



What Religions Teach About Justice and Punishment

KS4 RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Ages 14-16 ⌚ 3 min read

What Is Justice?

Justice means treating people fairly when they break the law. But religions don't always agree on what fair punishment looks like. Some focus on punishing wrongdoing, while others believe in **rehabilitation** — helping criminals change and become better people.

Christianity and Forgiveness

Christianity teaches that **forgiveness** and **redemption** are central to justice. Jesus taught his followers to forgive others, even those who hurt them. Many Christian thinkers believe punishment should help criminals repent (feel sorry) and change their ways, rather than simply cause suffering.

Think of it like a parent who punishes their child not just to make them sad, but to help them learn from their mistake and become a better person.

Islam's Approach

Islam has detailed teachings about justice in its holy text, the **Quran**. Islamic law aims to protect society and deter crime through fair punishment. However, it also emphasizes **mercy** and **compensation** — criminals can sometimes make amends by paying money to victims or their families instead of facing physical punishment.

Buddhism and Karma

Buddhism teaches about **karma** — the idea that our actions have consequences that affect our future lives. Rather than focusing on harsh punishment, Buddhism encourages understanding why people commit crimes, often rooted in suffering or ignorance. The goal is to break this cycle through compassion and education.

Think of it like planting seeds: if you plant bad seeds, bad plants grow. Understanding this helps you choose better seeds next time.

Judaism's Balance

Judaism values both **justice** and **mercy**. The Jewish tradition teaches **teshuvah** — the process of repentance and returning to the right path. While punishment exists to maintain order, rehabilitation and the criminal's genuine remorse are considered important parts of true justice.

What They Have in Common

Despite their differences, most major religions share common themes: justice should be fair, proportional to the crime, and ideally should help people change for the better. They recognize that simply hurting people back doesn't always create a better society.