79 - Ruling on Congregational Prayer in the Mosque

the question

Dear brother in faith.

I start with the name of Allah. I would like to thank you for your prompt response for our previous question which was of a great help to our community (All thanks be to Allah).
What is the Islamic point-of-view regarding those who attend Friday prayers in the Masjid and fail to attend any other of the daily prayers? Do you have to attend the prayers at the Masjid if time permits?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

All Praise is due to Allah A- Evidence From The Quran

First Evidence

Our Lord tabaraka wa ta'aala said what may be translated as {And when you [i.e., the commander of an army] are among them and lead them in prayer, let a group of them stand [in prayer] with you and let them carry their arms. And when they have prostrated, let them be [in position] behind you and have the other group come forward which has not [yet] prayed and let them pray with you} (Quran 4:102)

I say:

1. In the verse is an order to establish salat, and the order was repeated once more, "and let the other party ..."
2. There is evidence here that jama'ah meaning congregational prayer is obligatory on all because the obligation did not fall from being upon the second party simply by the

congregation of the first party.

3. Allah has commanded a congregational prayer while they are in a state of war and fear, and if it were only a sunnah then it would have been better to abandon the congregational prayer; however, since Allah has ordered it, and obligations like following the Imam are allowed to be violated in order for the second party to pray behind the Imam. This proves clearly that the congregational prayer is obligatory.
4. This is a clear proof, and there is none amongst Muslims (scholars) that denies the salat of fear ordered in this verse.

Second Evidence

Our Lord the Exalted has said what may be translated as "The day that a Shin shall be laid bare, and they shall be summoned to prostrate, but they shall not be able to. Their eyes will be cast down, ignominy will cover them, seeing that they had been summoned aforetime to bow in adoration while they were whole, and had refused." (Quran 68:42-43)

The evidence here is from several facets amongst them:

1. Allah punished them because they did not answer the call to prostrate.
2. The one that is calling to salat is the one calling Athan. As has been explained by the hadith of Ibn Abi Maktoom: the Prophet told him "do you hear Hayya Alassalat, Hayya Alalfalah (parts of the call to prayer)"? He said yes, then the Prophet said "fahayhala" which means something like "then go answer the call." This hadith is sahih (which means sound, and authentic) and is narrated by Abu Dawood and Ahmad.
3. So he learned that the one who does not answer the call, has not answered.

Third Evidence

Allah ta'aala said what might be translated as "Establish salat and pay your zakat and bow with those that are bowing". (Quran 2:43)

The proof therein is:

1. That Allah ordered us to bow, and meaning salat because it is a pillar of the salat.
2. His statement which was translated as "with those that are bowing" is an order to bow with those that are bowing, and that is not accomplished except through congregation. So this is evidence that salat al-jama'ah is obligatory because the meaning of the verse is not accomplished except through congregation.

B- Evidence From The Sunnah

First Evidence

Abu Huraira narrated that the Messenger of Allah said "The heaviest salat for the hypocrite is that of Isha'a and Fajr and if they knew what was in them they would have attended them even if it meant crawling, and I have a strong desire to order the salat to be established, then order a man to lead the people in salat then I would go with some men carrying bundles of wood to a people not attending the salat and burn their houses on them." Agreed upon by Bukhari and Muslim, and this was Muslim's version.

This hadith proves that salat al-jama'ah is obligatory because one's house would not be burned for leaving a sunnah.

Those of the opinion that salat al-jama'ah is not obligatory find refuge in a few excuses with regards to this hadith which follow:

1. They said this punishment is in reference to those that do not attend the Jum'ah (Friday) prayer, and their evidence in this regard is the hadith of Abdullah Bin Mas'ood narrated by Muslim that the Prophet said to a people that miss the Friday prayer "I have a strong desire to order a person to lead the salat and I would burn the homes of those that have missed the Friday prayer". This is not in contradiction to the hadith of Abu Huraira because Ibn Mas'ood is stating that the burning is for those that miss the Friday prayer, and Abu Huraira is stating that the burning is for those that miss salat al-jama'ah and there is no contradiction between the two because the hadith of Abu Huraira clearly states the Isha'a and Fajr and it is likely that what is meant is to show that both cases are worthy of the burning.

