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Deviance in Society: A Sociological and Biblical Appraisal of Its Causes and Responses

La Déviance Sociale : Une Analyse Sociologique et Biblique de ses Causes et des Réponses Apportées

Precious Webngong[1]

Abstract

Deviance remains a persistent challenge in society despite extensive efforts to prevent and punish it. This paper uses a qualitative approach to examine seven major sociological theories of deviance and appraise their explanations and proposed solutions in light of biblical teaching. The study finds that while these theories identify important social, economic, cultural, and environmental factors, they inadequately address the biblical understanding of deviance as rooted in humanity's sinful nature and rebellion against God. It further argues that punishment and social control may restrain deviance but cannot produce lasting transformation. The paper concludes that Christian discipleship, through the gospel of Jesus Christ, repentance, and spiritual transformation, provides a more comprehensive and sustainable response to deviance.

Keywords: Deviance, Sociological, Biblical Appraisal

Résumé

La déviance reste un défi persistant dans la société malgré les efforts considérables déployés pour la prévenir et la sanctionner. Cet article adopte une approche qualitative pour examiner sept grandes théories sociologiques de la déviance et évaluer leurs explications ainsi que les solutions proposées à la lumière de l'enseignement biblique. L'étude conclut que, bien que ces théories identifient d'importants facteurs sociaux, économiques, culturels et environnementaux, elles ne tiennent pas suffisamment compte de la conception biblique de la déviance, qui trouve ses racines dans la nature pécheresse de l'humanité et dans sa rébellion contre Dieu. Il soutient en outre que la répression et le contrôle social peuvent certes limiter la déviance, mais ne peuvent pas aboutir à une transformation durable. L'article conclut que la vie de disciple chrétien, à travers l'Évangile de Jésus-Christ, la repentance et la transformation spirituelle, apporte une réponse plus complète et durable à la déviance.

Mots-clés : Déviance, sociologique, évaluation biblique

Introduction

Deviance is on a steady increase in the society. Prisons are continually overcrowded as more and more people are getting involved in crime and being incarcerated. Those released from prison, especially the minors, are continually being reconvicted and reincarcerated. While many hope that the suffering in prison meted out to convicts as a way of retribution would result in repentance and a determination to avoid crime, the opposite seems to be true, as those released from prison are worse after incarceration and the rate of recidivism is increasing.

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In some places and situations, people have lost faith in the legal system and in law enforcement officers. This has resulted in mob justice and seeking diabolic means to hurt those whose deviant behavior cause pain or loss. Interestingly, even where a thief is being burned alive for stealing a phone, for example, another person's phone may be stolen in the process. Deviance continues to thrive in the midst of the fight against it.

Different schools of thought have attempted an answer to where deviance originates and why it is thriving in the midst of a rigorous fight against it. This includes sociology and Christianity. There are several sociological theories that attempt an explanation to the reason and cure for deviance. While some think that deviance is real and is learned, others think that deviance is not a real but perceived phenomenon only seen through the eyes of the beholder. Still, some think that conditions in society favor the existence of deviance, making it a noble reaction to injustice. Christianity too is not silent about the origin of deviance and why it continues to be an unwanted but unavoidable companion of human society.

Sociological Theories Explaining the Existence of Deviance

Although Structural Functionalism emphasizes the social functions that deviance performs within society, it does not sufficiently explain how individuals come to learn deviant patterns of behavior. If deviance is influenced by the social environment, it is important to examine how relationships, observation, imitation, and reinforcement shape individual conduct. Social Learning Theory provides a different perspective by focusing on the processes through which individuals acquire behaviors from the people and environments around them.

Structural Functionalism

Structural functionalism views society as a system of interrelated parts that work together to maintain stability. From this perspective, deviance is not simply disruptive; it also serves important social functions.[2] Émile Durkheim was one of the main proponents of this theory.[3] He believed that deviance is a necessary part of a successful society and that it serves three functions: first, it clarifies norms and increases conformity. Seeing a person punished for a deviant act reinforces what a society sees as acceptable or unacceptable behavior.

