101317 - Text messages and e-mails which say: “Forward this or else you will be sinning and such and such will happen to you”

the question

Recently it has become wide spread to receive an e-mail or a text message that includes a du’a or an advice. It reads: “I ask you by Allah to forward it”, or they might say: “if you forward it you will receive good news”. What is the ruling on such messages? Will I be sinful if I do not forward it?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Using modern means of communication such as mobile phones and e-mail to spread advice, exhortations, reminders and guidance is a good deed, because it is possible to reach hundreds of people with one click of the button. It is well known that the one who guides others to do good is like the one who does it, and that the one who calls others to guidance will have a reward like that of those who follow him, as Muslim (2674) narrated from Abu Hurayrah (may Allaah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Whoever calls others to guidance will have a reward like that of those who follow it, without that detracting from their reward in the slightest.”

And Muslim (1893) narrated from Abu Mas’ood al-Ansaari (may Allaah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “The one who tells another about something good is like the one who does it.”

If a Muslims writes some advice about the adhkaar for morning and evening, for example, and sends it to a hundred people, and many of them follow his advice, then he will have a great reward for that.

Hence we should make use of these means of communication and raise the level of the messages that are transmitted through them, so that they will be most effective and beneficial.

But unfortunately some people mix this good deed with a bad deed, which is a kind of lying and falsehood, such as saying, “If you forward this, you will hear some good news”! This is a kind of fortune-telling. There is no shar’i evidence that the one who receives advice and passes it on to another will hear good news, rather he may hear bad news, or good news, or he may not hear anything at all.

The same applies to the one who says, “I am entrusting you with this to forward it and spread it, or else you will be sinning if you do not do that,” or “Such and such will happen to the one who does not forward it.” All of this is false and there is no basis for it. The one to whom it is sent does not have to do anything and there is nothing to oblige him to forward it, and he is not sinning if he does not do that. There is no basis for stating that someone is sinning without any proof from sharee’ah, and there is no basis for speaking of the unseen future which no one knows except Allaah.

Stating that reward or punishment will come as the result of actions done is something that must be referred to Allaah. Whatever He has permitted is what is halaal, and whatever He has forbidden is what is haraam, and reward and punishment are in His hand. Whoever says anything about that without proof is lying. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Say (O Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم): ‘(But) the things that my Lord has indeed forbidden are Al-Fawaahish (great evil sins and every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse) whether committed openly or secretly, sins (of all kinds), unrighteous oppression, joining partners (in worship) with Allaah for which He has given no authority, and saying things about Allaah of which you have no knowledge’”

[al-A’raaf 7:33]

These people think that they are making people spread good by encouraging and warning them, but they are mistaken and they are overstepping the mark. They should limit themselves to that which is mentioned in sharee’ah, which is sufficient, praise be to Allaah, such as saying: “Whoever spreads this good, there is the hope that he will have a reward like that of all those who act upon

it.” That should be sufficient to encourage people to spread it.

This explains the importance of knowledge, because most of those who do this only do it because of ignorance, like those who fabricated ahaadeeth and attributed them to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) on the basis of spreading good and encouraging people to do good, but they ended up telling lies of a type for which the one who tells them is given a stern warning, but he thought that he was earning reward!

Our aim is to point out the falseness of this method and to warn people against it. Hence we say:

The one who receives any of these false messages should advise the one who sent it and explain to him that he should stop using these false incentives, and he should not believe what it says in the message, that if he forwards it such and such will happen to him and if he does not forward it such and such will happen to him, because this is a kind of lie, as stated above.

May Allaah help us all to do that which He loves and which pleases Him.

And Allaah knows best.