

Question 67: What Are 'Smaller' And 'Greater Sins'?

Question: How can we differentiate between 'Smaller' and 'Greater sins'?

Answer: Actually the source of judging the Smaller and Greater sins are the verses of the Holy Qur'an from whom is the following:

"If you shun the great sins which you are forbidden, We will do away with you small sins..."¹

Now let us see what is the scale of determining whether a sin is small or big

Our scholars say that every sin, be it small or big is a great sin in itself.

But the scale of finding whether a sin is small or big is not that it should be inspected with relation to the Divine realm. Because from the aspect of such investigation it is all 'great' even though this division of sins is done to compare between themselves. According to which there are two kinds of sins, 'Greater' and 'Smaller.'

Now we should see what is the scale of differentiating the two? There are many techniques to discriminate the two of them and the most famous of them according to scholars is that every sin regarding which the Holy Qur'an has promised punishment is greater sin. For example, murder. Regarding which the Holy Qur'an says:

"And whoever kills a believer intentionally, his punishment is hell; he shall abide in it..."²

Some scholars have added another condition also that greater sin is that for which punishment is promised or it is emphatically prohibited. Because there are many sins which are not promised punishment but they are emphatically and repeatedly prohibited.

For example if we consider that only the following sentence has arrived for usury that those who take usury have made a declaration of war against Allah. Then this alone is a sign that usury is a greater sin.

And if in other ayats and traditions if the users had not been promised hell, even its emphatic and repeated prohibited shows that it is a greater sin.

From this aspect the magnitude of sins is not relative. Their limits are different. It can never be that a sin is smaller as well as greater. Because if it is promised punishment of if its performance is emphatically prohibited, it would be a greater sin, otherwise it is smaller.

[1. Surah Nisa 4:31](#)

[2. Surah Nisa 4:93](#)

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