There are two common forms of morality: known as relative morality and absolute morality. Making decisions on how we behave is complex, but put very simply, crime and sin are linked because they are about what is right and wrong or good and bad behaviour. The role of the police is to detect and prevent crime; the role of the justice system is to enforce the laws and punish those who break them.

Crime and sin are different purposes when sentencing a person for the crime they have committed. Why do we punish? Deterrence – put people off! Retribution – make them pay! Rehabilitation – help them start again!

Deterrence means to discourage, or put someone off committing a crime. Punishment may put someone off doing that action again. It also makes an example of the criminal and seeing the punishment given might deter someone else from doing the same thing. This is often one of the main arguments for the death penalty. Execution for murder should put others off committing murder. However, many argue that deterrence does not work and that people are not really discouraged by the example of others receiving punishment. Deterrence also has to be just. Punishments should be no harsher than they need to be to put criminals off. The threat of hanging would probably deter someone from speeding but it would not be fair.

Retribution is the idea that punishment should make criminals pay for what they have done wrong. To put it simply, this means getting even or taking revenge. It makes the victim of a crime feel a sense of justice that the offender got what they deserved. This goes with the Old Testament idea of ‘an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth’, but it does not reflect Jesus’ teaching that we should ‘turn the other cheek’ and not seek revenge. Sometimes victims feel that criminals do not get severe enough punishment, or there is a fear that the punishment could be too harsh. For Christians, the punishment has to be connected to justice and not revenge.

Rehabilitation Punishment should help the offender to see what they have done wrong and to change their behaviour so they do not repeat the offence. It is the idea that criminals can somehow be ‘cured’ if we understand why they commit crimes and help them to change. This may mean providing criminals with education, counselling, skills or training so they can become productive members of society and avoid breaking the law again. This is also known as reform. It is really the only type of punishment that works in the long term because if criminals are not reformed, they will continue to commit crime when they are released from prison. Rehabilitation is the aim of punishment which is most in line with Christian ideas on forgiveness. However, some see it as being soft on criminals and not really a punishment at all.

Knowledge Check
1. What is a crime?
2. What is a sin?
3. What is the definition of morality?
4. What is relative morality?
5. What is absolute morality?
6. What is deterrence?
7. What is retribution?
8. What is rehabilitation?

Choose a Task
1. Create a detailed mind-map (try to make this visual)
2. Create a multiple-choice quiz (aim for at least 10 questions)
3. Create a poster/leaflet

Exam Question
b) Describe the difference between crime and sin (5)

Exam Question
b) Describe the difference between absolute and relative morality (5)

Summary
- A crime is an offence against the law and a sin is an offence against God
- There are several aims of punishment such as retribution, deterrence and rehabilitation
- At the heart of the Christian message is forgiveness. Christians should follow Jesus’ teaching and example
- The Catholic Church has allowed, but not encouraged capital punishment
- Some Christians are against the death penalty for such reasons as it goes against the commandment ‘Do not kill’, and there is a risk the wrong person is killed
- Some Christians are for the death penalty because the Church allows it and the Old Testament argues for it