311316 - Why are the prophets the best of humanity even though they were infallible and protected against committing major sins?

the question

According to our creed, the prophets were infallible and protected against committing major sins, which result from the desires that the human has the strongest inclination towards and many people fall into these sins. If that is the case, then why is their reward greater than that of other humans? I know that Allah is just, but I want to understand.

Summary of answer

Thus Allah, may He be Exalted, chose and selected the prophets, and He knows best who deserved to be chosen. They attained the highest level of servitude to Allah, and the most sublime level of attitude and manners, and effort and sacrifice. No one can attain their level, and the prophets did not attain such high levels because they were prevented from committing sins and were compelled not to sin. Rather Allah favoured them by granting them His protection and His care and grace, because they are the best of humanity, the most pious of humanity, those who have the greatest knowledge of Allah, those who feared and venerated Him the most, and adhered the most to His commands. May the blessings and peace of Allah be upon them all.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Firstly:

The infallibility of the prophets

The prophets are infallible and protected against committing major sins such as zina and stealing, and minor sins that could be indicative of a base and mean character. Some of them might commit

minor errors which are not of the type that is indicative of a base and mean character, but they would not be left without their mistake being called out; rather Allah, may He be Exalted, would correct them and alert them to their mistake so that they would give it up.

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said: The view that the prophets are infallible and protected against committing major sins, but not minor sins, is the view of most of the scholars of Islam and all of the sects… It is also the view of most of the commentators on the Quran, the hadith scholars and the jurists. In fact there is no report narrated from the early generations, the leading scholars, the Sahabah, the Tabi`in and the generation that followed them but it is in agreement with this view.

End quote from *Majmu` al-Fatawa*, 4/319.

It says in Minhaj as-Sunnah an-Nabawiyyah (1/472): The majority of scholars who say that it was possible that they might commit minor sins say that they were protected from persisting in that.

See: *Majmu` al-Fatawa*, 4/320 and 51/15.

As-Safarini (may Allah have mercy on him) said: Al-Qadi `Iyad said: The Muslims are unanimously agreed that the prophets were infallible and protected against committing immoral actions and major sins that doom a person to hell. He said: Some of the scholars are of the view that the prophets were protected from deliberately doing any action that is disliked (makruh). End quote.

Al-`Allamah as-Sa`d at-Taftazani said: As for them being protected from all sins, that is subject to further explanation and discussion: they were protected from falling into disbelief before and after revelation came to them, according to scholarly consensus. Similarly they were protected from deliberately falling into major sins according to the majority, with the exception of the Hashawis. Rather the difference of opinion has to do with whether the evidence for their being protected is textural or rational.

As for their committing major sins by mistake, the majority of scholars say that that was possible.

He said: As for minor sins, it is possible that they may have committed minor sins deliberately

according to the majority, with the exception of al-Jaba'i and his followers. And it is possible that they might have committed minor sins by mistake, according to scholarly consensus, except for minor sins of the type that is indicative of a base and mean character, such as stealing a morsel of food and cheating when weighing by as much as a grain. But the scholars stated that in such cases, the prophets would inevitably be told to stop, and they would stop.

End quote from *Lawami` al-Anwar al-Bahiyyah*, 2/305.

Secondly:

Does the infallibility of the prophets mean that it is not possible for them to sin?

The infallibility of the prophets does not mean that it is not possible for them to sin, or that they are compelled not to sin, or that the ability to commit sin is taken away from them. Even though some scholars gave this as a definition of infallibility, it is not a correct definition.

Al-Iji said in *Sharh al-Mawaqif* (8/396): Some of the scholars said that it – infallibility – is a quality that is part of a person's character, or it is a quality that is part of his physical being, which would prevent any sin being committed by him.

And this view may be refuted by noting that if that were the reason for him not committing sin, he would not deserve to be praised for refraining from sin, because there is no praise or reward for refraining from something that is impossible for a person to do because it is not within his ability and is not something that he has the free will to do.

Moreover, there is scholarly consensus that the prophets are enjoined to refrain from sin and they will be rewarded for that. If committing sin was not possible for them, then there would be no command and reward, because there is no obligation to refrain from that which it is not possible to do, and there is no reward for that restraint…

Furthermore, the verse {Say [O Muhammad], "I am only a man like you"} [al-Kahf 18:110] indicates that the prophets are the same as all other people with regard to having the same human nature, and what makes them different is their having received revelation, and nothing

else. So it is not impossible for them to commit sins, as is the case for all other humans. End quote.

Ash-Shihab al-Khafaji held a similar view, as he said: If that were the case, they would not be deserving of praise and reward, because it would be something concerning which they had no choice, but they are accountable according to scholarly consensus.

Then he defined infallibility by describing it as: a kind of special care and help from Allah, may He be Exalted, that motivates [the prophet] to do what is good and deters him from doing what is bad, whilst at the same time he has free will, so that he will be subject to the test (like any other human).

End quote from *Nasim ar-Riyad fi Sharh Shifa' al-Qadi `Iyad*, 4/39.

So the prophets refrained from sin by their own choice, and they were the best of humanity in their caution and prudence in striving to avoid falling into sin, in addition to the help and support that they received from Allah. This is what is meant by infallibility.

Therefore they will be rewarded and praised for not falling into sin, as Allah, may He be Exalted, said regarding Yusuf (peace be upon him):

{But she in whose house he was living wanted to seduce him. She bolted the doors and said: Come here. He said: Allah forbid! Surely, he [your husband] is my master; he has taken good care of me. Verily, the wrongdoers will never prosper.

