

Recitation of Qiraah behind Imam

Those of us who adhere to the madhab of Imam Abu Hanifa believe that when an individual performs salat alone then it is wajib to recite al-Fatiha, but when one is praying behind the Imam then al-Fatiha should not be recited, whether the Imam is reciting loudly or quietly. The evidence available from the Qur'an and Sunna are as follows:

Allah says in the Qur'an:

"When the Qur'an is recited, listen to it"

[Sura al-A'raf: 204]

Hafiz Ibn Kathir writes:

"The Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said: 'The Imam's recitation is enough for the followers' "

[Tafsir Ibn Kathir, Sura al-Fatiha]

Hence the position taken by those who adhere to this madhab is that it is impermissible to recite behind the Imam in any salat.

There are people who believe that we should recite behind the Imam even when the Imam recites loudly or quietly. Their evidence is from the hadith in which the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said:

"The salat of the person who does not recite al-Fatiha is not accepted"

[Bukhari & Muslim, Kitab as-Salat, Wujub al-Qira'at]

Rather than reading this hadith in isolation, when we read other sources of Islamic law we can establish that the meaning of this hadith is that it is essential to recite al-Fatiha when praying salat alone. Some people have also established from the above hadith that it implies that the recitation of al-Fatiha in every rakat is fard (compulsory). It is also worth mentioning that this hadith is established from a single narration, and an action cannot be proved to be fard from such type of narration. There is proof from Qur'an and Sunna which supports the view that if someone reads any part of the Qur'an in the salat, the salat will be accepted. Allah says in the Qur'an:

"Recite the Qur'an [in salat] that which is easy for you"

[Sura al-Muzzammil, verse 20]

If Surat al-Fatiha was fard then the verse would have stated this explicitly. There is also another hadith which states that the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) taught a man how to perform salat, yet he did not mention al-Fatiha. Imam al-Bukhari and Imam Muslim write:

"The Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) was sitting in the masjid and a man came and performed salat. The Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) ordered him to perform salat again. When he finished, the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) told him again to perform salat. The man said, 'This is the best way that I can perform salat. Teach me a better way.' The Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said 'When you stand, say takbir then recite from the Qur'an whatever is easy for you' "

[Bukhari & Muslim, Bab al-Wujub al-Qira'a]

Imam Daraqutni writes:

"The Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said that whoever joins the salat with the Imam in ruku' [before the Imam stands straight], that ruku will not have to be repeated"

[Daraqutni, Adrak Imam Qabla ar-Ruku']

If the recitation of Sura al-Fatiha was fard, the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) would have told the man to recite al-Fatiha first and then to recite any other part of the Qur'an which was easy for him. Also the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) would not have said that the ruku' of the person who joins the Imam in ruku' does not have to be repeated. In such a case al-Fatiha is missed. If al-Fatiha was fard the person joining the salat at ruku' would have had to repeat his salat, simply because a fard was missing.

Allama Sa'idi writes:

"The meaning of the above debated hadith is similar to the following ahadith: The Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said, 'Whoever lives close to the mosque and does not pray in the mosque his salat is not accepted.'

"There is another hadith, which states that if a person makes wudu' and does not recite bismillah, the wudu' is invalid. There is also another hadith stating that a person is not Muslim if his neighbour sleeps in a hungry state. Another hadith states that if a person does not fulfil their promise then he is not a Muslim. Of course, the person who fails to fulfil their promise is still a Muslim and, in the same way, if someone does not recite al-Fatiha in salat, his salat is still accepted but without full perfection. If this was not the case the Prophet should have said: 'The salat of the one who does not recite al-Fatiha is false' "

[Sa'idi, Sharh Muslim, Bab Wujubi Qira'at]

There is a further explanation of this hadith, which we shall touch upon later insha'llah. We accept that there are scholars who hold the view that people should recite al-Fatiha behind the Imam. The scholars have also written books on this subject.

