5208 - What Happens If You Don't Pray Out of Laziness?

the question

If you do not pray salat out of laziness on purpose, are you a disbeliever or just a bad Muslim? Please answer.

Summary of answer

-Neglecting prayer out of laziness has serious consequences in Islam. According to Quranic verses and authentic Hadiths, abandoning prayer is classified as major disbelief, which takes a person outside the fold of Islam.
-Renowned scholars, including Imam Ahmad, have affirmed that failing to pray out of laziness is a form of disbelief.
-Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of prayer as the distinguishing factor between a believer and a disbeliever.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Does Abandoning Prayer Make You a Disbeliever?

Imam Ahmad (may Allah have mercy on him) said that the one who does not pray because of laziness is a disbeliever . This is the more correct view and is that indicated by the evidence of the Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger, and by the words of the Salaf and the proper understanding. (End quote from Ash-Sharh Al-Mumti` `ala Zad Al-Mustanqi`, 2/26)

Quranic and Sunnah Evidence on Not Praying

Anyone who examines the texts of the Quran and Sunnah will see that they indicate that the one who neglects the prayer is guilty of major disbelief which puts him beyond the pale of Islam.

Among the evidence to be found in the Quran is:

- The verse (interpretation of the meaning): {But if they repent [by rejecting Shirk (polytheism) and accept Islamic Monotheism], perform As-Salat (Iqamat As-Salat) and give Zakat, then they are your brethren in religion.} [At-Tawbah 9:11]

The evidence derived from this verse is that Allah defined three things that the polytheists have to do in order to eliminate the differences between them and us: they should repent from polytheism, they should perform prayer, and they should pay Zakah. If they repent from polytheism but they do not perform the prayer or pay Zakah, then they are not our brethren in faith; if they perform the prayer but do not pay Zakah, then they are not our brethren in faith. Brotherhood in religion cannot be effaced except when a person goes out of the religion completely; it cannot be effaced by immoral conduct or lesser types of disbelief.

- Allah also says (interpretation of the meaning):

{Then, there has succeeded them a posterity who have given up As-Salah (the prayers) [i.e. made their prayers to be lost, either by not offering them or by not offering them perfectly or by not offering them in their proper fixed times] and have followed lusts. So they will be thrown into Hell. Except those who repent and believe (in the Oneness of Allah and His Messenger Muhammad), and work righteousness. Such will enter Paradise and they will not be wronged in aught.} [Maryam 19:59-60]

Hadiths on Abandoning Prayer

The evidence derived from this verse is that Allah referred to those who neglect the prayer and follow their desires, Except those who repent and believe, which indicates that at the time when

they are neglecting their prayers and following their desires, they are not believers.

The evidence of the Sunnah that proves that the one who neglects the prayer is a disbeliever includes the Hadith of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him): “Between a man and shirk and disbelief there stands his neglect of the prayer.” (Narrated by Muslim in Kitab Al-Iman on the authority of Jabir ibn `Abdullah from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)).

It was narrated that Buraydah ibn Al-Husayb (may Allah be pleased with him) said: “I heard the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) say: ‘The covenant that distinguishes between us and them is the prayer, and whoever neglects it has disbelieved (become a disbeliever).’” (Narrated by Ahmad, Abu Dawud, At-Tirmidhi, An-Nasa’i and Ibn Majah).

What is meant here by disbelief is the kind of disbelief which puts a person beyond the pale of Islam, because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) made prayer the dividing line between the believers and the disbelievers. It is known that the community of disbelief is not the same as the community of Islam, so whoever does not fulfil this covenant must be one of the disbelievers.

There is also the Hadith of `Awf ibn Malik (may Allah be pleased with him), according to which the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “The best of your leaders are those whom you love and who love you, who pray for you and you pray for them. The worst of your leaders are those whom you hate and who hate you, and you send curses on them and they send curses on you.” He was asked, “O Messenger of Allah, should we not fight them by the sword?” He said, “Not as long as they are establishing prayer amongst you.”

This Hadith indicates that those in authority should be opposed and fought if they do not establish prayer, but it is not permissible to oppose and fight them unless they make a blatant show of disbelief and we have evidence from Allah that what they are doing is indeed disbelief.