Second, responses to deviant behavior help individuals distinguish between right and wrong. For example, when a student cheats on a test and receives a failing grade for the course, the rest of the class learns that cheating is wrong and will not be tolerated.[4]

Lastly, it strengthens social bonds. Responses to deviance can bring people closer together. For instance, in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 of the World Trade Center and other facilities, people across the United States, and even the world, were united in their shock and grief. There was a surge in patriotic feeling and a sense of social unity among the citizens of the United States who found themselves united to condemn terrorism even when they had political or religious disagreements.[5]

Structural Functionalism assumes that all social structures serve a positive function and deviance is not only unavoidable but desirable for the stability of the society. But Scripture sees evil as evil without any exception. Even when it results in something desirable, deviance is still undesirable according to biblical teachings.

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[2] "Deviance and Structural Functionalism," Spark Notes, accessed December 6, 2025, sparknotes.com.
[3] McMahon Maureen, "Structural Functionalism," EBSCO, accessed on June 18, 2026, ebsco.com.
[4] Spark Notes, Op. cit.
[5] Ibid.

Social Learning Theory

Social learning theory also known as Social Cognitive Theory is the explanation of deviance that emphasizes the role of cognitive processes in learning through observation, imitation, and modeling. This theory holds that all human behavior is learned through socialization. Whether what an individual learns to do conforms to or violates social norms depends on who is doing the teaching or socialization.[6]

This theory was begun in the 1920s by Edwin H. Sutherner, an American criminologist.[7] Fundamentally, this argument comes down to attributing deviant behavior to keeping bad company. It holds that people learn deviant behavior by keeping company with those who engage in or admire such behavior.[8] Ronald Akers' Social Learning Theory builds on and refines Sutherland's differential association theory by asking not just *who* people associate with, but *how* criminal behavior is actually learned.[9] According to Akers, criminal behavior is learned when deviant actions are differentially reinforced—that is, when they produce more rewarding or less punishing outcomes than conforming behavior. The strength of this reinforcement depends on factors such as its frequency, duration, intensity, and probability. Rewards can be direct (e.g., money, peer approval) or indirect (e.g., status, reputation).[10]

Key proponents and contributors to the Social Learning Theory include Albert Bandura who developed the core theory, proposing that people learn from one another via observation, imitation, and modeling, Richard Walters, John Dollard, Neal Miller, Julian Rotter among others.

While the Social Learning Theory points to the social reality that what is learned depends on what is taught, the question social learning theorists need to answer is that of what accounts for variations in the social environment. Why do two people living in the same environment end up with one influenced by social learning and the other not? If deviance is exclusively an outcome of social learning, why do two people associating with the same people in the same environment end up with different habits?

Social Strain Theory

Strain theory can also be called motivational theories because it focuses on the forces that drive people to commit deviant acts.[11] Robert K. Merton, through his work *Social Structure and Anomie* published in 1938, is considered the foremost Strain Theorist in contemporary sociology.[12] Strain Theory states that through the process of socialization people develop a conscience and want to obey the norms of their society. This is because human beings are profoundly sensitive to the expectations of others. Because others expect conformity, people can only deviate from what is socially correct at a great psychic cost or strain.[13]

Merton argues that the source of this pressure is the discrepancy between goals and means. That is, people are uniformly committed to the goals society tells them to desire, but they encounter unequal access to the means socially defined as legitimate for achieving these goals. Because of this frustration in finding access to legitimate means for achieving goals, people sometimes turn

[6] Rodney Stark. *Social Problems* (Toronto: Random House, 1975), 106.
[7] Ibid.
[8] Stark. Op. cit. 106.
[9] Von Christian Wickert, "Social Learning Theory," Akers SozTheo, May 14, 2019, soztheo.com.
[10] Ibid.
[11] Stark. Op. cit. 107.
[12] Stark. Op. cit. p. 107.
[13] Stark. Op. cit., 107.

to illegitimate means to achieve them and thus violate norms.[14]According to Merton, the strain in society produces four types of people because they have four fundamental options. They include the conformist, innovator, ritualist, and retreatist.

First, the conformist is one who accepts both the goals of society and the means defined by society as legitimate. They are mostly those favored with the means of achieving the goals and those whose hard work pays off and assures them that they can use legitimate means to achieve their goals.

Second, an innovator is one who accepts the goals set by society but rejects the legitimate means to achieve them. This category is made up of offenders. They accept the goals of society; they agree with the generally accepted code of conduct and virtues held by all but they feel deprived of the legitimate means to achieve them.

