

# 3.1 Religious Attitudes to Matters of Life

Modern medicine has created lots of difficult questions that many people think we need to find answers to. These include whether we should change the genetic make-up of humans, and in what way, and whether we should help create life through fertility treatments. Important for thinking about this is to understand certain views about life:

The **sanctity of life** principle is the belief that all life is **sacred** because it is a **gift from God**. It is therefore very precious and special.

**Quality of life** is the satisfaction and enjoyment that a person has while being alive. A person's quality of life is generally reduced through pain, suffering, distress and illness.

**Value of life** is the importance and preciousness of life. The value of something such as a chocolate bar is often talked about in terms of how much it costs, e.g. 80p. The value of life cannot be talked about in this way because it is valuable in a different and much more significant way.

**RIGHT**

**WRONG**

**The sanctity of life and medical ethics**

Couples who are unable to conceive naturally often experience great worry and sadness at the thought of not having a child. It can be a very difficult and emotional time. Recent scientific advancements have developed artificial ways for couples to have children.

**Artificial methods of reproduction**



Medical Practice	Definition	Law	Benefits	Christian Teaching
<b>Human genetic engineering / embryology</b>	The changing of a human's genes, normally on an embryo (12-14 days after conception). <b>Designer babies</b> are created when parents chooses certain genetic characteristics of their child. <b>Saviour siblings</b> are created when a couple have a child to transplant that child's stem cells to help save the life of their other child.	Designer babies and saviour siblings are illegal.  Embryos can only be used for 14 days after conception.	Research using embryos can help develop cures for human genetic diseases.	Some Christians are against genetic engineering and research involving embryos because it is unnatural and 'playing God'.  The manipulation and destruction of embryos is considered to be against the sanctity of life because they believe life begins at conception.
<b>Stem-cell (therapeutic) cloning</b>	<b>Cloning</b> is the creating of a genetically identical copy of an organism. <b>Therapeutic cloning</b> is the taking of cells, often from a woman's egg, to produce an embryo, and using the stem cells from it for scientific research. <b>Stem cells</b> are special cells because they can develop into cells which can be used in numerous organs, such as hearts and livers.	It is legal in the UK, although allowing the embryo to develop into a human (creating human clones) is illegal.	Produces stem cells which can be used for research.	Some Christians are hesitant about donating organs because they believe the body may be needed in the afterlife.
<b>Transplant surgery</b>	The taking of an organ, e.g. a heart, from one person (and occasionally animals, e.g. pigs) and putting it into another whose current organ is diseased or malfunctioning.	Legal in the UK. Organs cannot be bought or sold for money in the UK.	It can provide lifesaving treatment.	Jehovah's Witnesses, a Christian group, refuse blood transfusions based on Leviticus 17:11 'For the life of a creature is in the blood'.
<b>Blood transfusions</b>	Receiving blood donated by someone else, often during an operation when extra blood is required.	Legal in the UK.	It helps saves lives in operations and when someone has lost a lot of blood.	Other Christians allow genetic engineering and embryology because of the medical benefits. They believe that saving someone from a life-threatening or debilitating illness is showing love for one's neighbour. Catholics agree that organ donation and donating blood are acts of kindness.
<b>Experiments on humans</b>	Medical experiments on humans who volunteer themselves to test medical drugs, and may be paid.	Legal as long as individuals give their full and informed permission to be involved.	Drugs have to be tested on humans for researchers to know if they are safe for use.	

Reproduction method	Definition	Implications
<b>In vitro fertilisation (IVF)</b>	When the egg and sperm are fertilised in a petri dish and then placed into the woman's uterus	It is often unsuccessful and therefore upsetting for couples. There may be numerous attempts.
<b>Artificial Insemination by Donor (AID)</b>	When a donor's (not the husband's) sperm is injected into the woman's uterus	The child is not raised by their biological father, which the child may find difficult. It allows for single-sex and single-parent families.
<b>Artificial Insemination by Husband (AIH)</b>	When the husband's sperm is injected into the woman's uterus	This is often seen to have fewer implications than AID, although conception takes place outside the uterus which some people consider unnatural.
<b>Surrogacy</b>	When another woman carries the child of another couple	The mother does not have the opportunity to carry her child.

