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WHAT IS THE RULING ON ALLOWING
GARMENTS TO DROP BELOW THE
ANKLE?¹
FROM THE FATĀWĀ OF SHAYKH MUHAMMAD IBN
SĀLIH AL-‘UTHAYMEEN

QUESTION:

What is the ruling on *isbāl* (allowing your garments to drop below the ankle)?

ANSWER:

The ruling of *isbāl* for women is a non-issue because it covers their feet.² As for men allowing their garments to fall below their ankles then it is forbidden. Rather, it is from the major sins. *Isbāl* can be done in two ways. **The first way** is done out of pride and arrogance. The recompense for the one who does this is that Allah will neither speak to him nor look at him on the Day of Standing, and nor will he purify him, and he will be punished severely. This is based on the hadith of Abu Dharr, who said that the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said

ثَلَاثَةٌ لَا يَكَلِّمُهُمُ اللَّهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ، وَلَا يَنْظُرُ إِلَيْهِمْ، وَلَا يَرْكَبُهُمْ، وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ

There are three to whom Allah will neither speak on the Day of Resurrection nor will look at them nor purify them (i.e., of their sins), and they will be severely tormented.

¹ Translation: Abu Ameenah AbdurRahman Bennett.

² **Translator’s note:** This does not negate that some type of *isbāl* is also forbidden for women because the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said, “Whoever trails his garment on the ground out of pride, Allaah will not look at him.” Umm Salamah said: ‘O Messenger of Allah, what should women do with their hems?’ He said, ‘Let them go down a hand span.’ She asked, ‘What if their feet show?’ He said, ‘Let them lengthen it by a cubit, but no more.’”

The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) repeated the above three times (to stress its seriousness). Then Abu Dharr said,

خابوا وخسروا من هم يا رسول الله

They are doomed and destroyed! Who are they, O Messenger of Allah?

He answered,

المسبل، والمنان، والمنفق سلعته بالحلف الكاذب"

The one who drags his garments along the floor, one who reminds others of his kindness shown to them and one who promotes sale of his business by taking false oaths.³

So the *musbil* (the doer of *isbāl*) is the one lowers his garments until they drag along the ground. As you can see, the punishment is immense and severe.

The second type refers to the *isbāl* that is not done out of arrogance or haughtiness, and thus his punishment is less in severity. This is based on the Prophet's (صلى الله عليه وسلم) statement

ما أسفل من الكعبين من الإزار ففي النار

What is below the ankles of a lower garment is in to the Fire.⁴

And this mean that whatever drops below the ankle then the person who allows this will be chastised by fire. A person's punishment will depend on how much he allowed his garment to drop below the ankle. This punishment is less [and thus different] from the first punishment, and as a result, we say that this hadith, which is unrestricted, cannot be restricted by the hadith that states **"the one who allows his garment to drag out of self-conceitedness"** This is because both of these punishments differ. When two punishments differ, interpreting one hadith by the other hadith [that has a different punishment] is not possible because it would require one of the two punishments to be untrue. So *this* punishment is such and such and *that* punishment is such and such, and by this distinction, we know that one who is told that all types of *isbāl* is forbidden

³ Sunan Abi Dāwood (4020).

⁴ Saheeh al-Bukhari (5787).

but states **“I’m not doing it out of arrogance”** then this excuse that he uses as an argument holds no validity at all. And this is because they are two different punishments and consequently one hadith cannot be used to interpret the other.⁵

The scholars of Usool (principles) have stated that if one ruling differs from another then **the general wording is not to be understood in terms of the specific**. The example they gave was by way of **dry ablution** (التَّيْمُمُ) and **wet ablution** (طَهَارَةُ الْوُضُوءِ). Allah states with regard to ablution:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا إِذَا قُمْتُمْ إِلَى الصَّلَاةِ فَاغْسِلُوا وُجُوهَكُمْ وَأَيْدِيَكُمْ إِلَى الْمَرَافِقِ ۖ

O you who believe, when you rise up to prayer, wash your faces and your hands as far as the elbows.

