47748 - What are lamam (“small faults”)? And what is the ruling on a disobedient Muslim who repeatedly commits them?

the question

Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):
“Those who avoid great sins and Al-Fawaahish (illegal sexual intercourse) except the small faults (lamam)…”
[al-Najm 53:32]
I know that lamam (translated here as “small faults”) means minor sins, such as looking, kissing and touching, and these sins will be forgiven by Allaah so long as major sins are avoided.
My question is: does this mean that a person will not be punished for these sins even in this world, if he repents from them then does them again, and repents again and goes back to them again? Will he not be punished by Allaah for committing these sins?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

In the answer to the question no. 22422 , The meaning of small faults’” we have discussed the different scholarly opinions on the meaning of the word lamam in the verse (interpretation of the meaning):

“Those who avoid great sins and Al-Fawaahish (illegal sexual intercourse) except the small faults (lamam)…”

[al-Najm 53:32]

The majority of scholars are of the view that lamam refers to minor sins.

This does not mean that a person may be negligent with regard to the matter of committing minor sins, rather persisting in minor sins makes them major sins, which means that they are no longer

minor faults.

Al-Nawawi (may Allaah have mercy on him) said in Sharh Muslim:

The scholars (may Allaah have mercy on them) said that persisting in a minor sin makes it a major sin. It was narrated from ‘Umar, Ibn ‘Abbaas and others (may Allaah be pleased with them) that there is no major sin with prayers for forgiveness and no minor sin if one persists in it.

What this means is that a major sin may be erased by praying for forgiveness, but a minor sin may become a major sin if one persists in it. End quote.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah said in Majmoo’ al-Fataawa (15/293):

Adultery is a major sin, but looking and touching are lamam (minor sins) which may be forgiven if one avoids major sin. But if a person persists in looking or touching, that becomes a major sin, and persisting in that may be worse than a small amount of major sin, for persisting in looking with desire, along with the connected feelings of mixing and touching, may be much worse than the evil of an isolated act of zina. Hence the fuqaha’ said concerning the witness of good character: he does not commit a major sin or persist in a minor sin… Indeed, looking and touching may lead a man to shirk as Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“And of mankind are some who take (for worship) others besides Allaah as rivals (to Allaah). They love them as they love Allaah”

[al-Baqarah 2:165]

The one who is in love becomes a slave to the one he loves. end quote.

The Messenger (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) warned us against being negligent with regard to minor sins, and said:

“Beware of minor sins, like a people who camped in the bottom of a valley, and one man brought a stick, another man brought a stick, and so on, until they managed to bake their bread. There are some insignificant sins which, once (they accumulate) and a person is questioned about them,

they lead to his doom.”

Narrated by Ahmad, 2/223, from the hadeeth of Sahl ibn Sa’d (may Allaah have mercy on him). Al-Haafiz said: Its isnaad is hasan.

Ahmad (3803) narrated from ‘Abd-Allaah ibn Mas’ood (may Allaah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Beware of minor sins, for they accumulate until they doom a man,” and the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) gave a likeness of that: “Like people who camped in the wilderness, and one man brought a stick, another man brought a stick, and so on, until they accumulated a lot, then they lit a fire and cooked their food.” Classed as hasan by al-Albaani in Saheeh al-Jaami’, 2687.

Ibn Maajah (4243) narrated that ‘Aa’ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her) said: The Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said to me: “O ‘Aa’ishah, beware of deeds that are regarded as insignificant, for they have a pursuer from Allaah.” Classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh Ibn Maajah.

Al-Ghazaali said:

Repeatedly committing small sins has a great effect of blackening the heart. It is like the effect of water dripping onto rock, which will inevitably erode it, even though water is liquid and rock is solid. End quote.

The poet spoke well when he said:

Do not think of minor sins as insignificant, for mountains are made out of pebbles.

Secondly:

If a person repents from his sin, then it is forgiven and he will not be punished for it, either in this world or in the Hereafter. Hence the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “The one who repents from sin is like one who did not sin at all.” Narrated by Ibn Maajah, 4250. al-Haafiz said: Its isnaad is hasan; it was also classed as hasan by al-Albaani in Saheeh Ibn Maajah.

Al-Nawawi said:

The scholars (may Allaah be pleased with them) are agreed that repentance is accepted so long as the death rattle has not reached the throat, as it says in the hadeeth. There are three pillars or essential parts of repentance: the person must give up the sin, regret doing it, and resolve not to go back to it.

If a person repents from sin then goes back to it, that does not invalidate his repentance, and if he repents from one sin then commits another, his repentance is still valid. This is the correct view. End quote.

He also said:

If a person repeats the sin a hundred times or a thousand times or more, and repents each time, his repentance is accepted and his sin is erased. Even if he were to repent once after all these sins, his repentance would be valid. End quote.

In al-Saheehayn it is narrated from Abu Hurayrah (may Allaah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said in a hadeeth qudsi: “A person committed a sin and said, ‘O Allaah, forgive me my sin.’ Allaah said: ‘My slave has committed a sin, but he knew that he has a Lord Who forgives sins and punishes for sin.’ Then he committed the sin again and said: ‘O Lord, forgive me my sin.’ Allaah said: ‘My slave has committed a sin, but he knew that he has a Lord Who forgives sins and punishes for sin.’ Then he committed the sin again and said: ‘O Lord, forgive me my sin.’ Allaah said: ‘My slave has committed a sin, but he knew that he has a Lord Who forgives sins and punishes for sin. Do what you wish, for I have forgiven you.’” According to another report: “I have forgiven My slave, so let him do what he wishes.”

Al-Nawawi (may Allaah have mercy on him) said:

The words “Do what you wish, for I have forgiven you” mean: so long as you sin then repent, I will forgive you.

Whatever the case, the mercy of Allaah is vast and His bounty is immense. Whoever repents,

Allaah will accept his repentance. But the Muslim should not take the risk of committing sins because he may not be able to repent. What is mentioned in the hadeeth is for the purpose of explaining how great the mercy of Allaah is and how immense His bounty, not to encourage people to commit sin.

For more information, please see the answer to question no. 9231.

And Allaah knows best.