39188 - Can Women Lead Men in Prayer?

the question

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

Summary of answer

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 must repeat his prayer.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Can women lead men in prayer?

Allah 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 Allah.

Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And wish not for the things in which Allah 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 Allah of His Bounty. Surely, Allah is Ever All-Knower of everything” [An-Nisa’ 4:32]

As-Sa’di (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“Allah forbids the believers to wish for that with which Allah 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 Allah has favoured them over women, and no 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 Allah."

One of the things for which Allah 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:

- Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"Men are the protectors and maintainers of women , because Allah has made one of them to excel the other, and because they spend (to support them) from their means." [An-Nisa' 4:34]

Ash-Shafi`i (may Allah have mercy on him) 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 Allah 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."

Al-Sa'di (may Allah 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 Allah has favoured them with intellect, wisdom, patience and toughness which women do not share."

- Allah 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 Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise" [Al-Baqarah 2:228]

Al-Sa'di (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

"'but men have a degree over them' means higher status and leadership, and more rights over them, as Allah 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."

- Al-Bukhari (4425) narrated that Abu Bakrah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "No people will ever succeed who appoint a woman as their leader."

This Hadith 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.

- Abu Dawud (567) and Ahmad (5445) narrated that Ibn 'Umar (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "Do not prevent your women from attending the mosques , although their houses are better for them ." (Classed as authentic by Al-Albani in Sunan Abu Dawud)

It says in `Awn Al-Ma`bud:

"'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 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 (temptation). That was confirmed after women began to wear adornments."

- Muslim (440) narrated that Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: "The best rows for men are those are 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."

An-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) 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 Hadith 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 Shari`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 Allah knows best.”

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?

- Al-Bukhari (684) and Muslim (421) narrated from Sahl ibn Sa’d As-Sa’idi (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, “Whoever notices anything amiss during the prayer, let him say Tasbih, for if he does so it will be noticed; and clapping is only for women.”

Ibn Hajar (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

“It is as if women are not allowed to say Tasbih because they are enjoined to keep their voices low in prayer at all times, because of the fear of Fitnah.”

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?

- Muslim (658) narrated from Anas ibn Malik (may Allah be pleased with him) that he prayed behind the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah 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.

Ibn Hajar (may Allah have mercy on him) 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.”

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’bud:

“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.”

- According to the actions of the Muslims throughout fourteen hundred years, no woman should be allowed to lead men in prayer. (Bada’i` Al-Sana’i`, 2/289)

Whoever goes against this is following a path other than that of the believers. Allah 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!.” [An-Nisa’ 4:115]

There follow some comments of the scholars:

It says in Al-Mawsu`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 jurists unanimously agreed on this matter."

Ibn Hazm (may Allah have mercy on him) said in Maratib Al-Ijma`, 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."

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 if she walks in front of him… The ruling of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah 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."

An-Nawawi (may Allah have mercy on him) said in Al-Majmu` (4/152):

"Our companions 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, Tarawih and all supererogatory prayers. This is our view and the view of all the scholars from the earlier and later generations – may Allah have mercy on them. Al-Bayhaqi narrated this from the seven jurists, the Tabi'i jurists of Madinah. It is also the view of Malik, Abu Hanifah, Sufyan, Ahmad and Dawud.…

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 Thuhr. This is the view of Shaykh Abu Hamid, but it does not amount to anything. And Allah knows best."

In Al-Insaf (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.”

The Maliki 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-Fawakih Ad-Dawani it says (1/204):

“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 woman who led the prayer.”

Shaykh Ibn Baz (may Allah 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.” (Majmu` Fatawa Ibn Baz, 12/130)

Did the Prophet give Umm Waraqah permission to lead her household in prayer?

With regard to the evidence presented by those who refer to the reports which say that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) gave Umm Waraqah permission to lead her household in prayer (narrated by Abu Dawud, 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:

- The Hadith is inauthentic.

Ibn Hajar (may Allah have mercy on him) said in At-Talkhis (p. 121): “Its Isnad (chain of narration) includes ‘Abd Ar-Rahman ibn Khallad who is unknown.”

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

"This Hadith is one to which no attention should be paid."

- Even if the Hadith is authentic, what it means is that she used to lead the women of her household in prayer.
- That was something that applied only to Umm Waraqah, and it is not prescribed for anyone else.
- 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-Fatihah properly. (Hashiyat Ibn Qasim, 2/313) (See Al-Mughni, 3/33)