Every parent should be able to try to have a child because of the joy a child can bring.

**Christian arguments FOR fertility treatments**

God commanded humans to procreate: 'Go forth and multiply' (Genesis 1:28). Trying to have children through whatever means helps to fulfil this.

**Christian arguments AGAINST fertility treatments**

In 1 Samuel 1:5, a woman is described as unable to have a child because God 'had closed her womb', although she later conceived after praying. This suggests fertility is decided by God and should not be changed by human actions. It goes against God's plan for each person.

It is unnatural and 'playing God'.

Children are a gift from God, not a right.

AID involves a third party and is therefore similar to adultery, which is condemned in the Bible. IVF, AID and AIH all require the male partner to ejaculate sperm through masturbation, which is considered immoral.

Catholics believe children should only be conceived by a married mother and father, not single-sex or single-parent families.

'Spare' embryos, which constitute a life, from IVF are thrown away.

## 3.2 Religious Attitudes to the Elderly and Death

### Senior citizenship

**Senior citizenship** refers to individuals who are elderly. It is generally considered to be those able to claim a pension from the government, which is over the age of 65. It also refers to those who are **retired** (stopped working), which is often the same age. The elderly play an important part in society and the family. They often, however, face numerous problems.

**Retirement** – individuals can find it hard to adapt to life without a job which previously gave them purpose and responsibilities.

**Ageism** – elderly people are sometimes discriminated against because of their old age. They are seen as a drain on the economy and a burden on their family.

**Role within the family** – the elderly sometimes find that, whereas they used to be a central member of the family, they have become less able to participate and may find themselves isolated.

**Finance** – some elderly people live in relative poverty because the state pension is a low amount of money and they may not have sufficient personal savings.

**Health** – the elderly often suffer numerous and ongoing health problems. This can limit their mobility and ability to live independently, and affect their quality of life.

### Self-determination and euthanasia

**Euthanasia** means 'gentle death' and is the bringing about of a painless death because it is what the individual has requested or is what the family or doctors have decided is most compassionate, given the suffering of the individual. Euthanasia is considered for individuals who are in high amounts of pain and very unlikely to recover. Their quality of life is very low.

Core to the debate about euthanasia is who is responsible for when we die. Supporters of euthanasia believe there should be **self-determination**, whereby individuals can decide for themselves when they die. If a terminally ill person requests it, it should therefore be respected. Others, however, believe that God or nature should decide when a person dies and that interfering with this is unnatural or 'playing God'.

**Hospices** (care homes for the terminally ill) are an alternative to euthanasia. They are a way for individuals to live out the end of their life in dignity. They provide physical and mental support to relieve pain and provide as much comfort as possible.

### Christian teaching on self-determination and euthanasia

The **Catholic Church** interprets euthanasia to be murder and against the sanctity of life. They believe only God should take away life. It does, however, allow euthanasia through the doctrine of double effect if the primary purpose of the action is to reduce pain.

**Anglican and other Churches** believe human life should not be extended at all costs when the individual is in a lot of pain or brain-dead, for example. Passive euthanasia could be allowed in such situations and be a loving action.

Key Term	Definition	Legal status
<b>Active Euthanasia</b>	When deliberate actions are taken to end someone's life, such as a lethal injection or withholding treatment knowing it will result in death.	Illegal in the UK.
<b>Passive Euthanasia</b>	Ending or refusing treatment that is most probably needed to keep the person alive.	Legal in the UK.
<b>Voluntary Euthanasia</b>	When someone asks for help in ending their life.	Illegal in the UK and could result in imprisonment of up to 14 years. It is legal in the Netherlands.
<b>Non-voluntary euthanasia</b>	When someone's life is ended but the individual has not requested it themselves because they are not able, e.g. because they are brain-dead.	Depends on whether it is active or passive euthanasia.
<b>Self-determination</b>	The ability or right of an individual to make decisions for themselves, e.g. request voluntary euthanasia.	Illegal in the UK, although there have been numerous challenges in Parliament for a right-to-die Act.

