

Fast 13: Religious principles taught to Israelites — (7) Don't neglect your own soul!

- Continuing along the group of verses from ch. 2 that we are discussing (see Study 10), the next two are as follows:

<p>“⁴³And keep up prayer and give the due charity and bow down with those who bow down. ⁴⁴Do you tell people to be good and neglect your own souls while you read the Book? Have you then no sense?— ch. 2, v. 43–44</p>	<p>وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَارْكَعُوا مَعَ الرَّاكِعِينَ ﴿٤٣﴾ أَتَأْمُرُونَ النَّاسَ بِالْبِرِّ وَتَنْسَوْنَ أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ تَتْلُونَ الْكِتَابَ أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾</p>
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Here v. 43 indicates the two fundamental practical duties of human beings in religion. It says that this was taught to the Israelites. Of course, it applies to Muslims also.

- Prayer expresses the relationship between a person and God. Charity expresses the relationship between a person and the creatures and the creation of God, most importantly other people. Bowing down with those who bow down indicates that prayer is not only individual but also a communal activity. That too is a means of strengthening bonds in society. But “bowing” also implies that in prayer there should be true humility of the heart.
- Verse 44 points out a great failing of religious leaders and preachers. They tell the masses to do good deeds but neglect to do the same themselves. Similar ideas are expressed elsewhere in the Quran as well:

<p>“O you who believe, why do you say things which you do not do? It is most hateful in the sight of Allah that you say things which you do not do.” — ch. 61, v. 2–3</p>	<p>يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لِمَ تَقُولُونَ مَا لَا تَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٢﴾ كَبُرَ مَقْتًا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَنْ تَقُولُوا مَا لَا تَفْعَلُونَ ﴿٣﴾</p>
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It is not only in the case of **telling others** to do good while not applying it to yourself. More generally, just saying that **you will do** something which you regard as good and necessary, or merely talking that a certain thing needs to be done, but not doing anything, is condemned here as hateful in the sight of God.

Then there is the following verse in chapter 5:

<p>“O you who believe, take care of your souls — he who goes astray cannot harm you when you are on the right way.” — ch. 5, v. 105</p>	<p>يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا عَلَيْكُمْ أَنْفُسَكُمْ لَا يَضُرُّكُمْ مَن ضَلَّ إِذَا اهْتَدَيْتُمْ</p>
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The concern for others, that they should be on the right path, is no good if you are not taking care of your own soul. Even if they are on the wrong path, this cannot harm you, it cannot reflect badly on you, it cannot make you responsible for their actions, as long as you take care of your own soul and behaviour.

- It is stated in hadith that Ibrahim at-Taimi, a preacher of Islam of early times, said: “Whenever I applied my words to my deeds I feared that I would become a denier (of faith)”. In other words, he was afraid that if his deeds were judged by his words, by what he preached to others, he would be condemned as a denier of faith, one who didn’t act according to the faith.

Another person is reported as saying: “I met thirty persons from among the Companions of the Prophet, every one of whom was afraid of committing hypocrisy on his own part.” They were cautious in the highest degree lest their deeds did not match their words.

Another early Muslim scholar said: “No one is afraid of it but a believer, and no one feels secure from it but a hypocrite.” Only a believer is *afraid* that his deeds might not be according to his words, and it is only a hypocrite who *feels safe and secure*, unworried and unbothered, whether or not his deeds match up to his words.

- The failing of the Jewish priests and clerics mentioned in v. 44 was also condemned by Jesus. He told a crowd about these teachers of the law and clerics that they:
 - “sit in the seat of Moses. So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach. They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them. Everything they do is done for people to see.” (Matthew, 23:2–5)
 - He said directly to the religious lawyers: “And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them.” (Luke, 11:46)

This shows that, apart from not practising the good things they preached to people, they also made acting on religion a heavy load and burden on people. The Quran relates this because the same would happen among Muslims. This is why the Quran taught them to pray:

<p>“Our Lord, do not lay on us a burden as You did lay on those before us.” — ch. 2, v. 286</p>	<p>رَبَّنَا وَلَا تَحْمِلْ عَلَيْنَا إِمْرًا كَمَا حَمَلْتَهُ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِن قَبْلِنَا</p>
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Of course, it is not meant here that God laid these burdens upon people. This was done by their religious leaders. But it is mentioned in this way because it was something which happened. The prayer is that the same should not happen to us.