`Ubadah ibn As-Samit (may Allah be pleased with him) said: “The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) called us and we gave Bay`ah (oath of allegiance) to him. Among

the things that we pledged to do was to listen and obey him both when we felt enthusiastic and when we were disinclined to act, both at times of difficulty and times of ease, and at times when others were given preference over us, and that we would not oppose those in authority. He said: 'unless they made a blatant show of disbelief and you have evidence from Allah that what they are doing is indeed disbelief.'" (Narrated by Al-Bukhari and Muslim)

On this basis, their neglecting the prayer, for which the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said we should oppose them and fight them by the sword, constitutes an act of blatant disbelief for which we have evidence from Allah that it is indeed disbelief.

Does Neglecting Prayer Mean Disbelief?

If someone were to say: is it not permissible to interpret the texts about a person who neglects prayer being a disbeliever as referring to the one who neglects the prayer because he does not think it is obligatory?

We would say: it is not permissible to interpret the texts in this way because there are two reservations about this interpretation:

1. it involves ignoring the general description that the Lawgiver took into consideration and to which the ruling was connected. The ruling that the person who neglects prayer is a disbeliever is connected to the action of neglecting prayer, not to his denial of it being obligatory. Brotherhood in religion is based on performing the prayer, not on whether a person declares it to be obligatory. Allah did not say, "If they repent and state that the prayer is obligatory", and the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) did not say "Between a man and shirk and disbelief there stands his denial that the prayer is obligatory" or "The covenant that distinguishes between us and them is our statement that the prayer is obligatory, so whoever denies that it is obligatory has disbelieved." If this is what Allah and His Messenger had meant, then not stating it clearly would have contradicted what is said in the Quran. For Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

{And We have sent down to you the Book (the Quran) as an exposition of everything.} [An-Nahl 16:89]

{And We have also sent down unto you (O Muhammad) the Dhikr [reminder and the advice (i.e. the Quran)], that you may explain clearly to men what is sent down to them.} [Al-Nahl 16:44]

It is not correct to refer to a reason which the Lawgiver did not make a factor in ruling a person to be a disbeliever, because if a person who does not have the excuse of ignorance denies that the five daily prayers are obligatory then he is deemed to be a disbeliever, whether he prays or not. If a person performs the five daily prayers, fulfilling all the conditions of prayer and doing all the actions that are obligatory or recommended, but he denies that the prayers are obligatory with no valid reason for doing so, then he is a disbeliever, even though he is not neglecting the prayers. From this it is clear that it is not correct to interpret the texts about neglecting the prayers as referring to denying that they are obligatory.

The correct view is that the person who neglects the prayer is a disbeliever who is beyond the pale of Islam, as is clearly stated in the report narrated by Ibn Abu Hatim in his Sunan from `Ubadah ibn As-Samit (may Allah be pleased with him), who said: “The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) exhorted us: ‘Do not associate anything in worship with Allah, and do not neglect the prayer deliberately, for whoever neglects the prayer deliberately puts himself beyond the pale of Islam.”

Moreover, if we interpret the Hadiths about neglecting the prayer as referring to a denial that it is obligatory, there would be no point in the reports referring specifically to the prayer, because this ruling applies equally to Zakah, fasting and Hajj – whoever neglects any of these, denying that it is obligatory, is a disbeliever, if he does not have the excuse of ignorance.

Just as the one who neglects the prayer is deemed to be a disbeliever on the basis of the evidence of the texts and reports, so he may also be deemed to be a disbeliever on the basis of rational analysis.

How can a person be a believer if he neglects the prayer which is the pillar of religion, and when

there are verses and Hadiths urging us to perform prayer which make the wise believer rush to do the prayer, and when there are verses and Hadiths warning against neglecting it, which make the wise believer scared to ignore the prayer? Once we have understood this, a person cannot be a believer if he neglects the prayer.

If a person were to say: can we not interpret disbelief in the case of one who neglects the prayer as meaning a lesser form of disbelief (Disbelief An-Na`mah) rather than the kind of disbelief which puts a person beyond the pale of Islam (Disbelief Al-Millah)?

Or can we not interpret it as being less than major disbelief and more like the disbelief referred to in the Hadiths, “There are two qualities that exist among people which are qualities of disbelief: slandering people’s lineage and wailing over the dead” and “Trading insults with a Muslim is Fisq (immoral conduct) and exchanging blows with him is disbelief”, etc.?

