

Crime and Punishment

Topics covered:

1. Crime and Punishment
2. Reasons for crime
3. Law breakers and types of crime
4. Aims of punishment
5. Suffering
6. Treatment of criminals
7. Forgiveness
8. Death penalty

Remember: if a question is asking you for the similarities it means two things the same. If it says contrasting it is asking you to say both for and against.

6. Treatment of criminals

Prison:

- ✓ Prison is reserved for those who commit a serious crime.
- ✓ Conditions in many UK prisons have been criticised.

Islam – Muslims agree with the use of prison, but under Shari’ah law prisons have less of a role in reforming the criminal and are only normally used while the offender is awaiting trial or punishment. The punishment they usually receive is corporal but some argue that imprisonment may be a far greater punishment than the infliction of pain.

Christianity – Whilst Christians agree that prison should be used for serious crimes, many strongly support trying to help prisoners while in prison and are keen to see education and training facilities well used.

Corporal punishment:

- ✓ Means punishing an offender by causing them physical pain.
- ✓ It is illegal in the UK but allowed in some other parts of the world.

Islam – Public caning is used in some Muslim countries. Corporal punishment is regarded as a violation of human rights but some Muslims argue that imprisonment is far less humane than corporal punishment. Under Shari’ah law punishments are harsh. Whilst some believe that they are too harsh, they are only used under strict regulations and are often not used at all. Where Shari’ah law is used, there is significantly less crime than in the UK.

‘Cut of the hands of thieves, whether they are man or woman, as punishment for what they have done – a deterrent from God’. Qur’an 5:38

Christianity – Christians do not disagree with discipline. They see a positive need for it. However, they may question the method used as Jesus taught to love and care for people. Christians focus on positive sanctions that help offenders.

Community service:

- ✓ Community service offers the offender a chance to make up for what they have done and to receive help in reforming their character.

Islam – These sentences are rarely used in Shari’ah law as they are not considered enough of a deterrent to protect society.

Christianity – As the aims of community service are positive and offer the chance to reform, Christians generally agree that it is a suitable punishment for minor offences. The Church of England condemned programmes for offenders which required unpaid work.

5. Suffering

Muslim attitudes to suffering:

- ✓ Muslims believe God is aware of all types of suffering and allows it to happen, usually for a reason that humans cannot understand.
- ✓ Muslims believe sometimes it is a test from God, or the result of giving into temptation of the devil.
- ✓ It teaches that hope and faith can help believers to endure suffering.
- ✓ Muslims believe it is wrong to blame God for the suffering in the world. They believe God gave free will and therefore can make their own choices.
- ✓ The teachings in the Qur’an, of Muhammad and advice from religious leader teaches Muslims how to use their free will responsibly.

Muslim attitudes to causing suffering to others:

- ✓ It is against the teachings of Islam. They are opposed to causing others to suffer.
- ✓ They share the belief of caring for their brothers and sisters in need.
- ✓ Muslims believe it is inevitable to sometimes cause suffering to others. They believe it is important to be honest with themselves, and to repair the damage they have done.
- ✓ They believe God will forgive anyone who sincerely repents.

Christian attitudes to suffering:

- ✓ Christians believe they should try to help others who are suffering.
- ✓ The Bible explains how good can come out of suffering.
- ✓ They believe they should follow the example of Jesus, who helped many whom he saw suffering, and taught those who believe in God should help those that suffer.
- ✓ Christians believe it is wrong to blame God for the suffering in the world. They believe God gave free will and therefore can make their own choices.
- ✓ The teachings of the Jesus give guidance to help Christians to use their free will responsibly.

‘We also glory in our sufferings; because we know that suffering produces perseverance, character, and hope.’ Romans 5

Christian attitudes to causing suffer to others:

- ✓ Christians are generally opposed to causing others to suffer. Jesus taught humans should love each other and take care of those in need.
- ✓ Christians believe it is inevitable to sometimes cause suffering to others. They believe it is important to be honest with themselves, and to repair the damage they have done.
- ✓ Christians believe they should heal the wrong that has been done and the suffering that has been caused in whatever way they can.

7. Forgiveness

Christian beliefs:

- ✓ A core belief in Christianity and one that Jesus emphasised in his teachings.
- ✓ Christians are expected to forgive others, regardless of what they have done, and Christians believe that in turn, God will forgive them.
- ✓ Many Christians argue that forgiveness is not a replacement for punishment.
- ✓ They believe in both forgiving the offender and justice for the crime that they committed.
- ✓ There is no maximum number of times a person should be forgiven. They believe this as there is no limit on the amount of love God shows them, therefore there can be no limit on forgiveness.
- ✓ They believe they should follow the example of Jesus, which includes forgiving those who do wrong things.
- ✓ They believe reformation should be the primary aim of punishment as it helps forgiveness and the moving on from the crime.

‘Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us’. The Lord’s Prayer.

