182252 - Ruling on a follower praying to the left of the imam

the question

Is it permissible to pray to the left of the imam in one row when there is no space his right hand side, when the prayer is being offered in one row due to lack of space?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

If a follower is praying to the left of the imam, it must be one of two scenarios:

The first scenario: the follower stands to the left of the imam even though there is no other follower standing on the right of the imam. In this case, the follower's prayer is not valid – according to the Hanbalis –.

The second scenario: the follower stands to the left of the imam when there is another follower who is standing to the right of the imam. In this case, the prayer of the follower who is on the imam's left is valid.

Ibn Qudamah (may Allah have mercy on him) said: If he stands to the left of the imam, if there is someone to the right of the imam, his prayer is valid, because Ibn Mas`ud (may Allah be pleased with him) prayed between 'Alqamah and al-Aswad, and when they had finished praying he said: This is what I saw the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) do. Narrated by Abu Dawud. And because the middle of the row is where the imam stands in the case of a women-only congregation. But if there is no one to his right, then the prayer of anyone who stands to his left is invalid, whether that is one person or a group.

(End quote from *al-Mughni*, 2/24)

The second view regarding this issue is that the prayer of the follower is valid in both cases

mentioned above.

Ibn Qudamah (may Allah have mercy on him) said: Most of the scholars think that a single follower should stand to the right of the imam, and that if he stands to his left, he has gone against the Sunnah.

(End quote from *al-Mughni*, 2/24).

The scholars of the Permanent Committee said:

If the follower is one person, he should stand to the right of the imam, because of the hadith of Ibn `Abbas (may Allah be pleased with him) which was narrated by al-Bukhari and Muslim, in which he said: I stayed overnight with my maternal aunt Maymunah. The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) stood up to pray at night, so I got up and stood to his left, but he took hold of my braid and brought me round to stand on his right. Sahih – agreed upon.

This applies if there is no one on the right of the imam, as mentioned in the hadith of Ibn `Abbas. But if someone is standing on his right, then there is nothing wrong with the second person standing to the left of the imam, and the prayer of all of them is valid, but the Sunnah is for them to form a row behind him, if there is space to do that, because the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) instructed Jabir and Jabbar, when they stood to his right and his left, to pray behind him.

(End quote from *Fatawa al-Lajnah ad-Da'imah*, 8/20).

Based on that, if the mosque is big enough to have more than one row, then the Sunnah is for the imam to stand in front and for the followers to pray behind him. If that is not possible, because the place is small, then the best is for the follower to stand to the right of the imam. If that is not possible, then there is nothing wrong with the follower who comes late standing to the left of the imam.

And Allah knows best.