# AMR BI-MA’RUF WA AN-NAHY AN AL-MUNKAR

# Enjoining the Good and Forbidding the Evil

# 3:104

# 3.104. There must be among you a community calling to good, and enjoining and actively promoting what is right, and forbidding and trying to prevent evil (in appropriate ways). They are those who are the prosperous.(1)



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| **2.44. Do you enjoin upon people godliness and virtue but forget your own selves, (even) while you recite the Book (and see therein the orders, prohibitions, exhortations and warnings)? Will you not understand and come to your senses? (2)** |  |



**61.3. Most odious it is in the sight of God that you say what you do not (and will not) do.(3)**



**9.71. The believers, both men and women: they are guardians, confidants, and helpers of one another. They enjoin and promote what is right and good, and forbid and try to prevent the evil, and they establish the Prescribed Prayer in conformity with its conditions, and pay the Prescribed Purifying Alms. They obey God and His Messenger. They are the ones whom God will treat with mercy. Surely God is All-Glorious with irresistible might, All-Wise.(4)**



**11.117. And it has never been the way of your Lord to destroy the townships unjustly while their people were righteous, dedicated to continuous self-reform and setting things right in the society.(5)**

**Enjoining Good and Forbidding Evil**

**106.** Abu Said al-Khudri, may Allah be pleased with him, said, “I heard the Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, say, ‘Whoever of you sees something wrong should change it with his hand; if he cannot, then with his tongue; if he cannot, then with his heart, and that is the weakest form of belief.’” (Sahih Muslim, Iman, 78).(6)

**110.** Abu Said al-Khudri, may Allah be pleased with him, reported that the Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “Beware of sitting in the roadways.” They said, “O Messenger of Allah. we must have places where we can sit and talk together.” The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, said, “If you must sit there, then give the roadway its rights.” They asked, “What are the rights of the roadway, O Messenger of Allah?” He said, “Lowering the eye, refraining from causing annoyance, returning the greeting, commanding the right and forbidding the wrong.” (Sahih al-Bukhari, Mazalim, 22; Sahih Muslim, Libas 114).(7)

# AMR BI-MA’RUF WA AN-NAHY AN AL-MUNKAR

# (Enjoining the Good and Forbidding the Evil)

Abu Said al-Khudri, may Allah be well pleased with him, said, “I heard the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, say: ‘Whoever of you sees something wrong should change it with his hand; if he cannot, then with his tongue; if he cannot, then with his heart, and that is the weakest form of belief.’” (*Sahih Muslim*, Iman, 78. See also: *Sunan at-Tirmidhi*, Fitan, 11; *Sunan an-Nasa’i*, Iman, 17).

 *Ma’ruf* denotes a thing accepted as good in Islam and encompasses everything in the sphere of obedience to Allah. On the contrary, *Munkar* are those things not approved of in Islam and deemed to be transgression against Allah. The responsibility of enjoining the *ma’ruf* and forbidding the *munkar* is religiously incumbent upon Muslims. The obligatory nature of this has been established with the Book and the Sunnah. In addition, this religious obligation is one of the greatest of all religious obligations and constitutes the backbone of the religion. The formation of a group that would realize this mission is a collective duty (*fard al-kifaya*). The Muslim community is obligated to raise a community to fulfill this duty. If this is not accomplished, the entire community will be held accountable and cannot be absolved from responsibility.

Allah declares: “*The hypocrites, both men and women, are all of a kind: enjoining and promoting what is evil and forbidding and trying to prevent what is right and good*…” (at-Tawbah 9:67). However, the qualities of the believers in this regard are described thus: “*The believers, both men and women, they are guardians, confidants, and helpers of one another. They enjoin and promote what is right and good and forbid and try to prevent the evil*…” (at-Tawbah 9:71).