Hafiz Ibn Taymiyya writes:

"Some scholars say that al-Fatiha should be recited behind the Imam. The scholars of Hadith say this opinion is weak. Qur'an and authentic ahadith and the opinion of the early Muslims [salaf] is with those scholars who say that al-Fatiha should not be recited behind the Imam"

[Ibn Taymiyya, Tanaw Ibadat, p. 76]

Hafiz Ibn Kathir writes:

"Imam Ahmad and Imam Abu Hanifa say there should be no recitation behind the Imam during any salat. This is more accurate because Imam ash-Shafi'i has one opinion which is similar to this"

[Tafsir Ibn Kathir, Sura al-A'raf, verse 204]

Imam Abu Dawud writes:

"One day the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) was leading the prayer. After he had finished praying he asked, 'Perhaps some of you were reciting behind me?' The followers replied, 'Yes.' The Prophet said, 'That was why I was facing difficulty in reciting.'" Abu Hurayra, Imam Zuhri and Imam Awza'i said that after this advice from the Prophet everyone stopped reciting behind the Imam"

[Abu Dawud, Bab Man al-Qira'at]

From this narration, we can see that people used to recite behind the Imam but stopped it afterwards.

Surely, after reading such statements, it should suffice to understand which position is in accordance with the Prophet's (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) command of 'Pray as you see me pray.' Whoever decides to embark on their own research on this subject will find it difficult not to arrive at the same conclusion of Hafiz Ibn Taymiyya and Hafiz Ibn Kathir.

Evidence For Reciting al-Fatiha Behind the Imam

Let us now examine the evidence of the people who insist that they should recite behind the Imam. Essentially, they claim that there are three ahadith which state that the Prophet said that we should recite behind the Imam. In fact, there is not a single hadith in which the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) has commanded us to recite behind the Imam. As we have seen thus far, there is proof from the Qur'an and Sunna to suggest that we should NOT recite behind the Imam.

Let us examine the three narrations which have been put forward. The first narration is from 'Ali ibn 'Abdullah from Sufyan from Zuhri from Mahmud who reported:

"The Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said that the salat of whoever does not recite al-Fatiha is not complete"

[Bukhari & Muslim, Bab al-Wujib al-Qira'a]

Those who recite behind the Imam put forward this hadith as their evidence to recite Sura al-Fatiha in every salat behind the Imam. There is no word in this hadith that proves that al-Fatiha should be recited behind the Imam. If we take the literal meaning of reciting behind the Imam, then this narration would go against the Qur'an and authentic ahadith. The actual meaning of this narration is that when a person is praying alone and does not recite al-Fatiha then his salat is not complete. This is the actual opinion held by narrators of this narration. The following proves this:

Imam Muslim writes:

"Ma'mar reported from Zuhri that the Prophet Muhammad said, 'The salat of the person who does not recite Sura al-Fatiha and another part of the Qur'an is not accepted' "

[Muslim, Bab al-Qira'a]

Imam Muslim's narration confirms that this hadith is for the person who is praying alone because when a person prays alone he reads Sura al-Fatiha and another part of the Qur'an. Even the people who recite al-Fatiha behind the Imam do not say that there should be another part of the Qur'an recited. So it is clear that this hadith is for those people who are praying alone.

An Objection Raised

Imam al-Bukhari narrated a narration from Sufyan which is about the wujub of only reciting al-Fatiha whereas Imam Muslim narrates from Ma'mar a hadith which says that the person's prayer is not accepted if they do not recite Sura al-Fatiha AND another part of the Qur'an. We prefer Sufyan's narration over Ma'mar's because Sufyan is more reliable.

This objection can be cleared easily by looking at what the books of al-jarh wa ta'dil say about the quality of hadith narrators.

Imam adh-Dhahabi and Hafiz al-'Asqalani write:

"Imam Yahya ibn Mu'in was asked by his students as to who had memorised more of Imam adh-Dhahabi's narrations and whom he preferred. He replied: 'Imam Ma'mar. Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal said that Sufyan heard ahadith from Imam Zuhri at a young age, so this is why when he reported ahadith from Zuhri he made mistakes in twenty of them' "

[al-'Asqalani, Tahzib at-Tahzib; adh-Dhahabi, Mizan al-I'tidal, Biography of Sufyan and Ma'mar]

This reference proves that Ma'mar's narration is more authentic than Sufyan's narration.

