



127480 - The difference between major sins and minor sins

the question

Can you explain to me the difference between major sins and minor sins?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said: Sins may be divided into minor sins and major sins, according to the texts of the Qur'an and Sunnah, the consensus of the early generations, and how they are regarded by scholars. End quote.

Madaarij as-Saalikeen (1/315)

Once we know what major sins are, then we will know what minor sins are.

There are various scholarly views concerning the definition of major sins, after establishing the fact that they are not limited to the seven (mentioned in a well-known hadith).

Al-Haafiz said:

It was said that the major sin is that for which the doer is subject to a warning of punishment in a text of the Qur'an or Sunnah.

Ibn 'Abd as-Salaam said: I have not come across any definition of major sin that could be completely free of some flaws. The best is to define it as any sin that could indicate that the level of negligence of the one who commits it is like the level of negligence of one who commits the least of the major sins mentioned in the texts. Some defined it as any sin that is accompanied by a warning of punishment or being cursed.

Ibn as-Salaah said: Major sins have indications such as: the stipulation of hadd punishments for such acts; a warning of punishment in Hell and the like in the Qur'an or Sunnah; a description of



the doer as an evildoer; and mention of a curse upon the one who does it.

Ismaa'eel al-Qaadi narrated, with a sound chain of narration from al-Hasan al-Basri, that the latter said: Every deed concerning which Allah, may He be exalted, warned the doer of Hell is a major sin.

One of the best definitions is that given by al-Qurtubi in al-Mufhim: Every sin concerning which a text of the Qur'an or Sunnah, or scholarly consensus, states that it is a major sin or a grave sin, or mentioned a severe punishment for it, or decreed a hadd punishment for it, or denounced it in the strongest terms, is a major sin.

Based on that, one can check the texts and see where mention is made of a warning of punishment or curse, or a deed is described as evildoing, in the Quran and saheeh or hasan hadiths. We may add to that cases where the text of the Qur'an or the saheeh or hasan hadith state clearly that an act is a major sin. Al-Haleemi said in al-Minhaaj: There is no sin but it is either minor or major. A minor sin may become a major sin when there is something to indicate that, and a major sin may become a faahishah (shameful, abhorrent deed) by the same token. For example, killing a soul unlawfully is a major sin, but if someone kills an ascendant (parent or grandparent) or a descendant (child or grandchild) or a relative, or he kills someone in the Haram (sanctuary), or during the sacred months, then it is a faahishah. Zina (unlawful sex) is a major sin, but if it is with a neighbour's wife or a mahram (close relative) or during the month of Ramadan, or in the Haram, then it is a faahishah.

Stealing less than the threshold amount [that is, less than the value of stolen goods at which the hadd punishment of amputating the hand becomes due] is a minor sin, but if the one from whom it is stolen possesses nothing else and losing it will lead to him becoming vulnerable, then it becomes a major sin.

End quote from al-Haafiz.

See: Tafseer Ibn Katheer (2/285-286).



Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) was asked about the major sins mentioned in the Qur'an and hadith: is there a definition by which one may recognise them?

He replied:

The best of the views concerning this issue is that which was narrated from Ibn 'Abbaas and was mentioned by Abu 'Ubaydah, Ahmad ibn Hanbal and others. It is the view that the minor sin is that for which no punishment is specified in this world or the hereafter. This is similar to what was said by those who say that it is a sin that is not subject to a hadd punishment in this world. And it is similar to what was said by those who say that any sin concerning which mention is made of a curse, divine wrath or warning of Hell is a major sin. And it is similar to what was said by those who say that the minor sin is that concerning which there is no hadd punishment in this world, and no warning of punishment in the hereafter – that is, a specific warning such as a warning of Hell, divine wrath or curse.

Similarly, every sin concerning which the doer is warned that he will not enter Paradise or even smell the fragrance of Paradise, or it was said concerning it that the one who does it is not one of us, or the one who does it is a wrongdoer – all of these are major sins. End quote.

Majmoo' al-Fataawa (11/650-652). See also Majmoo' al-Fataawa (11/658-659); Madaarij As-Saalikeen by Ibn al-Qayyim (1/315-327)

There is a report which appears to limit the major sins to seven:

Al-Bukhaari (2767) and Muslim (89) narrated from Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Avoid the seven sins that doom a person to Hell." It was said: What are they, O Messenger of Allah? He said: "Associating others with Allah (shirk); witchcraft (sihr); killing a soul whom Allah has forbidden us to kill, except in cases dictated by Islamic law; consuming riba; consuming orphans' wealth; fleeing from the battlefield; and slandering chaste, innocent women."

