

7

Religion, crime and punishment

7.1

Crime and punishment

■ What are crime and punishment?

A **crime** is any action which is against the law that has been put in place by the rulers of any state. In the UK, the government must get the approval of Parliament before any new crimes are written into law. The police arrest people who are suspected of having broken the law by committing crimes. If after questioning the police are confident they have got the right person, they charge them with having committed the offence.

Once charged of a serious crime in the UK, suspected offenders face a hearing in front of a local magistrate before being required to appear in a Crown Court before a judge and jury of 12 people, selected at random. Less serious cases are dealt with by a magistrates' court, while some more minor crimes result in the police giving the offender an official caution if they admit they are guilty.

Offenders who are found guilty by a court face a legal **punishment**. Most serious offences such as murder and rape carry a life sentence in prison, although this rarely means offenders spend the rest of their lives in prison. Less serious offences are punished with a shorter spell in prison, or with non-custodial sentences such as community service or a fine. If a court decides that the person has committed no crime, they are released without any punishment. Under no circumstances in the UK can a court impose a sentence intended to cause physical harm (corporal punishment) or death (capital punishment). However, in some countries, such as China, parts of the USA, and Saudi Arabia, the death penalty is permitted.

In no instance is an individual victim of a crime allowed to punish the offender. Such action is against the law and punishable by the law.



▲ The statue of Lady Justice stands on top of the Central Criminal Court or 'Old Bailey' in London

Objectives

- Know the definitions of crime and punishment.
- Understand the legal position regarding crime and punishment.
- Understand concepts of good and evil intentions and actions.

Key terms

- **crime:** an offence which is punishable by law, for example stealing, murder
- **punishment:** something legally done to somebody as a result of being found guilty of breaking the law
- **evil:** the opposite of good; a force or the personification of a negative power that is seen in many traditions as destructive and against God

Activities

- 1 Carefully explain the meanings of 'crime' and 'punishment' in your own words.
- 2 With a partner, make a list of six crimes. Rank them in order of severity and suggest what punishment should be given for each. Discuss your list and suggestions with others.
- 3 Explain the difference between criminal and civil law.
- 4 Explain the meaning of a good action and an evil action. Give examples in your answer.

Civil law is different from criminal law. Civil law concerns disputes between private individuals or groups. This includes such matters as the settlement of a divorce, disputes between landlords and tenants and disputed wills. Cases are usually dealt with in a small claims court although in more serious cases, the case will be heard in Crown Court.

■ Good and evil intentions and actions

The teachings in the Bible warn against having any evil or wrong thoughts and intentions:

“ You have heard it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder', and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. ”

Matthew 5:21–22 (NIV)

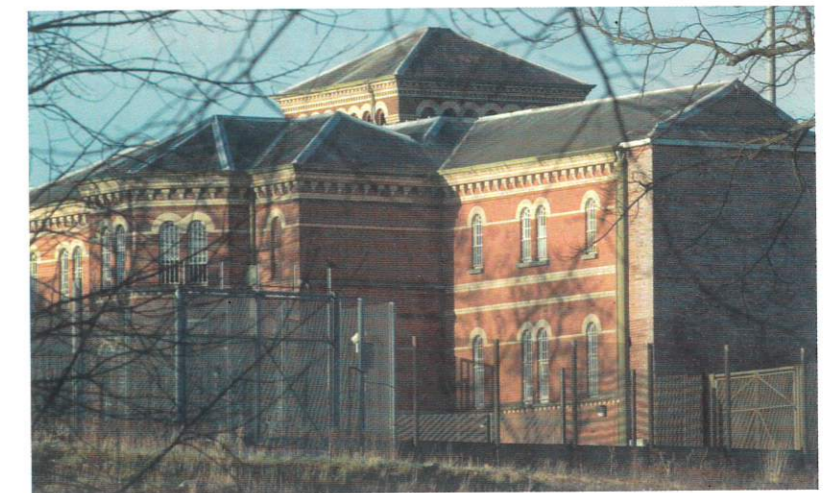
Many people would say that any action that obeys the law is a good action. However a good action also includes that which is good but not specified in the law, such as generosity and love. There is no law that dictates supporting charities, but offering support in some way to a good cause is usually considered to be a good thing. Likewise, many Christians believe that even though actions such as adultery are legal, they are still wrong. Actions encouraged or required by genuine religious faiths are considered to be good.

Evil actions are those which cause suffering, injury or possibly death. These include murder, causing a terrorist explosion and child abuse, which are all illegal. Some actions could be considered evil even though they are not against the law.

In a religious sense, evil can be linked with the devil (Satan) who is the source of all that is considered evil. However, when Christians speak about evil criminal actions, they usually mean that the offence is profoundly immoral and wicked rather than directly linked to the devil. Christianity generally considers crimes involving violence against people as sinful and against God.

A Christian response

Many Christians would claim that there is no such thing as an evil person. Human beings are not perfect and make mistakes. However, the belief in original sin derived from the disobedience of Adam and Eve means that all humans have a tendency to do things that are evil even though they are not evil in themselves. If God created people to be good, they are unlikely to do something unspeakably awful unless there was a specific reason, for example a psychological illness. If this is the case, they should receive treatment for their illness while being punished for their actions.



▲ Many people who are convicted of evil actions are sentenced to imprisonment in Broadmoor Hospital, a high-security psychiatric hospital

Discussion activities

- 1 With a partner, try to think of any actions that are evil but not illegal. What is it that makes them evil?
- 2 In a small group, discuss what you think is the appropriate treatment for those in prison who have committed evil actions.
- 3 In your group discuss whether there are any circumstances in which it may be acceptable to cause suffering.