Hafiz Ibn Kathir writes:

"Sufyan sometimes committed tadril [which means that when he narrated some of the hadith he made out that he heard it directly from Zuhri, but he had actually heard it from someone else who in turn heard it from Zuhri]. One day, Sufyan was sitting with his students and he told them a hadith, which he was narrating from Zuhri. One of the students questioned: 'Did you hear this directly from Zuhri?' Sufyan paused and said: 'No, I heard it from 'Abd ar-Razzaq, who heard it from Ma'mar, who heard it directly from Zuhri'"

[Ibn Kathir, Iftisar 'Ulum al-Ahadith, Bab at-Tadril]

This reference proves that Sufyan at times committed tadril and since Ma'mar's name is not mentioned under those who committed tadril, we can safely assert that he did not.

Someone may say that Sufyan's narrations are preferred over Ma'mar's even if Ma'mar is more reliable concerning Zuhri's narrations. In response to this we assert that Sufyan's narrations do not actually prove that we should read al-Fatiha even if we are praying behind an Imam. Let us examine what Imam Zuhri and his other students (including Imam Malik and Sufyan himself) understood from this narration.

The main narration comes from Imam Zuhri, then his students: Imam Malik, Sufyan, Yunus, Ma'mar, Awza'i and others narrate this narration:

Imam Abu Dawud writes:

"Sufyan narrates from Imam Zuhri that the hadith, that a prayer of the person who does not recite al-Fatiha and another part of the Qur'an is not accepted, is meant for the person who is praying alone. Imam Zuhri says that when the Prophet used to lead the prayer loudly the people used to recite behind him. This narration is from Imam Zuhri, narrated by Sufiyan, Ma'mar, 'Abdullah ibn Muhammad, Awza'i, 'Abd ar-Rahman ibn Ishaq, Yunus, 'Usama and Imam Malik"

[Abu Dawud, Bab Tark al-Qira'a Khalf al-Imam]

From this we can prove that the hadith concerning nullification of the prayer of the one who does not recite Al-Fatiha in their prayer is meant for that person who is performing salat alone, and not behind the Imam. This is what Imam Sufyan, his teacher and colleagues understood by this narration. This hadith is found in two versions: one version is narrated by Sufyan concerning just reading Al-Fatiha (and without any clarification). The other version is that the person's prayer is not accepted who does not recite al-Fatiha AND another part of the Qur'an. This narration comes from Sufyan, Ma'mar and others. The second narration is an explanation of the first one. Imam Sufyan himself explained that this narration is for that person who is performing salat alone.

More Evidence Supporting the Recitation Behind the Imam

Imam Muslim writes:

"Someone asked Abu Hurayra, 'What do we do when we are behind the Imam? Should we recite al-Fatiha or not?' He answered, 'Recite it in your heart' "

[Muslim, Bab Wujubi Qira'at]

The people who recite behind the Imam take evidence from this narration by saying that reciting al-Fatiha behind the Imam is fard as Abu Hurayra said that it should be recited in the heart. These words are neither from Allah nor the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace), but are the words of Abu Hurayra himself. In Bukhari, Muslim, and other books of ahadith there is no such narration which says that when you are behind the Imam you must recite al-Fatiha in your heart. There are, however, narrations which say that when the Imam is reciting al-Fatiha one should listen to it.

Imam Muslim writes in Sahih Muslim:

"Abu Hurayra relates that the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said, 'When the Imam recites, listen and stay quiet' "

[Muslim, Bab at-Tashahhud]

How can it be possible that Abu Hurayra contradict his own narrations? The actual meaning of Abu Hurayra's words concerning reciting in the heart is to contemplate its meanings. This is the true meaning which does not go against the Qur'an and the Sunna.

