

American Government & Politics: A Christian Worldview:
To Punish or Not to Punish (12-15 minutes)

TEACHER INSTRUCTIONS/KEY

Goal

Students distinguish between moral wrongs (sins) and actions that fall under the proper authority of civil government (crimes), recognizing that not all sin is punishable by law.

Instructions

1. Read the instructions as a class.
2. Students complete the questions (give them 8-10 minutes); discuss as a class.

Answer Key

1. Crime (fraud/theft of property)
2. Sin (lying/gossip; harmful but not typically a civil offense)
3. Crime (fraud—deceptive business practice)
4. Sin (verbal insult; wrong, but not a civil violation in itself)
5. Crime (theft/burglary)
6. Crime (fraud/theft of wages)
7. Sin (hatred of the heart; not punishable by civil authority)
8. Crime (assault)
9. Sin (dishonesty; not a civil matter)
10. Crime (fraud/theft through unlawful access)

(Note the intentional contrast pair: #9 (cheating privately) → Sin; #10 (hacking to alter records) → Crime.)

Wrap-Up/Final Direction

Scripture gives a clear picture of what civil authority is for:

- “Execute judgment and righteousness, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the oppressor...” — Jeremiah 22:3
- “Remove violence and spoil, and execute judgment and justice...” — Ezekiel 45:9
- “For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil...” — Romans 13:3
- “...for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.” — 1 Peter 2:13–14

Not everything that is wrong should be punished by government—but what government does punish should be rooted in justice: protecting people from violence, theft, and oppression.

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Read each scenario. For each one, decide: Is this primarily a CRIME (properly punishable by government) or a SIN (morally wrong but not the government's role to punish)? Write either Crime or Sin underneath each scenario, and be ready to explain your reasoning.

1. A man secretly alters official records in a courthouse so that a piece of land is transferred into his name without the owner's knowledge.
2. A teenage girl spreads a damaging rumor about a classmate, knowing it isn't true, causing embarrassment and broken friendships.
3. A store owner knowingly uses a rigged scale so customers receive less product than what they paid for.
4. A neighbor loudly insults another neighbor in anger during a dispute but makes no threats and causes no physical harm.
5. A person breaks into a parked car at night and steals a backpack left inside.
6. A worker consistently arrives late, lies about his hours, and collects pay for time he did not actually work.
7. A man harbors deep hatred in his heart toward a coworker but never acts on it outwardly.
8. During an argument, a woman deliberately strikes another person, causing injury.
9. A student cheats on a private homework assignment at home without anyone else being directly harmed.
10. A student hacks into the school's grading system and changes his test score to a higher grade.