Links

To remind yourself about the concept of original sin, return to pages 28–29.

★ Study tip

It is best when writing about crime and justice to restrict yourself to writing about the UK legal system.

Summary

You should now know more about the meaning of crime and punishment, and understand the concepts of good and evil intentions and actions.

7.2 Reasons for crime

Reasons why some people commit crime

While most people believe that all crime is wrong, sometimes how wrong it is may depend upon why it was committed.

Sometimes it is due to selfishness, whereas at other times there may be circumstances that make it more understandable. As far as Christians are

concerned, there is rarely any justification for committing crimes, especially as they believe that God has put lawmaking authorities in place. They also believe that laws are important for keeping order in society so that people may live in peace. Christians may refer to Romans 13:1 to justify their beliefs.

Poverty

It is a fact that in the UK, some people live in **poverty** and cannot afford the necessities of life. Welfare payments should cover living expenses but sometimes, for whatever reason, they do not. This can lead some people to steal food and essentials that they cannot afford to buy. Even though this may seem to be a good reason, it is still against the law and people will still be arrested for stealing.

While Christians condemn stealing they are keen to make sure that nobody is so poor that they use poverty as an excuse for stealing. In June 2015, Pope Francis said:

“Focusing on poverty and sacrificing for the poor are the heart of the gospel. If Christians don't dig deep and generously open up their wallets, they do not have genuine faith.”

Pope Francis

Upbringing

Growing up in a household where crime is a way of life may encourage a young person to follow the example of people they live with and drift into crime themselves. Even their parents may encourage them to commit crimes. Once they have been drawn into a life of crime, it is difficult for them to stop, even though they know that what they are doing is wrong.

Mental illness

Some people suffer from a **mental illness** that causes them to commit crimes. Kleptomania is a mental condition that makes some people steal.



▲ Why people commit crime

Objectives

- Know and understand reasons why some people commit crime.
- Know and understand Christian attitudes to the reasons why some people commit crime.

Key terms

- **poverty**: being without money, food or other basic needs of life (being poor)
- **mental illness**: a medical condition that affects a person's feelings, emotions or moods, and perhaps their ability to relate to others
- **addiction**: physical or mental dependency on a substance or activity which is very difficult to overcome
- **greed**: wanting to possess wealth, goods or items of value which are not needed

“Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.”

Romans 13:1 [NIV]

Links

Turn to page 51 to learn more about food banks. See page 120 for an example of someone who turned away from a life of crime and became a Christian.

Anger management problems may lead to assault or murder. In cases involving serious crimes and serious mental illnesses, the offender may be viewed as unfit to stand trial. They are likely to be sentenced to be kept in a secure unit where they receive the treatment they need, even though they have not had an actual trial. Their legal representatives will work with the court authorities to ensure justice is done.

Addiction

The nature of **addiction** to drugs means that the human body cannot cope without them. Addicts may resort to stealing in order to purchase the drugs their body needs.

The drug that causes more crime than any other is alcohol. People who have drunk too much alcohol lose control of their thoughts and actions to such an extent that they may commit acts of violence and get into fights. If they drive while under the influence of alcohol, they are more likely to cause an accident than if sober. Most denominations of Christianity do not forbid drinking alcohol, but for Catholics, drunkenness is a sin, and no denomination encourages excessive drinking.

Greed

In the UK personal possessions and wealth are seen as signs of status. **Greed** can lead to crime, especially theft or fraud.

In the Ten Commandments, Christians are taught not to covet, which means they should not be jealous of what somebody else has, and envy is one of the seven deadly sins.

Hate

Hatred is a negative feeling or reaction. It can lead to violence or aggression towards whoever or whatever the offender hates.

Opposition to an unjust law

According to lawmakers, any breach of the law is wrong. However, there are occasions where people have deliberately broken laws they consider to be unjust. In the USA in 1955 Rosa Parks was arrested for breaking segregation laws by refusing to give up her seat in the bus to a white person. This act of defiance became an important symbol of the Civil Rights Movement that eventually changed unjust laws about the treatment of African Americans in the USA. Many people believe that any law that is based on prejudice or that breaches basic human rights is wrong and should be changed. If breaking the law brings about change, it may be seen as acceptable.

Some people think it is right to break laws that try to prevent public protest in order to try to change an unjust law. But in most cases protests do not intend to cause injury or death.

Activities

- 1 Write a sentence to explain each of the reasons for crime listed on these pages.
- 2 Are there any reasons for crime that you could add to the list? Say which and explain why.
- 3 Do you think it is right to break an unjust law? Explain your opinion.
- 4 'There is never any reason why somebody should commit a crime.' How far do you agree with this quote? Explain your opinion.



▲ A looted and smashed-up supermarket: what might cause people to commit this sort of crime?

★ Study tip

Although the reasons for crime on these pages are listed in the examination specification, you can write about any others you can think of.

Summary

You should now know and understand some reasons why people may commit crimes, and have considered Christian attitudes to some of these issues.

7.3 Christian attitudes to lawbreakers and different types of crime

Christian attitudes to lawbreakers

Christians are generally against people breaking the laws of their country without just cause. The law in the UK is there to protect the rights and security of all citizens. There are some laws that a Christian might consider to be morally wrong, and that they feel they must challenge. However they believe that in general laws protect citizens and should therefore be respected.

The way that offenders are dealt with is also governed by the law. All suspected offenders are presumed to be innocent until they are proven guilty and the courts exist to decide whether there is any doubt as to whether somebody is guilty. If there is any reasonable doubt, they are found innocent and allowed to resume their normal life without any need for punishment.

