What does the Bible teach about making moral decisions?

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 Ten Commandments
The Ten Commandments are a set of laws which the Bible describes as having been given by God to the Jewish people at Mount Sinai. The Ten Commandments are at the heart of Judaism and have also shaped Christian teaching and ethics. They are believed to express God’s universal standard of right and wrong in any circumstance.

Do you think these are still relevant to Christians today? Work through the commandments and decide whether it is possible or desirable to live by each one.

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To do...

Match the following with the relevant commandments

Older people should be cared for.

Relationships should be honest.

Work should be balanced with rest.

God should be remembered.

Property should be looked after.

Life should be respected.

Only God must be worshipped.

Family should be nurtured.

The law should be respected.

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Exodus chapter 20 verses 2–17

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me.

You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not acquit anyone who misuses his name.

Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy. For six days you shall labour and do all your work. But the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God; you shall not do any work – you, your son or your daughter, your male or female slave, your livestock, or the alien resident in your towns. For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but rested the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and consecrated it.

Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you.

You shall not murder.

You shall not commit adultery.

You shall not steal.

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

You shall not covet your neighbour’s house; you shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.
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. For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, will be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but who ever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.’

Matthew chapter 5 verses 17-20

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 find out...

Use a Bible or New Testament to read Matthew chapter 5 verses 21–48. Complete the table on the opposite page with the teachings Jesus gives to his followers.

To do...

As well as Jesus’ teachings, 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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Murder and anger</th>
<th>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.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘You have heard it said to those of ancient times, “You shall not murder”’</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Adultery and lust</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>‘You have heard it said, “You shall not commit adultery”’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Divorce</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘It was also said, “Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce”’</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Taking oaths</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘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”’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Revenge</td>
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<td>‘You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”’</td>
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<tr>
<td>Love of neighbour</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘You have heard that it was said, “You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy”’</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Colour this bar to show how similar you think the teachings of Jesus are to Ten Commandments, and explain why in the space below.

Totally different _____ Completely the same _____

‘In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus often took rules which were about behaviour and expanded on them to include what happens in peoples’ hearts.’ How far do you agree?

Would what Jesus taught on the Sermon on the Mount be easier to follow or harder than:

The Ten Commandments?

The rules at your school?

Why?