### Caring for the elderly

The elderly often need care. This will vary from 'Meals on Wheels', when a service delivers meals to homes, to care homes which provide 24-hour care and support for all tasks. Someone has to take responsibility for this care. Who does this depends on the level and type of care required, the costs involved and the preference of those involved.

Some people choose to take **individual responsibility** for this care, which means care is provided by the family, friends or the community, either through visits or the elderly person moving in with family members. Other choose **corporate responsibility**, which means an external organisation provides the care, paid for by the family and/or government. This could be a residential home where there is full-time care, or sheltered housing where houses are specially adapted for the elderly and help is available.



### Definitions of death

Medical technology, especially life-support machines, can prolong life once the heart has stopped beating. This creates questions about: *When is a person dead? When should life support be switched off? How long should technology keep someone alive?*



When the **heart** stops beating? Hearts can be kept beating with a ventilator, even if the brain stem has died.

When someone is in a **vegetative state**? This can appear similar to being brain-dead but the brain stem is still functioning and there is the very rare chance of recovery. Breathing by themselves is usually possible and there may be some form of consciousness.

When the brain stem has died and someone is '**brain-dead**'? The brain stem is responsible for regulating breathing and heart beating, as well as consciousness, awareness and movement. There is no chance of recovery but the heart can be kept artificially beating. Once the **life-support machine**, which is keeping them alive, has been switched off, the doctor declares them dead.

### Life after death

Christians believe that after death a person will go to **heaven** or **hell** (Catholics also believe in Purgatory, where people with less serious sins must be cleansed before going to heaven). God will judge where a person goes depending on their behaviour and character in this life.

Christians hold a **funeral** for the deceased to commit (send) them to God. Funerals provide comfort to the **bereaved** (the family and friends of the deceased) through explaining how the deceased will be joining God and live on eternally. It also provides a chance for the family to come together and celebrate the life of the deceased.

**Christians believe...** caring for others, including the elderly, is very important because of Jesus' command to love one's neighbour. Care for one's parents is also important because one of the Ten Commandments is to 'honour your mother and father'.

### 3.3 Religious Attitudes to Drug Abuse



#### The law and illegal drugs

A drug is a substance which, when taken, affects and changes the person's mind and body. **Illegal** drugs, and some legal drugs when used incorrectly, can cause physical, mental and emotional harm. Illegal drugs are classified by the government as A, B or C depending on how harmful and addictive they are.

Some people disagree with the classification system. They argue, for example, that cannabis is a 'soft drug' and not harmful or highly addictive. Cannabis is legal in the states of Washington and Colorado in the USA.

Class	Drug	Legal consequences for possessing the drug	Legal consequences for producing or selling the drug
A	Cocaine, ecstasy, heroin, LSD, magic mushrooms, methadone, methamphetamine	Up to 7 years in prison, an unlimited fine or both	Up to life in prison, an unlimited fine or both
B	Amphetamines, cannabis, ketamine	Up to 5 years in prison, an unlimited fine or both	Up to 14 years in prison, an unlimited fine or both
C	Anabolic steroids, temazepan, khat	Up to 2 years in prison, an unlimited fine or both	Up to 14 years in prison, an unlimited fine or both

#### Legal drugs and their effects



Certain drugs are **legal** in the UK. The most common are caffeine (in tea and coffee), alcohol, tobacco (in cigarettes) and **solvents** (in some glues).

These are often called '**social drugs**' because they are used in social settings to relax or for more energy. There are, however, laws on how these drugs can be sold; e.g. alcohol and solvents can only be sold to people over 18.

Legal drugs can still cause **damaging effects**. Tobacco causes much higher risk of cancer. Alcohol can lead to cancer of the mouth, neck & throat, liver cirrhosis and high blood pressure.

Other legal drugs are only available through a prescription given by a doctor. These drugs can be bought illegally online. This involves many risks due to counterfeits (fake drugs) and self mis-diagnosis. Both legal and illegal drugs, especially alcohol, can be very dangerous when used while **driving** and can result in crashes and unsafe driving.

