2182 - Ruling on one who neglects prayer

the question

The saheeh ahaadeeth state clearly that the one who neglects prayer is a kaafir. If we take the hadeeth at face value, it appears that we are obliged to deprive the person who neglects prayer deliberately of all his rights of inheritance, a separate cemetery should be allocated for such people, and we cannot pray for them or greet them with salaam, because there is no greeting of peace for a kaafir. Let us not forget that if we were to calculate the number of men, believers and non-believers alike, who pray, we will find it is only 6%, and among women the number is even less. What does Islam have to say about this? What is the ruling about giving or returning the greeting of salaam to one who neglects prayer?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

The scholars have differed concerning the Muslim who deliberately neglects salaah without denying that it is obligatory. Some of them say that he is definitely a kaafir who has gone beyond the pale of Islam. He is considered to be a murtadd (apostate) who is to be given three days to repent – if he does not, he is to be executed for his apostasy. The funeral prayer will not be recited over him, and he will not be buried in the Muslim graveyard. The greeting of salaam is not to be given to him, in life or in death, and his greeting is not to be returned; prayers for forgiveness and mercy for him cannot be offered; he cannot inherit, neither can his wealth be inherited, instead it is to be given to the Muslim treasury (bayt al-maal). This ruling applies whether the number of people who are neglecting their prayers are many or a few.

This opinion is the soundest and most correct, because of the words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him): “The difference between us and them is salaah. Whoever neglects it is a kaafir.”

(Reported by Imaam Ahmad and the authors of Sunan with a saheeh isnaad); and: “(Nothing stands) between a man and kufr and shirk, except prayer: (whoever neglects it becomes a kaafir and a mushrik).” (Reported by Imaam Muslim in his Saheeh, with other similar ahaadeeth).

The majority of scholars said that if a person denies that prayer is obligatory, he is a kaafir and an apostate from the religion of Islam. The ruling concerning such a person is as described above. If he does not deny that it is obligatory, but he neglects it because of laziness, for example, then he is guilty of a major sin (kabeerah), but he is not considered to be beyond the pale of Islam. He should be given three days in which to repent. If he does, then al-hamdu lillah (praise be to Allaah); if he does not, then he should be executed, but this is a punishment, not because he became a kaafir. In this case, he should be washed (ghusl, after death) and wrapped in a shroud (kafn). The funeral prayer should be offered for him, prayers can be offered for forgiveness and mercy for him, and he should be buried in the Muslim graveyard. He can inherit and be inherited from. In general, all the rules concerning Muslims who are sinners apply to him, in life and in death.