She advanced towards him, and he felt inclined towards her; were it not that he saw a sign from his Lord [he would have succumbed]. Thus We averted from him evil and shameful deeds. Verily, he was one of Our chosen slaves}[Yusuf 12:23-24].

Thirdly:

The prophets are the most perfect of people in keeping away from whims and desires

The minor sins that stem from desires are very many, such as looking, touching, being alone with a member of the opposite sex, and the things that need to immoral actions.

The prophets and the righteous are the most perfect of people in keeping away from these unlawful desires.

Many people may not fall into zina, stealing, drinking alcohol and killing, but they may be unable to refrain from minor sins having to do with physical desires and other desires. Thus the superiority of the prophets in this regard also becomes clear.

When it comes to acts of worship, conveying the message of Islam, striving in jihad in Allah's cause, and the readiness to offer one's life and what one holds most precious in that cause, there is no comparison between the prophets and other people.

No one realizes how difficult and hard it is to strive in calling people to Allah and in jihad against the enemy, going through pain and suffering in that cause, except one who experiences some of that.

Think about the report that was narrated by Ahmad (12212), at-Tirmidhi (2472) and Ibn Majah (151) from Anas, who said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "I was caused to go through fear for the sake of Allah before anyone else was subjected to such fear, and I was caused to go through persecution for the sake of Allah before anyone was subjected to such persecution. Thirty nights and days passed during which Bilal and I had no food that could be eaten by any living creature except a small amount that could be hidden under Bilal's armpit."

Look at how great the Prophet's worship was, and how he would stand and pray tahajjud until his feet became swollen, even though his past and future sins had been forgiven.

This is another aspect of his greatness, which is that he reached the highest level of worship and persisted in that, even though he knew that he had been forgiven!

Moreover, what the prophets had in their hearts of love and veneration for Allah, submission to Him, fear of His punishment, hope of His mercy and purity of heart is the secret behind their superiority. Hence Abu Bakr as-Siddiq was the best of this ummah after its Prophet, because of what he had in his heart of true servitude to Allah.

Ibn Rajab (may Allah have mercy on him) said: The Prophet's supererogatory acts of worship and those of his closest companions were not distinguished by the quantity of their fasts and prayers; rather what led to that special status that they had before Allah was their having good and pure hearts and their strong attachment to Allah in terms of fearing Him, loving Him, venerating Him, glorifying Him and longing for what is with Him, and their lack of interest in that which is fleeting.

In *Al-Musnad* it is narrated from `A'ishah (may Allah be pleased with her) that the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "I am the most knowledgeable of you about Allah, and I am the one among you who fears Him the most."

Ibn Mas`ud (may Allah be pleased with him) said to his companions: You pray and fast more than the companions of Muhammad (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him), but they were better than you. They said: How come? He said: They had much less interest than you in the life of this world, and they were more keen to attain the reward of the hereafter.

Bakr al-Muzani said: Abu Bakr was not superior because he fasted and prayed a great deal, but because of something that settled in his heart. One of the earlier scholars said: What settled in his heart was love of Allah and sincerity towards His creation.

Fatimah bint `Abd al-Malik, the wife of `Umar ibn `Abd al-`Aziz, was asked about his acts of worship after he died. She said: He was not the one who fasted and prayed the most of the people, but by Allah I never saw anyone who feared Allah more than `Umar. He would remember Allah when lying in his bed, and he would tremble like a sparrow due to his great fear of Him, to the extent that we would say: In the morning, the people will wake up with no caliph.

End quote from *Lata'if al-Ma`arif*, p. 254.

These heart-based acts of worship are the foundation of piety (taqwa) and the criterion of superiority; they are wider in scope than visible acts of worship.

Moreover, all bounties are in the hand of Allah and He grants them to whomever He wills, as He, may He be exalted, says:

{Say: All bounties are in the Hand of Allah; He grants them to whomever He will. And Allah is All-Encompassing, All-Knowing.

He singles out for His mercy whomever He will; for Allah is the Possessor of abundant grace}[Al 'Imran 3:73-74]

{Your Lord creates whatever He wills and chooses [whomever He wills]; they have no choice in the matter. Glorified and exalted be Allah far above the partners they ascribe to Him}[Al-Qasas 28:68]

{Allah chooses messengers from among the angels and from among humankind. Verily, Allah is All-Hearing, All-Seeing}[Al-Hajj 22:75]

{And when a sign comes to them, they say: We will not believe until we are given the like of what Allah's Messengers were given. Allah knows best where to place His message}[Aal-An`am 6:124].

Thus Allah, may He be Exalted, chose and selected the prophets, and He knows best who deserved to be chosen. They attained the highest level of servitude to Allah, and the most sublime level of attitude and manners, and effort and sacrifice. No one can attain their level, and the prophets did not attain such high levels because they were prevented from committing sins and were compelled not to sin. Rather Allah favoured them by granting them His protection and His care and grace, because they are the best of humanity, the most pious of humanity, those who have the greatest knowledge of Allah, those who feared and venerated Him the most, and adhered the most to His commands. May the blessings and peace of Allah be upon them all.

Allah the Almighty spoke the truth when He said:

{And thus We have tried some of them through others that the disbelievers might say, “Is it these whom Allah has favored among us?” Is not Allah most knowing of those who are grateful} [Al-An`am 6:53].

And Allah knows best.