74341 - Ruling on seeking refuge with Allah before reciting al-Fatihah in the prayer

the question

What is the ruling on seeking refuge with Allah before reciting al-Fatihah in the prayer? Is it obligatory or mustahabb?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

It is proven that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used to seek refuge with Allah before reciting al-Fatihah in the prayer. Narrated by Abu Dawood (775) and classed as saheeh by al-Albani.

Secondly:

The scholars differed as to the ruling on seeking refuge with Allah before reciting al-Fatihah in the prayer. Some of them were of the view that it is obligatory. This is the view of ‘Ata’, al-Thawri, al-Awza’i and Dawood, as was narrated by Ibn Hazm in al-Muhalla (3/247-248), and it was the view favoured by him. It was also narrated from Ahmad and was favoured by Ibn Battah, as it says in al-Insaaf (2/119). Among later scholars this view was favoured by Shaykh al-Albani (may Allah have mercy on them all).

Others were of the view that it is only mustahabb and is not obligatory. This is the view of the majority of scholars among the Sahabah and Taabi’een and of the Imams Abu Haneefah and al-Shafa’i, and Ahmad according to the well known view of his madhhab.

See: Tabyeen al-Haqaa'iq (1/107); al-Majmoo' (3/280-282), al-Mughni (1/283); al-Fatawa al-Kubra by Ibn Taymiyah (5/332).

Those who say that it is obligatory quoted as evidence the verse in which Allah says (interpretation of the meaning):

"So when you want to recite the Quran, seek refuge with Allah from Shaytan (Satan), the outcast (the cursed one)"

[al-Nahl 16:98]

They said: In this verse there is the command to seek refuge with Allah, and the basic principle is that a command means that something is obligatory, so long as there is no other evidence to indicate that what is meant in the command is mustahabb.

Ibn Hazm said in al-Muhalla (2/279):

With regard to the view of Abu Haneefah and al-Shafa'i, that seeking refuge with Allah is not obligatory, this is wrong, because Allah, may He be exalted, says: "So when you want to recite the Quran, seek refuge with Allah from Shaytan (Satan), the outcast (the cursed one)". When Allah commands something, it is wrong for anyone to say without any evidence from the Quran or Sunnah that this is not obligatory, especially His command to pray for Him to protect us from the tricks of the shaytan. So this command is definitely obligatory, because avoiding the shaytan and fleeing from him and asking for protection against him are things that no one can dispute are obligatory. Moreover, Allah has enjoined that upon us when reading Quran. End quote.

The majority of scholars responded by noting that there is other evidence which indicates that it is mustahabb rather than obligatory. This other evidence is:

1 – The hadeeth about the man who did not pray properly. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) taught him how to pray and said: "When you go to pray, say takbeer, then recite whatever you can of the Quran. Then bow …" Narrated by al-Bukhari and Muslim (397). And he did not tell him to seek refuge with Allah.

Imam al-Shafa’i said in al-Umm (1/208):

If he omits it by mistake or out of ignorance or deliberately, he does not have to repeat it or do the prostration of forgetfulness, but I regard it as makrooh to omit it deliberately. If he omits it in the first rak’ah, I prefer for him to say it in some other rak’ah. The only thing that keeps me from telling him to repeat the prayer is the fact that when the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) taught a man what is sufficient in prayer he said: “say takbeer, then recite…”, and it is not narrated that he told him to seek refuge with Allah or recite the opening du`a. This indicates that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) regarded the opening du`a as something optional, and that seeking refuge with Allah is something that does not invalidate the prayer if it is omitted. End quote.

2 –It says in al-Mawsoo’ah al-Fiqhiyyah (4/6):

The majority quoted as evidence that the command means that it is recommended and not obligatory the fact that the salaf were unanimously agreed that it is Sunnah. End quote.

The scholars of the Standing Committee for Issuing Fatwas also favoured the view that it is mustahabb and not obligatory, as did Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen.

It says in Fatawa al-Lajnah al-Da’imah (6/383):

What is the ruling on one who forgets to seek refuge with Allah from the accursed shaytan and remembers after finishing the prayer, if he remembers that he did not say A’oodhu Billahi min al-shaytan il-rajeem (I seek refuge with Allah from the accursed shaytan) whilst he was praying?

They replied:

Seeing refuge with Allah is Sunnah, and it does not matter if it is omitted from the prayer whether deliberately or by mistake. End quote.

Shaykh Ibn ‘Uthaymeen was asked: Should one seek refuge with Allah in every rak’ah or only in the first rak’ah?

He replied:

Seeking refuge with Allah from the accursed shaytan in prayer is Sunnah.

The scholars (may Allah have mercy on them) differed as to whether one should seek refuge with Allah in every rak'ah or only in the first rak'ah, based on the recitation in prayer – is it regarded as one recitation or is the recitation in each rak'ah separate?

It seems to me that the recitation in prayer is one recitation, so one should seek refuge with Allah in the first rak'ah, unless there happens something that requires seeking refuge with Allah, such as if there come whispers from the shaytan (waswas), because if whispers come from the shaytan, the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) enjoined spitting drily to the left three times and seeking refuge with Allah from the accursed shaytan. End quote.

Majmoo' Fatawa Ibn 'Uthaymeen (13/110)

This view is also favoured in the answer to question no. 65847.

And Allah knows best.