The situation referred to as *anomie* in Strain Theory describes the situation where a society places strong emphasis on a particular goal, but far less emphasis on the means of achieving it. It is this imbalance that can lead some individuals to pursue illegal paths to achieve the goals. Jewkes argues in her book *Media and Crime* that the means of the internalization of cultural goals is the media which instill in people the needs and desires that may not be satisfiable by means other than criminal.[15] The result is anomie which results in some members of the society accepting the goals set by the society but rejecting the legitimate means to achieve them.

Third, the ritualist is one who rejects the goals set and approved by the society but adheres to the legitimate means of achieving them. This category is made up of the law-abiding poor. Instead of struggling to achieve what is "unachievable" based on their limited means, they choose to let go of dreams and live life as fate may determine for them. They prefer to be poor but honest, suffering but truthful, disfavored but law-abiding.

Lastly, a retreatist is one who rejects both the goals and legitimate means of achieving it.[16] People like perpetual drunkards and drug addicts fall into this category. They are considered to be the social drop-outs.[17] They substitute success or other social goals with drugs and alcohol.

Strain Theory points out, and rightly so, that alcoholism, drug addiction, and other social ills are concentrated among groups most deprived of access to legitimate means for achieving socially approved goals. They have retreated from pursuing any goal and do not care about the means to achieve them. However, Strain Theory fails to explain the reason for the deviance of those who seem to have all the advantages required to achieve social goals. The rich and successful are hardly immune to alcoholism, crime and drug addiction. Also, not all who suffer strain in society to alcohol and drug consumption as a solution. This behavior in society defeats the assumption of strain theorists that all humans are generally moral and wants to do what is right. Scripture rather teaches the opposite stating that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and none has the intrinsic ability to do right or stay away from deviance.

Conflict Theory

Conflict theory looks to social and economic factors as the causes of crime and deviance. Conflict theory was greatly influenced by the work of 19th-century German philosopher, economist, and

[14] Charlotte Nickerson, "Merton's Strain Theory of Deviance in Sociology," Simply Psychology, Updated on August 12, 2025, simplypsychology.org.

[15] Yvonne Jewkes. *Media and Crime* (Olives Yard, London: Sage Publications, 2011), 18.

[16] Adam Mckee and Scott Bransford, "Fundamentals of Sociology," Doc Mckee, June 10, 2024, docmckee.com.

[17] Stark. Op. cit.

social scientist Karl Marx.[18] He believed that the general population was divided into two groups. He labeled the wealthy, who controlled the means of production and business, the bourgeoisie and labeled the workers who depended on the bourgeoisie for employment and survival the proletariat. Marx believed that the bourgeoisie centralized their power and influence through government, laws, and other authority agencies in order to maintain and expand their positions of power in society. Thus, Marx viewed the laws as instruments of oppression for the proletariat that are written and enforced to maintain the economic status quo and to protect the interests of the ruling class.[19]

Conflict theorists hold that the media, like all other capitalist institutions, are owned by the ruling bourgeois elite and operate in the interest of that class.[20] Those in power manipulate the media to harness support for policies that criminalize those with less power in society. To Karl, deviance is simply an attempt by the poor to respond to the injustice meted on them by the ruling class. They are oppressed by the ruling class who already know how they would react to injustice and already put in place the laws that should stop them from fighting for their rights.

Conflict Theory sees the society as a conflict of interest between two opposing groups. However, the battle is not always between the rich and the poor as argued by the Marxists. There is also deviance among the rich or the influential as it is among the poor. In some experiences, the children born to the wealthy class are more deviant than the children born to the poor.