There are many different attitudes among Christians towards lawbreakers. Some believe a punishment should be as severe as the crime committed. Others believe they should be helped in order that they do not offend again. They may hate the crime but not the person who committed it. Lawbreakers have rights and these should be protected, even while they are being punished. Christians believe that inhumane treatment of offenders is wrong.

Most Christians also believe that offenders should be helped to change their ways so that they do not reoffend once the punishment is over. In the parable of the sheep and goats, Jesus gave various actions that are pleasing to God, and these include treating prisoners well:

“Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For ... I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

Matthew 25:34–36 [NIV]

This inspires Christians to treat prisoners with compassion and to consider how they may be helped as well as punished for their wrongdoings.

Objective

- Understand and analyse Christian attitudes to lawbreakers and different types of crime.



▲ At Journey House in Kansas City, USA, women released from prison live side-by-side with Catholic nuns who help the women get back on their feet

Discussion activities

- Imagine living in a country without any laws. Discuss with a partner what life would be like.
- Should offenders have rights? Give reasons for your opinion.
- Do you think it is right to hate a crime but not the person who commits it? Give reasons for your view.

Different types of crime – hate crime, theft and murder

There are many different types of crime, ranging in severity from minor offenses to very serious ones such as mass murder. More severe punishments are reserved for the more serious offenses. Some crimes are considered to be **hate crimes**. These are often violent actions against someone because of their race, religion, sexuality, disability or gender. Because hate crimes are targeted at a person rather than at property, as in the case of theft, they are considered to be more serious crimes. Hate crimes make the idea of a society without prejudice or discrimination impossible to achieve.

An example of a very serious crime, which in some cases may also be a hate crime, is murder. Murder means to unlawfully and deliberately kill a human being. It could well be argued that there is no greater harm that can be done than to take a person's life.



▲ The result of a racially inspired hate crime against a Polish shopkeeper in the UK

Christian attitudes to different types of crime

Christians condemn both hate crimes and murder. God created all humans with equal value and no individuals or groups should be singled out for inferior treatment from others. Jesus taught that all people should 'love their neighbour' (Mark 12:31). In this context, neighbour means everybody, regardless of their race, religion, sexuality, disability or gender. Jesus also mixed with people from all sections of society and did not turn anybody away. Echoing Jesus' teaching, Paul wrote:

“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Galatians 3:28 [NIV]

Even though Christians may be understanding of people committing theft out of need rather than greed, they believe that the needy should be cared for so they have no need to commit crimes. They teach the Golden Rule 'Do to others what you want them to do to you'. Therefore even though theft is considered to be less serious than hate crimes and murder, it is still wrong.

Summary

You should now understand Christian attitudes to lawbreakers and different types of crime and have analysed these attitudes.

Key term

- hate crimes:** crimes, often including violence, that are usually targeted at a person because of their race, religion, sexuality, disability or gender

Activities

- Explain what theft, hate crimes and murder are.
- Some people believe that all crimes are hate crimes. Do you agree? Give reasons.
- Do you think theft committed due to poverty is ever justified? Explain your opinion.
- Are Christians correct in what they believe about lawbreakers and different types of crime? Explain your point of view.

★ Study tip

If you are asked to write down Christian attitudes to lawbreakers and/or different types of crime, there is no need to include your own opinion. Remember to include only Christian beliefs or teaching.

7.4 Three aims of punishment

Whenever a punishment is imposed by a court, the judge has to consider what purpose the punishment will serve.

There are three main aims of punishment: retribution, deterrence, and reformation.

Retribution

Retribution is the least positive of the three aims of punishment. It means to get your own back. In other words, retribution means that society, on behalf of the victim, is getting its own back on the offender. An early form of retribution, introduced in the Old Testament, is called *lex talionis* (the law of retaliation). Put simply, this means that criminals should receive the same injuries and damage that they caused to their victim. In cases of murder, this meant that the murderer was executed to match the fate of the victim.

“ If there is serious injury, you are to take life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise. ”

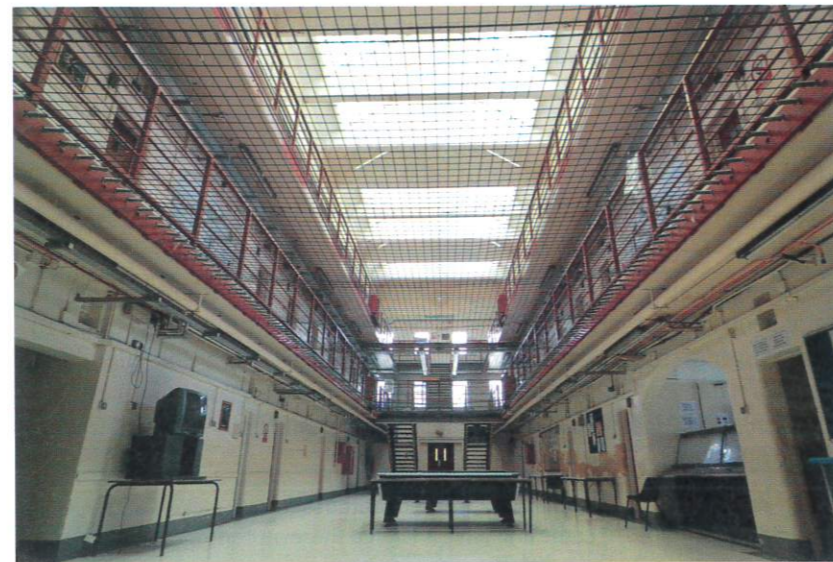
Exodus 21:23–25 [NIV]

Christians do not take this teaching literally but interpret it to mean that an offender should receive a punishment severe enough to match the seriousness of their crime. Once this principle is established, Christians prefer to focus on different aims of punishment.

