194317 - Their imam does not recite al-Fatihah properly; should they pray behind him then repeat the prayer, for fear of causing trouble?

the question

Is it permissible not to pray in congregation because the imam recites Qur’an poorly? Especially as he clearly mispronounces some words in Surat al-Fatihah. If our prayer is not valid in that case, can we pray behind him and then repeat it privately on our own, for fear of causing trouble? Can we do the same in the prayers in which the recitation is done quietly?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

Praying in congregation in the mosque is obligatory for every individual, and it is not permissible to stay away from the congregational prayer except for a valid excuse. For the evidence on it being obligatory to pray in congregation in the mosque, please see the answer to question no. 8918.

Secondly:

If someone mispronouncing some words in al-Fatihah in a way that alters and changes the meaning, such as if he recites {iyyaka na`budu} with a kasrah on the kaf (“iyyaki”), or he omits a letter of the surah or replaces it with another letter, it is not permissible for anyone to pray behind him except one who is like him.

As for mispronouncing in a way that does not change the meaning, such as if he recites {al-hamdu Lillahi Rabb il-`alamin, but he says rabb with a fathah or dammah (“rabba” or “rabbu”), it is permissible to pray behind him, but praying behind someone who recites properly and does not

mispronounce any words is more appropriate and better.

Please see the answers to questions no. 27049 and 70270.

Thirdly:

It is essential to teach this imam and point out the mistakes he is making, because reciting al-Fatihah is an essential part of the prayer.

If he responds and improves his recitation, then praise be to Allah; otherwise, it is essential to inform those in charge of the mosque and try to get them to let him go and appoint someone else who recites well.

The scholars of the Standing Committee were asked about praying behind an imam who does not recite well: is it better to not join him and pray on one's own, or to pray behind him?

They replied: If you want to pray, then try to pray behind an imam who is able to recite properly. If you know that an imam does not recite properly, in the sense that he mispronounces some letters in al- Fatihah in a way that changes the meaning, such as if he recites {iyyaka na`budu} with a kasrah on the kaf ("iyyaki"), or he pronounces {an`amta} with a dammah or kasrah ("an`amtu" or "an`amti"), then it is not permissible to pray behind him. But it is essential to point out that mistake to him, then if he responds [and corrects his pronunciation], then praise be to Allah, otherwise you must inform those in charge so that they can replace him with an imam who is more suited to this post.(*Fatawa al-Lajnah ad-Da'imah*, 7/348).

Shaykh Ibn `Uthaymin (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

If his mispronunciation changes the meaning in al-Fatihah or any other surah, then it is not permissible to pray behind him, but the mosque attendees must inform those in charge of the mosques that this imam should either learn how to recite properly or be replaced. As for him leading Muslims in the prayer, which is the most important pillar of Islam after the twin declaration of faith (ash-shahadatayn), when he is not able to recite properly as is required, it is not permissible for him to be an imam, and whoever appointed him as an imam is sining indeed and

transgressing against the rights of Allah, because he appointed someone who is not qualified for that task. And he is also sinning and transgressing against the rights of the worshippers, because he is either causing them to feel uneasy when they pray behind the imam or he is causing them hardship by forcing them to look for a mosque that is further away, and that may be difficult for them.(*Fatawa Nur `ala ad-Darb*, 182/15).

Fourthly:

It is not valid to pray behind this imam and then repeat the prayer if he mispronounces words in al-Fatihah in a way that changes the meaning, because praying behind him when he mispronounces words in this way is not permissible in the first place, whether it in the prayers in which recitation is done quietly or in those in which it is done out loud. Moreover, your praying behind him suggests that you approve of his being an imam, so others may be deceived by you. What he is doing is a wrong action that must be changed or stopped, not approved of. Rather what you must do is teach him and advise him gently, then if he responds all well and good, otherwise you must refer the matter to those in charge of the mosque, as noted above. If none of that succeeds in making him correct his recitation, then you must tell people that praying behind him is not valid, then you should stop praying behind him and go to another mosque in which the imam recites properly in al-Fatihah and other surahs.

Shaykh Salih al-Fazan (may Allah preserve him) said:

As for your keeping away from the mosque, I do not see any justification for doing that, unless the imam mispronounces his recitation in such a way that it changes the meaning, or this imam is an evildoer who commits some major sins.(*Al-Muntaqa min Fatawa al-Fawzan*, 80/29).

It is not permissible for you to stop praying in congregation altogether and pray in your houses individually or in congregation, because of what we have noted above about it being obligatory to pray in congregation in the houses of Allah which Allah has ordained to be built so that His name may be remembered therein.

For more information, please see the answer to question no. 43737.

And Allah knows best.