At-Tabaraani narrated in al-Mu'jam al-Awsat (5709) from Abu Sa'eed al-Khudri (may Allah be



pleased with him) that he said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "The major sins are seven: associating others with Allah (shirk); killing a soul whom Allah has forbidden us to kill, except in cases dictated by Islamic law; slandering chaste women; fleeing from the battlefield; consuming riba; consuming orphans' wealth; and going back to living in the desert like Bedouin after having migrated (hijrah)."

Classed as hasan by al-Albaani in Saheeh al-Jaami' (4606)

But this is not intended to limit the number of major sins to seven.

Al-Haafiz said in al-Fath:

At-Tabari narrated from Ibn 'Abbaas that it was said to him: The major sins are seven. He said: They are more than seven plus seven. According to another report from him: They are closer to seventy. According to another report: They are closer to seven hundred. His words may be interpreted as emphasising that the hadith is not to be understood literally as meaning that there are only seven. End quote.

There are three points to which we should pay attention and be aware of:

Firstly:

Persisting in a minor sin may make it a major sin.

Al-Qaraafi said: A minor sin does not undermine a person's integrity or make him an evildoer, unless he persists in it, in which case it becomes a major sin.... There is no minor sin if one persists in it, and there is no major sin if it is followed by prayer for forgiveness, as the early generations said... What they mean by prayer for forgiveness is repentance fulfilling all the necessary conditions, not asking for forgiveness whilst persisting in the sin and not intending to give it up. End quote.

Al-Mawsoo'ah al-Fiqhiyyah (34/156)

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said:



Persisting in a minor sin may incur a burden of sin equivalent to a major sin or even more. End quote.

Ighaathat al-Lahfaan (2/151)

Shaykh Ibn 'Uthaymeen (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

If a person persists in a minor sin and that becomes his habit, then it becomes a major sin because of persisting in it, not because of the deed in and of itself. Talking to a woman on the phone for the purpose of pleasure is haraam, but it is not a major sin. However, if a person persists in doing that and it becomes his main focus to call these women and talk to them, then it becomes a major sin. Persisting in a minor sin makes it a major sin because of persisting in it, because persisting in a minor sin indicates that one is heedless of Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, or that one does not care about the prohibitions of Allah. End quote.

Liqā' al-Baab al-Maftooh (5/172)

Secondly:

Thinking lightly of minor sins leads to doom. Ahmad (3808) narrated from 'Abdullah ibn Mas'ood (may Allah be pleased with him) that the Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: Beware of these sins that are regarded as insignificant, for they will accumulate until they destroy a man."

The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) gave a likeness of such deeds: the likeness of "people who stopped to camp in the wilderness, and they wanted to prepare some food, so one man went and brought a stick, and another man brought a stick, until they had gathered a huge pile and lit a fire, and whatever they put in the pot was cooked as a result."

Classed as saheeh by al-Albaani in Saheeh at-Targheeb (2470).

See also the answer to question no. [22422](#).

Avoiding major sins is an expiation for minor sins.



No one is free of sin in his daily life, whether that sin has to do with the relationship between him and his Lord, or between him and other people. So let him strive to purify his record constantly, and let him know that if he keeps away from sins that could lead to doom, major sins and sins that could doom a person to hell, Allah may forgive him for small faults other than that. Allah, may He be exalted, says (interpretation of the meaning):

“If you avoid the great sins which you are forbidden to do, We shall remit from you your (small) sins, and admit you to a Noble Entrance (i.e. Paradise)”

[an-Nisa’ 4:31]

“Those who avoid great sins) and Al-Fawahish (illegal sexual intercourse, etc.) except the small faults, verily, your Lord is of vast forgiveness”

[an-Najm 53:32].

Al-Haafiz Ibn Hajar (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Al-Khattaabi said: What is meant by small faults is what Allah, may He be exalted, mentioned in the verse “Those who avoid great sins) and Al-Fawahish (illegal sexual intercourse, etc.) except the small faults”; this is what is overlooked. In the other verse He said: “If you avoid the great sins which you are forbidden to do, We shall remit from you your (small) sins”. From the two verses we understand that the small faults are minor sins, and that they may be remitted or expiated if one avoids major sins.

End quote.

And Allah knows best.