

Does One Have to be Practicing Himself Before He Rectifies Others?

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Question

What do the noble scholars and jurists of Islamic law say about the following: Nowadays, people say "We ourselves are sinners; how can we rectify others." I wanted guidance about this statement. Does one have to be practicing himself before he can rectify others. Or can one rectify others despite falling short of practicing himself? Please provide guidance in detail.

Answer

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
الْجَوَابُ بِعَوْنِ الْمَلِكِ الْوَهَّابِ اللَّهُمَّ هِدَايَةَ الْحَقِّ وَالصَّوَابِ

Calling towards righteousness and forbidding from evil is one of the many prominent attributes of the Muhammadan ummah. It is due to this great virtue that the Almighty, creator of the universe, has declared this ummah to be the greatest ummah. So, just like every Muslim has to refrain from falling into sins himself, they must also, to the best of their ability and with wisdom, prevent their family and other Muslims from falling into sins. Furthermore, although it is not acceptable for one to have shortcomings in one's own actions as this leads to the displeasure of Allah, but this will not absolve one from the obligation of calling other towards righteousness and forbidding from evil. This is because performing good deeds and refraining from sins is one obligation and preventing others from sins, to the best of one's ability, is another obligation. If one fails to fulfill an obligation, the correct approach would be to rectify the shortcoming rather than leaving another obligation on top of that. Therefore, the statement mentions in the question "We ourselves are sinners; how can we rectify others" is incorrect. It is necessary for us to obey sharī'ah by refraining from sins ourselves as well as preventing others from falling into sins, to the best of our ability and with wisdom.

Note – Where one has the dominant assumption that the person will not accept (the rectification) or it will cause Fitna, then in that situation calling towards righteousness and forbidding from evil is not necessary.

Thus, Allāh Almighty states in the Noble Qur'ān:

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ

Translation (Kanz-ul-'Irfān): O Muslims, you are the best nation which was sent forth for the guidance of people; you command the good and forbid evil; and you believe in Allah. (Part 04, Sūrah Āl 'Imrān, Verse 110)

Under the above-mentioned verse, it is stated in *Tafsīr Qurtubī*:

إنما صارت أمة محمد صلى الله عليه وسلم خير أمة لأن المسلمين منهم أكثر، والأمر بالمعروف والنهي عن المنكر فيهم أفضى

Translation: The Muḥammadan ummah became the best ummah because it has the most believers and the act of commanding good and forbidding from bad is more common. (Tafsīr Qurtubī, Vol. 04, p. 171, Publ. Dār al-Kutub al-Misriyah, Cairo)

It is stated in *Tafsīr Sirāt-Ul-Jinān*:

یاد رہے کہ نیکی کی دعوت دینا وہ عظیم منصب اور عہدہ ہے جو اللہ تعالیٰ نے اپنے انبیاء کرام علیہم الصلوٰۃ والسلام کو عطا فرمایا اور جب اللہ تعالیٰ نے اپنے حبیب صلی اللہ تعالیٰ علیہ وآلہ وسلم کو مبعوث فرما کر نبوت کا دروازہ ہمیشہ کے لئے بند کر دیا تو اس نے اپنے حبیب صلی اللہ تعالیٰ علیہ وآلہ وسلم کی امت کو اس منصب سے سرفراز فرمایا اور اس عظیم خوبی کی وجہ سے انہیں سب سے بہترین امت قرار دیا، لہذا ہر مسلمان کو چاہئے کہ وہ بقدر توفیق نیکی کی دعوت دیتا اور برائی سے منع کرتا رہے۔

Translation: Remember, calling towards righteousness is a great duty that Allāh Almighty granted his blessed Prophets علیہم الصلوٰۃ والسلام. When Allāh Almighty sent his beloved ﷺ and brought Prophethood to a close forever, He Almighty honored Ummah of his beloved ﷺ with this duty. **Because of this great attribute, they have been declared the best ummah. Therefore, every Muslim should try, to the best of their ability, to call towards righteousness and forbid evil.** (Sirāt-Ul-Jinān, Vol. 02, p. 33, Publ. Maktaba-Tul-Madīnah, Karachi)

