358112 - Ruling on praying on one’s own behind the row for fear of being infected with covid-19

the question

What is the ruling if I entered the mosque to pray, and I found that people were not following the social distancing rules during the covid-19 pandemic, and when I spoke up about that, they said: This is our way, so I went to the back of the mosque and prayed standing on my own, following the imam?

Summary of answer

There is nothing wrong with standing on one’s own behind the row for a reason, such as finding that the row is complete, as the obligatory parts of the prayer – in general – are waived when there is a valid excuse. If someone is afraid of catching some sickness or becoming infected with covid-19, so he prays on his own standing behind the row, his prayer is valid, because even though he omitted something obligatory, he omitted it for a valid reason.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Praying standing on one’s own behind the row

The jurists differed regarding the prayer of someone who stands on his own behind the row . The majority are of the view that it is disliked (makruh), and the Hanbalis are of the view that it is invalid if he stands on his own for a complete rak`ah.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah and a number of other scholars were of the view that the prayer is valid and there is no sin if the person stood on his own for a valid reason.

It says in *Al-Mawsu`ah al-Fiqhiyyah* (23/183): The basic principle regarding prayer in congregation is that the worshippers should form compact rows, as explained above. Therefore it is disliked for someone to pray standing on his own behind the rows with no excuse, but his prayer is valid, although it is disliked. It is not disliked if there is a good reason for doing that, as we will explain below.

This is according to the majority of jurists – the Hanafis, Malikis and Shafa`is.

The basic principle regarding that is what al-Bukhari narrated from Abu Bakrah: that he came to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) when he was bowing, so he bowed before he reached the row. He mentioned that to the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) and he said: “May Allah increase you in eagerness; do not do that again.”

The jurists said: From this it may be understood that it is not required to repeat the prayer, and that the command mentioned in the hadith of Wabisah ibn Ma`bad – which was narrated by at-Tirmidhi, according to which the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) saw a man praying behind the row, so he instructed him to repeat the prayer – was only by way of recommendation, so as to reconcile between the two texts.

According to the Hanbalis, the prayer of the one who prays an entire rak`ah standing on his own behind the row with no excuse becomes invalid, because of the hadith of Wabisah ibn Ma`bad, according to which the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) saw a man praying behind the row on his own, so he instructed him to repeat the prayer.

And it was narrated from `Ali ibn Shayban that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) led them in prayer, then when he finished the prayer he noticed a man praying on his own behind the row. The Prophet of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) waited for him to finish his prayer, then he said: “Repeat your prayer; there is no prayer for the one who stands behind the row [on his own].” Narrated by Ibn Majah.

With regard to the hadith of Abu Bakrah, the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did not tell him to repeat the prayer, but he said: “Do not do that again.” This instruction not to do

that again indicates that the prayer is invalid, but he excused him for what he did because he was unaware that it is prohibited, and being unaware of the ruling has an impact on pardoning a person. End quote.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Similar to that is the case of a man who does not find anywhere to stand except behind the row. This is subject to a difference of opinion between those who say that the prayer of the one who stands on his own behind the row is invalid.

The more correct view is that his prayer is valid in this situation, because all obligatory parts of the prayer are waived when one is unable to do them.

Similarly, the prayer of one who stands ahead of the imam if there is a need to do so is valid, as is the view of some scholars, and it is also one view in the madhhab of Ahmad.(*Majmu` al-Fatawa*, 23/396).

He (may Allah have mercy on him) also said: The story of the woman indicates two things:

It indicates that if there is no one else behind the row with whom he could stand, and he is not able to join the row, he may pray standing on his own because of necessity. This is by way of analogy, because the obligatory parts of prayer are waived in the case of necessity. The command to the worshipper to have someone else stand beside him is one of the obligatory parts of the prayer, but if it is not possible to do that, it is waived because of necessity, as other obligatory parts of the prayer may be waived because of necessity, in cases such as the fear prayer, so that the worshipper will be able to catch up with the prayer in congregation.

Similarly, if he cannot pray with the congregation except by standing ahead of the imam, he should pray there, because there is a valid reason to pray ahead of him. This is the view of several groups of scholars, and it is one of the two views in the madhhab of Ahmad, even though they do not think it is permissible to stand ahead of the imam if it is possible not to do that.

Generally speaking, standing in the row is not more important than the other actions of prayer, so

if other actions can be waived when there is a valid reason, then by the same token, when praying in congregation it is more appropriate that this action [standing in the row] may be waived if there is a valid reason.

One of the general principles is that in cases of necessity, what one is unable to do of obligatory duties is no longer obligatory, and what one is compelled to do without intending to commit sin is no longer prohibited.

Allah has not made obligatory on a person what he is unable to do, and He has not forbidden what a person is compelled to do.(*Majmu` al-Fata*, 20/559).

Shaykh Ibn `Uthaymin (may Allah have mercy on him) said: The more correct view is that prayer is not valid if it is offered standing on one's own behind the row, unless it is not possible to stand in the row, such as if the row is complete. In that case, he should pray standing on his own behind the row, following the imam, because he is excused, and an action is not obligatory when one is unable to do it, as the scholars (may Allah have mercy on them) said.

The Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) made a woman stand behind the row on her own behind the men for a valid reason, which is that she cannot stand with the men. So a physical reason [i.e., when the row is full] also waives the obligation of standing in the row.(*Majmu` Fatawa wa Rasa'il al-`Uthaymin*, 15/193).

From this it is known:

that there is nothing wrong with standing on one's own behind the row for a reason, such as finding that the row is complete, as the obligatory parts of the prayer – in general – are waived when there is a valid excuse.

Based on that, if someone is afraid of catching some sickness, so he prays on his own behind the row, his prayer is valid, because even though he omitted something obligatory, he omitted it for a valid reason.

And Allah knows best.