There are very high levels of **tax** on alcohol and tobacco. This is done to put people off using these products because of the high price. It also helps pay for the NHS costs of treating illnesses relating to these drugs. The money raised through the taxes are, however, higher than these health costs.

#### Why illegal drugs may be taken

People take illegal drugs for lots of different reasons. Some do it because they think it will be fun and to see what it is like.



Other may feel pressure from peers or from the media where celebrities are shown taking drugs. More seriously, people take drugs as a way to cope with or escape from other problems, such as abuse, or feelings of low self-worth, such as due to unemployment, poor mental health or a sense that life is not going anywhere. Drugs are not a solution to these problems and often make them worse. Drugs can also be **addictive** which means individuals continue to take them because they feel dependent on them and unable to stop.

#### Consequences of drug abuse

Drug abuse has physical, mental and social consequences both on the user and those around them.



#### Effects on the individual:

- Damage to physical and mental health, and possible death
- Disruption to daily life because of addiction
- Risk of prison and a criminal record

#### Effects on others:

- Worry and distress for family and friends seeing the abuse and possible family breakdown
- Increased crime by users to get money to buy drugs
- Increased antisocial behaviour, violence, unemployment, unwanted pregnancies, unsafe driving
- Cost of treatment and rehabilitation

#### Christian beliefs about the mind and body

The Bible does not mention drugs (apart from alcohol). Christians therefore apply the teaching about the mind and the body to this issue. The Bible emphasises that a clear mind is needed to worship God and communicate with him, which drugs do not provide. Drugs could also block or distort God trying to communicate with Christians.

*'Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray' (1 Peter 4:7)*

The body is also considered to be a 'temple' where the Holy Spirit lives and therefore it should not be damaged through drugs:

*'Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person' (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)*

The negative consequences of drug abuse on society and others is not considered to be following Jesus' command to love one's neighbour.

#### Ways to reduce drug abuse and rehabilitate users

#### Ways to prevent drug abuse:

- Educate young people about the risks
- Use the **law and police** to remove drugs from the streets through imprisoning drug producers and dealers
- Reduce causes of drug abuses, e.g. unemployment and homelessness

The NHS and many charities aim to **rehabilitate** drug addicts (help them stop using) through:

- Counselling to address the cause of drug abuse
- Support groups with other addicts
- Key workers who provide advice and support
- Residential care, e.g. 'rehab' or in hospital
- Methadone, which is a drug that can be prescribed to help addicts as a substitute for heroin and is gradually reduced
- Going 'cold-turkey' – just stopping taking drugs. This is very hard to do

There are many different ways to help stop addiction but they are not always successful. This might be because the person is not fully willing to stop, but more often because there are many reasons people take drugs which cannot all be addressed.

#### Christian attitudes to drugs

Christians believe taking illegal drugs is wrong because people should follow the law.

*'Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established' (Romans 13:1)*