It is obligatory upon every Muslim, to the best of their ability, to prevent others from committing sins. Thus, it is narrated in *Saḥīḥ Muslim* that The Messenger of Allāh ﷺ stated:

من رأى منكم منكرا فليغيره بيده، فإن لم يستطع فبلسانه، فإن لم يستطع فبقلبه، وذلك أضعف الإيمان

Translation: Whoever sees an evil should rectify it with his hands. If he cannot, he should rectify it with his tongue. If he cannot, he should despise it with his heart, and this is the weakest level of Imān. (Saḥīḥ Muslim, Vol. 01, Ḥadīth No. 49, Publ. Dār al-Tabā‘ah al-‘Āmirah, Turkey)

The command given in the ḥadīth is directed to every person, whether he is pious or sinful, just as ‘Allāmah ‘Alī Qārī Ḥanafī عليه رحمة الله تعالى (d. 1014 AH/ 1605 CE) writes in the commentary of this ḥadīth:

اعلم أنه إذا كان المنكر حراما وجب الزجر عنه، وإذا كان مكروها نذبه، والأمر بالمعروف أيضا تبع لما يؤمر به، فإن وجب فواجب، وإن نذبه فمندوب،--- وشرطهما أن لا يؤدي إلى الفتنة، كما علم من الحديث، وأن يظن قبوله، فإن ظن أنه لا يقبل فيستحسن إظهار شعار الإسلام، ولفظ من لعمومه شمل كل أحد رجلا أو امرأة، عبدا أو فاسقا أو صبيا مميزا

Translation: Know that if the evil act is ḥarām, then it is wājib to prohibit from it. But if it is Makrūh, then it is Mustaḥab. Similarly, calling towards good depends on the level of the obligation. If it is a wājib act, then it is wājib. If the act is Mustaḥab, then giving the command for it is also Mustaḥab. But the condition for both (calling towards good and prohibiting evil) is that they should not lead to fitnah, as understood from the ḥadīth, and one should have the dominant assumption that they will accept it. But if one has the dominant assumption that they will not accept his rectification, then it is still Mustaḥab for him to express that signs of Islām. The word من is inclusive of everyone due to its unrestricted nature, whether male or female, (free) or enslaved, sinful or discerning child. (Mirqāt al-Mafātīḥ, Vol. 08, p. 3209, Publ. Dār al-Fikr, Beirut)

The one who commits sins must abstain from sins himself along with trying to prevent others from sins, rather than abandoning the duty of preventing others. Thus, is the summary of the following verse in which Allāh Almighty states:

أَتَأْمُرُونَ النَّاسَ بِالْبِرِّ وَتَنْسَوْنَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ تَتْلُونَ الْكِتَابَ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ

Translation (Kanz-ul-Irfān): Do you command the people to righteousness and forget yourselves even though you read the Book? So, do you not have intelligence? (Part 01, Sūrah al-Baqarah, Verse 44)

It is stated in *Tafsīr Bayzāwī* under the above-mentioned verse:

والمراد بها حث الواعظ على تزكية النفس والإقبال عليها بالتكميل لتقوم فيقيم غيره، لا منع الفاسق عن الوعظ فإن الإخلال بأحد الأمرين المأمور بهما لا يوجب الإخلال بالآخر

Translation: This is to encourage the one who advises and calls towards good to do tazkiyah al-nafs (adopt righteousness) and to bring his attention towards perfecting it, so that he himself gets rectified and he can also rectify others. The purpose here is not to prohibit a sinner from calling towards good because falling short in fulfilling one commandment does not permit neglecting the other. (*Tafsīr Bayzāwī*, Vol. 01, p. 77, Publ. Dār Ihyā' al-Turās al-'Arabiyy, Beirut)

It is stated in *Tafsīr Sirāt-Ul-Jinān*:

