

Chapter 5, Verse 2: Help One Another

Description: God commands that we help one another, regardless of race or religion.

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"...And help one another in righteousness and piety, but do not help one another in sin and transgression. And fear God; His punishment is indeed severe."

These essential verses are the last two sentences of the second verse of Chapter Five of the Quran, The Table (Spread with Food). It is one of three chapters in the Quran that deal extensively



with the life of Jesus and his mother, Mary. It was revealed in Medina when the Muslims were no longer a persecuted minority, rather they were an established community with Prophet Muhammad, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, as their leader.

In the first verse and the first part of this verse, God is talking about contracts; the fulfillment of contracts and the social justice embedded in contracts and binding agreements. All of our actions are because of agreements we have made. For instance, we are bound by our obligations towards God and the religion of Islam; we pray, we fast, and we give in charity. Some of our more worldly agreements are referred to as social contracts; they are agreements that we are implicitly bound by. They are our dealings with such institutions as governments, banks, and schools, and our courteous and morally correct behavior with others. For example, we keep good neighborly relations, and we give our seat in the bus for elderly or disabled people.

In verse two, God exhorts the believers not to desecrate the symbols and signs of God. This can be taken to mean that whenever a Muslim finds something in the creed or practice of a non-Muslim that embodies devotion to the One God, he should show respect

towards it. Thus, we can understand that we are bound by certain rules of behavior; these rules allow us to live in stable thriving communities. The last two sentences instruct us how to fulfill our social contracts and our agreements with God.

In Medina, God introduced religious laws and rules about moral and righteous behavior, and in these two succinct sentences the Muslims are told to help one another be righteous and pious, but not to help or encourage each other to be sinful or transgress the limits set by God. They are also reminded that choosing to disobey God will result in severe punishment.

When God created humankind, He honored them and endowed them with great responsibilities. Humankind are the custodians of the earth, and they are obliged to carry out God's commands. The believers in particular are exhorted by God to enjoin good and forbid evil. This is a theme that is repeated throughout the Quran, and here, God reminds us to help each other to be pious and stay away from sin. He clearly defines the areas in which we should help one another and the areas in which we should not help each other.

However, God does not specify who it is we should help because He means that we should help all people, regardless of their religion, race, or ethnicity. Cooperation should not be limited to those of the same religion, and likewise we should not cooperate with people in sin and transgression just because they are our fellow Muslims. In addition to this, the verse is written in such a way that it covers every act of righteousness conceivable. In other words, God wants us to help each other in every possible way that does not involve sin or transgression.

In his traditions Prophet Muhammad explained the idea of cooperation in more detail. He said, "...Bringing about a fair reconciliation between two opposing parties is charity, helping somebody to mount his animal, or to load his baggage onto the animal, is also a charity..."[1] And, "God fulfills the needs of the one who fulfills the needs of his brother. God will ease a hardship on the Day of Judgment for the one who eases a hardship of his brother."[2]

"Whoever guides someone to a virtuous action will be rewarded the same amount as he who practices that good action."[3] In another tradition, Prophet Muhammad said, "If anyone calls others to follow right guidance, his reward will be the same as those who follow him (in righteousness) without their reward being diminished in any way."[4]

Behaving righteously, and encouraging and aiding others to do the same brings about a sense of inner peace and satisfaction. Adhering to a firm set of beliefs and actions, keeps a person's life balanced and safe. Behaving righteously and being aware of God with each step is a reward in itself. Whenever we cooperate with others, enjoin morally righteous behavior, or help others to feel the bliss of obeying God, we are really providing ourselves with extra rewards and adding to the content feeling associated with doing the right thing.

On the other hand, cooperating in sin or transgressing the limits set by God, causes only heartache and fear. We are stripping away our sense of security and leaving

ourselves vulnerable to feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness. If a person encourages others to do sinful things, they will receive the same penalty of those who actually do the sin. Prophet Muhammad said, "If anyone invites others to transgress, the sin of which he is guilty, will be the same as those of the people who followed him in sinfulness."^[5]

Committing sin or transgressing the limits and boundaries very clearly set by God has a ripple effect. Our actions can reverberate and lead to a hard heart and a lessening of the fear and sorrow we normally expect to feel when we cross the boundaries set by God. This has a negative effect on the community and can even lead to people helping each other in sin.

In spite of this negativity there is always a way back and cooperating with each other in righteousness and piety is an easy way to change the path on which we are traveling, and it can even reverse the effects our sin and transgression had on the community. Although we are reminded at the end of the verse that God's punishment is severe, we know that the door to repentance and forgiveness is always open.

Endnotes:

^[1] *Saheeh Bukhari, Saheeh Muslim*

^[2] Ibid

^[3] *Saheeh Muslim*

^[4] Ibid

^[5] Ibid

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