

## 39188 - Ruling on a woman leading men in prayer

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### the question

What is the ruling on a woman leading men in Jumu'ah and other prayers?.

### Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

Allaah has singled out men for some virtues and rulings, and He has singled out women for other virtues and rulings. It is not permissible for any man to wish for that which has been granted to women only, nor is it permissible for any woman to wish for that which has been granted to men. This kind of wishing is tantamount to objecting to the laws and rulings of Allaah.

Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And wish not for the things in which Allaah has made some of you to excel others. For men there is reward for what they have earned, (and likewise) for women there is reward for what they have earned, and ask Allaah of His Bounty. Surely, Allaah is Ever All-Knower of everything”

[al-Nisa' 4:32]

al-Sa'di (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

Allaah forbids the believers to wish for that with which Allaah has favoured others, whether that is in things that are possible or things that are impossible. Women should not wish for the things that have been bestowed uniquely upon men, by which Allaah has favoured them over women, and no

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poor person or person who has shortcomings should merely wish for the position of one who is rich or perfect, because this is the essence of destructive envy (hasad)... and because that implies displeasure with the decree of Allaah. End quote.

One of the things for which Allaah has singled out men is that the acts of worship which require physical strength, such as jihad, or require a position of leadership such as leading the prayers, etc., are only for men, and women have nothing to do with them.

This is indicated by a great deal of evidence, such as the following:

1 - Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allaah has made one of them to excel the other, and because they spend (to support them) from their means”

[al-Nisa’ 4:34]

al-Shaafa’i said in al-Umm (1/191):

If a woman leads men, women and boys in prayer, then the prayer of the women is valid and the prayer of the men and boys is invalid, because Allaah has given men the role of protectors and maintainers of women, and He has not allowed them to be in charge, so it is not permissible for a woman to lead a man in prayer under any circumstances, ever. End quote.

Al-Sa’di (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

Men have been favoured over women in numerous ways, such as the fact that positions of leadership and Prophethood are limited to men only, and many acts of worship, such as jihad and leading the Eid prayers and Jumu’ah prayers, are for men only, and Allaah has favoured them with intellect, wisdom, patience and toughness which women do not share. End quote.

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2 - Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And they (women) have rights (over their husbands as regards living expenses) similar (to those of their husbands) over them (as regards obedience and respect) to what is reasonable, but men have a degree (of responsibility) over them. And Allaah is All-Mighty, All-Wise”

[al-Baqarah 2:228]

al-Sa'di (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

“but men have a degree over them” means higher status and leadership, and more rights over them, as Allaah says, “Men are the protectors and maintainers of women”. The position of Prophet and judge, leading the prayers and leading the state, and all positions of authority, are restricted to men. End quote.

3 - al-Bukhaari (4425) narrated that Abu Bakrah (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “No people will ever succeed who appoint a woman as their leader.”

This hadeeth indicates that it is not permissible for a woman to hold a position of public authority, and leading the prayers is a position of public authority.

4 - Abu Dawood (567) and Ahmad (5445) narrated that Ibn 'Umar (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Do not prevent your women from attending the mosques, although their houses are better for them.” Classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Sunan Abi Dawood.

It says in 'Awn al-Ma'bood:

“although their houses are better for them” means: their praying in their houses is better for them than their praying in the mosques, if only they knew, but they do not know that, and they ask for

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permission to go out to the mosques, because they think that the reward for them in the mosque is greater. The reason why their praying at home is better is that there is no danger of fitnah. That was confirmed after women began to wear adornments. End quote.

5 - Muslim (440) narrated that Abu Hurayrah (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: "The best rows for men are those at the front and the worst are those at the back, and the best rows for women are those at the back and the worst are those at the front."

Al-Nawawi said:

The phrase "the rows for men" is to be understood in general terms as meaning that the best of them are those that are at the front, and the worst are those at the back, and that is always the case. As for the rows for women, what is meant in this hadeeth is the rows of women who are praying with men. But if women are praying on their own and not with men, then they are like men and the best rows are those at the front and the worst are those at the back. What is meant by the worst rows for both men and women is that they bring less reward, are lower in status and are further removed from what is required by sharee'ah. And the best rows are the opposite of that. The virtue of the last row for women who are praying with men is that they are farther away from mixing with men or seeing them or becoming attracted to them when seeing their movements or hearing their words and so on. The first rows are condemned for the opposite of that. And Allaah knows best. End quote.

If a woman is enjoined to pray in her house and keep away from men, and the worst rows for women are the front rows, because they are closer to the men, then how can it be befitting for Islam to allow a woman to pray as an imam, leading men in prayer, when it enjoins her to keep away from men?

6 - al-Bukhaari (684) and Muslim (421) narrated from Sahl ibn Sa'd al-Saa'idi that the Messenger

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of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said, “Whoever notices anything amiss during the prayer, let him say tasbeeh, for if he does so it will be noticed; and clapping is only for women.”

al-Haafiz said:

It is as if women are not allowed to say tasbeeh because they are enjoined to keep their voices low in prayer at all times, because of the fear of fitnah. End quote.

If women are forbidden to alert the imam by speaking if he makes a mistake, and should clap instead, so that they will not raise their voice in the presence of men, then how can it be allowed for a woman to lead them in prayer and deliver a khutbah to them?