Subcultural Theory

Subcultural Theory of deviance begins with the assumption that human beings are fundamentally moral.[21] While members of the society are all intrinsically moral, they do not agree about norms. Rather, different groups within the society are socialized into different sets of norms. What appears to be deviant behavior, therefore, is really conformity to a set of norms accepted by one group and rejected by another. This means that everyone conforms, but some kinds of conformity are labelled as deviant by those outside the social group that accepts it as a norm. For example, sexual relations out of marriage are wrong when you socialize with groups like Christians, but they are appropriate when you socialize with groups like prostitutes. No group has the right to impose their beliefs on the other, and none is better than the other as every social group has a right to define their own norms. However, when the outside group is more powerful, the behavior will be socially defined as deviant and a punishment will be attributed to it and justified as deviant behavior when in reality it is not.[22]

According to this theory, when society is isolated and examined in its different social groups in their social environment, norms will be seen to be uniformly sanctioned in them. It is only when we look at society as a whole that we see discrepancy.[23] Sub Cultural Theory insists that society is not made up of a single uniform culture but different sub cultures. In recognizing the existence of these sub cultures, one sees that there is no deviance, only conflict among sub cultures over which different behaviors should be permitted which is based on their preference and advantage and not necessarily because the behavior is inherently bad.[24]

This theory opines that all acts in society are justified if judged according to the norms of the social group. But many offenders, instead of defending the norms of their sub culture, accept

[18] "Conflict Theory and Deviance" Lumen Learning, accessed December 16, 2025, lumenlearning.com.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Jewkes. Op. cit., 19.
[21] Stark. Op. cit., 109.
[22] Harbeck Karen, "Subcultural Theories of Deviance," EBSCO, accessed on June 18, 2026, ebsco.com.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Stark. Op. cit. 105.

their guilt and wish for change. The admission of guilt over wrong behavior is inconsistent with Subcultural Theory of deviance. Deviance is an undeniable fact.

Labeling Theory

Labeling theory is a sociological perspective which holds that deviance is not inherent in an act, but rather defined by society's reaction to it. When individuals are negatively labeled or stigmatized by being referred to as criminals or lawbreakers, they may internalize this label, leading to a self-fulfilling prophecy and increased, sustained deviant behavior. Labeling begins by denying that deviance is primarily found in the acts of persons identified as deviant. Instead, deviance can be found exclusively in the eyes of the beholder.[25] This theory shows how social reactions can actually create the very deviance they aim to control.[26] Developed by theorists such as Howard Becker and Edwin Lemert, Labeling Theory emerged from symbolic interactionism and focuses on the social processes that define what counts as deviant. The core ideas of the theory include primary and secondary deviance.[27]

Primary deviance refers to initial acts of deviance by an individual that have only minor consequences for that individual's status or relationships in society. The notion behind this concept is that the majority of people violate laws or commit deviant acts in their lifetime; however, these acts are not serious enough and do not result in the individual being classified as a criminal by society or by themselves, as it is viewed as "normal" to engage in these types of behaviors. Speeding would be a good example of an act that is technically criminal but does not result in labeling as such. Secondary deviance, however, is deviance that occurs as a response to society's reaction and labeling of the individual engaging in the behavior as deviant. This type of deviance, unlike primary deviance, has major implications for a person's status and relationships in society and is a direct result of the internalization of the deviant label.[28]

Howard S. Becker, one of the proponents of this theory argues, "Social groups create deviance by making rules whose infraction constitutes deviance, and by applying these rules to particular people and labeling them as outsiders… The deviant is one to whom that label has been successfully applied. Deviant behavior is behavior that people so label."[29] According to labeling theorists, deviance is what people say it is, usually conceived by the ruling class in society to their advantage and applied to the masses. For example, the ruling class will label anyone fighting for the respect of their rights as terrorists, making their actions unlawful though in itself it has no evil act or intention. Most labeling theorists simply dismiss the act alleged to be deviant and focus on explaining why it is that some group defines some particular acts as deviant. People will make up their minds to become what they have been labelled to be.

Labeling Theory, however, fails to explain why people first engage in the kind of behavior that gets them to be socially labelled as deviant.[30] While the theory highlights the power of social definitions, it is often criticized for overlooking structural causes of deviance and the ability individuals have to resist labels.[31]

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[25] Ibid.

[26] Chalotte Nickerson, "Labeling Theory," Simply Psychology, updated October 13, 2025, simplypsychology.org.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Sherry Lynn Skaggs, "Labeling Theory," Britanica, consulted February 6, 2026, britanica.com.

[29] Pamela Ugwudike, "Labeling Perspective," Bristol University Press Digital, accessed on June 18, 2026, bristoluniversitypressdigital.com.