Deterrence

Many believe that if offenders are seen to be punished for wrongdoing, and in some cases punished severely, the threat of similar punishment might put off others from committing crimes. This is called **deterrence**. For example, the threat of a ban from driving may deter people from driving under the influence of alcohol.

The offender themselves might be deterred from reoffending if they do not like the punishment they receive.



▲ Prisons such as this are used to punish serious offenders and deter others from doing wrong

Objectives

- Know and understand three aims of punishment.
- Understand Christian attitudes to three aims of punishment.

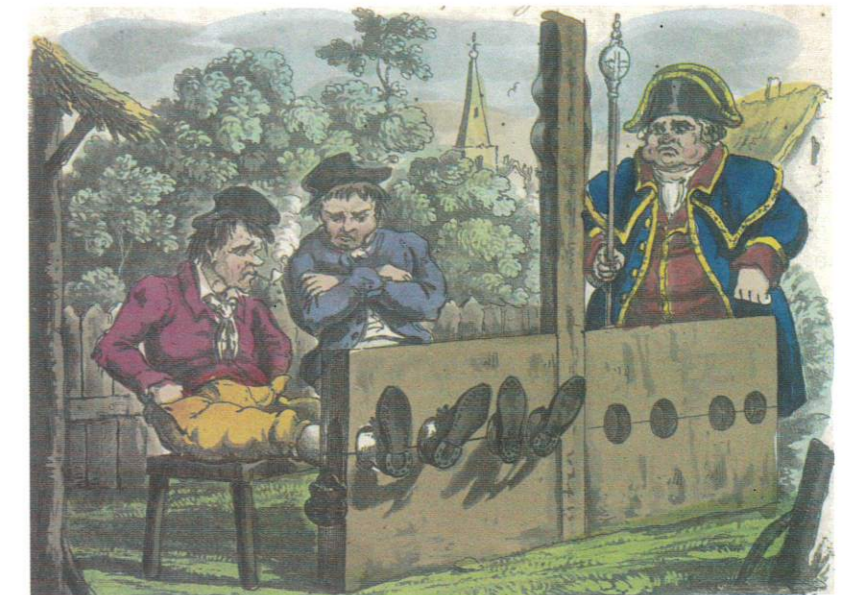
Key terms

- **retribution:** an aim of punishment – to get your own back; ‘an eye for an eye’
- **deterrence:** an aim of punishment – to put people off committing crimes
- **reformation:** an aim of punishment – to change someone’s behaviour for the better

Links

For more information about the interpretation of Exodus 21:23–24 in the context of war and peace, turn to page 131.

Years ago in Britain, people were punished in public, for example with public floggings and executions, in order to deter others. Making such an extreme example of offenders in an effort to persuade others to obey the law is not acceptable to many Christians today, who believe that every human being should be treated with respect, regardless of what they have done.



▲ In Britain, locking people in stocks was once a form of uncomfortable punishment for wrongdoers

Reformation

Reformation is the aim of punishment that most Christians prefer because it seeks to help offenders by working with them to help them to understand that their behaviour is harming society. It is hoped that offenders will change their attitudes and become responsible, law-abiding members of the community. In order for this to work, the offender needs to realise that their behaviour is wrong before they can hope to be reformed. This may involve group therapy sessions, individual counselling and treatment (if required), meeting their victims so they realise the harm they may have caused or working in the community (community service).

Christians who favour reform rather than retribution take their inspiration from the teachings of the Bible. Paul in Romans wrote:

“ Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord. On the contrary: ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink [. . .] Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good ”

Romans 12:19–21 [NIV]

This encourages Christians not to seek revenge, but instead to set an example by showing compassion. A more positive response to an offender is to work with them to help them turn their life around by helping them understand the effect of their actions on others. However, this is not a replacement for punishment; it should be done at the same time as the punishment and is likely to happen in prison if that is where the offender is being held.

Discussion activity

With a partner, try to come up with some other aims of punishment. Are your aims more important than the three given here? Discuss the reasons for your opinion.

Activities

- 1 Write a couple of sentences to help you remember the three aims of punishment.
- 2 Which of the three aims of punishment do you prefer? Why?
- 3 Why do you think most Christians prefer reformation to retribution or deterrence?

★ Study tip

If you are asked to write about one of the aims of punishment, try to make sure you are clear about the difference between them.

Summary

You should now know and understand three main aims of punishment and Christian attitudes to them.

7.5 Christian attitudes to suffering and causing suffering to others

Christian attitudes to suffering

For many people, suffering is an unfortunate part of living. It may be caused by something natural, such as an illness, or it may be due to how people have behaved or how somebody else has behaved. Whatever the cause, Christians believe they should try to help others who are suffering. The Bible even talks about how good can come out of suffering:

“ We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. ”

Romans 5:3–4 (NIV)

This was written by Paul who suffered at the hands of the Roman authorities several times after he had become a Christian.

Christians feel that they should follow the example of Jesus, who helped many whom he saw were suffering, and who taught that those who believe in God should help those who suffer. Helen Keller (1880–1968), a Christian writer and activist who became deaf and blind when she was only 19 months old, summed up the Christian responsibility to help those who are suffering:

“ We are never really happy until we try to brighten the lives of others. ”

Helen Keller, My New Speech, (undated)

Charleston church shooting

In June 2015, at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, USA, a gunman killed nine people, including the senior pastor of the church, while they attended a Bible study. Dylann Roof, a 21-year-old white man, was captured by the police and confessed that he committed the murders in the hope of igniting a race war.