Is the duty of enjoining the good and preventing the evil merely the duty of a community established solely for this task? Don’t human beings hold individual responsibilities in this regard? The obligation of promoting the good and trying to prevent the evil is common to all believers. Such verses as, “*Do you enjoin upon people holiness and virtue but forget your own selves*,” (al-Baqarah 2:44) and “*Most odious it is in the sight of Allah that you say what you do not (and will not) do*,” (as-Saff 61:3) demonstrate that all individuals in society are charged with the duty of enjoining the good and forbidding the evil. No one can absolve themselves in this regard. Advocating the good and striving to prevent the evil to the best of their ability is a command that is absolutely binding on every individual Muslim (*fard al-ayn*).

1. Muslim scholars have asserted that, in the general sense, changing something that is wrong with one’s hand is the duty of administrators, changing it with one’s tongue is the duty of scholars, and changing it with the heart falls upon the people, and those unable to actualize the others. If changing an evil is going to give rise to even greater disorder and evil, such as killing, than one must suffice with changing it verbally, or by means of advice and counsel. If speaking is similarly going to endanger or threaten, then trying to change that wrong with one’s heart must be preferred. Implied in changing something with one’s heart is to view that thing as repugnant and to abhor it inwardly.

2. *Amr bi-ma’ruf wa an-nahy an al-munkar* is a path leading to the purpose of one’s creation. Allah revealed for display the palace of the universe for precisely this reason and again charged the human being therein with this mission. “*There must be among you a community calling to good, and enjoining and actively promoting what is right, and forbidding and trying to prevent evil (in appropriate ways). They are those who are the prosperous*” (Al Imran 3:104). Indeed, there must be in society, a community carrying out *Amr bi-ma’ruf wa an-nahy an al-munkar*, inviting to good and prevent wickedness, showing human beings what is true and right, and who are themselves upon the path of righteousness.

If there, is in a particular place, a community enjoining the good and striving to prevent evil, Allah the Almighty promises to protect the people of that place from all afflictions and disasters. It is not possible for another to provide such a guarantee. He declares:

And it has never been the way of your Lord to destroy the townships unjustly while their people were righteous, dedicated to continuous self-reform and setting things right in the society. (Hud 11:117)

Allah does not impose punishment upon a place wherein the duty of calling people to what is right and working to prevent the wrong is realized. Thus, the Prophet states, “Anyone who creates a good Sunnah in Islam has its reward.” It is not possible to consider the enterprise of promoting good and preventing evil without reflecting upon Mus’ab ibn Umayr, his self-sacrifice, his endeavors, as well as his method:

**The First Teacher**

The Medinan natives who had embraced Islam at the first Aqaba Allegiance wrote to the Messenger of Allah, saying: “O Messenger of Allah, Islam has been declared among us and has begun to spread. Send to us a person who will invite the people to the Book of Allah, to recite the Qur’an to us, teach us the religion of Islam, demonstrate and establish its practices and commandments, and lead us in the Prayer.” Upon this, Allah’s Messenger appointed Mus’ab ibn Umayr to Medina, instructing him to teach the natives of Medina how to read the Qur’an, to teach them Islam, to help them understand its commandments and prohibitions, and to lead them in Prayer.

Mus’ab ibn Umayr reached Medina in a short time and was greeted with great jubilation. He was hosted at the residence of As’ad ibn Zurara, one of the first Medinan Muslims. There, he began to teach the people their religion and, by virtue of his great efforts and service, Islam spread rapidly throughout the city until it reached every house.

#### LESSONS FROM THE HADITH

1. The establishment of an administration that would promote the good and work to prevent evil, raising scholars to realize this task, and forming a community to undertake this endeavor is a collective obligation upon the Muslims.

2. Advocating what is right and trying to prevent what is wrong is a duty that is absolutely binding upon every Muslim, to their own ability and capacity.

3. Preventing evil in society with the hand is, broadly speaking, the duty of administrators, prevention with the tongue, or through verbal communication, teaching, counsel and advice, is the duty of scholars and the learned, and reacting to evil with the heart, expressing abhorrence and aversion, is the duty of the community.

4. Promoting the good and trying to prevent the evil is the common responsibility of the Muslim community. (8)

# RETURNING EVIL WITH GOOD

Wickedness is weak, even when it seems to be victori- ous. In fact wickedness cannot escape the destiny of its ultimate destruction. Goodness, honesty, and righteousness are the conquerors of the heart, and they are powerful in and of themselves. When good and evil truly come head to head with one another, there are very few people who will not respect good and despise evil. This clearly demonstrates that goodness and evil cannot be one.