[30] Law Teacher, Strengths and Weaknesses of Labelling Theory, Law Teacher, February 2, 2018, lawteacher.net.

[31] Nickerson. Op. cit. Consulted February 6, 2026.

Control Theory

Control theory handles deviance from the opposite angle. Instead of answering the question on why people offend, they rather look at why people do not offend. This theory begins by rejecting all assumptions that humans are fundamentally moral. They note that there are important variations in the control of or sanctioning systems in society. Some people are rewarded more for conformity and others are punished more for deviance than other people.[32] Based on this, conformity occurs in society only when people have more to lose than to gain by deviance; and deviance occurs when people have little to gain from conformity and much to gain or little to lose from deviance.[33]

The theory holds that access to good things in life is unequally distributed and the disadvantaged simply have less chance to succeed, giving them more freedom to act in deviant ways. This is because the more opportunities people have to achieve desirable goals through conventional means or socially approved ways, the more those people have to lose by engaging in deviant behavior. [34] For example, a person qualified only for unskilled jobs does not risk destroying a great career by being drunk but the qualified and well placed and top-ranking personnel does. Thus, "freedom is just another word for nothing left to lose."[35] Those who have little or nothing to loss by deviant behavior will feel free to be deviant more than those who have much to lose if they engage in deviant behavior.

In the same vein, those who have more to gain by being law abiding will avoid deviant behavior more than those who have little to gain from obeying the law. Control theorists argue that it is not that bad company corrupts good manners but that birds of a feather flock together. People with similar life chances tend to associate and behave in like manner. Those who have less to loss by offending will associate and commit deviant activities.

Thus, according to the Control Theory, deviance is prevented by the number of bonds or potential advantages between an individual and the society, advantages that would be jeopardized by deviance. Among the advantages are not only economic rewards and opportunities but such significant interpersonal relationships such as those with parents, friends, teachers, coaches, spouses, children and the like. People who have advantages that will be threatened by deviant behavior are controlled by them to avoid deviant behavior but those deprived from such advantages will more likely involve themselves in deviant behavior.

The reality in society is that not all who have much to loss by deviant behavior stay away from it. A well-respected civil servant, for example, may know the risk involved in rape and how much he will lose not only in his job, but his esteem, career, reputation, and more, and still go on to rape. This indicates that deviance is not always measured on the scale of what one may loss or gain by involving or abstaining from it.

Appraisal

The seven theories presented above each have their strengths and weaknesses as they try to explain the cause of deviance in the society and why the rigorous fight against deviance has not yielded the required fruit. According to the theories, deviance is simply the violation of established cultural, social, or legal norms. Rather than being an inherent trait, it originates from social and environmental contexts.

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[32] Nicole Jose, Control Theory Sociology: Why We Conform to Rules, SocJournal, June 24, 2025, sociology.org.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Stark. Op. cit. 111.

[35] Ibid.

This raises two obvious limitations. First, deviance, according to the various theories, exists only in human societies and in social relationships. This neglects the relationship between man and his creator. But Scripture emphasizes that sin is first and foremost against God. Second, deviance is defined as external to man. It is seen as a phenomenon that could be resolved by either by a simple change of the environment to move away from those who may be a negative influence or by changing laws and making the economy favorable to all. Thus, their general weakness obviously lies in the fact that they overemphasize social structure while neglecting the biblical understanding that deviance is first and foremost an individual choice.

Biblical Understanding of Deviance

The biblical understanding of deviance differs fundamentally from the sociological perspectives discussed above because it locates the ultimate problem not merely in society but in humanity's relationship with God. Scripture presents wrongdoing as a manifestation of humanity's rebellion against the Creator and therefore treats deviance as a moral and spiritual problem as well as a social one. To understand the biblical solution to deviance, it is therefore necessary first to examine its origin and the universal sinful condition of humanity.

Origin of Deviance and Universal Sinfulness

No historical account reports the existence of deviance earlier than the period reported by the Biblical text. The Bible reports the first case of disobedience when there were only two human beings on earth, Adam and Eve. The Fall of Man in the Garden of Eden is the beginning of deviance. Deviance refers to how wrongdoing, moral failure, and separation from the divine entered the world.