The murders caused suffering to the friends and family of the victims, as well as the people from the local community. However, when relatives of the victims faced Dylann Roof in a court hearing, they told him that they forgave him. Nadine Collier, whose mother was murdered, told Roof in court, ‘You hurt me, you hurt a lot of people, but God forgive you, and I forgive you.’

Many people question why a loving God, who cares about his people, allows them to suffer. However, it would be wrong to blame God for actions such as those of the Charleston gunman. Christians believe that God gave humanity the **free will** to behave as they choose. If they choose to follow the example and teaching of Jesus and stay close to

Objectives

- Know and understand Christian attitudes to suffering.
- Understand what Christians should do if they cause suffering.

Key term

- **free will:** the ability of people to make decisions for themselves without constraint

Discussion activity

Think carefully about what the quotation from Romans means. With a partner, discuss whether you agree that these are good reasons to ‘rejoice in our sufferings’.

Extension activity

Find out more about Helen Keller’s work aimed at reducing suffering in people’s lives.

God, they will want to make good choices which do not harm others. However, there are consequences, including legal punishments imposed by courts, when people choose to behave in a way that harms other people and is not pleasing to God. The teachings of Jesus give guidance to help Christians to use their free will responsibly.

Christian attitudes to causing suffering to others

Christians are generally opposed to causing others to suffer. Jesus taught that humans should love each other and care for those in trouble. He even spoke out against using violence in self-defence because of the further suffering that retaliation may cause.

However, as no human is perfect it is inevitable that Christians may be the cause of suffering, often by accident or because their minds are troubled for some reason. Having caused suffering, it is important that Christians are honest to themselves, to other people and to God, and work at repairing the damage they may have caused. This way, relationships can be restored. During Jesus’ arrest:

“ One of [the disciples] struck the servant of the High Priest, cutting off his right ear. But Jesus answered ‘No more of this!’ And he touched the man’s ear and healed him. ”

Luke 22:50–51 (NIV)

While people cannot perform a physical healing in the way described by Luke, Christians learn from this example that if possible they should heal the wrong that has been done and the suffering that has been caused in whatever way they can.

Activities

- 1 Explain how a Christian might answer the question: ‘Why does God allow people to suffer?’
- 2 Explain why Christians try not to cause others to suffer.
- 3 According to Christian teaching, what should Christians do if they cause somebody else to suffer?



▲ The congregation at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston pay tribute to those who were killed at their church

★ Study tip

Try to avoid using free will as an argument to justify behaving badly. Christians think that people must use their free will to choose what is right, not what is wrong.

Links

You can learn more about suffering and some causes of it in Chapter 5, pages 112–113.

Summary

You should now have increased your knowledge and understanding of Christian attitudes towards suffering, and understand what Christians would try to do if they caused suffering to others.

7.6 Christian attitudes to the treatment of criminals – prison, corporal punishment and community service

■ Punishment

In UK law, there are many ways that criminals can be legally punished and several ways that they cannot. How severe the punishment is depends on the seriousness of the crime. It can range from a long-term stay in **prison** for a serious crime, to payment of a fine for a lesser one.

Reformation is considered to be an important criterion used in deciding punishment, because in the long term, if a criminal is reformed through punishment, both the individual and society benefit.

■ Prison

Prison is reserved for those who have committed a serious crime. The punishment of imprisonment is loss of liberty. Prisoners have no choice to live as ordinary people do, are locked in cells for much of the day, are fed at set times and have to do manual work for little money. While most Christians agree that prison should be used as a punishment for serious crimes, many strongly support trying to support prisoners while in prison and are keen to see education and training facilities well used.

■ Corporal punishment

Corporal punishment means to punish an offender by causing them physical pain. This could be by whipping them, or hitting them repeatedly with a cane. Many consider this a breach of the Human Rights legislation that the UK supports. It is illegal in the UK but allowed in some other parts of the world. For example some Muslim countries, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, allow caning as punishment for offenses such as gambling and sexual promiscuity.

Corporal punishment was permitted in schools in the UK until it was made illegal in 1987 in government-funded schools and in 1999 in all other schools in England and Wales. By 2003, it had also been banned completely in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Imposing physical pain on any person, no matter what they have done, is completely unacceptable for most Christians, although in 2005 a group of head teachers in private Christian schools unsuccessfully challenged the ban of corporal punishment in schools.

“ He who spares the rod hates their children, but the one who loves their children is careful to discipline them. ”

Proverbs 13:24 [NIV]

Christians do not disagree with discipline. They see a positive need for it, as the quotation from Proverbs shows. However, they may question the method used since Jesus' teachings on love and caring for people

Objectives

- Know and understand three forms of punishment.
- Consider ways in which criminals are treated, and Christian beliefs and attitudes to their treatment.

Key terms

- **prison:** a secure building where offenders are kept for a period of time set by a judge
- **corporal punishment:** punishment of an offender by causing them physical pain – now illegal in the UK
- **community service:** a way of punishing offenders by making them do unpaid work in the community

Activities

- 1 Explain in your own words the three forms of punishment described here.
- 2 Do you agree that prisoners should be treated with dignity while in prison? Give your reasons.
- 3 Do you think corporal punishment would reduce crime if it was reintroduced? Give your reasons.
- 4 Explain why Christians agree with the use of community service.

rule out any physical punishment. Instead, Christians focus on positive sanctions that help offenders realise the error of their ways and reform. Jesus always treated people with respect, and Christians believe they should follow his example.

■ Community service

Some crimes are punishable by **community service**. This may include offences such as vandalism, benefit fraud or minor assaults. Community service offers offenders a chance to make up for what they have done and receive help in reforming their behaviour. Because the aims of community service are positive and offer the chance to reform, Christians are in general agreement that it is a suitable punishment for fairly minor offences.

