

HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

PREJUDICE AND DISCRIMINATION

Christians believe that being created in God's image makes people very special and precious. Whatever their status, religion or gender, they are equally valuable and can have the same relationship with God. People should only be judged on how well they live their lives in obedience to God, not on wealth or status. Jesus taught people to treat everyone as having equal value when he said, **'love your neighbour as yourself'**.

Christian views on prejudice based on sexuality

Some Christians see homosexuality as sinful whilst others see it as morally acceptable. Those who oppose it believe that sexual relations are for creating children, something that homosexual relations cannot do. Those who think homosexual relationships are acceptable focus more on the love between people, rather than on the sexual act which is of lower importance. Recent changes in British legislation have given equality to everybody regardless of sexuality and homosexual couples can now legally marry.

Christian views on prejudice based on race

Christians oppose racial prejudice and other forms of discrimination. Positive discrimination can help to ensure equality of opportunity. Racism means showing prejudice against someone because of their ethnic group or nationality. In Britain, racism was made illegal in the 1976 Race Relations Act.

Positive Discrimination

The use of positive discrimination can help groups that have previously been discriminated against gain equal access to opportunities. For example, people with physical disabilities sometimes experience discrimination and often do not have equal access to physical spaces. Many people support the use of positive discrimination, e.g. giving wheelchair users front-row positions at a football ground so they can see the match. Some political parties in Britain may use positive discrimination to give more women the chance to be elected to Parliament, because there have always been many more male MPs than female.

Christian beliefs

- Christians oppose racism. It denies equality of opportunity to people purely because of where they come from or the colour of their skin.
- “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female for you are one in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:28 [NIV]**
- At the time this was a revolutionary way of thinking and the fact that discrimination is still a problem in some parts of the world shows Paul's vision is still not completely accepted.
 - In the twentieth century, races were kept apart with black people being discriminated against in countries such as South Africa and the USA.
 - The actions of Christians such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu (South Africa) and Dr Martin Luther King Junior (USA), with the help of others, persuaded their respective governments that racist policies were unfair and needed to be changed.

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Social justice is ensuring that society treats people fairly whether they are poor or wealthy, and protects people's human rights. All people have a responsibility not to harm the rights of others.

Christians promote social justice by following Jesus' teachings (e.g. **parable of the Sheep and the Goats**) and by campaigning to improve the lives of the less fortunate in society.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), was adopted by the United Nations in 1948. It states: *"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."*

In 1998, the UK government passed the Human Rights Act that reinforces the UDHR. It prohibits slavery, torture and forced labour and includes the rights to life, liberty, security, education, privacy, a fair trial, family life, free elections and to get married.

Responsibilities

Humans have the right to freedom of speech but the responsibility not to say something that causes offence to someone else. Children have the right to protection from cruelty and neglect but the responsibility not to harm each other. This applies to individuals, as well as countries and their governments.

GIVING MONEY TO THE POOR

Christians have a religious duty to help the poor. Those in need should use their talents to provide for themselves by working.

Giving Aid

When a disaster strikes, emergency aid is needed. Voluntary aid organisations such as Christian Aid immediately mobilise their workers to provide emergency supplies such as food, water, blankets, basic shelter and medical supplies. The money for supplies and transport comes from donations. Long-term aid consists of development work designed to help people to become less dependent on outside aid and be more self-reliant. An old saying, used to illustrate the meaning of long-term aid is: 'Give a man a fish and feed him for one day, teach a man to fish and feed him for life.'

Justice

One way that justice is shown is through the Fairtrade movement, which provides long-term development opportunities based on trade, not charity. The products are guaranteed to be grown and traded justly. Workers are paid fairly and work in good conditions. The price paid for the goods is a little higher than some non-Fairtrade goods, but consumers know that they are buying a product which has not been produced by workers who are exploited. Profits from the sale of Fairtrade products are used to further develop communities overseas. Fairtrade reduces the reliance on aid and gives people in LEDCs self-respect. Fairtrade allows Christians to exercise the concept of stewardship and show their love of God and their neighbour. In Britain, people of all faiths support those in need by helping in soup kitchens and food banks and by helping the charities that support the poor to find work so they can support themselves in future.