Qadi Shawkani (Imam al-Qurtubi has also written something similar) writes:

"The word 'Nafsaka [Your self] means to think about the meaning"

[Fath al-Qadir, Sura al-A'raf, verse 203]

Imam an-Nawawi writes:

"Some Maliki scholars have explained Abu Hurayra's words about 'reading in the heart' as to mean thinking about the words of al-Fatiha, because if you read something in the heart it cannot be called recitation because recitation is actually when one reads from the tongue. So it is only called recitation when the tongue is actually moving. The proof of this is that all the scholars say when a woman is in an impure state she cannot recite with the tongue, but she can think about the meaning in her heart"

[Sharh Muslim, Bab Wujubi Qira'at]

From the above we can see that Abu Hurayra's words do not mean to recite behind the Imam but rather they mean to think about the meaning in the heart.

The Status of the Words of the Companions

It is said that the words of Abu Hurayra prove that recitation behind the Imam is fard. This objection can be easily cleared, as the words of the Companions cannot prove something to be fard, wajib, halal or haram, as only the Qur'an and ahadith of the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) can prove this. This is particularly so when the words of the Companion contradict any hadith that the Companion himself reported. The words of the Companions are normally proof of something when there is nothing related to it (from the Qur'an and Sunna).

Hafiz Ibn Taymiyya writes:

"The words of the Sahaba cannot prove anything to be fard, wajib, halal or haram, especially when words go against authentic hadith. So when the words go against the hadith it is not necessary for Muslims to follow it. There is a narration saying that Abu Hurayra used to wipe his neck during wudu. We know that to perform this wiping is against Sunna. This is why groups of scholars criticise those people who wipe the neck during wudu"

[Kitab al-Wasila, Bab Hadith al-Ama]

After Hafiz Ibn Taymiyya's statement one cannot prove that reciting al-Fatiha behind the Imam from Abu Hurayra's words.

More evidence supporting recitation behind the Imam

Imam Abu Dawud writes :

" 'Ubada ibn Samid reported: 'Once we prayed Fajr behind the Prophet and he experienced difficulty in his recitation. When he finished praying he asked, 'Maybe one of you was reciting behind me?' We said, 'Yes.' The Prophet said, 'Do not recite anything behind me except al-Fatiha.' Narrated by Muhammad ibn Ishaq, Muqhl, and Nafi' from 'Ubada."

[Abu Dawud, Bab al-Qira'at fi as-Salat]

From this narration one cannot prove that the recitation behind the Imam is necessary. Here are some reasons for this:

1) This narration opposes the Qur'an and the authentic ahadith which say that one should not recite behind the Imam (of which we have mentioned but a few, above).

2) This narration is very weak. The reason for this is that the narrators of this hadith have been criticised by the scholars of Hadith.

3) Abu Dawud, who collected this hadith, wrote a second chapter in which there is the full explanation of this hadith. When we read the full explanation we can see that we should not recite behind the Imam.

4) The narrator of this narration himself, never recited behind the Imam.

The Narrator of This Hadith

Abu Dawud writes:

"Muqhl sometimes got this narration confused because sometimes he said he got the narration from 'Ubada and sometimes that he said he heard it from Nafi' and sometimes he said he heard it from Mahmud"

[Abu Dawud, Bab Qira'a Khalf al-Imam]

The other narrator of this hadith is Naf'i, who is unknown. Imam adh-Dhahabi and Hafiz al-'Asqalani write:

"Naf'i only ever narrated one hadith [which was the one above]. This is the reason why Imam Ibn 'Abdi'l-Barr says that he is unknown. Imam al-Bukhari and Imam Abu Hatim never mentioned Naf'i's name in their books. Ibn Habban said that Naf'i's narration is weak, but he was not a liar"

[Mizan al-'Itidal, Tahzib at-Tahzib, Biography of Naf'i ibn Mahmud]

The other narrator of this narration is Muhammad ibn Ishaq, who was very knowledgeable in Islamic history but very weak in narration of hadith. Imam adh-Dhahabi and Hafiz al-'Asqalani write:

