217453 - Should he enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong to someone who will not listen to what he says?

the question

Does a person who has fallen into some sins and objectionable actions have the right to tell others not to do these sins or other objectionable actions? Is this not included in the verse in which Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning): “Enjoin you Al-Birr (piety and righteousness and each and every act of obedience to Allah) on the people and you forget (to practise it) yourselves?” [al-Baqarah 2:44]?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

Undoubtedly the one who enjoins what is right and forbids what is wrong should be complying with what he enjoins and avoiding what he forbids.

Al-Qaadi Abu Ya‘la said: It is more appropriate for the one who seeks to enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong to be one of the people of discretion, decency, and good character, and one who is accepted and well-liked by people, because if he meets this description, the one whom he enjoins will have respect for him and may respond to him and accept what he says… When a person is like this, his words are more likely to have an impact and be accepted. End quote from his essay al-Amr bi’l-Ma‘roof (p. 47).

But this does not allow the sinner or the one who falls short to refrain from enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong on the grounds that they fall short in some deeds or fall into some objectionable actions.

The view of the majority of scholars among the earlier and later generations is that it is not stipulated that the one who wants to enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong should be of exemplary conduct and never commit any wrong deeds or sins, because this condition would close the door to enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong. Could anyone be free of wrongdoing and sins?!

That is because what is required of the individual is two things: avoiding wrong deeds and telling others not to do them. If he fails in one of the two, that does not mean that the other is waived.

Abu Bakr ibn al-'Arabi said: It is not stipulated that he should be of exemplary conduct according to Ahl as-Sunnah, but the innovators said that no one can change wrong actions except one who is of exemplary conduct.

This is wrong, because truly exemplary conduct is limited to very few people, but forbidding what is wrong is something that is required of all people. End quote from Ahkaam al-Qur'an (1/349)

An-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said: The scholars said: With regard to enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, it is not stipulated that one must be perfect, complying fully with what he enjoins and avoiding fully what he forbids; rather he must enjoin what is right, even if he is falling short in what he enjoins, and he must forbid what is wrong, even if he does some of that which he forbids.

So two things are required of him: to enjoin himself to do what is right and to forbid himself to do what is wrong, and to enjoin others to do what is right and forbid them to do what is wrong. If he falls short in one of them, how can it be permissible for him to fall short in the other?! End quote from Sharh Saheeh Muslim (2/23)

Al-Haafiz Ibn Hajar said: With regard to the one who says that no one should enjoin what is right except one who is free of all faults, if he means that this is what is preferable, all well and good, otherwise it implies closing the door to enjoining what is good, if there is no one else who can meet that condition. End quote from Fath al-Baari (13/53).

As-Safaareeni said: It is not stipulated, with regard to enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, that the one who does that must be of exemplary conduct, according to the correct view. Rather the ruler, the judge, the scholar, the ignorant man, the man of good character and the evildoer are all equal in that regard. Yes, his actions should not contradict his words; rather he should enjoin what is right and comply with that, and forbid what is wrong and avoid it.

If you say: these saheeh reports clearly stipulate that being of exemplary conduct is essential in the one who wants to enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, our response is that this is the best-case scenario, but we say that it is required of every believer to be pious and of exemplary conduct. However, people must enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong; if only those who are infallible or divinely protected were to exhort people, then no one would enjoy what is right and forbid what is wrong, even though that is of utmost importance in supporting the religion.

It was said:

If no one who is a sinner were to admonish the people, then who would admonish the sinners after Muhammad?

It was said to al-Hasan al-Basri: So and so does not admonish the people and he says: I am afraid to say what I do not do. Al-Hasan said: Which of us does what he says? That is what the Shaytaan wants people to think, then no one would enjoin anything that is right or forbid anything that is wrong.

To sum up: every believer, in line with the conditions outlined above, is required to enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong, even if he is an evildoer, or that is without the permission of the authorities, and even with his companions in wrongdoing and even with himself. So he should rebuke himself for doing wrong, because people are accountable for enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong.

End quote from Ghidha' al-Albaab fi Sharh Manzoomat al-Adaab (1/215).

Secondly:

There are several Islamic texts from which it may be understood that one of the conditions that must be met by the one who wants to enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong is that he should himself already be complying with these exhortations. These texts include the following:

1.

Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Enjoin you Al-Birr (piety and righteousness and each and every act of obedience to Allah) on the people and you forget (to practise it) yourselves, while you recite the Scripture! Have you then no sense?” [al-Baqarah 2:44].

2.

Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“O you who believe! Why do you say that which you do not do?

Most hateful it is with Allah that you say that which you do not do”

[as-Saff 61:2-3].

3.

It was narrated that Usaamah ibn Zayd (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: “A man will be brought on the Day of Resurrection and thrown into the Fire; his intestines will spill forth in the Fire and he will go around them as a donkey goes around the millstone. The people of Hell will gather around him and will say: O So and so, what is the matter with you? Did you not enjoin us to do what is good and forbid us to do what is evil? He will say: Yes, but I used to enjoin good and not do it, and I used to forbid evil and do it.”