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

‘Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing’. Luke 23:34

Muslim beliefs:

- ✓ Muslims believe that punishment satisfies the demands of society. It reinforces the requirements Islam lays down about how to behave in a way that is pleasing to God.
- ✓ Forgiveness serves no part in the punishment process.
- ✓ Forgiveness, however, plays an important part in Islam.
- ✓ Muslims believe in two categories of forgiveness; forgiveness from God and forgiveness from humans.
- ✓ **Forgiveness from God** – only God can truly forgive and will only forgive those who are truly sorry.
- ✓ **Forgiveness from humans** – Humans should forgive those who ask for forgiveness, and once that has happened, the person who has committed the wrong should then ask for forgiveness from God. If they offend again, they should repeat the process again.

‘Let them pardon and forgive. Do you not wish that God should forgive you? God is most forgiving and merciful’. Qur’an 24:22

‘Pardon each other’s faults and [God] will grant you honour’. Hadith

8. Death penalty

- ✓ Illegal in the UK since 1969. Three people have been pardoned since its abolition because evidence has shown they were innocent.

Christian beliefs:

- ✓ Some Christians agree with the death penalty as they use Old Testament teachings to support their views. They believe people should have the same punishment as the crime committed.

‘Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed’. Genesis 9:6

‘Life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth’. Exodus 21:23-24

- ✓ Christians who oppose the death penalty do so mainly because they do not believe that taking another life is right. They believe only God has the right to take life.
- ✓ Jesus taught about the importance of forgiveness and warned people not to judge each other harshly.

‘I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn away from their ways and live’. Ezekiel 33:11

‘The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away’. Job 1:21

Islam beliefs:

- ✓ Shari’ah law allows for the death penalty to be carried out.
- ✓ The victim’s family has to decide whether to show mercy and allow the offender to be spared. If they do not the offender will be executed.
- ✓ The Qur’an can be interpreted to justify the death penalty.
- ✓ In countries that operate Shari’ah law, methods of execution can include beheading, firing squad, hanging and stoning.
- ✓ There must be very strict evidence before a conviction of the death penalty will be made.

‘Do not take life, which God has made sacred, except by right. This is what He commands you to do: so that you may use your reason’. Qur’an 6:151

- ✓ Some Muslims do not agree with the death penalty. They believe supporting passages in the Qur’an have been misinterpreted.

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1. 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.
- ✓ Offenders who have been found guilty of a crime face a legal punishment.

Good and evil intentions and actions

Christianity:

- ✓ The teachings in the Bible warn against having any evil or wrong thoughts or actions.
- ✓ Many Christians believe that good actions that follow the law, but also others actions such as generosity and love.
- ✓ They also believe that there are wrong actions which are legal such as adultery.
- ✓ Evil actions are those which cause suffering, injury or possible death. Some actions could be considered evil even though they are not against the law.
- ✓ When Christians speak about evil criminal actions, they mean that offence is immoral and wicked rather than directly linked to the devil.
- ✓ Christians claim that there is no such thing as an evil person. Due to the belief in original sin, Christians believe that all humans have a tendency to do things that are evil even though they are not evil themselves.

'You have heard it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder,' and anyone who murders will be subject to judgement'. Matthew 5:21-22

Islam:

- ✓ Muslims also believe that some actions which are legal are still wrong, such as adultery.
- ✓ For Muslims, evil can be linked with the Satan who was originally created by God.
- ✓ When Muslims speak about evil criminal actions, they usually mean that the offence is immoral and wicked as a result of giving in to temptation and going against the will of God.
- ✓ Muslims claim that people do evil things but this is because they are not perfect they have not resisted temptation, not because they are bad people.
- ✓ Shari'ah law puts great emphasis on the beliefs and intentions of people, and even if you have thoughts of committing crime, it is considered as serious as committing the crime itself.

2. Reasons for crime

- ✓ Whilst most people believe crime is wrong, how wrong it is may depend upon why it was committed.
- ✓ Christianity can rarely see any justification for committing a crime, especially as they believe that God put the law-making authorities in their place.
- ✓ Muslims say there is never any justification for committing crimes, especially in countries that follow Shari'ah law that originated in the Qur'an, the Sunnah and the hadith.

'Those who do not judge according to what God has revealed are doing grave wrong'. Qur'an 5:45

Poverty

Some people live in poverty and cannot afford the necessities of life. This can lead people to steal food and essentials that they cannot afford to buy. This is still against the law and people will still be arrested for stealing.

Islam:

Although some Muslims do live in poverty, Zakah is in place to help them. Muslims hope that such community support will prevent Muslims from turning to crime.

Christianity:

Christian condemn stealing, but are keen to make sure nobody is so poor that they use poverty as an excuse for stealing.

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. Parents may even encourage their children to commit crimes. Once they have started this way of life it is hard to stop.

Islam:

Muslims emphasise a strong extended family to help ensure that children are brought up to respect the law by following the good examples they are set.

Christianity:

Christians believe that both the family and wider society have a duty to help children understand what is right and wrong by setting the right example.

Mental Illness

Some people suffer from a mental illness that causes them to commit crimes. In cases involving major crimes and serious mental illnesses, it is likely that the offender's sentence will ensure that they are kept in a secure unit where they receive the treatment they need.