The majority of biblical interpreters, throughout the ages, have considered Adam and Eve's disobedient act of eating the forbidden fruit (Genesis 3:6) as the first sin in the Bible and the moment sin and death entered the world.[36] It was a simple but devastating choice made against the will of God. The text makes it clear that it was an individual choice rather than an involuntary response to an unfavorable social structure.

The This act of disobedience to the will of God set the stage for continued rebellion to the will of God. Because of Adam's sin, all his offspring inherited the legal guilt of his disobedience, causing all men to become sinful from conception.[37] The sin and guilt that are transferred to them from conception create a fallen state of "original sin," so that people are born into a sinful condition where they only desire to choose rebellion against God.[38]

It is this state of man that gives credibility to the biblical declaration that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Not only is man fallen, but he is in a helpless situation. The Apostle Paul rightly notes, "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God" (Rom. 8:7-8). This clearly indicates that sin is not only an act but a nature, and as long as one has that nature, his mind will be hostile to the will of God. David clearly recognized that this hostility begins from conception: "Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me" and "… from the womb they are wayward and speak lies" (Psalm 51:5; 58:3). Thus, from birth, deviance

[36] Megan Sauter, "The Origin of Sin and Death in the Bible," March 31, 2026, Biblical Archeology Society, biblicalarchaeology.org.

[37] Steven Begakis, "The Origins of Sin: A Review of Religious History," Daily Nexus, May 24, 2012, dailynexus.com.

[38] Ibid.

is found as a nature in all who are born into the world, even before they commit the first act of disobedience.

Social Solution to Deviance

Deviance is rejected and fought in all societies. In response to the theories of deviance, theories of punishment have been developed and applied in different societies to ensure the eradication or at least a significant reduction of crime. The major form of punishment is that of incarceration in prison. According to WPB, the total worldwide prison population stands at 10.99 million. However, the total is likely to be in excess of 11.5 million if numbers estimated to be held in detention centres in China and in prisons camps in North Korea are included.[39] The prison population continues to grow but instead of changing, those convicted and incarcerated leave from prison worse and they become more courageous and efficient in in criminal activities. Those who have been publicly punished with the hope that it will help to change them and deter others generally end up worse as well as the fear for prison or fear for punishment is mastered and put under control.

It has been proven, as Harvest Time International rightly notes, that the prison system is the only "business" that succeeds by its failure.[40] Prisons actually may have the opposite effect: Persons who are incarcerated learn more effective crime strategies from each other, and time spent in prison may desensitize many to the threat of future imprisonment.[41] Marie Rose Moro, a children's psychiatrist notes, "Prison is without doubt necessary in our society because we have nothing else. But it is a place of terrible violence that gives birth to criminals. This destructive tendency takes a higher tool on the young than on the old. It places young people on a negative destiny, adding new violence to the one they had. Putting adolescence or minors in prison is a prove of the failure of our society."[42] If prisons fully functioned as truly correctional institutions, a majority of prisoners would be rehabilitated and would be unlikely to reoffend after being released from prison.[43] However, 80% of prisoners are said to reoffend in a way that they will be sentenced to undergo another incarceration. And because prisons are populated with people who have been active in crime, prisons often act more like schools of crime than instruments of reform.[44] Thus, even incarceration, which is the greatest tool the society has together with other forms of punishment, is not the way out of the reality of increasing deviance.

William Barnwell notes that whether prison reform takes hold or not, many who were the most violent will eventually be released into society.[45] If they rejoin the society worse than they went to jail, then the society will become worse and insecure each time a former inmate regains freedom. Therefore, a solution must be sought that is sustainable to make the society safer and better.

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[39] "World Prison Brief," Prison Studies, May 1, 2024, prisonstudies.org.

[40] "You came to Me- Jail and Prison Ministry Training Manual," Harvest Time, accessed March 21, 2024, harvestimeinternational.org.

[41] "Five Things About Deterrence," National Institute of Justice, June 5, 2016, nij.ojp.gov.

[42] Michel Gabriel Ngono- Djob Lited. *Réflexions Sur le Statut du Détenu au Cameroun* (Rue de l'Ecole: Polytechnique, 2017), 247.

[43] Byron R. Johnson, Michael Hallett, Sung Joon Jang. *The Restorative Prison* (New York, NY: Routlege, 2022), p.4.

