How religions understand sin and forgiveness

KS4 RELIGIOUS STUDIES Ages 14-16 ⏰ 4 min read

What is sin?

Sin is a religious word that means doing something wrong or breaking God's rules. But different religions understand sin in different ways. In **Christianity**, sin is when people disobey God and act against what is good and right. In **Islam**, sin (called **dhanb**) is an action that goes against the teachings of **Allah**. In **Judaism**, sin means failing to follow **God's laws** and the teachings in the **Torah**. In **Buddhism**, there is less focus on sin and more on **karma**—the idea that every action has consequences.

Think of it like breaking a promise to a friend. When you promise to meet them and then don't show up, you've broken their trust. Sin is similar—it's breaking your promise or relationship with God.

How do religions view forgiveness?

Most religions teach that forgiveness is possible, but the paths to forgiveness differ. In **Christianity**, believers can confess their sins to God and ask for forgiveness through **Jesus Christ**. Many Christians believe that Jesus died to take away human sin, so forgiveness comes through faith and repentance. In **Catholicism**, there's a special practice called **confession**, where people speak to a **priest** about their sins.

In **Islam**, Muslims can seek forgiveness directly from **Allah** through **repentance** (called **tawbah**). They must feel genuine regret and promise not to repeat the sin. **Ramadan**, the month of fasting, is an important time for seeking forgiveness. In **Judaism**, **Yom Kippur**—the Day of Atonement—is the holiest day of the year, when Jews fast and ask God for forgiveness.

Think of it like when you accidentally hurt a friend's feelings. First you feel bad about it, then you say sorry and mean it, and finally they forgive you and you move forward. That's what repentance and forgiveness are like.

Why does forgiveness matter?

Forgiveness is central to most religions because it allows people to make peace with God and with themselves. It teaches that even when people do wrong, they can change and improve. **Forgiveness isn't about ignoring wrongdoing**—it's about acknowledging mistakes, feeling sorry, and trying to become a better person. Religious teachings on forgiveness also encourage people to forgive others, not just seek forgiveness themselves. This creates communities built on compassion, understanding, and second chances.

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