"The scholars of Hadith have different opinions about Muhammad ibn Ishaq. Yahya ibn Mu'in says that he is authentic but his narration of hadith is not good. 'Ali ibn Madini says his two narrations are unknown. An-Nasa'i said that he is not strong in the knowledge of Hadith. Imam Daraqutni said that his hadith cannot be used as evidence. Imam Abu Bakr said that Muhammad ibn Ishaq was Qadri. Imam Hasham and Imam Sulayman said that he was a liar. Imam Malik said that he is a liar and is a Dajjal. 'Abdullah ibn Mubarak said, 'I saw Muhammad ibn Ishaq in Masjid al-Haif. I did not go near him because people might have said that I have wrong beliefs like him.' Imam Ahmad said, 'When he narrates hadith, he narrates hadith from those people whom he never met. Imam Yahya ibn Sa'id says, 'I bear witness that Muhammad ibn Ishaq is a liar. He has narrated one thousand ahadith which no one else has narrated.' Imam al-Bukhari never wrote any hadith that was narrated by Muhammad ibn Ishaq. No one can use his narration of hadith as evidence for halal and haram but there are a few people who praised him, like Imam Shoba"

[Mizan al-'Itidal, Tahzib at-Tahzib, Tadhkirat al-Huffaz, Biography of Muhammad ibn Ishaq]

We can see that the majority of scholars have criticised Muhammad ibn Ishaq so how can we use his narration as evidence?

Imam Abu Dawud writes :

"Naf'i reported: One day, 'Ubada and I performed salat behind Abu Na'im. 'Ubada was standing besides me. He recited behind the Imam. When the salat was over, I asked him, 'Why, when the Imam was reciting loudly, did you recite behind him?' He told me about the hadith that has been mentioned above"

[Abu Dawud, Bab Qira'at Khalf al-Imam]

From this we can see that Naf'i (who is the narrator of the hadith) did not recite behind the Imam, and nor did the other people who were there. Secondly, it is proved that 'Ubada was reciting al-Fatiha loud enough so that the next person could hear him. So the people who use this hadith as evidence should only recite loud enough so that the next person can hear them. If everyone recites loudly behind the Imam it would sound like similar to the "Amin" said in unison. So these are the reasons why this narration cannot be used as evidence. We also know that there are authentic ahadith that exhort one to listen to the Imam when he is reciting. So how can we leave the authentic hadith and follow the weak hadith?

Hafiz Ibn Taymiyya writes :

"To listen to the recitation of the Imam is mentioned in the Qur'an and the authentic ahadith. The whole Umma agrees on this. All the Companions say that when the Imam recites al-Fatiha or any other Sura it is fard to listen and to stay quiet. Imam Shafi'i saying is also like this. This is the reason that the knowledgeable Shafi'i scholars, like Imam Qadri and Imam Abu Muhammad, say that if the Imam is reciting loudly, and someone recites behind him, that person would be denying the Qur'an, Sunna and the opinion of all the Companions"

[Ibn Taymiyya, Tanaw al-'Ibadat, p. 87]

After Hafiz Ibn Taymiyya's statement no-one can say that recitation behind the Imam is fard and that the one who recites behind the Imam risks his salat being not accepted.

Evidence From the Qur'an For Not Reciting Behind the Imam

Allah says in the Qur'an:

"When the Qur'an is being recited, listen to it and be silent"

[Sura A'raf, verse 204]

Hafiz Ibn Kathir explains the meaning of this verse as follows:

"You should remain quiet when the Imam is reciting Qur'an loudly in the fard salat. There is a hadith in which the Prophet said, 'When offering salat behind the Imam you should recite takbir. When he recites takbir, and when he recites qira'at you should remain quiet

"There is also another narration:

' 'Abdullah Ibn Mas'ud heard some people reciting Qira'at behind the Imam and said to them, "What is wrong with you? Why are you not obeying the Qur'an?" '

"This implies that when the Qur'an is being recited one should remain quite. Imam Zuhri states that this verse was revealed because one man used to recite behind the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace). Abu Hurayra said that before this verse was revealed people were in the habit of reading behind the Imam aloud in salats Fajr, Maghrib and Isha and when this verse was revealed they stopped this practice.

