Jesus’s moral teaching

What did Jesus teach about how to live a good life?

In Christianity, Jesus is seen as a model of how to live a good life, and also as the inspiration to lead one. Christians use the Bible as an authoritative source for moral teaching, especially the examples of Jesus’ actions and teachings as found in the Gospels.

The Beatitudes

The main teachings of Jesus on how to live the Christian life can be found in the Sermon on the Mount, which is in Matthew’s Gospel. It opens with a list of blessings which are called the beatitudes (from the Latin word for blessed, happy or fortunate). They are a strange list of nine different characteristics which people might have, most of which don’t sound fortunate at all by the usual standards of the world.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matthew chapter 5 verses 3-12

‘Mourn’ means to be very sad or sorrowful, usually over someone or something which has been lost.

‘Meek’ means being gentle and humble.

‘Righteous’ means behaving in a pure, fair and just way.

To ‘revile’ someone means to speak to them abusively.

To do...

A Christian might use the beatitudes to guide them to try to live their life in the way that Jesus would want them to. Choose two of the types of people mentioned in the beatitudes and describe how a Christian could live like that today.
The Sermon on the Mount

The main teachings of Jesus on how to live the Christian life can be found in the Sermon on the Mount, which is in Matthew's Gospel. Matthew's Gospel was probably written for an audience with a Jewish background and it includes many references to the Old Testament.

Jesus teaches his followers about the Law of Moses and the commandments and how they should interpret them. Jesus states that he has not come to destroy the Old Testament law, but to complete it.

'Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have some not to abolish but to fulfil.'

Matthew chapter 5 verse 17

Jesus goes on to take particular laws and develop each of them in a new way that goes beyond their original setting. He usually begins with the phrase ‘You have heard it said …’ to refer to one of the laws, then goes on to say, ‘but I say to you’ before expanding on that law. In acting this way, Jesus implicitly claimed that he had the authority to do so, as God's special messenger.

To do...

Read Matthew chapter 5 verses 21–48 and complete the table on the next page with the teachings Jesus gives to his followers.

‘In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus often took rule about how to behave and expanded on it to what is happening in your heart.’ How far do you agree?

To do...

As well as Jesus’ teaching, Christians also have his example to follow. Match up these heads and tails.

In the Gospels there are many stories in which Jesus cares for the sick. Jesus made the blind see, cured people of leprosy and gave the deaf hearing.

This means that Christians shouldn't be quick to pass judgement, but should be compassionate as we have all done wrong.

When Jesus was presented with a woman who was caught committing adultery, he did not condemn her even though she was guilty. He told the crowd, ‘Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.’

Jesus’ example shows Christians that they should treat others with compassion, love, mercy and forgiveness.

Jesus also showed forgiveness in the last moments of his life. While he was on the cross he says, ‘Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing.’

This shows that Christians must treat the vulnerable with compassion and care.
### Murder and anger

‘You have heard it said to those of ancient times, “You shall not murder”’

If you are even angry with or insult your brother or sister, you will be liable to judgement.

Be reconciled to them before making an offering to God.

### Adultery and lust

‘You have heard it said, “You shall not commit adultery”’

### Divorce

‘It was also said, “Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce”’

### Taking oaths

‘Again, you have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, “You shall not swear falsely, but carry out the vows you have made to the LORD”’

### Revenge

‘You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”’

### Love of neighbour

‘You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy”’
What did Jesus teach about responding to those in need?

Mark’s Gospel describes how, on one occasion, a Pharisee asked Jesus which of the commandments was the most important one. In his reply, Jesus gave the two great commandments:

‘ “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” The second is this, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these.’

Mark chapter 12 verses 30-31

What does loving your neighbour mean in practice? In this passage from Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus uses imagery which would have been familiar to people in Israel at the time when he lived, of a shepherd dividing his animals into different types, to illustrate his teaching about how we should treat our neighbours.

To do...

As you read, highlight what the passage says will be done by people who are ‘the sheep’ (on the right) and by ‘the goats’ (on the left), using a different colour for each.

That ‘the Son of Man (i.e. Jesus) comes in his glory’ is a reference to the Christian belief that one day, Jesus will return and everyone who has lived will have the quality and goodness of their life judged by him.

Jesus often referred to himself as ‘the Son of Man’. In this passage, ‘king’ is also used as a metaphor for Jesus.

‘When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.” Then he will say to those at his left hand, “You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.” Then they also will answer, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?” Then he will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.” And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.’

Matthew chapter 25 verses 31-46
In the parable of the sheep and the goats, Jesus promises that those who perform these acts to those in need will be rewarded for having shown charity to Jesus himself. Christians believe that the image of God is present, therefore kindness to a person is also kindness to God.

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<tr>
<th>To do...</th>
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<tr>
<td>List three actions which were done by ‘the sheep’.</td>
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<tr>
<td>List three actions which were done (or ought to have been done, but weren’t) by ‘the goats’.</td>
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<th>What will happen to the righteous people?</th>
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<td>What will happen to the unrighteous people?</td>
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| What does this passage tell Christians today about how to treat others? |

| How might they put this into practice in their everyday lives? |
Catholic Social Teaching

Catholic Social Teaching refers to the teachings of the Catholic Church about supporting and promoting the welfare and dignity of all of society. It is inspired by the example set by Jesus and his teachings, such as the great commandments and the parable of the sheep and the goats.

There are seven key themes of Catholic Social Teaching

1. The sacredness of life in all its stages and the dignity of the human person.
2. The call to family, community and participation.
3. Human rights and the responsibility to protect them.
4. The option for the poor and vulnerable.
5. The dignity of work and the rights of workers.
6. Solidarity with all people as one global family.
7. Care for God’s creation.

To do...

Which of the seven themes of Catholic Social Teaching are reflected in the parable of the Sheep and the Goats? Circle them in the list above, and circle the relevant parts of the passage on p23.

Imago Dei

Most people, whether they are religious or not, believe that human life is special and should be cared for. The Catholic Church teaches that all human life is sacred and that everyone has a right to life which should be protected and valued at every stage. Catholics believe each person is unique because God made them in his own image. ‘In the image of God’ is *Imago Dei* in Latin.

Key concept...

*Imago Dei* – ‘In the image of God’. The belief that human beings are uniquely a reflection of God’s personhood. Unlike the other animals, human beings are rational, free and moral.

To do...

Revisit the story of Creation on p4. How does it show that humans are different from all the other animals?

Catholics also see this idea in Luke’s Gospel. The verse below is spoken by Elizabeth, who was Mary’s cousin. She was pregnant, and it describes part of her reaction to the news that Mary was also pregnant, with Jesus.

> For as soon as I heard the sound of your greeting, the child in my womb leaped for joy.

*Luke chapter 1 verse 44*

Catholics might learn from this verse that Jesus was recognised as a living person from before he was born. The Catholic Church teaches that life begins at conception, and that it is God who gives life at this moment, which is the start of a human being’s relationship with God. This informs the Catholic Church’s teachings on issues such as abortion.