It is goodness to forgive a wrong. But  to  return  evil  with good on top of forgiveness is to win over the heart of the one who was against you.

And none are ever enabled to attain it (such great virtue) save those who are patient (in adversities and against the temptations of their souls and Satan), and none are ever enabled to attain it save those who have a great part in human perfections and vir- tues. And if a prompting from Satan should stir in you (when carrying out your mission or during worship or in your daily life), seek refuge in God immediately. He is the One Who is the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing. (Fussilat 41:35–36)

In terms of the struggle between good and evil, Satan is griev- ously disappointed when believers respond to evil with good. For he wants the believers to do something wrong, even some small reaction, so that he can use it to create doubts in the believers. In fact, if the believers show even the tiniest bit of excess in their re- sponse to those who attack them, some might say that “they were influenced by Satan’s whispers.” This will cause the believers to lose a large part of their power. By reacting they cast a small shad- ow over their righteousness, even if they were completely in the right, and those who see this shadow will have, to some extent, an excuse. The following hadith provides a very useful commentary on the verse above:

One day a man came up to Abu Bakr and began to heap in- sults on him. The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, was also there. As the man insulted him, Abu Bakr listened but gave no reply. The Prophet was smiling. Finally Abu Bakr could no longer stand it and gave a harsh retort. The Prophet’s countenance changed and he left. Abu Bakr followed him out to ask him why he left. He answered, “When you were quiet, there was an angel answering on your behalf. But when you opened your mouth, Satan showed up. I cannot stay in the same place as Satan.”23

In relation to this issue of repelling falsehood with truth and responding with what is the best in conduct, the Qur’an says,

(But whatever they may say or do,) repel the evil (done to you and committed against your mission) with the best  (of what you can do). We know best all that they falsely attribute to Us. And say, “My Lord! I seek refuge in You from the promptings and provocations of the satans (of the jinn and humankind especially in my relations with people, while I am performing my mission). I seek refuge in You, my Lord, lest they be present with me.” (Mu’minun 23:96–98)

Just as one must refuse to heed slights and wrongs, it is also important to respond to wrongs with the best possible positive action.

Adopt the way of forbearance and tolerance, and enjoin what is good and right, and withdraw from the ignorant ones (do not care what they say and do). And if a  prompting  from Satan should cause you hurt (as you carry out your mission or during worship or in your everyday life), seek refuge in God. He is All-Hearing, All-Knowing. (A’raf 7:199–200)

A believer is commanded to take refuge in God when  they hear any whispers from within themselves that urge them to take an  action  that  is  against  God’s  commands  and  which  will  not please God. In every situation when a person is subject to such whispers regarding the essentials of faith, worship, prohibitions, or how to treat people— in short, any aspect of life—they must turn to God and seek His protection. On the surface, the verse above seems to be addressed to the Prophet, but it is in fact intended for all people.

Those who keep from disobedience to God in  reverence  for Him and piety: when a suggestion from Satan touches them— they are alert and remember God, and then they have clear dis- cernment. Whereas their brothers (the brothers of the satans in the form of human beings)—satans draw them deeper into error and do not relax in their efforts. (A’raf 7:201–202)

Those who refrain from setting themselves against God never feel completely secure that they will do no wrong. Satan also tries to influence them. He can cloud their vision and they are poten- tially susceptible to the images and ideas he puts in their heads. But before long they will perceive the  truth,  remembering  that they must seek refuge in God; their understanding will become clear and thus they will be saved from doing wrong.

Consider the promise of reward announced by our Prophet for the person who avoids an argument, even if they are in the right: “For the person who avoids an argument, even when they are in the right, I guarantee a mansion in the corner of Heaven. And for the one who never lies, even in jest, there is a mansion in the center of Heaven. And for the person of good morals, I guar- antee a mansion at the highest level of Heaven.”24 (9)

**References**

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