We would say that this interpretation is not correct for a number of reasons:

1. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) made prayer the dividing line between disbelief and faith, between the believer and the disbeliever. This is where he drew the line, and the two things are quite distinct and do not overlap.
2. Prayer is one of the pillars of Islam, so when the person who neglects it is described as a disbeliever, this implies the kind of disbelief that puts a person beyond the pale of Islam, because he has destroyed one of the pillars of Islam. This is a different matter from attributing disbelief to a person who does one of the actions of disbelief.
3. There are other texts which indicate that the disbelief of the one who neglects the prayer is the kind of disbelief which puts a person beyond the pale of Islam, so what is meant here by disbelief should be interpreted according to the apparent meaning, so as to avoid contradictions between the texts.
4. The description of disbelief in those Hadiths is different. Concerning neglecting the prayer, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: “Between a man and shirk and disbelief.” Here the word disbelief is preceded in the original Arabic by the definite article “al”, which indicates that what is referred to here is the reality of disbelief. This is in contrast

to the other Hadiths where disbelief is referred to without the definite article, or in a verbal form, which indicates that this is a part of disbelief or that the person has disbelieved by doing this action, but it is not the absolute disbelief which places a person beyond the pale of Islam.

Shaykh Al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said in his book Iqtida' As-Sirat Al-Mustaqim (p. 70, As-Sunnah Al-Muhammadiyyah edn.), concerning the Hadith of the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)" ""There are two qualities that exist among people which are qualities of disbelief":

"The phrase 'which are qualities of disbelief' means that these two qualities which exist among people are qualities of disbelief because they are among the deeds of disbelief and they exist among people. But not everyone who has a part of disbelief becomes a disbeliever because of it, unless there exists in his heart the reality of disbelief. Similarly, not everyone who has a part of faith becomes a believer because of it, unless there exists in his heart the essential reality of faith.

So there is a distinction between disbelief that is preceded [in the original Arabic] by the definite article "al" - such as in the Hadith 'Between a man and polytheism and disbelief there stands nothing but his neglecting the prayer', - and disbelief that is not preceded by the definite article but is used in an affirmative sense.'"

So it is clear that the person who neglects the prayer with no excuse is a disbeliever who is beyond the pale of Islam, on the basis of this evidence.

This is the correct view according to Imam Ahmad, and it is one of the two opinions narrated from Ash-Shafi`i, as was mentioned by Ibn Kathir in his Tafsir of the verse (interpretation of the meaning):

{Then, there has succeeded them a posterity who have given up As-Salat (the prayers) [i.e. made their prayers to be lost, either by not offering them or by not offering them perfectly or by not offering them in their proper fixed times] and have followed lusts.} [Maryam 19:59]

Ibn Al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) mentioned in his book As-Salah that it was one of the two views narrated from Al-Shafa'i, and that At-Tah-hawi narrated it from Ash-Shafi`'i himself.

This was also the view of the majority of the Companions, indeed many narrated that there was consensus among the Companions on this point. `Abdullah ibn Shaqiq said: the companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) did not think that neglecting any deed made a person a disbeliever, apart from neglecting the prayer.

This was reported by At-Tirmidhi and Al-Hakim, who classed it as authentic according to the conditions of Al-Bukhari and Muslim).

Is-haq ibn Rahawayh (may Allah have mercy on him), said, It was reported with an authentic chain of narration from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) that the one who neglects the prayer is a disbeliever.

This was also the view of the scholars from the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) until the present day: that the person who deliberately neglects the prayer with no valid excuse, until the time for that prayer is over, is a disbeliever.

Ibn Hazm (may Allah have mercy on him) said that it was reported on the authority of `Umar, `Abd Ar-Rahman ibn `Awf, Mu`adh ibn Jabal, Abu Hurayrah and others among the Companions. He said: "We do not know of any opposing view among the Companions."

Al-Mundhiri (may Allah have mercy on him) narrated this from him in At-Targhib wat-Tarhib, and added more names of Companions: `Abdullah ibn Mas`ud, `Abdullah ibn `Abbas, Jabir ibn `Abdullah and Abud-Darda' – may Allah be pleased with them.

He said: apart from the Companions, there are also Ahmad ibn Hanbal, Is-haq ibn Rahawayh, `Abdullah ibn Al-Mubarak, An-Nakha`i, Al-Hakam ibn `Utaybah, Ayyub As-Sakhtayani, Abu Dawud At-Tayalisi, Abu Bakr ibn Abu Shaybah, Zuhayr ibn Harb and others.

And Allah knows best.