[Al Mā'idah 6]

So Allah stipulated that the elbows be included in the washing; however, with regard to dry ablution, He states

فَتَيَمَّمُوا صَعِيدًا طَيِّبًا فَامْسَحُوا بِوُجُوهِكُمْ وَأَيْدِيكُمْ مِنْهُ ۖ

Then seek clean earth and wipe over your faces and hands with it,

[Al Mā'idah 6]

and he did not stipulate that the elbows be included when performing dry ablution. Only the hands should be washed during dry ablution. As for wet ablution then the hands, arms and elbows should be washed and thus **the general wording is not to be understood in terms of the specific** due to a discrepancy between the two types of purification. This is a principle that the student of knowledge should be familiar with, and it is that **the general wording is not to be understood in terms of the specific**.

⁵ **Translator’s note:** Accepting this distinction and acting according to what it necessitates is a real struggle for many Muslims in the west because of culture and the way we wear our trousers. Many brothers wear trousers and not thobes and having your trousers ‘swinging’ around your ankles is socially unacceptable, especially for those who herald from a fashion-scene Jāhiliyah. And in these little matters one’s loyalty and sincerity is tested: do we accept these one-size-fit-all scholarly interpretations of these hadith or do we go fatwah-shopping for interpretations that are tailored-made to suit our whims and desires?

Question:

What is the ruling on praying in a long thobe [below the ankles]? Does it invalidate the prayer or not, knowing that many people pray in long garments, disregarding the ruling of wearing garments that fall below the ankle?

Answer:

This question requires that we address two matters: **The first matter** is with regard to lengthening the thobe, trousers and the *mashlah* (traditional Arabian cloak) below the ankles. We state that this type of lengthening is from the major sins because the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said

ما أسفل من الكعبين من الإزار ففي النار

What is below the ankles of a lower garment is in to the Fire.⁶

There is no threat of punishment except for major sins. Moreover, there is no distinction between the one who drops his garments below the ankles out of self-conceitedness or pride and the one who does not do it out of self-conceitedness. Some people are under the impression that this threat of punishment is only for the one who is self-conceited. They claim that they do not do this out of a self-conceitedness. However, this way of thinking is erroneous because the threat for the one who does this out of self-conceitedness is severer and greater than the threat for the one who just drops his garments below his ankles. And this is because the threat that looms over the self-conceited individual is that Allah will neither speak to him nor look at him on the Day of Standing, and nor will He purify him, and he will be punished severely, as affirmed in Saheeh Muslim on the authority of Abu Dharr:

ثَلَاثَةٌ لَا يُكَلِّمُهُمُ اللَّهُ وَلَا يَنْظُرُ إِلَيْهِمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَلَا يُرَكِّبُهُمْ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ

There are three to whom Allah will neither speak on the Day of Resurrection nor will look at them nor purify them (i.e., of their sins), and they will be severely tormented.

خابوا وخسروا من هم يا رسول الله

They are doomed and destroyed! Who are they, O Messenger of Allah?

⁶ Saheeh al-Bukhari (5787).

He answered,

المُسْبِلُ وَالْمَنَّانُ وَالْمُنْفِقُ سِلْعَتُهُ بِالْحَلْفِ الْكَاذِبِ

The one who drags his garments along the floor, one who reminds others of his kindness shown to them and one who promotes sale of his business by taking false oaths.⁷

The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) also said,

مَنْ جَرَّ ثَوْبَهُ حَيْلَاءَ لَمْ يَنْظُرِ اللَّهُ إِلَيْهِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ

Allah will not look on the Day of Judgment at him who drags his robe out of pride.⁸

In view of the fact that the punishments differ [in each hadith], it is impossible to subordinate one to the other because if we do this then that would require one of the two reports to be untrue. This is because if the deed done is the same then the punishment cannot differ under any circumstance. And so I say to these people who are tempted with lowering their garments below their ankles to fear Allah in themselves and know that what the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) has said is the truth, and that if you do act out its prohibition then you run the risk [of being punished] and you have wronged yourself.

