they are blatantly unbelievers.

1 Ibn Taymiyyah, *al-Risālah al-Tabūkiyyah: Zād al-Muhājir ilā Rabbih*, Vol. 1, p. 9. Also, Ibn al-Qayyim, *Madārij al-Sālikīn*, Vol. 1, p. 459.

2 Related by al-Bukhari, 7144.



The Prophet (peace be upon him) then tells us that the Muslim community was bound to go through turmoil and great strife after him. Safety in such a situation is achieved through strict following of his Sunnah and the sunnah of the rightly-guided caliphs, Abu Bakr, 'Umar, 'Uthman and 'Alī (may God be pleased with them). The Prophet orders that Muslims should adhere to this pattern as a person bites hard on something he is keen to keep and fears to let go.

The Prophet mentioned the sunnah of the rightly-guided caliphs because he was certain that they would not deviate from his Sunnah. He was also aware that some aspects of his Sunnah may not be well-known in his own time. In this case, these would become better known during the rule of these caliphs. As they would be keen to revive such aspects, these are attributed to them, although originally they are part of the Prophet's Sunnah.

Another possibility is that the Prophet's reference to 'caliphs' means leading scholars, because they are the Prophet's successors in establishing the truth, adhering to the faith and guiding people along the right way.



The Prophet then warns against different ways that were not practised in his lifetime. Every such invention in the divine faith is a deviation, leading people astray. However, new practices are of two types:

- They are not related to religion. Whatever has been invented or developed in worldly and life matters are not considered deviations.
- They are related to religion but have no religious basis. The Prophet (peace be upon him) says: 'He who introduces in this matter of ours something that does not belong to it will have it rejected'.⁽¹⁾ Therefore, whatever is introduced into the religion and claimed to belong to it, while it has no basis in the religion, is deviant and erroneous. Islam has nothing to do with it. This applies to all fields of faith: beliefs, statements and actions, be they clearly manifest or subtle.⁽²⁾

If what is introduced has a clear basis, then it is not a deviation and will not be rejected, even though it is described as *bid'ah*. It is given this description in the linguistic sense of the word, which means 'something new'. When 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb organized the Tarāwīḥ Prayer in the Prophet's Mosque, ordering the people to form one congregation and appointed Ubay ibn Ka'b to lead the prayer, he used the same word, describing the action as a 'fine *bid'ah*'.⁽³⁾ The Prophet had led the people in such prayer on a couple of occasions, but then stopped, fearing that it might become a duty and people would then be unable to continue with it.

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 2697; Muslim, 1718.

2 Ibn Rajab, *Jāmi' al-'Ulūm wal-Ḥikam*, Vol. 2, p. 218.

3 Related by al-Bukhari, 2010.

Implementation

1

Scholars, educators and advocates of Islam should be gentle in giving admonition and also make it brief. Shaqīq Abu Wā'il narrated: "Abdullāh [ibn Mas'ūd] used to address us every Thursday. One man said to him: "Abu 'Abd al-Raḥmān, we love your speech and are eager to listen. We would love that you address us every day". He said: "Nothing stops me from addressing you other than that I would dislike for you to be bored. I am selective with my admonition as God's Messenger (peace be upon him) used to be selective as to which days he would admonish us, fearing that we be bored"⁽¹⁾.

2

One distinctive characteristic of believers is that when they listen to God's words or the Prophet's hadiths, they attentively listen, eager to understand it. Their hearts would tremble and their eyes would be tearful. God says: 'True believers are only those whose hearts are filled with awe whenever God is mentioned, and whose faith is strengthened whenever His revelations are recited to them'. (8: 2) Everyone of us should emulate them.

3

In his admonition, a scholar should include general and comprehensive rules.

4

Every Muslim is recommended to seek admonition and sincere advice from scholars and people known for their good faith and wisdom.

5

Every Muslim should be keen to do what pleases God, both in public and private. This is the way of safety from stress and temptation in this life and from Hell in the next.

6

Consider the well-known saying whereby:

unless a person covers himself with a shroud of righteousness, he remains naked even though he is dressed in clothes. The best of a person's garments is his obedience of his Lord.

7

Listen to those in authority and obey them, unless they order disobedience of God or they revert to disbelief.

8

To endure the injustice of rulers is better than getting involved in strife and a conflict that leads to bloodshed and disunity in the Muslim community.

9

Assured safety is the result of following the Prophet's Sunnah. He has taught us every good thing and warned us against all evil.

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 70; Muslim, 2821.

10

Following the example of the Prophet's companions is the best way to ascertain the truth. They were the people who understood God's revelations best and knew the Prophet and his Sunnah better than anyone else.

'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz said: 'Stop where they [i.e. the Prophet's companions] stopped, and say as they said, and remain silent on things they did not speak about. They stopped on the basis of clear knowledge, and refrained through clear insight. They were better able to understand things, and more qualified to know their merits'. This means that: 'if your present practice complies with right guidance, then you have excelled them. If you say that it occurred after they had departed, then it has been introduced by others who chose a different way and distanced themselves from them. Yet they [the Prophet's companions] were the front leaders. They spoke about it well enough. What is not up to their standard is inferior, and what is above them is pretentious. Some people lagged behind them and they went astray, while others were driven by ambition and, thus, they became extremists. In their middle way, they were the followers of right guidance'.⁽¹⁾

11

The *tābi'īn* were very keen to follow the practice and Sunnah of the Prophet and his companions. Ibrāhīm al-Nakha'ī said: 'Were I to be told that they [meaning the Prophet's companions] did their ablution, or *wudu*, stopping at a particular nail, I would not exceed that. It is wrong for anyone to do what is contrary to the practice of the Prophet's companions'.⁽²⁾



12

Every Muslim should refrain from doing what has no basis in Islam. The truth is embodied in the Qur'an and the Sunnah, with nothing beyond.

13

There is no such thing as a 'good *bid'ah*'. Whatever is inconsistent with the Prophet's practice may not be introduced into Islam. It is false and its advocates bear its burden.

1 Ibn al-Qayyim, *I'lām al-Muwaqqi'īn 'an Rabb al-'Ālamīn*, Vol. 4, p. 115.

2 Ibid.