2. They say: This has been abrogated! My reply is: Where is the proof that this has been abrogated, and who has narrated it? However, to simply claim abrogation without evidence is a forgery upon Allah which is not backed by any knowledge.
3. They say: The Prophet wanted to burn their houses because they were hypocrites, not because they did not attend the prayer in congregation. The best rebuttal of this statement was given by Ibn Al-Qayyim, may Allah have mercy upon him in his statement, ...as for your claim that he wanted to punish them because of their hypocrisy, and not for missing the congregation this implies two errors:

The first: cancelling what the Messenger confirmed and related to missing the congregation.
The second: Confirming what the Messenger cancelled. For he never punished the hypocrites for their hypocrisy; to the contrary, he used to accept from them what they announced, and left what they concealed between them and Allah.

As such the hadith of Abu Huraira remains a strong argument for the obligation of salat al jama'ah.

Second Evidence

What Muslim narrated in his Sahih that a blind man said, "Oh Messenger of Allah, I do not have someone to guide me to the Mosque," and thus asked the Messenger to grant him special permission not to attend congregational prayers. As he was leaving, the Messenger called him and said "Do you hear the call? ", he said "yes". He said, "Then answer." Authentic versions narrated by Ahmed and others came as: narrated by Ibn Maktoom that he said: "Oh Messenger of Allah, I am blind, live far away, and have a guide that does not suit me, so can't you give me consent to pray at home?" He said "Do you hear the call?" Ibn Maktoom replied "Yes". The Prophet then said "I cannot find an excuse for you". If the blind man has no excuse not to pray in congregation, how can there be an excuse for the one that can see?

Those that conclude salat al-jama'ah to be sunnah say, "This is an order to pray in congregation that implies the preference not the obligation of salat al-jama'ah".

The response to this is that since the order here was unrestricted one needs supportive evidence to conclude that it was only meant to show preference. Now how about supportive evidence confirming salat al-jama'ah to be obligatory.

If supportive evidence were not necessary to conclude that an order was stated to imply preference then each and every order could be understood to have been implying preference, and nothing would remain obligatory.

Third Evidence

Narrated by Ibn Abbas, may Allah be pleased with them (him, and his father), that the Prophet said, "Whosover hears the call to salat, and does not respond, then there is no salat for him unless he has a valid excuse." This is a sound, and authentic hadith.

Ibn Al-Qayyim wrote in his Risalat Assalat "... and mind you this chain (referring to chain of narration of the above hadith) is authentic." This hadith has been narrated by Abu Dawood, Ibn Majah, Daar qutni, Al-Hakim, Al-Baghawi, Bayhaqi, and has also been traced and judged authentic by the following scholars: Al-Thahabi, Al-Nawawi, Ibn Hajar Al Asqalani, Ibn Taimiya, Ibn Qayyim Al, and Al-Albani. Some have spoken about this hadith, claiming that its chain is stopped (literal translation for the Arabic word mawqoof; however, the authentic chains of narrations which have been traced to the Prophet contradict their claim.

That hadith states that whoever does not answer the call, there is no salat for him, and this judgment would not be passed to someone who is simply going against an order which implies preference, and not obligation.

Fourth Evidence

Abdullah Bin Mas'ood said: who ever would be pleased to meet Allah as a Muslim, then let him take care of those salat which are called to because they are of the ways of huda (guidance), and Allah has given to your Prophet the ways of huda. And if you were to establish salat in your homes, like that person staying behind in his home, you would be abandoning the sunnah of your Prophet,

and if you were to abandon the sunnah of your prophet you would surely go astray. And there is not a man amongst you that purifies himself (yatatahhar), and does so properly, then directs himself to one of these mosques except that Allah will write for him with each step he takes a hasanah (merit), and raises him a grade, and drops from him a sayyi'ah (demerit). And I have seen us, where not one of us would stay behind from prayer in congregation except for a hypocrite whose hypocrisy is known. And one that could not come on his own would be carried between two men until he is stood in the row.

In another narration he said, "the Messenger of Allah taught us the ways of huda, and amongst the ways of huda is salat in the Mosque in which Athan is called". Narrated by Muslim.

The evidence in this hadith is that not praying in congregation is considered a sign of confirmed hypocrisy.

It is known that the signs of hypocrisy are those of abandoning something which is obligatory, or doing something which is haram (unlawful.) And there is not a Muslim in whose heart iman (faith) has established itself, that would want to be like the hypocrites in their attributes.