Community payback is one part of a community sentence. This involves doing between 40 hours and 300 hours unpaid work in the community such as removing graffiti, clearing wasteland or decorating public places or buildings. While working, those who are doing community payback wear a high visibility orange vest so everybody knows they have been convicted of an offence.

Other elements included in a community service sentence might be treatment programmes for medical conditions and drug or alcohol abuse if required, plus counselling sessions and basic education services. In 2007 The Church of England produced a report that commended programmes for offenders which required unpaid work in the community, counselling and treatments for addiction in a mainstream setting (not in prison).

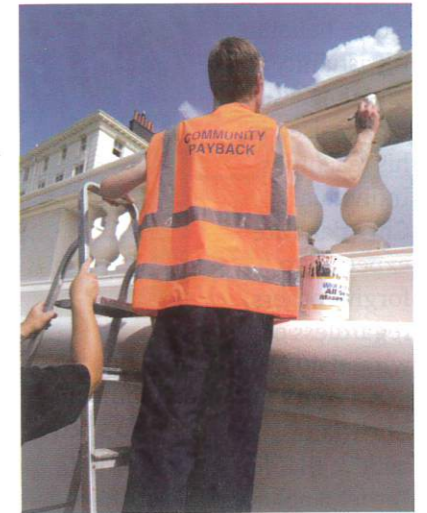
Offenders under the age of 18 may be required to complete a work programme, make up for the damage they have caused to property or complete a rehabilitation order which makes it clear what they must and must not do for a set period of time. It may also require them to listen to the victim's side of the story and possibly apologise in writing or face to face. If offenders do not complete their community service, they may be required to return to court for an alternative, more severe punishment.



▲ This probation officer is giving a workshop to offenders

Contrasting beliefs

Use the Internet or library to find out a contrasting belief on corporal punishment from another religion.



▲ This offender is doing painting and decorating as part of his community service sentence

Research activity

Find out about other forms of punishment that are legally used in the UK.

Links

For more about the aims of punishment, turn back to pages 148–149.

★ Study tip

Remember that Human Rights is an important issue when considering punishment.

Summary

You should now know and understand three forms of punishment. You will have considered the way criminals are treated and Christian beliefs and attitudes towards their treatment.

7.7 Christian attitudes to forgiveness

■ Forgiveness

Forgiveness is a core belief in Christianity and one that Jesus emphasised in his teachings. Individual Christians are expected to forgive others, regardless of what they have done, and Christians



▲ 'Forgive as the Lord forgave you.' Colossians 3:13

believe that in turn, God will forgive them. The Lord's Prayer (Our Father) includes the line:

“Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us.”
The Lord's Prayer

However, many Christians would argue that forgiveness is not a replacement for punishment. It is possible both to forgive somebody who has committed murder and to believe that justice is done when they are sentenced to a long period of imprisonment. However, the intention of the imprisonment should be to reform the murderer so they will not re-offend when released.

During his ministry, Jesus was asked by Peter, one of his disciples:

“‘Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?’ Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.’”
Matthew 18:21–22 [NIV]

The Church interprets seventy-seven times as an unlimited amount. Therefore, there is no maximum number of times a person should be forgiven. Christians believe that just as there is no limit on the amount of love that God shows to them and they should show to others, so there can be no limit to forgiveness.

Even as he was being crucified, Jesus said to those crucifying him:

“Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”
Luke 23:34 [NIV]

Objectives

- Understand Christian beliefs, teachings and attitudes about forgiveness.
- Consider a case study related to forgiveness.

Key term

- **forgiveness:** showing mercy, and pardoning someone for what they have done wrong

Extension activity

Read the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant in Matthew 18:23–35. Explain what Christians can learn about forgiveness from this parable.

Activities

- 1 Fully explain the meaning of forgiveness.
- 2 What was Jesus' attitude to forgiveness?
- 3 Explain the link between forgiveness and reformation.

Contrasting beliefs

Use the Internet or the library to learn more about a contrasting belief on forgiveness from another religion.

Christians believe that in their lives, they should follow the example of Jesus, and this includes forgiving those who do wrong things. In Judaism, those who have wronged others should show remorse to their victims and honestly and directly ask for their forgiveness before they can expect to be forgiven by their victim and by God. Christians don't believe this is a necessary part of forgiveness, but they do believe that forgiveness is easier if the offender shows a serious intention to repent and change their ways so they can start afresh. This is why many Christians believe that reformation should be the primary aim of punishment.

Nobody would pretend that it is easy to forgive people who have wronged you. However, people like Maureen Greaves show that it is possible to achieve.

Maureen Greaves



▲ Maureen Greaves

On Christmas Eve 2012, 68-year-old retired social worker Alan Greaves was on his way to St Saviour's Church in Sheffield to play the organ at the Christmas Midnight Mass service. Tragically, two local men made an unprovoked and brutal attack on him and left him for dead.

Three days later, Alan died in hospital from his severe head injuries. His wife, family and friends were understandably heartbroken.

As Alan's wife, Maureen, sat at his bedside on Christmas Day she remembers that she started to

pray. Her thoughts then turned to the person, as then unknown, who had attacked Alan:

'And I thought Alan would forgive them. It's Christmas Day. I didn't want to carry the anger, all that destructive anger, in my life . . .

'I'm not saying I don't want justice for Alan, I did. But I had to carry myself in a way that would help my children. Forgiveness means you are not seeking retribution or vengeance. Forgiveness is recognising that we are all in the same boat, we're all the same, not perfect.' (Guardian, 2012)

Alan's killers were found guilty and sentenced to serve time in prison.