Responsibilities of those living in poverty

Everybody has talents and abilities to help themselves out of poverty if they have the opportunity to do so. Providing opportunities is an important part of helping people to provide for themselves, so Christians try to encourage the poor to work, but there are some who are unable to do so. This may be because there are few jobs available in their area, they lack the qualifications required and training is not available, or their domestic arrangements make full-time work impossible. Paul wrote **'If a man will not work, he shall not eat.'** Although the harshness of this reflects the situation and time in which it was written, it does stress that wherever possible, people should provide for themselves and their families by working.

EXPLOITATION OF THE POOR

In 2017, the National Living Wage in Britain was £7.50 per hour for workers aged 25+. The majority of people in Britain earn more than the National Living Wage. In many LEDCs the National Living Wage does not exist and many workers are paid a small fraction of the minimum in Britain. Some are so desperate that they are forced into work in textiles factories where they work hard for little reward, making clothes for wealthy countries such as Britain. Conditions in the factories are often unsafe as labour rights such as fair pay, working conditions and hours worked are ignored. As long as companies are prepared to buy goods cheaply and sell them for a large profit, people will continue to be exploited.

Excessive Loans on interest

The Christian Church does not oppose, in principle, the charging of interest but does oppose the charging of excessive interest on loans.

People trafficking

Moving to developed countries is attractive to those in LEDCs because the quality of life is better. However, they may be restricted by immigration rules preventing them from settling or working in their target country. Many are forced into paying a people trafficker to transport them illegally. If they arrive, they may be found work by the trafficker with very low pay and in unsafe conditions, often in 'sweatshop' factories or in the sex industry as prostitutes. As they are working and living illegally, they cannot report this exploitation to the authorities. Some are kidnapped and trafficked to work against their will.

disability: a physical or mental impairment which has an adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities

discrimination: actions or behaviour that results from prejudice

emergency aid: also known as short-term aid; help given to communities in a time of disaster or crisis, e.g. food during a famine, shelter after an earthquake

equality: the state of being equal, especially in status, rights, and opportunities

exploitation: misuse of power or money to get others to do things for little or unfair reward

freedom of religion: the right to believe or practice whatever religion one chooses

freedom of religious expression: the right to worship, preach and practise one's faith in whatever way one chooses

heterosexual: to be sexually attracted to members of the opposite sex

homosexual: to be sexually attracted to members of the same sex

human rights: the basic rights and freedoms to which all human beings should be entitled

human trafficking: the illegal movement of people, typically for the purposes of forced labour or commercial sexual exploitation

long-term aid: assistance given to a poor country over a long period of time that has a lasting effect

positive discrimination: treating people more favourably because they have been discriminated against in the past or have disabilities

poverty: being without money, food or other basic needs of life (being poor)

prejudice: unfairly judging someone before the facts are known; holding biased opinions about an individual or group

social justice: ensuring that society treats people fairly whether they are poor or wealthy and protects people's human rights

tithe: one tenth of annual produce or earnings

HUMAN RIGHTS AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM



Religions believe that people have freedom of religion (the right to believe or practise whatever religion one chooses) and freedom of religious expression (the right to worship, preach or practise one's faith in whatever way one chooses).

Christianity is the main religious tradition in Great Britain. The reigning monarch is the Head of the Church of England and has been referred to as the 'defender of the faith' since 1521.

The government protects the freedom of religious expression which gives individuals the right to follow whichever faith they choose or none. Laws forbid the persecution of members of any faith, and any person can encourage others to follow their faith, provided they do not preach hatred and intolerance.

These freedoms are protected in both the Universal and the Cairo Declaration of Human Rights: **"Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion and belief, and freedom ... to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."**

In some parts of the world governments do not allow their citizens such freedoms. In Britain there are still some who discriminate against members of particular religious traditions. Those found guilty of such behaviour in Britain can be punished by a court. Conflict based on politics and a divide between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland during the second half of the twentieth century has largely been ended.

Look at the table below for additional information...

For those living in poverty:

- Cheap loans are not available, so there is often little choice but to go to a loan company that offers small short-term loans with massive interest rates (sometimes over 1000%).
- These unsecured 'payday loans' are legal in Britain but end up costing the poor vastly more than they borrow, especially if they cannot repay quickly.
- They are unlikely to be able to afford a mortgage so cannot buy a house, missing out on it increasing in value and providing them with a profit.



TEACHINGS ABOUT WEALTH



Christians and Muslims both believe that wealth is a gift from God and should be used responsibly.

What does the Bible say about wealth?