Fifth Evidence

1. Ibu Sa'eed Al-Khudry said that the Messenger of Allah said, "If there are three let one of them be their Imam, and the one with the strongest right to be Imam is the one that is the best reciter of the Quran (both in terms of the amount memorized, and ability to recite it properly)".
2. Abu Ad-Darda'a said that the Messenger of Allah said "There are not three in a town where no Athan is called, and congregational prayers are not established amongst them except that the Sheitan will overcome them, so you must stick to jama'ah because the wolf gets the stray one". Authentic hadith narrated by Abu Dawood and Ahmed.

Sixth Evidence

Abu Asha'a'thaa'a Al-Muharibi said: We were sitting in the masjid (mosque) then the Mu'athin (the

one that makes the call to prayer) made the call to prayer. Then a man got up from the masjid walking. Abu Huraira followed him with his sight until he left the Masjid. Then Abu Huraira said "as for this person he has disobeyed Abal Qasim (the Messenger) ". Narrated by Muslim.

Abu Huraira, may Allah be pleased with him, judged this man as having disobeyed Abal Qasim , and Abu Huraira would not have passed this verdict without knowledge of the sunnah of Abal Qasim . And whosoever is considered among the disobedient then he has left something which is obligatory.

These, my Muslim brothers are some of the pieces of evidence that oblige the Muslim servant to pray in congregation, and whoever ponders in the Quran and Sunnah will find more and more.

Each piece of the preceding evidence is enough in itself to be proof that salat al-jama'ah is obligatory. We also remind our brothers that the Muslim servant is not allowed to reject anything from Allah or his Messenger just because a certain scholar ruled differently. Evidence is an argument against all people. Imam's that have concluded differently are expected to have a valid excuse because even they cannot contradict clear evidence from Quran and Sunnah. Their teachings that people must follow Quran and Sunnah are well known, and they, may Allah have mercy upon them, did not become Imam's except by strong adherence to Quran and Sunnah.

Know this because it is beneficial to you...

Of Allah's bounty upon us with regards to this issue is that the best of people, the companions of the Messenger , have had Ijma'a (consensus) in it. There are no narrations passed down from any one of them giving leave not to pray in congregation. And following is what has been confirmed by them:

1. Ibn Mas'ood said, "and I have seen us, where not one of us would stay behind except for a hypocrite whose hypocrisy was known." (5th evidence)
2. Ibn Mas'ood, Abu Musa Al-Ash'ary, Ali, Abu Huraira, Ayesha, and Ibn Abbas have stated, "Whoever hears the call to salat and does not answer, there is no salat for him unless he has a valid excuse." (3rd evidence)

Ibn Al-Qayyim said after he presented the statements of the companions: "These are statements of the companions as you find them, authentic and well known, and there is not one known statement from any of the companions which contradicts this. Each of these pieces of evidence is enough all by itself, so how about when they all enforce one another. Verily in Allah is our success."

These are the statements of the people of knowledge:

1. Al-Baghawi wrote in Sharh Assunnah (3/349), "More than one of the companions were of the opinion that whoever hears the call and does not answer, then there is no salat for him."
2. Ata'a bin Rabah said, "There is no excuse for anyone created by Allah in a city or country side not to attend if he hears the call to prayer."
3. Al-Hasan Al-Basri said, "If his mother forbids him from praying Isha'a in congregation, out of pity, he should not obey her.
4. Al-Awza'i said: "There is no obedience to the father in leaving the Friday prayer, or the daily congregational prayers, regardless of whether one heard the call to prayer or not."
5. Amongst those that have said that it is obligatory as well are Ibn Khuzaima, Al-Shafi'i, Al-Bukhari, Ibn Hibban, Dawood, Ahl Al-Dhahir, Hanabila, Ishaaq, and most of Ahl Al-hadith, and some of the companions of Al-Shafi'i.

You now know, may Allah have mercy upon you, the preceding evidence concerning the obligatory status of salat al-jama'ah,and the statements of those that conclude it as such from amongst the pious predecessors of our Ummah (nation.)

Now what remains for you to know is that whoever prays alone, then his prayer is correct; however, he has the ithm (sin) of leaving the jama'ah (congregation). As for the acceptance, or rejection, this is up to The Creator, and no one can say that the prayer of Zaid is accepted while the prayer of Obaid is not.

We ask Allah to help us in remembering and thanking him and better worshipping him. Allah the exalted knows best.