Exactly one year after Alan's murder, the congregation of St Saviour's met at the spot where he was killed to hold a short ceremony of remembrance and a minute's silence. Maureen asked people to use the time to pray for Alan and his family but also for his killers.

Links

For another case study on Christianity and forgiveness, read about the Charleston church shooting on pages 150–151.

Research activity

Find out more about NEPACS.

Discussion activities

- 1 'Forgiveness means you are not seeking retribution or vengeance. Forgiveness is recognising that we are all in the same boat, we're all the same, not perfect.'
With a partner, discuss your reaction to Maureen Greaves' words about forgiveness.
- 2 What do you think would be the impact of holding a short service of remembrance a year later at which people were asked to pray for Alan's killers?

In addition to forgiveness being a reaction to wrongdoing, it can also prevent it. North East Prison After Care Society (NEPACS) is a society based on principles of forgiveness and the reformation of prisoners. It was founded by a chaplain at Durham prison and supported by many Christians in the north-east of England either by raising money, volunteering in the prison visitors' centre, or in helping to resettle offenders once they are released.

★ Study tip

Remember that Christians try to follow the teaching of Jesus when asked to forgive others. Try to learn a belief from another religion about forgiveness that contrasts with Christian teaching.

Summary

You should now understand more about Christian attitudes to forgiveness, and have considered a case study related to forgiveness.

7.8 Christian attitudes to the death penalty

■ The death penalty

The **death penalty** was abolished in the UK in 1965 initially as a temporary experiment and then permanently abolished in 1969. The European Community has since made it illegal in all member countries. Several campaigns have been carried out in the UK to try to have it reintroduced but all have failed.

Since its abolition, three people executed in the early 1950s have been pardoned because new evidence that emerged since they were put to death showed that they were innocent. In addition, there have been several instances, since abolition, where people have been shown to be wrongly convicted of murder and released from prison. If the death penalty was still legal in the UK, it is likely that they would have been executed for crimes they did not commit. The chance of killing an innocent person is one of the arguments put forward by those who argue against bringing back the death penalty in the UK.

The philosophical principle of utility suggests that an action is right if it promotes maximum happiness for the maximum number of people affected by it. It would appear that on this basis, the death penalty should be allowed. However, the principle of utility does not support the death penalty on grounds of retribution. It only allows it if the protection of wider society can be proven.

The **sanctity of life** is a teaching that God gave life and only he has the right to take it away. In relation to the death penalty, it appears to suggest that as executing an offender is denying God's right to take away the offender's life, it is wrong. However, some argue that as the death penalty is usually reserved for murderers who have already taken away life, they are being punished in a way that they deserve and which God approves of.

■ Christian attitudes to the death penalty

Individual Christians may have different beliefs about whether the death penalty should or should not be allowed. Those who agree with the death penalty tend to use teachings from the Old Testament to support their views. Their main justification is taken from Genesis:

“Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed.”

Genesis 9:6 [NIV]

They often support this by making reference to the teaching in Exodus:

“Life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth.”

Exodus 21:23–24 [NIV]

Objectives

- Know and understand arguments for and against the death penalty.
- Understand ethical arguments related to the death penalty, including those based on the principle of utility and sanctity of life.
- Understand different Christian attitudes to the death penalty.

Key terms

- **death penalty:** capital punishment; a form of punishment in which a prisoner is put to death for crimes committed
- **sanctity of life:** all life is holy as it is created and loved by God; Christians believe human life should not be misused or abused



▲ Timothy Evans, seen here under guard of the police in 1950, was wrongly convicted and later hanged in Britain for the murder of his wife

In some Muslim-majority countries, the death penalty is used as a deterrent for offences such as murder and rape. However, the victim or their family are encouraged to show mercy by accepting money from the offender to reduce the penalty from death to imprisonment. A Muslim may look to their faith in order to forgive the perpetrator.

Supporters of the death penalty believe it is a justifiable retribution for serious criminal acts, such as murder. In addition to being seen as retribution, some people claim that the death penalty deters people from committing murder. However, there is little evidence to support the view that the death penalty does deter people from committing serious crimes. Countries such as the UK that do not permit the death penalty do not all have higher murder rates than those that do. Most people who commit murder do not think about what may happen to them, although they may consider it afterwards. It is possible that they do not expect to be caught anyway and in some cases they may be so angry that they do not care.

However, Christians who oppose the death penalty do so mainly because they do not believe that taking another life is right. They believe that only God has the right to take life – after all, it is he who gifted life to humanity. Jesus taught about the importance of forgiveness and warned people not to judge each other harshly. In the sixth century BC, speaking on behalf of God, the prophet Ezekiel said:

“I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn away from their ways and live.”

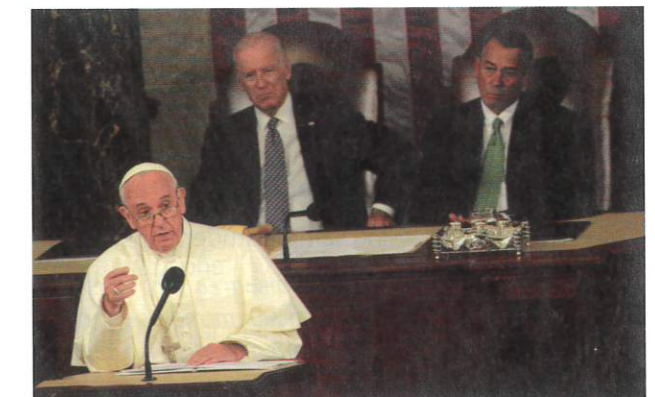
Ezekiel 33:11 [NIV]

Some people would also argue that the death penalty protects society by ensuring that a violent criminal does not kill again. While it can be argued that the rest of society is protected if murderers are executed, protection is achieved by imprisoning murderers. Imprisonment also gives murderers the chance to repent and be reformed so that, when released, they can become useful members of society. This is what many Christians want to happen and is why they oppose the death penalty.