The Old Testament says that to thank God, people should pay a tithe (one-tenth of annual produce or earnings) to God, to be shared among the poor. Today some Christians choose to pay a tithe to the Church.

The focus of the New Testament teaching on wealth is on the dangers associated with it such as greed and selfishness. It is easy to become so involved with money that you neglect your spiritual life and forget to love God and love your neighbour. (Matthew 6:24 & 33)

God's wish is for people to **set their hearts on him rather than things on earth which are temporary.** (1 Timothy 6:17)

Muslim principles

- Wealth is a blessing from God and should be used to benefit everybody. It should not be gained from gambling, fraud, deception and producing or selling alcohol.
- The value of money is only in the good it can do, especially helping the poor.
- Having wealth is not wrong but hoarding excessive wealth is discouraged. **"Tell those who hoard gold and silver instead of giving in God's cause that they will have a grievous punishment. Qur'an 9:34"**
- A Muslim's first responsibility is to serve God and too much wealth can be a distraction.
- Greed and selfishness must be avoided and exploitation of others is wrong. **"Beware of greed for it is ready poverty." Hadith**
- Islam teaches that usury – the act of loaning money with interest – is forbidden. **"God blights usury, but blesses charitable deeds with multiple increase." Qur'an 2:27**

THE STATUS AND ROLES OF WOMEN



Both Christians and Muslims believe that women and men have equal status in the eyes of God. They are of equal value and will be held equally accountable for their actions. The roles of women within religions vary as attitudes have changed through the years.

Christian views

- At the time of the early Christians (first century CE), attitudes to women were very different from today. Paul wrote: **Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak [...] for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.** 1 Corinthians 14:34–35
- He also wrote that **just as Christ is the head of man, so a man is head of a woman.**
- Many Christians believe that Paul's writings are a reflection of the times he lived in. Society has now changed and what 2000 years ago seemed right and normal is not so now.
- Some Christian non-conformist Churches have ordained women as ministers for nearly 100 years.
- The Catholic and Orthodox Churches do not allow women to be priests.
- In 1993 women were allowed to become priests in the Church of England and in 2014, Rev Libby Lane became the first female bishop.

Muslim views

- Muslims believe that men and women were designed for different purposes.
- Traditionally men are the providers and women bring up children and look after the home.
- Women have the responsibility to teach their children the basics of Islam.
- Mothers teach their children about their future roles as husband and father or wife and mother.
- Many women now have a paid job. The money they earn is for themselves.
- Men are also expected to take a role in the home. Although all Muslims have a duty to obey and worship God, women have a different role from men.
- As mothers, women do not have to attend mosque five times a day for prayers, nor for Jummah (Friday) prayer. If they choose to attend, they worship separately from men.
- Even though Muslim women can become scholars, teachers and in some cases preachers, they cannot become an imam unless no man is present at the worship.

Christian beliefs

- Christian teaching encourages tolerance and harmony.
- Different Christian denominations fighting each other or against other religions are not following Paul's words in the New Testament:

"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." Romans 12:18 [NIV]

"Watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them." Romans 16:17 [NIV]

Muslim beliefs

- Muslims believe that religious freedom is part of God's design and freedom of belief is taught in the Qur'an.

"Now the truth has come from your Lord: let those who wish to believe in it do so and let those who wish to reject it do so." Qur'an 18:29

- The whole of a believer's life can be seen as religious expression if it is lived according to God's will.
- Shari'ah law does have provisions to punish people who convert from Islam to another faith, although these are only strongly enforced in a few countries.
- Some Muslim countries have strict blasphemy laws that stop people criticising the Qur'an, Muhammad, Jesus or any of the prophets.

Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year. Deuteronomy 14:22

For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil. 1 Timothy 6:10

Christian views

- Everybody needs money to live but Christians believe that those with excess money should give it to the Church for its upkeep and mission, including providing for the poor.
- The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus ended with the rich man in hell for not helping Lazarus the poor beggar (Luke 16:19–31).
- The Parable of the Sheep and Goats states that those who help the poor are rewarded with a place in heaven.

Muslim views

- The first duty of a husband is to provide for his wife and children.
- It is a duty to consider others and to use any remaining money for them.
- Muslims are required to give 2.5% of their wealth to the mosque for the poor every year (**Zakah**). This purifies the remainder of what they have.
- They are encouraged to choose to make any additional voluntary contributions to charity (**Sadaqah**).