7 - Muslim (658) narrated from Anas ibn Maalik that he prayed behind the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) and with him was his grandmother and an orphan. He said: The orphan and I stood in a row behind him, and the old woman stood behind us.

Al-Haafiz said:

This shows that a woman should not stand in a row with a man. The basic reason is that there is the fear of fitnah because of her. End quote.

If a woman should stand on her own behind the rows, and not stand in the same row as the men, how can she stand in front of them and lead them in prayer?

It says in ‘Awn al-Ma’bood:

This indicates that it is not permissible for a woman to lead men in prayer, because if she is not allowed to stand in the same row as them, it is less likely that she should be allowed to stand in front of them. End quote.

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8 - According to the actions of the Muslims throughout fourteen hundred years, no woman should be allowed to men in prayer.

Badaa'i' al-Sanaa'i', 2/289

Whoever goes against this is following a path other than that of the believers. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And whoever contradicts and opposes the Messenger (Muhammad) after the right path has been shown clearly to him, and follows other than the believers' way, We shall keep him in the path he has chosen, and burn him in Hell — what an evil destination!”

[al-Nisa' 4:115]

There follow some comments of the scholars:

It says in al-Mawsoo'ah al-Fiqhiyyah (6/205):

In order to lead men in prayers, it is essential that the imam be a male; it is not valid for a woman to lead men in prayers. The fuqaha' are unanimously agreed on this matter. End quote.

Ibn Hazm said in Maraatib al-Ijmaa', p. 27

They are unanimously agreed that a woman should not lead men in prayer when they know that she is a woman. If they do that then their prayer is invalid, according to scholarly consensus. End quote.

It says in al-Muhalla (2/167):

It is not permissible for a woman to lead a man or men in prayer. There is no difference of scholarly opinion on this point. Moreover the text states that a woman invalidates a man's prayer

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if she walks in front of him... The ruling of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) is that she should definitely stand behind the man in prayer, and the imam must stand in front of the congregation or with one who is praying with him in the same row... From these texts it may be established that it is definitely invalid for a woman to lead a man or men in prayer. End quote.

Al-Nawawi (4/152) said in al-Majmoo (4/152):

Our companions are agreed that it is not permissible for an adult man or a boy to pray behind a woman... the prohibition on a woman leading men in prayer applies equally to obligatory prayers, Taraweeh and all supererogatory prayers. This is our view and the view of all the scholars from the earlier and later generations – may Allaah have mercy on them. Al-Bayhaqi narrated this from the seven fuqaha', the Taabi'i fuqaha' of Madeenah. It is also the view of Maalik, Abu Haneefah, Sufyaan, Ahmad and Dawood....

Moreover if a woman leads a man or men in prayer, the men's prayer is invalid, but her prayer and the prayer of any women who pray behind her is valid in all prayers, except if she leads them in Jumu'ah prayer, in which case there are two views, the most sound of which is that her prayer does not count. The second view is that it does count and it takes the place of Zuhr. This is the view of Shaykh Abu Haamid, but it does not amount to anything. And Allaah knows best.

In al-Insaaf (2/265) it says:

“ A woman's leading a man in prayer is not valid” –

This is our view in general – meaning the madhhab of Imam Ahmad – it says in al-Mustaw'ib: This is the correct view. End quote.

The Maaliki view concerning this matter is the strictest of all. They do not allow a woman to lead even other women in prayer, and they regard maleness as an essential condition for leading the prayer in all cases. In al-Fawaakih al-Dawaani it says (1/204):

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Note that there are conditions for leading the prayer to be valid and complete. The conditions of it being valid are thirteen, the first of which is being male; it is not valid for a woman or an effeminate man to lead the prayer. The prayer of the one who prays behind a woman is invalid but not the prayer of the female who led the prayer. End quote.

Shaykh Ibn Baaz (may Allaah have mercy on him) was asked about a man who prayed 'Asr behind his wife. He replied:

It is not permissible for a woman to lead a man in prayer and his prayer offered behind her is not valid, because of a great deal of evidence to that effect, and the man mentioned must repeat his prayer."

Majmoo' Fataawa Ibn Baaz, 12/130

Secondly:

With regard to the evidence presented by those who refer to the reports which say that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) gave Umm Waraqah permission to lead her household in prayer (narrated by Abu Dawood, 591), they say that she used to lead the people of her house in prayer, among whom were men and boys. The scholars have given several answers to that:

1-The hadeeth is da'eef (weak).

Al-Haafiz said in al-Talkhees (p. 121): Its isnaad includes 'Abd al-Rahmaan ibn Khallaad who is unknown. End quote.

It says in al-Muntaqa Sharh al-Muwatta':

This hadeeth is one to which no attention should be paid. End quote.

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2-Even if the hadeeth is saheeh, what it means is that she used to lead the women of her household in prayer.

3-That was something that applied only to Umm Waraqah, and it is not prescribed for anyone else.

4-Some scholars quote it as evidence that a woman may lead a man in prayer, but only in cases of necessity, and what is meant by necessity is when there is no man who can recite al-Faatihah properly. Haashiyat Ibn Qaasim, 2/313

See al-Mughni. 3/33.