یہاں ایک بات ذہن نشین رکھیں کہ معمولی فساد اس وقت بہت بڑے فتنے اور تباہی کی شکل اختیار کر لیتا ہے جب اس کا ارتکاب کرنے والے خود وہ لوگ ہوں جو دوسروں کو تو بھلائی کا حکم دیتے ہوں لیکن جب ان کے عمل سے پردہ اٹھے تو معلوم ہو کہ گناہوں کے سب سے بڑے مریض یہی ہیں، انہیں یاد رکھنا چاہئے کہ قول و فعل کا تضاد اور خلوت و جلوت کا فرق دنیا و آخرت دونوں لئے بہت نقصان دہ ہے، دنیا میں تو یہ اس قدر نقصان دہ ہوتا ہے کہ ایک مرتبہ کسی کے متعلق یہ تضاد ثابت ہو جائے تو لوگ زندگی بھر اسے منہ لگانا پسند نہیں کرتے بلکہ ایسوں کے عمل کو دیکھ کر نجانے کتنے لوگ ہمیشہ کیلئے دین ہی سے متنفر ہو جاتے ہیں۔

یاد رہے کہ اس آیت کی مراد وعظ و نصیحت کرنے والوں کو تقویٰ و پرہیزگاری پر ابھارنا ہے، بے عمل کو وعظ سے منع کرنا مقصود نہیں، یعنی یہ فرمایا ہے کہ جب دوسروں کو وعظ و نصیحت کرتے ہو تو خود بھی عمل کرو، یہ نہیں فرمایا کہ جب عمل نہیں کرتے تو وعظ و نصیحت کیوں کرتے ہو؟ کیونکہ عمل کرنا ایک واجب ہے اور دوسروں کو برائی سے روکنا دوسرا واجب ہے۔ اگر ایک واجب پر عمل نہیں تو دوسرے سے کیوں رُکا جائے۔

Translation: One thing should be kept in mind that a small issue evolves into a big problem and becomes a cause of destruction when those involved are the people who call others towards goodness, but if their actions are observed, they seem to be the biggest sinners. Such people should remember that contradiction of action and words and keeping a difference in one's personal and public life is harmful in this world and the hereafter. In this world, the harm is that if people find out that a person is such, people don't like to associate themselves with them. In fact, countless people become permanently averse to the religion by seeing the behavior of such individuals.

Remember that this verse encourages preachers to adopt piety and righteousness, not to discourage the sinful from preaching. In other words, it states that since you preach to others, then act upon it yourselves! It is not saying that 'if you do not act, then why do you preach? Because practicing oneself is one obligation and preventing others from evil is another obligation. If you don't fulfill one obligation, then do not fail to fulfill the other. (*Tafsīr Sirāt-Ul-Jinān*, Vol. 01, p. 123, Publ. Maktaba-Tul-Madīnah, Karachi)

Sadr al-Sharī'ah, Muftī Muḥammad Amjad 'Alī 'A'zamī رحمه الله تعالى عليه (d. 1367 AH/1947 CE) writes:

امر بالمعروف یہ ہے کہ کسی کو اچھی بات کا حکم دینا مثلاً کسی سے نماز پڑھنے کو کہنا۔ اور نہی عن المنکر کا مطلب یہ ہے کہ بری باتوں سے منع کرنا، یہ دونوں چیزیں فرض ہیں۔

Translation: Calling towards good is to command a person to do righteous acts, for example commanding someone to offer salāh. Prohibiting from evil means to prevent someone from bad actions. Both of these are fard. (Bahār-e-Sharī'at, Vol. 03, pt. 16, p. 614, Publ. Maktaba-Tul-Madīnah, Karachi)

وَاللّٰهُ اَعْلَمُ عَزَّوَجَلَّ وَرَسُوْلُهُ اَعْلَمُ صَلَّى اللّٰهُ تَعَالٰى عَلَيْهِ وَاٰلِهٖ وَسَلَّمَ

(Allah Almighty knows best and His Messenger صَلَّى اللهُ عَلَيْهِ وَآلِهِ وَسَلَّمَ knows best.)

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