Narrated by al-Bukhaari (3267) and Muslim (2989).

4.

Anas narrated that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said:

“On the night on which I was taken on the Night Journey (Isra’), I saw men whose lips were being cut off with scissors of fire. I said: ‘O Jibreel, who are these?’ He said: ‘These are the khateebs from among your ummah who used to enjoin righteousness on the people and forget themselves, and they used to recite the Book but they did not understand.’”

Narrated by Imam Ahmad (13515); classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in as-Silsilah as-Saheehah (291).

Some people understood from these texts that one should not enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong if the one who wants to do so is not of a certain level of righteousness and obedience, or is not adhering to what he is enjoining and forbidding.

The response to that is as follows:

What is intended in these texts is to criticise the one who does not do the good deed that he is enjoining others to do, and to criticise the one who commits the evil deed that he is forbidding others to do. There is nothing to suggest criticism of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong in itself. It is criticism of him for failing to do what he is enjoining others to do, not for enjoining what he does not do himself. The difference between the two matters is obvious.

In his commentary on the verse in which Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning), “Enjoin you Al-Birr (piety and righteousness and each and every act of obedience to Allah) on the people and you forget (to practise it) yourselves?” [al-Baqarah 2:44], al-Qurtubi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

It should be understood that the rebuke in this verse has to do with failing to do deeds of piety, righteousness and obedience to Allah; it does not have to do with enjoining such deeds.

End quote from Tafseer al-Qurtubi (1/366)

Al-Haafiz Ibn Katheer said:

What we understand from this is that Allah, may He be exalted, criticised them for this attitude, and pointed out their mistake with regard to themselves, as they used to enjoin others to do good but not do it themselves. It does not mean that they are criticised for enjoining righteousness when they themselves did not do it; rather they are criticised for failing to do it.

Enjoining what is right is good and it is obligatory upon the one who has knowledge, but it is obligatory and more appropriate for the one who has knowledge to do what is right whilst also enjoining it upon others, and he should not be different from them, as Shu'ayb (peace be upon him) said: "I wish not, in contradiction to you, to do that which I forbid you. I only desire reform so far as I am able, to the best of my power. And my guidance cannot come except from Allah, in Him I trust and unto Him I repent" [Hood 11:88].

Both enjoining what is right and doing it are obligatory, and neither is waived if the other is not done, according to the more correct of the two scholarly opinions among the earlier and later generations.

Some scholars were of the view that the one who commits sins should not tell others not to do them, but this view is da'eef (weak), and even weaker than that is their quoting this verse, because there is no proof for their view in it.

The correct view is that the one who has knowledge should enjoin what is right, even if he does not do it himself, and he should forbid what is wrong, even if he does it himself.

Maalik said, narrating from Rabee'ah: I heard Sa'eed ibn Jubayr say to him: If a person refrains from enjoining what is right and forbidding what is evil until he is perfect (and free of any sin), no one would enjoin what is right or forbid what is evil.

Maalik said: and he spoke the truth; who is there who does not have any faults?

I say: But – if that is the case – he is to be criticised for not doing acts of obedience and for doing acts of disobedience, because he was aware of that, but he went against it knowingly. The one

who knows is not like the one who does not know; for that reason the hadiths warn against that.

End quote from Tafseer al-Qur'an al-'Azeem (1/248)

Abu Bakr ibn al-'Arabi said: Rather the criticism in this case is for committing that which he was forbidden to do, not for forbidding what is wrong.

End quote from Ahkaam al-Qur'an (1/349)

Shaykh Khaalid as-Sabt said: In these texts, the criticism and warnings have to do with committing the wrong actions that the person wants to forbid others to do. There is no criticism of the act of forbidding what is wrong; rather that is to be commended and not to be criticised, for it is obedience to Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, and is a deed that brings one closer to Him. Undoubtedly the doing of wrong by one who is forbidding others to do it is more abhorrent than the same action on the part of one who does not know that it is an evil deed, or who knows but does not call others to refrain from it. This does not mean that he is excused from enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong.

End quote from al-Amr bi'l-Ma'roof wa'n-Nahi 'an al-Munkar: Usooluhu wa Dawaabituhu (p. 165)

Conclusion:

Enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong is one of the prominent symbols of Islam, and it is not waived in the case of a person who falls short or fails to do some obligatory duties or commits some sins.

Undoubtedly the most effective and beneficial of people in enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and the best of them in his call, is the one who complies with what he enjoins and avoids what he forbids, as in the case of the Messengers. Shu'ayb (peace be upon him) said: "I wish not, in contradiction to you, to do that which I forbid you. I only desire reform so far as I am able, to the best of my power" [Hood 11:88].

Please see also the answers to questions no. 175916 and 11403 .

And Allah knows best.