In September 2015, when addressing the United States Congress, Pope Francis said:

“This conviction (that human life and dignity should be protected) has led me, from the beginning of my ministry, to advocate at different levels for the global abolition of the death penalty. I am convinced that this way is the best, since every life is sacred, every human person is endowed with an inalienable dignity, and society can only benefit from the rehabilitation of those convicted of crimes.”

Pope Francis



▲ Pope Francis addresses the US congress on 24 September 2015

Contrasting beliefs

Using the Internet or library, research a contrasting belief from another religion about the death penalty.

Links

You may find it helpful to read again about forgiveness on pages 154–155.

Activities

- 1 Make a list of arguments for and against the death penalty.
- 2 Do you think Christians should be in favour of the death penalty? Give religious reasons for both sides of the argument.

★ Study tip

Try to refer to a contrasting view from another religion about the death penalty.

Summary

You should now have a greater knowledge and understanding of the death penalty and should understand different Christian attitudes towards the death penalty.

Religion, crime and causes of crime – summary

You should now be able to:

- ✓ explain Christian beliefs and teachings about good and evil intentions and actions, including whether it can ever be good to cause suffering
- ✓ explain reasons for crime, including poverty and upbringing, mental illness and addiction, greed and hate, and opposition to an unjust law
- ✓ explain views about people who break the law for these reasons
- ✓ explain views about different types of crime, including hate crimes, theft and murder.
- ✓ explain beliefs and teachings about the treatment of criminals, including prison, corporal punishment and community service, and Christian beliefs and teachings about these
- ✓ explain Christian beliefs and teachings about forgiveness
- ✓ explain Christian beliefs and teachings about the death penalty
- ✓ explain and evaluate ethical arguments related to the death penalty, including those based on the principle of utility and sanctity of life
- ✓ explain contemporary British attitudes (both religious and non-religious) towards all of the above issues
- ✓ explain contrasting beliefs in contemporary British society to the three issues of corporal punishment, the death penalty and forgiveness, with reference to the main religious tradition in Britain (Christianity) and one or more other religious traditions.

Religion and punishment – summary

You should now be able to:

- ✓ explain the aims of punishment, including retribution, deterrence and reformation, and Christian beliefs and teachings about these

Sample student answer – the 4 mark question

1. Write an answer to the following question:
Explain **two** contrasting beliefs in contemporary British society about corporal punishment.
In your answer you should refer to the main religious tradition of Great Britain and one or more other religious traditions. [4 marks]
2. Read the following sample student answer:
"Most people in Britain disagree with corporal punishment. It is not a loving action because it harms people, some of whom may be innocent and doesn't reform them. God did not give people the right to harm each other in this way. Others would quote from the Bible where it says 'He who spares the rod hates his son.' This applies to Judaism because it is in the Old Testament."
3. With a partner, discuss the student answer. Can you identify two contrasting points? Is there reference to the main religious tradition in Great Britain (Christianity) and one other religious tradition? Can it be improved? If so, how?
4. What mark (out of 4) would you give this answer? Look at the mark scheme in the introduction (AO1). What are the reasons for the mark you have given?
5. Now swap your answer with your partner's and mark each other's responses. What mark (out of 4) would you give the response? Refer to the mark scheme and give reasons for the mark you award.

Sample student answer – the 5 mark question

1. Write an answer to the following question:
Explain **two** religious beliefs about reasons why some people commit crimes.
Refer to sacred writings or another source of religious belief and teaching in your answer. [5 marks]
2. Read the following sample student answer:
*"If a person has a mental illness such as difficulty controlling anger, minor assaults on people who upset them can be excused even though they are still wrong. Offering them help to control their anger is a loving action that Christians favour."
If a person steals because they are greedy, greed is wrong because 'the love of money is the root of all evil'. They should be punished severely."*
3. With a partner, discuss the student answer. Can you identify two religious beliefs about reasons why people commit crimes? Are the beliefs detailed and is the teaching relevant and accurate? Can it be improved? If so, how?
4. What mark (out of 5) would you give this answer? Look at the mark scheme in the Introduction (AO1). What are the reasons for the mark you have given?
5. Now swap your answer with your partner's and mark each other's responses. What mark (out of 5) would you give the response? Refer to the mark scheme and give reasons for the mark you award.

Practice questions

- 1 Which **one** of the following is an aim of punishment?
A) Prison B) Deterrence C) Forgiveness D) Murder [1 mark]
 - 2 Give **two** different causes of crime. [2 marks]
- ★ Study tip**
Make sure you write two *causes* of crime and not two actual crimes.
- 3 Explain **two** contrasting beliefs in contemporary British society about whether the death penalty should exist in the UK.
In your answer you must refer to one or more religious traditions. [4 marks]
 - 4 Explain **two** religious beliefs about reformation as an aim of punishment.
Refer to sacred writings or another source of religious belief and teaching in your answer. [5 marks]
 - 5 'It is right to forgive all offenders whoever they are and whatever they have done.'
Evaluate this statement. In your answer you:
 - should give reasoned arguments to support this statement
 - should give reasoned arguments to support a different point of view
 - should refer to religious arguments
 - may refer to non-religious arguments
 - should reach a justified conclusion.[12 marks]
[+ 3 SPaG marks]