

10995 - Reciting al-Faatihah during prayer

the question

My question relates to the correct manner of praying Farz salaah behind an Imaam, specifically the recital of surah Al Fatiha.

1. Is it obligatory on us to quietly recite surah Al Fatiha whilst the Imaam recites it aloud, during the first and second rakaat of a farz prayer?
2. Is it obligatory on us to recite the surah Al Fatiha in the same situation but in the third and/or fourth rakaat, i.e., the Imaam is silent in these rakaats?

This question arises due to our community's wish to correct our method of praying. There are two opinions amongst us, one being that when the Imaam leads a prayer, whether he recites them aloud (1st and 2nd rakaat) or is silent (3rd and 4th rakaat) we must only listen; whilst others comment that without the recitation of surah Al Fatiha, whether recited by the Imaam or not, a prayer is not valid.

Please advise with as many factual evidence as possible.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Reciting al-Faatihah is one of the essential parts of the prayer, and is to be recited in each rak'ah both by the imaam and by those who are being led by him, because the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "There is no prayer for the one who does not recite the Opening of the Book [i.e., al-Faatihah]." (Narrated by al-Bukhaari, 714). With regard to one who is following an imaam reciting al-Faatihah behind the imaam in a prayer where Qur'aan is to be recited out loud, there are two scholarly opinions.

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The first opinion is that it is obligatory, the evidence for that being the general meaning of the hadeeth of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him): “There is no prayer for the one who does not recite the Opening of the Book [i.e., al-Faatihah].” And because when the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) taught the one who had not prayed properly, he told him to recite al-Faatihah.

It was narrated in a saheeh report that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) used to recite it in every rak’ah. Al-Haafiz ibn Hajar said in Fath al-Baari: “It was proven that permission was given to the one who is praying behind an imaam to recite al-Faatihah in prayers in which Qur’aan is to be recited out loud, without any exceptions. That is what was narrated by al-Bukhaari in Juz’ al-Qiraa’ah, and by al-Tirmidhi, Ibn Hibbaan and others, from Makhool from Mahmood ibn al-Rabee’ from ‘Ubaadah, that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) stumbled in his recitation in Fajr, and when he finished he said, “Perhaps you recite behind your imaam?” They said, “Yes,” He said, “Do not do that, except for the Opening of the Book (al-Faaithah), for there is no prayer for the one who does not recite it.”

The second opinion is that the recitation of the imaam is also the recitation of the one who is praying behind him. The evidence for that is the aayah (interpretation of the meaning):

“So, when the Qur’aan is recited, listen to it, and be silent that you may receive mercy” [al-A’raaf 7:204]

Ibn Hajar said: “Those who say that (the one who is praying behind an imaam) does not have to recite it in prayers where Qur’aan is to be recited out loud, such as the Maalikis, quote as evidence the hadeeth, ‘When he recites then listen attentively.’ This is a saheeh hadeeth which was narrated by Muslim from Abu Moosa al-‘Ash’ari.”

Those who say that it is obligatory say that it should be recited after the imaam has finished reciting al-Faatihah and before he starts to recite another soorah, or that it should be recited when

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the imam pauses. Ibn Hajar said: “He should listen when the imam is reciting, and recite it when he is silent.”

Shaykh Ibn Baaz said, “What is meant by when the imam pauses is when he pauses during al-Faatihah or after reciting it, or in the soorah that he recites after it. If the imam does not pause, then the one who is praying behind him has to recite al-Faatihah even if the imam is reciting, according to the more correct of the two scholarly opinions.” (See Fataawa al-Shaykh Ibn Baaz, vol. 11, p. 221)

The Standing Committee was asked a similar question and replied as follows:

The correct scholarly opinion is that it is obligatory to recite al-Faatihah when praying alone and it is obligatory upon the imam and those whom he is leading both in prayers where Qur’aan is to be recited out loud and when it is to be recited silently, because of the soundness and specific nature of the texts which indicate that. The aayah (interpretation of the meaning):

“So, when the Qur’aan is recited, listen to it, and be silent that you may receive mercy”

[al-A’raaf 7:204] is general in meaning. The hadeeth, “When the Qur’aan is recited then listen attentively” is general and applies both to al-Faatihah and other soorahs. These two texts are general in meaning, and the following hadeeth refer to an exception to that rule:

“There is no prayer for the one who does not recite the Opening of the Book.” Thus we may reconcile all the proven evidence. The hadeeth “The recitation of the imaam is the recitation of the one who is praying behind him” is da’eef (weak). It is not correct to say that the Ameen of the congregation to the imaam’s recitation of al-Faatihah takes the place of their own recitation. The differences of opinion among the scholars concerning this matter should not be taken as a means to hate one another, and to divide and turn our backs on one another. Rather you have to study the matter in more detail and find out more. If one of you is following a scholar who says that the

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one who is praying behind an imam has to recite al-Faatihah during prayers in which Qur'aan is to be recited out loud, and others are following a scholar who says that they must be silent and listen to the imam in prayers where Qur'aan is to be recited out loud, and that the imam's recitation of al-Faatihah is sufficient, there is nothing wrong with that. There is no need for one group to denounce the other, or to hate one another because of that.

They have to be open-minded about differences of opinion among the scholars, and about the reasons for that, and ask Allaah to guide them in matters concerning which there are differences of opinion as to what is correct, for He is the All-Hearing, Ever-Responsive.

May Allaah bless our Prophet Muhammad.