With reference to the prayer then the scholars differ: is the prayer of the one who prays in a prohibited garment valid or invalid? Some say that his prayer remains valid because the prohibition on wearing prohibited garments is a general ruling and not a ruling specific to the prayer. So the general prohibition, which includes garments worn during acts of worship or outside of it, do not nullify said acts of worship. And based on this, backbiting does not invalidate a person's fast, despite it being forbidden during fasting and outside of fasting due to its general prohibition. As for when a prohibition is related specifically to an act of worship then the act of worship itself is nullified. And this is why a person's fast is nullified by the act of eating or drinking because both are specifically forbidden whilst fasting.

⁷ Sunan Abu Dāwood (4087).

⁸ Al-Bukhāri (3665).

It is known that allowing the garment to extend below the ankles is forbidden during prayer and outside of prayer and thus prayer that is performed in any type of prohibited garment remains valid, but the one who wears these garments remains sinful. So the one who drops his thobe, trousers or the *msħll* below his ankles is in a very dangerous situation during his prayer since many of the scholars say that his prayer is invalid.

Question:

Noble Shaykh, is this hadith “Indeed Allah does not accept the prayer of the one who allows his garments to drop below the ankle” authentic?

Answer:

This hadith was reported from the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم); however, it is weak and thus it cannot be used as a proof. Even though the prayer of the one who allows his garments to drop below his ankle is accepted, he remains in a state of sin. In fact, his sin is from the major sins because the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) threatened whatever hangs below the ankle with the fire. For he said (صلى الله عليه وسلم),

مَا أَسْفَلَ مِنَ الْكَعْبِيِّنَ مِنَ الْإِزَارِ فَفِي النَّارِ

What is below the ankles of a lower garment is in to the Fire.⁹

In other words, he will be punished according to the extent his garments dropped below his ankle. This form of punishment is a partial punishment which only applies to the place that contravened the prohibition and not the whole body. Just a part of the body being punished is a real matter since it was reported in the Saheehayn (Bukhāri and Muslim) from Abu Hurairah that the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said,

وَيْلٌ لِلْأَعْقَابِ مِنَ النَّارِ

Woe to the ankles because of the fire.

And this was because he (صلى الله عليه وسلم) saw some of the companions performing wudhu whilst making light of washing their heels. And so the Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) limited the threat to the part

⁹ Saheeh al-Bukhari (5787).

of the body where the violation took place and not the whole body. As for when he drags his garment out of pride and arrogance then his state is severer and graver. The Prophet (صلى الله عليه وسلم) said,

ثَلَاثَةٌ لَا يَكَلِّمُهُمُ اللَّهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ، وَلَا يَنْظُرُ إِلَيْهِمْ، وَلَا يَزْكِيهِمْ، وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ

There are three to whom Allah will neither speak on the Day of Resurrection nor look at them nor purify them (i.e., of their sins), and they will be severely tormented.¹⁰

And so the punishment for dragging the garment out of pride and arrogance is severer and graver. So based on this, whoever allows his trousers or *mashlah* to drop below his ankles then he is sinful in all situations. However, if he drags it out of pride and arrogance then he falls under this severe threat.

Some people have become negligent in this matter, and thus it is incumbent upon our brothers who have been put to test with this matter to repent to Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, for what they have done, and that they do not jeopardise the blessings of Allah by being ungrateful. Rather, they remain grateful for the clothing that has been made attainable for them and they use them in a manner that does not incur Allah's wrath. Once, a young man from the Ansār came to Umar ibn al-Khattāb saying **“O chief of the believers! Receive the glad tidings from Allah to you due to your company with Allah's Messenger and your superiority in Islam which you know. Then you became the ruler (i.e. Caliph) and you ruled with justice and finally you have been martyred.”** Then Umar said to him, **“I wish that all these privileges will counterbalance (my shortcomings) so that I will neither lose nor gain anything.”** When the young man turned back to leave, his clothes seemed to be touching the ground. `Umar said, **“Call the young man back to me.”** (When he came back) `Umar said, **“O son of my brother! Lift your clothes, for this will keep your clothes clean and save you from the Punishment of your Lord.”¹¹** So Umar commanded him to lift up his clothes and made clear to him two great benefits by doing this: **a religious benefit** and it is taqwa, and **a worldly benefit** and it is preventing the earth from devouring the bottom of your clothes when dragging them along the earth.

¹⁰ Sunan Abu Dāwood (4087).

¹¹ Saheeh al-Bukhāri (3497).