



(Part No : 7, Page No: 285)

Forsaking congregational prayers without a legal excuse

The fourth question of Fatwa no. 1591

Q 4: What is the ruling on a person who offers Salah in his house without an excuse? Is he a disbeliever? If he is not, how do you explain the account relating that one of the Sahabah (Companions of the Prophet) was asked about a man who fasts during the day and performs optional Payer at night but does not attend Jumu`ah (Friday) or Congregational Prayers. He answered, "He is in Hellfire"?

A: Whoever offers the Five Obligatory Daily Prayers or one of them in his house without an excuse is not a disbeliever. However, he has committed a sin for abandoning an obligatory act i.e. offering Congregational Prayer at a Masjid (Mosque). Allah says, ﴿ When you (O Messenger Muhammad peace be upon him) are among them, and lead them in As-Salât (the prayer), let one party of them stand up [in Salât (prayer)] with you taking their arms with them; when they finish their prostrations, let them take their positions in the rear and let the other party come up which have not yet prayed, and let them pray with you taking all the precautions and bearing arms. Those who disbelieve wish, if you were negligent of your arms and your baggage, to attack you in a single rush... ﴾ Evidently, Allah orders Muslims to offer prayers congregationally in the most critical and frightening situations. The first party ends the final half of the prayer and says the final salutation before the Imam. The permissibility of this deed denotes that the obligatory prayer offered congregationally with the Imam is obligatory. It is even more obligatory than following the Imam in prayer so that he does not precede or synchronize

(Part No : 7, Page No: 286)

with the Imam's movements and sayings. Another evidence on the obligation of congregational prayers is the following Hadith in which the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, ﴿ Whoever hears the call (Adhan) and he does not come to it (the prayer), his prayer is rejected unless he is excused. ﴾ Related by Ibn Majah, Al-Daraqutny, Ibn Hibban and Al-Hakim. Its chain of transmission accords with the conditions stipulated by Muslim. On the authority of Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) that ﴿ A blind man came to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and said, 'O Messenger of Allah! I have no one to guide me to the mosque.' He, therefore, asked Allah's Messenger (peace be upon him) to permit him to offer prayer in his house. The Prophet called him and said, 'Do you hear the call to prayer?' He said, 'Yes'. He (the Prophet then) said, 'Respond to it.' ﴾

Related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih (authentic) Book on the authority of Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said, ﴿ I would order that wood be gathered and the Call to Salah (prayer) be pronounced, then order a man to lead the people in Salah, then I would go from behind some men (who do not attend the congregational prayer in the mosque) and burn their houses down while they are inside. By the One in Whose Hand is my soul, if any of

them only knew that he would find a fat bone covered with meat or two good pieces of meat in a sheep's hoof, he would have attended the `Isha' (Evening) Prayer.)It has been related by Al-Bukhari in his Sahih on the authority of Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said, (No prayer is more burdensome on the hypocrites than Fajr and `Isha' (Dawn and Evening Prayers); if only they knew what (goodness) there is in them, they would have come to them, even if they had to crawl. I was going to order the Mu'adhin (caller to Salah) to call for commencing Salah (prayer), then order a man to lead the people in Salah, and then I would take a flame of fire and burn (the houses) of those who have not come out yet to Salah (in congregation in the Masjid).)

(Part No : 7, Page No: 287)

Whoever does not attend the Jumu`ah or the congregational Prayers deserves to be thrown into Hell-Fire for forsaking one of the duties of Islam, i.e. offering the five Obligatory Prayers in congregation as well as the Jumu`ah Prayer. If he denies the obligation of congregational prayers or that of Jumu`ah Prayer on eligible Muslims, then he is to be regarded a disbeliever who will be punished in Hell-Fire. On the other hand, if he believes in both obligations but misses the prayers due to laziness, he will be punished in Hell-Fire according to the degree of his sin. He will remain in Hell-Fire until Allah forgives him. As long as the reason behind leaving Jumu`ah or the congregational Prayers is not the denial of their obligation, he will be punished in hell and finally be admitted into Paradise. Allah says, (Verily, Allâh forgives not that partners should be set up with Him (in worship), but He forgives except that (anything else) to whom He wills)The Hadith dealing with major sins other than Shirk (associating others in worship with Allah) state that the wrongdoer will be punished until Allah forgives him, then he will be admitted into Paradise.

As for the account mentioned in the question, it was reported on the authority of Ibn `Abbas (may Allah be pleased with them both) as follows: Someone asked him about a man who observes fasting daily and offering the night prayer nightly but does not witness the Jumu`ah and the congregational Prayers. He replied, 'He will be punished in Hell- Fire.'

(Part No : 7, Page No: 288)

Assuming that this account is authentic, its meaning is apparent in the explanation mentioned above.

May Allah grant us success! May peace and blessings be upon our Prophet Muhammad, his family and Companions!

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