

Jābir said: I heard the Prophet (peace be upon him) say:



‘What separates a person from disbelief and associating partners with God is negligence of prayer’.⁽¹⁾

From the Qur’an

- ﴿Attend regularly to your prayers, particularly the middle prayer, and stand up before God in devout obedience.﴾ (2: 238)
- ﴿Every soul is held in pledge for what it has wrought, (38) except for those on the right hand. (39) They will be in gardens, and will ask (40) about the guilty ones: (41) ‘What brought you into the scorching Fire?’ (42) They will answer: ‘We were not among those who prayed’.﴾ (74: 38-43)

The Narrator

Abu ‘Abdullāh Jābir ibn ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Amr ibn Ḥarām al-Anṣārī belonged to the Salimah clan of the Anṣār. He attended the second pledge given by the Anṣār to the Prophet at Aqabah. He was a youth at the time, accompanying his father who was one of the twelve representatives. His father took part in the battles of Badr and Uḥud. It is reported that Jābir took part in the Battle of Ṣiffīn alongside ‘Alī ibn Abi Ṭālib. He was also at one time the mufti of Madinah. He died in Year 78 AH, 698 CE. Thus, he was the last survivor of the Prophet’s companions who had attended the second Aqabah pledge of the Anṣār.

Summary

The Prophet (peace be upon him) states clearly that the difference between Islam and unbelief is negligence of prayer. So, a person who does not pray is an unbeliever.

1 Related by Muslim, 82.



Message and Meaning



Prayer is the second pillar of Islam, as the declaration of God's oneness and Prophet Muhammad's message is the first pillar. It is indeed the main pillar of the religion of Islam. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'The top matter is Islam, i.e. self-surrender, and its pillar is prayer. Its highest point is jihad'.⁽¹⁾ It is the deed God loves best. 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd said: 'I asked God's Messenger (peace be upon him): Which action God loves best? He said: "Prayer on time".'⁽²⁾



Prayer is the distinctive mark of Muslims. Hypocrites find it a heavy burden and only offer it reluctantly, as God describes: 'The hypocrites seek to deceive God, the while it is He who causes them to be deceived [by themselves]. When they rise to pray, they rise reluctantly, only to be seen by people, remembering God but seldom'. (4: 142) Unbelievers reject it as a binding duty and do not offer it at all. Therefore, God warns those who neglect it, saying: 'Every soul is held in pledge for what it has wrought, (38) except for those on the right hand. (39) They will be in gardens, and will ask (40) about the guilty ones: (41) 'What brought you into the scorching Fire?' (42) They will answer: 'We were not among those who prayed'. (74: 38-43) In the same surah, God describes the 'scorching Fire' stating: 'I will cast him into the scorching Fire. (26) Would that you knew what the scorching Fire is like! (27) It leaves nothing, and spares nothing; (28) it appears before mankind, (29) guarded by nineteen'. (74: 26-30)



In this hadith, the Prophet (peace be upon him) explains the verdict on a person who totally neglects prayer, stating that prayer is what distinguishes a Muslim from an unbeliever. The only thing that separates a person from disbelief and associating partners with God is negligence of prayer. This is similar to the Prophet's hadith: 'The bond between them and us is prayer. Whoever discards it goes into disbelief'.⁽³⁾ 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said: 'A person who neglects prayer has no share in Islam'.⁽⁴⁾ 'Abdullāh ibn Shaqīq said: 'The Prophet's companions considered prayer as the only deed that takes a person into disbelief when neglected'.⁽⁵⁾

1 Related by al-Tirmidhī, 2616; al-Nasā'ī, 11330.

2 Related by al-Bukhari, 527; Muslim, 85.

3 Related by al-Tirmidhī, 2621; al-Nasā'ī, 463; Ibn Mājah, 1079.

4 Related by Mālik in *al-Muwaṭṭa'*, Vol. 1, p. 39; al-Dāraquṭnī, 1750.

5 Related by al-Tirmidhī, 2622.

Implementation



Scholars unanimously agree that a person who discards prayer, denying it as a binding duty, is an unbeliever and apostate. However, they hold different views on one who neglects it out of complacency and laziness. Some say that such a person is an unbeliever while others consider him a transgressor who is required to declare his repentance and pray. Unless he does so, he incurs the death penalty. Others still consider him a transgressor, but one who does not incur the death penalty. A true Muslim who believes in God, Blessed and Exalted, and believes in Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) does not put himself in such a position that ranges between disbelief and transgression, according to the different views of scholars. Rather, a true Muslim hastens to do what earns God's pleasure and tries to draw closer to Him by offering the recommended prayers after finishing the obligatory ones.



When 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb was stabbed and taken home, his attendants tried to revive his consciousness, but could not do so. Some suggested: 'Nothing will make him come to except prayer'. They announced, 'O *Amīr al-Mu'minīn!* Prayer is due'. As he came to, he said: 'Yes. Anyone who neglects prayer has no share in Islam'. He prayed while continuing to bleed. This gives us an impression of the care the Prophet's companions attached to prayer.⁽¹⁾



'Abdullāh ibn 'Amr ibn al-'Āṣ narrated that the Prophet mentioned prayer one day and said: 'Whoever maintains it well, it will serve him as light, proof and means of safety on the Day of Judgement. The one who does not maintain it will have neither light, nor proof, nor means of safety. On the Day of Judgement, he will be with Qārūn [i.e. Korah], Pharaoh, Hāmān and Ubay ibn Khalaf'.⁽²⁾

Ibn al-Qayyim said: 'The Prophet mentioned these four in particular because they were the most hardened of unbelievers. The hadith includes a very interesting point. A person who neglects prayer is preoccupied with his wealth, kingship, high position or business. The one who is preoccupied with his wealth will be with Qārūn, while the one who is a king or leader will be with Pharaoh, the one preoccupied with his position or ministry will be with Hāmān, and the one preoccupied with his business will be with Ubay ibn Khalaf'.⁽³⁾



Why would anyone neglect prayer when God has made it the action that atones for a person's sins and errors: God's Messenger (peace be upon him) said: 'Suppose that a river ran in front of the door of any of you and he washed himself in the river five times every day. Will that leave any dirt on him?' They said: 'Nothing of his dirt will remain'. He said: 'This is the same as the five prayers: God erases sins with them'.⁽⁴⁾



Referring to congregational prayer, 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd said: 'There was a time when none stayed away from it except one whose hypocrisy was confirmed. A man might be brought to the mosque, leaning on two men, until he was stood in the row'.⁽⁵⁾

1 Related by Mālik in *al-Muwaṭṭa'*, Vol. 1, p. 39; al-Dāraquṭnī, 1750.

2 Related by Ahmad, 6576.

3 Ibn al-Qayyim, *al-Ṣalāt wa Ahkāmuhā*, p. 51.

4 Related by al-Bukhari, 528; Muslim 667.

5 Related by Muslim, 654.