"Imam Zuhri says that in the salat, where the Imam recites loudly, you should not recite behind him because the Imam's recitation is sufficient for you, even if you cannot hear. But there were some people who thought that they could recite behind the Imam if his voice did not reach them, but I [Ibn Kathir] say that this is wrong; no-one should recite behind the Imam, whether his voice reaches them or not. This is because Allah says in the Qur'an:

'When the Qur'an is being recited, listen to it and remain quiet.'

"A group of scholars say the following:

'Imam Ahmad and Abu Hanifa say that a person should not recite qira'at behind the Imam in any salat because the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) stated that the Imam's reciting is sufficient for the followers.

"Imam ash-Shafi'i has two opinions on this subject:

1) A person should recite qira'at behind the Imam

2) A person should not recite qira'at behind the Imam

"I [Ibn Kathir] say that the second opinion is correct as it corresponds with the Qur'an.

"Imam al-Bukhari states that a person is entitled to recite qira'at in every salat behind the Imam whether the Imam recites quietly or loudly, but the Sahaba and Tabi'un say that it is essential to listen to the Imam and remain quiet. This is the opinion held by Ibn 'Abbas, Mujahid, Ibn Jubayr, Ibn Mas'ud, and many other great Sahaba and Tabi'un"

[Ibn Kathir, Tafsir Ibn Kathir, Sura A'raf, verse 204]

Imam at-Tabari writes:

"This verse was revealed about salat, but some scholars say that the verse is not for salat but is also for the Jumu'a and 'Id Khutba. The Companions agree with this. Ibn Mas'ud, Abu Hanifa, Imam Zuhri, Zayd, Ibn Musayb, Hasan al-Basri, 'Ubaydh, Ata, Dhahak, Ibrahim, an-Nakhai, Qatada, Shabi (who had seen 500 of the Prophets Companions) and Sadai all hold this opinion"

[at-Tabari, Tafsir Tabari, Sura A'raf, verse 204]

Hafiz Ibn Taymiyya writes:

"Imam Ahmad Ibn Hanbal says that the whole Umma has agreed upon the fact that when the verse: 'When the Qur'an is recited, listen and remain quiet' was revealed for salat all scholars agreed that it is not essential for the muqtadi [follower] to recite but he should stay quite and listen. This opinion is authentic because it is in line with the Qur'an"

[Fatawa Ibn Taymiyya, Vol. 2, p. 143, 168 and 412]

From the tafsirs of Hafiz Ibn Kathir and Imam at-Tabari it is clear that the verse from Sura al-A'raf was revealed for salat. The Sahaba and Tabi'un also agreed on this. It may still be said that the Sahaba and Tabi'un, who say that this aya was revealed for salat, made a mistake. To remove this doubt, Hafiz Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Kathir were quoted. These are the names of the people who along with other great scholars have passed the Din down to us. When these people interpret any verse of the Qur'an, they say that their interpretation is authentic and any other opinion is useless. This is because of their knowledge in the Islamic Sciences.

Hafiz Ibn Taymiyya writes:

"The Tabi'un gained knowledge from the Sahaba and settled in different places. The people of Makka had the most knowledge in Qur'anic Tafsir because Ibn 'Abbas once lived there and his students gained knowledge of Tafsir from him. An example is Mujahid who was the most knowledgeable in interpreting the Qur'an. Imam ash-Shafi'i, Ahmed and al-Bukhari used to prefer the Tafsir of Mujahid over others. Indeed, Mujahid was the 'sign of Allah on this earth.' Students of 'Abdullah ibn 'Abbas were Ata ibn Rubah, 'Ikrimah, and Sa'id ibn Jubayr

"In Kufa 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ud taught the people the knowledge of the Qur'anic Tafsir. They and their students had great knowledge in the field of Tafsir.