Addiction

Addiction to drugs means that the human body cannot cope without them. If they do not have the money to get their next 'fix', the only way to get it is to steal it. The drug which causes more crime than any other is alcohol

Islam:

Muslims forbid the taking of illegal drugs and alcohol. They believe that alcohol is a temptation which will lead people to do wrong and should be resisted.

Christianity:

Most Christians do not forbid drinking alcohol, but for Catholics drunkenness is a sin, and no denomination encourages excessive drinking. All Christians are against the use of illegal drugs.

Greed

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

Islam:

Muslims do not condone criminal acts out of greed.

Christianity:

In the Ten Commandments, Christians are taught not to covet, which means they should not be jealous of what somebody else has.

Hate

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

Islam:

Islam teaches that violence is wrong. You can only use violence in self-defence, therefore hatred is wrong. People should try to resolve their difference peacefully.

Christianity:

Christians also believe violence is wrong. They learnt from Jesus to be peaceful and to try and resolve their differences in a peaceful manner

Opposition to unjust law

According to lawmakers any breach of the law is wrong. Sometimes people have deliberately broken laws which are unjust. Many people believe that a law which is prejudiced or breaches human rights is wrong and should be changed. If breaking the law brings about change it may be acceptable.

Islam:

Muslims believe none of God's laws can be unjust, in countries where Shari'ah law exists it should not be considered necessary to protest an unjust law.

Christianity:

Christians believe it is right to speak out against prejudice and unjust laws, but do not believe it is right to break them.

3. Law breakers and types of crime

Christian attitudes to law breakers:

- ✓ Generally, against people breaking the law.
- ✓ Some Christians believe a punishment should be as severe as the crime, whilst others believe they should be helped to no reoffend.
- ✓ Law breakers rights should be protected and they should be treated humanely.
- ✓ Most Christians believe that offenders should be helped to change their ways so they do not reoffend once the punishment is over.
- ✓ Jesus taught actions which were pleasing to God, which includes treating prisoners well.

'For I was in prison and you came to visit me'. Matthew 25:34-36.

Types of crime:

Murder – the unlawful and deliberate killing of a human being. Christians condemn murder as God created all humans equally. They believe in the 10 commandments, 'thou shall not kill'.

Theft – Christians are understanding of those who commit theft out of need and not greed, but believe that they should be cared for so that they don't need to commit crimes. They believe you should follow 'do to others what you want them to do to you'.

Hate crimes – Christians condemn hate crimes. Everyone should be treated equally regardless of who they are. Christians follow 'love your neighbour' and 'there is neither Jew nor Gentile... for you are all one in Christ Jesus.'

Muslim attitudes to law breakers:

- ✓ Muslims are against people committing crimes. They believe that God has made it clear that Shari'ah law has to be obeyed, as does any other law.
- ✓ Generally, laws should be respected to promote order in society.
- ✓ Some Muslims believe a punishment should be as severe as the crime, whilst others believe they should be helped to no reoffend.
- ✓ Law breakers rights should be protected and they should be treated humanely.

'God commands justice...and prohibits wrong doing, and injustice...'
Quran 16:190

Types of crime:

Murder – the unlawful and deliberate killing of a human being. Muslims believe that murder is wrong as only God has the right to take life away.

Theft – Muslims may be sympathetic towards people committing theft out of need rather than greed. However, they believe the needy should be cared for by the community, so they have no reason to commit crimes.

Hate crimes – Muslims believe that God creates all humans with equal value and no individuals or groups should be singled out as inferior to others. Hate crimes make the idea of a society without prejudice or discrimination impossible to achieve.

4. Aims of punishment

- ✓ It is generally acknowledged that punishments should not cause unnecessary, intentional harm to the offender.
- ✓ There are three main aims of punishment.

Retribution:

- ✓ It means to get your own back.

Christianity – In the Old Testament retribution was accepted. **'An eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth'. Exodus 21:23-25** Christians do not take the teaching literally but interpret it to mean that an offender should receive a punishment severe enough to match the seriousness of their crime.

Islam – Muslims favour severe punishment because they believe that actions in breach of Shari'ah law are actions against God. Muslims can grant mercy on the offender or the family can do it on their behalf. **'An equal wound for a wound, if anyone forgoes this out of charity, it will serve as atonement for his bad deeds'. Qur'an 5:45**

Deterrence:

- ✓ Trying to put people off doing a similar crime by giving a severe punishment.

Christianity – Making extreme examples of offenders in an effort to persuade others to obey the law is not acceptable to many Christians. They believe every human should be treated with respect, regardless what they have done.

Islam - Muslims favour severe punishment because they believe that actions in breach of Shari'ah law are actions against God.

Reformation:

- ✓ Trying to change the attitude and behaviour of the offender.

Christianity – Christians prefer this because it seeks to help offenders. It is hope that the offender will become law-abiding members of the community. They believe this because it says **'do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good'. Romans 12:21.** Christians are encouraged not to seek revenge, but to set an example. It should not however, be a replacement for punishment, it should be done at the same time as punishment.

Islam – It is considered necessary for offenders to seek God's forgiveness and to become purified. If they reform, this is more likely to happen.