

Al-nu'mān ibn Bashīr narrated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said:



The one who respects God's boundaries and the one who trespasses through them are like some people who drew lots to take up their places in a ship. Some were on the upper deck and others on the lower deck. When those who were on the lower deck needed to bring some water, they would pass across those above them. Some of them said: "Let us make a hole in our part so that we do not disturb those above us". If those above had let them do that, they would have all perished, but if they stopped them, they would all be safe.⁽¹⁾

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 2493.

From the Qur'an

- ﴿You are the best community that has ever been raised for mankind; you enjoy the doing of what is right and forbid what is wrong, and you believe in God.﴾ (3: 110)
- ﴿Why do not their devouts and their rabbis forbid them to make sinful assertions and to devour the fruits of unlawful gain? Evil indeed is that which they contrive.﴾ (5: 63)
- ﴿Those of the Children of Israel who disbelieved were cursed by David and Jesus, son of Mary. That was because they rebelled and persisted in their transgression. (78) They would never restrain one another from wrongdoing. Vile indeed were the things they did.﴾ (5: 78-79)
- ﴿The believers, men, and women are friends to one another: They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong; they attend to their prayers, and pay their zakat, and obey God and His Messenger. It is on these that God will have mercy. Surely, God is almighty, wise.﴾ (9: 71)

The Narrator

Al-Nu'mān ibn Bashīr ibn Sa'd ibn Tha'labah of the Anṣār was a companion of the Prophet, as was his father. Scholars are in agreement that he was one of the Prophet's young companions. He became a scholar and a governor. Mu'āwiyah appointed him Governor of Kufah for a period of time. He was subsequently appointed as Judge of Damascus, succeeding Faḍālah. He then became Governor of Homs in Syria. He narrated a small number of hadiths, but his hadiths are related in all six authentic hadith anthologies. He died in Year 64 AH 684 CE.

Summary

When God's boundaries are respected, and what is lawful is enjoined while wrongdoing is censured, all people will be safe. Otherwise, they will all suffer: the sinful because of what they commit, and the ones who remain silent because they abandon their duty of censuring evil and enjoining right.



Message and Meaning



The Prophet (peace be upon him) gives an example portraying the importance of the advocacy of the divine religion and sincerity in the faith. He makes clear that unless wrongful action is censured and stopped, all people will come to ruin. He gives an image showing the one who abides by the limits defined by God, obeying His commandments and doing what He orders and refraining from what He forbids. The image also shows the one who is careless about God's orders and pursues his own desires. The two are shown like a group of people boarding a boat which sails in a river of fresh water. They drew lots to decide who stayed on the lower deck and who remained on the upper deck. Everyone took their places.



Those who were on the lower deck needed fresh water for drinking and other uses. They had to go to the upper deck to get the water from the river and bring it down. Some of them suggested that it could be easier for everyone if they made a hole in their part, which was the bottom of the boat, to get the water directly, instead of having to go up and down for it. They thought that this solution spared them some hard work and relieved their friends on the upper deck of the inconvenience of having them coming up for water. The Prophet said that if those on the upper deck allowed them to carry out their suggestion, based on the assumption that they were free to do on their deck what they wanted, all of them would be drowned. If they stopped them, they would all be safe.



The same is the case of believers and sinners. If the believers let the sinners persist with their sins without objecting to their doing and advising them to desist, all of them will incur God's punishment: the sinners for their sins and the others for their acquiescence and lack of objection. It will then be a case to which the Prophet's hadith applies, as he says: 'When people see wrongful action and do not change it, they will be close to a general punishment by God'.⁽¹⁾ When the Children of Israel stopped enjoining right and censuring evil, they were cursed. This is mentioned in the Qur'an: 'Those of the Children of Israel who disbelieved were cursed by David and Jesus, son of Mary. That was because they rebelled and persisted in their transgression. (78) They would never restrain one another from wrongdoing. Vile indeed were the things they did'. (5: 78-79)



1 Related by Ahmad, 1; Ibn Mājah, 4005; Abu Dāwūd, 4338; al-Tirmidhī, 3057.

Implementation

- 1 Drawing comparisons is an effective method in educating people and explaining the faith of Islam. Educators will do well to use this method in order to present a clear message to their audience.
- 2 A true believer does not care only about himself, setting himself on the right course. Rather, he will continue to care for his community and try to explain the dangers that threaten them, whether they relate to their faith or livelihood.
- 3 Abandoning the duty of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is evil is a cause that brings about utter ruin on society as a whole. God says: 'Beware of temptation that does not lure only those among you who are wrongdoers. Know that God is severe in retribution.' (8: 25)
- 4 It is wrong to think that it is sufficient for a believer to refrain from sin in order to be safe from God's punishment. It is a duty to censure what is evil, as much as one can.
- 5 It is not right to refrain from speaking out against sin because one knows that the sinner will pay no heed. The right thing is to give good counsel and leave the outcome to God.
- 6 It is not permissible for a Muslim to see an evil practice which he is able to stop without taking the necessary action to stop it. God says in the Qur'an: 'Those of the Children of Israel who disbelieved were cursed by David and Jesus, son of Mary. That was because they rebelled and persisted in their transgression. (78) They would never restrain one another from wrongdoing. Vile indeed were the things they did'. (5: 78-79)