"In Madina, Zayd ibn Aslam had the most knowledge of the Qur'anic Tafsir. This is the reason why Imam Malik's quotations of Tafsir are from Zayd ibn Aslam. Hasan al-Basri, Musruq, Qatada, and Abu 'Aliya were also great scholars of Tafsir"

[Ibn Taymiyya, Usul at-Tafsir, p 21]

Hafiz Ibn Kathir writes:

"Mujahid, 'Ikrimah, Ata, Hasan al-Basri, Musruq, Sa'id and Abu 'Aliya had great knowledge of Tafsir but Mujahid was the 'Proof of Allah on this earth.' Sufyan ath-Thawri used to say that if Mujahid's Tafsir had said such and such a thing then further research is useless as his Tafsir is sufficient"

[Muqaddima Tafsir Ibn Kathir]

Therefore, if anyone should state that Sura al A'raf's verse was not revealed for salat, his statement can be ignored. This is because this opinion would be against the Sahaba and Tabi'un. This is proved from the above statements.

Evidence From Hadith For Not Reciting Behind the Imam

Imam Muslim writes :

"Abu Musa al-Ash'ari reported, 'The Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) taught us how to perform salat, and said, "First straighten the rows, then one person should become Imam, then follow him; when he says takbir say takbir and when he recites, remain quiet"

[Sahih Muslim, Book of Salat, Chapter on 'Tashahhud'; also reported in: Abu Dawud; Ibn Majah; Musnad Ahmad; Nayl al-Awtar, Kitab al-Qira'at; Muhallah Ibn Hazm, Chapter on 'Salat']

Imam Muslim writes:

"My student, Abu Nasr, asked me if the hadith narrated by Abu Hurayra in which it says '...when he [the Imam] recites, remain quiet' is authentic. I [Imam Muslim] replied, 'Yes, it is authentic"

[Sahih Muslim, Chapter on 'Tashahhud']

Imam Muslim writes:

"Zayd ibn Thabit was asked if a person should recite behind the Imam and he in reply said, 'Behind the Imam there is no qira'at' "

[Sahih Muslim, Chapter on 'Sujudi Tilawa]

Imam Malik writes:

"Jabir reported that if a person performs salat and fails to read Sura al-Fatiha, his salat is nullified, but if he is behind the Imam then his salat is valid"

[Muwatta Imam Malik, Majati Umal Qur'an]

Imam Malik further writes:

"Nafi' [who was a famous student of Ibn 'Umar] reported that when anyone asked Ibn 'Umar, 'Should a person recite Sura Al-Fatiha behind the Imam?' he used to reply that the Imam's reciting of Sura al-Fatiha is sufficient for you. Ibn 'Umar did not read Sura al-Fatiha behind the Imam"

[Muwatta Imam Malik, Book of Salat, chapter on 'Qira'at Khalf al-Imam]

Imam Ahmad writes:

"Ibn Sirin asked Ibn 'Umar, 'Should I recite al-Fatiha behind the Imam?' He replied, 'The Imam's recitation is sufficient for you' "

[Musnad Ahmad, Narrations of Ibn 'Umar]

Imam Ahmad writes:

"Jabir ibn 'Abdullah reported that the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said, 'The Imam's recitation is the person's recitation who is reading behind him' "

[Musnad Ahmad, Narrations of Jabir ibn 'Abdullah]

Ibn Majah also wrote this hadith in his book of salat. In Ibn Majah's narrative chain there is a person called Ja'far who is considered weak.

Imam Ahmad writes:

"Abu Hurayra narrated that the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said, 'The Imam is selected to be followed and when he says takbir, you say takbir; when he goes into ruku', you go into ruku'; when he goes into sajda, you go into sajda, but when he reads qira'at, you remain quiet"

[Musnad Ahmad, Narrations of Abu Hurayra; also see: an-Nasa'i, Nayl al-Awtar, Muhalla Ibn Hazm, Chapter of salat; Ibn Taymiyya, Fatawa Ibn Taymiyya, Kitab al-Qira'at, vol. 2 p.144]

Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal writes:

"Abu Darda reported, 'One day the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) told us (and I was the closest to the Prophet) about recitation behind the Imam. He said, 'The Imam's recitation is sufficient for the muqtadi' "

[Musnad Ahmad, Narrations of Abu Darda]

Imam at-Tirmidhi writes:

"Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal said that instruction from the hadith that states, '...salat is not accepted if Sura al-Fatiha is not read...' is for that person who is reading alone"

[at-Tirmidhi, Qira'at Khalf al-Imam]

Imam 'Abd ar-Razzaq (who was a great teacher of Imam Bukhari and Muslim) writes:

" 'Ali said that he who recites qira'at behind the Imam goes against nature. One person asked Ibn Mas'ud whether he should recite behind the Imam. Ibn Mas'ud replied, 'No.' Zayd ibn Aslam reported that the Prophet had prohibited a person from reading Qqra'at behind the Imam.