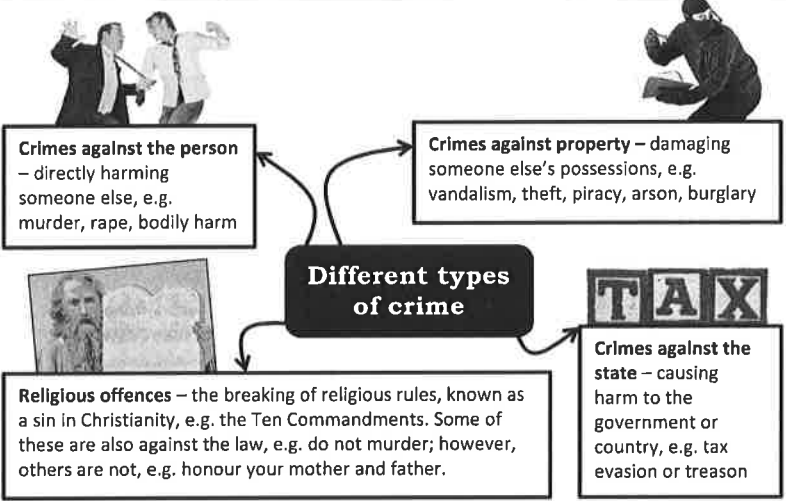
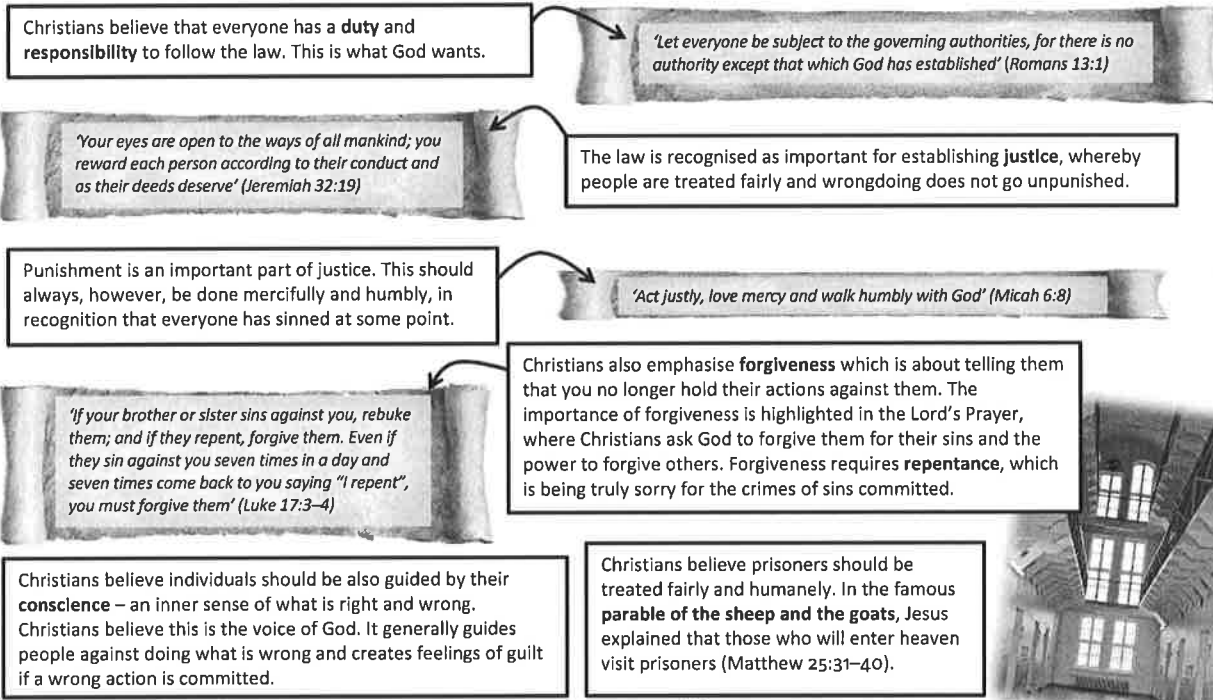
In terms of legal drugs, Christians accept the importance of prescribed drugs for health purposes. Social drugs are generally considered acceptable but should be used in moderation. Therefore, although Christians have a legal right to these drugs, they have a moral responsibility to limit their use and help others who abuse them.

Alcohol has an important role in the New Testament, such as in the Eucharist (taking of bread and wine) and when Jesus miraculously turned water into wine (John 2:1-11). Drunkenness is not, however, allowed. Paul writes:

*'You must not associate with anyone who [is]... a drunkard' (1 Corinthians 5: 11)*

# 3.4 Religious Attitudes to Crime and Punishment

## Christian views on crime and punishment



## Causes of crime

The reason somebody commits a crime is more complicated than that they simply chose to do something bad. There are nearly always other factors influencing the situation:

- Environmental factors** – unemployment rates, gang culture and poverty
- Social factors** – the kind of upbringing they had as a child, including role models, parental guidance and school experience
- Psychological factors** – many criminals have psychological problems and poor mental health

## The aims of punishment