[44] Norman Shields. *Christian Ethics* (Bukuru, Plateau State. African Christian Textbooks, 2004), 153.

[45] William Barnwell. *Called to Heal the Broken Hearted* (Mississippi, MS: The University Press of Mississippi, 2016), 13.

Biblical Solution to Deviance

All societies and states are fully engaged in the fight against criminality. Huge sums of money are injected into the efforts to fight to ensure a more secure and safe society, but deviance and crime waves seem to continually master the fight and quickly adapt to the changing strategies. Crime seems to be on a steady increase, and new laws are being promulgated every year to tackle new crimes. The unanswered question remains, "Why is deviance striving in the midst of a rigorous fight against it?" The biblical answer to this is obviously that the wrong method has been employed by society in the fight against deviance.

Scripture and Christianity have been consistent on the solution for deviance. Scripture states that it is a problem stemming from a nature and the solution must come from the change of that nature. Any other solution may seem to work but will eventually prove not to be sustainable. The Bible notes that the heart of man is terribly wicked (Jeremiah 17:9). It will be a waste of time to expect any sustainable change from a desperately wicked heart. That is why God begins the solution from the source of the problem. He says "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26).

Christian discipleship has proven to be the only sustainable and sure method of fighting deviance. Throughout generations and in different societies, the result has been the same: addicted prostitutes, dependent drug addicts, enslaved criminals of different kinds have been transformed into saints, trustworthy and law-abiding citizens by the power of the gospel through Christian discipleship. In fact, the billions of individuals around the globe who are Christians and growing in grace all have a history of varying degrees of deviance they have been freed from.

Christian discipleship begins with sharing the gospel of Jesus Christ for salvation and continues with a life of commitment. It is the lifelong process of surrendering one's life to Jesus Christ, learning his teachings, and intentionally and actively transforming to become like him in character, speech, desires, thoughts and action. It goes beyond simple intellectual knowledge of who Jesus is and what he has done or can do. It leads to a complete, lived-out way of life after his will.

This is a method of change that begins in a person and manifests in his daily relationships. Discipleship is a commitment to a journey, a pedagogy where you will not end in the same place you began. For this journey, there is not always a clear-cut map, but God provides a compass, points a direction, and says, "Follow me." The good news is that you have someone to guide you and help you when you make mistakes. The disciple-maker knows how to turn failures into teachable moments, mistakes into messages, and mishaps into milestones. It takes time to get from here to there, but both the disciple and the disciple-maker are committed to the process.[46]

Criminal behavior raises three main penal issues, namely stopping crime, the treatment of criminals, and balancing the interest of the victims of crime with those of the offenders.[47] Christian discipleship provides a reliable solution for all by stating "Love the Lord your God… and love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:37-40). This provides a solution that cuts across the board and gives a standard for living that ensures a safe and secure society for all.

If those involved in deviance are transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ, true, meaningful, and lasting change can be experienced. Any change that does not stem from true repentance begins from the outside and, at best, will be outward conformity. Without genuine change, criminals will become more and more deviant, and many of those who regain freedom

[46] Darrell Delaney, "What is discipleship?" Ground Work, January 17, 2023, groundworkonline.com.
[47] Peter Jackson. *Ethics for GCSE* (Causton Street, London: SPCK, 2011), 95.

after serving a prison term will become a new threat to the society in which they dwell, resulting in further deviance.

Conclusion

Socially conceived solutions to deviance have all systematically failed to produce the expected change in the society. Theories have been developed out of the failures of other theories with the hope that if implemented, deviance will be mastered and the society will be safer, but each has produced unsatisfactory results. Therefore, Christian Discipleship is the only hope for genuine and lasting transformation of the deviant. It has consistently produced the same positive results. When rightly discipled, the deviant will not only be transformed but will become part of the crusaders against deviance in society and will be exemplary citizens, portraying the fact that one can truly be transformed by the Gospel of Jesus Christ from whatever criminal history or addiction to a saint. This has been proven true not only by the lives of biblical characters like Matthew, Zacchaeus, Paul, and others but also in contemporary situations like that of the author. Christian discipleship can change what the prison, punishment, threat, and loss cannot change. It remains the only solution to deviance that is consistent and sustainable.

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