"Abu Ishaq said that Ibn Mas'ud's students did not recite behind the Imam. 'Ubaydullah asked Jabir ibn 'Abdullah whether he recited behind the Imam at Zuhr and 'Asr? He replied 'No?' "

[Musannaf 'Abd ar-Razzaq, Qira'at Khalf al-Imam]

Imam 'Abd ar-Razzaq, who died in 221AH, was neither a Hanafi nor Abu Hanifa's student. No-one can say that Imam 'Abd ar-Razzaq made up the narration to support the Hanifi position, so it should be accepted that this narration is not fabricated.

Imam Ibn Abi Shayba writes :

"The Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said, 'For any person who recites behind the Imam, my wish is that fire should be placed in his mouth.'

Nafi', Zayd ibn Aslam, Ibn 'Umar, Jubayr and Sa'id ibn Jubayr all hold that there is no qira'at behind the Imam whether he reads aloud or reads quiet"

[Musannaf Ibn Abi Shayba, Qira'at Khalf al-Imam]

Imam Ibn Abi Shayba, who strongly opposed Abu Hanifa, had written a full chapter against Abu Hanifa. In the same book he wrote the above narration without criticism. If this narration had not been true then he would have rejected it or at least criticised it. Also, because he has not criticised these reports, it is proof in itself that the narration had taken place. No-one can say that he had fabricated these narrations in order to support Abu Hanifa.

Imam Daraqutni writes:

"The Prophet said that there is no recitation behind the Imam. 'Ali says that a person who recites qira'at behind the Imam has gone against the Sunna"

[Daraqutni, chapter on 'Qira'at']

Daraqutni was also opposed to Imam Abu Hanifa and even tried to tamper with ahadiths which supported the Hanafi school. He did not criticise the above true narrations, which supports the contention that the above narrations are authentic.

Imam adh-Dhahabi writes :

"One man was performing salat behind the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) and was reciting. The person next to him tried to stop him with certain signals or signs. When the prayer had finished, they went to the Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) and told their case. The Prophet (may Allah bless him and grant him peace) said, 'The Imam's qira'a is sufficient for the followers' "

[adh-Dhahabi, Talqis Mustadrak, chapter on 'Salat']

The book Mustadrak, is written by al-Hakim. In this book there are all sorts of narrations both authentic and fabricated. Imam adh-Dhahabi has, in his book, examined every hadith to see whether it is authentic. Imam adh-Dhahabi's above hadith has been recorded as authentic.

Hafiz Ibn Taymiyya writes:

"When the Imam recites loudly it means that the Muqtadi should listen. This is the reason that the Imam recites loudly so the Muqtadi can say Amin with him. When the Imam recites quietly, they do not say Amin with him. If the Imam should recite and the Muqtadis also recite, this will mean that the Imam has been given the order to recite to people who do not want to listen to the qira'at [as if they wanted to listen they would remain quiet]. This is the same as saying to a person to do a speech to a nation that does not want to listen to it. This is such nonsense that Islam does not permit it.

There is a hadith which states that when a Khutba is being read and a person is talking, it is as though a pile of books is loaded onto a donkey. This is similar to a person reciting qira'at behind the Imam in the audible prayers"

[Fatawa Ibn Taymiyya, Vol. 2, p. 147]

So now, with all that has been mentioned and all the evidence cited, it should be clear that when the Imam recites qira'at the Muqtadi should stay quiet and listen - for the Imam's recitation is sufficient for the Muqtad