

# *Mere Christianity*: a conversation

Chapter outlines and discussion  
questions for a small group reading  
*Mere Christianity*, by C. S. Lewis

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## Notes

C. S. Lewis' classic, *Mere Christianity*, has been a challenging, interesting, and engaging book for both individuals and small groups for many decades. Whether a small group consists of Christians, a mix of Christians and non-Christians, or Christians of contrasting persuasions, *Mere Christianity* can be expected to focus the participants' attention on the vital characteristics of historic Christianity, providing a fresh perspective for most and a sharp clarity for all. These study outlines and discussion questions are intended to stimulate and extend thoughts that spring from the book.

Page numbers refer to a popular edition published by HarperCollins available since 2001. It can be identified by ISBN 978-0-06-065292-0. While neither the Preface nor the Foreword are outlined or discussed here, they are both worthwhile, and a small group leader should urge the members to read them both carefully.

This material is also available on a blog site at

<https://merechristianityconv.blogspot.com/>

Any notes or corrections may be logged on the website.

Many thanks to the members of the Growth Group who worked their way through this with me and thus helped to improve and refine the discussion questions.

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*Mere Christianity*, Book I: Right and wrong as a clue to the meaning of the universe

Chapter 1: The Law of Human Nature

I. Consciousness of a rule of correct behavior is nearly universal.

A. The rule is similar throughout the world and history.

B. Unlike physical nature, obeying the rule is voluntary.

II. People often do not follow the rule.

A. The failure to follow the rule often produces claims of exception or excuse.

B. Claims of exception and excuses underscore people's consciousness of the rule's existence and force.

III. These ideas are the foundation for understanding the moral universe.

Discussion questions: (pp. 3-8)

1. What evidence have you observed for the existence of the Law of Human Nature? (pp. 3-5)

2. How does the Bible treat the idea of Natural Law, as in, for instance, Romans 2:14-16?

3. Is the Law of Human Nature fairly uniform across time and cultures? (pp. 5-6)

4. We expect others to keep the law, but do we keep it? (pp.7-8) Why not? Does this agree with Paul's experience in Romans 7:21-23?



*Mere Christianity*, Book I: Right and wrong as a clue to the meaning of the universe

Chapter 3: The Reality of the Law

I. The Law of Nature is fundamentally different from the laws of physical nature.

A. A law of nature may mean no more than "what nature, in fact, does."

B. The Law of Nature describes what people ought, but often fail, to do.

II. The rule of correct behavior is not a means to something else, but a manifestation of a different kind of reality.

A. The Law does not necessarily represent behavior that is useful or convenient for some other purpose.

B. The Law does not necessarily represent merely those behaviors that, as individuals, a society, or a nation, would afford the best chance to live safely and productively.

C. The Law is not made up.

Discussion questions: (pp. 16-20)

1. How are the laws of nature different from the Laws of Human Nature? (pp. 16-18)

2. How is the Moral Law, "Unselfishness is good," transformed into "One ought to be unselfish"? What gives the Moral Law force? (pp. 16-19)

3. Why is right action not always profitable? (pp. 19-20)

4. Is there another, intangible reality in which the Moral Law exists? How can we know this? Relate this to 2 Cor. 4:17-18. (p. 20)

Note on currency, p. 19: In the old British currency, there were 20 shillings to the pound; thus, the comparison in the text is between 30 shillings and 60.

*Mere Christianity*, Book I: Right and wrong as a clue to the meaning of the universe

Chapter 4: What Lies Behind the Law

I. Science cannot decide between the two main explanations for existence.

A. Materialist—all things exist for no reason and have produced us by chance.

B. Religious—behind the universe is something that is most like a mind, with consciousness and purpose.

II. Neither view is much like the God of Christianity.

Discussion questions: (pp. 21-27)

1. What prevents science from deciding between the materialist and the religious views of what the universe is and how it came to be? (pp. 22-23)

2. Is the ultimate “why” answerable? How do “cause” and “purpose” differ?

3. Lewis distinguishes “does” and “ought to do”. Does this mean that there is a Power outside our observable universe that informs us of right and wrong? (pp. 23-25)

*Mere Christianity*, Book I: Right and wrong as a clue to the meaning of the universe

Chapter 5: We Have Cause to be Uneasy

- I. The best way to make progress is to correct past mistakes.
- II. There are two pieces of evidence about the "Something" behind the universe.
  - A. "Something" made the universe the way it is.
  - B. "Something" made us and placed in us the knowledge of the law of correct behavior.
  - C. We infer that "Something" is interested in correct behavior.
  - D. But we have no basis for inferring that "Somebody" is good, forgiving, indulgent, or any other property.
- III. We are on the wrong side with this "Something".

Discussion Questions: (pp. 28-32)

1. Are we on the wrong road? (pp. 28-29) In what ways?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Is God the only comfort and the supreme terror? (pp. 30-31)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Is the realization of our true situation "the way back to the right road"? (p. 32) See Matt. 9:10-13.

*Mere Christianity*, Book II: What Christians Believe

Chapter 1: The Rival Conceptions of God

I. Christians do not have to believe that other religions are completely wrong.

II. First division

A. Atheists (minority)

B. Theists (majority)

1. Second division

a. Pantheists

i. God is beyond "good and evil"

ii. God is part of the universe

b. Monotheists

i. God is interested in "good and evil" and strongly committed to good.

ii. God is outside the universe and created it, typically monotheistic.

III. If a good God made the world, why has it gone wrong?

A. An argument against God, who cannot be good if He created an unjust world

B. The judgment that the world is unjust requires a notion of justice. But where can that come from, if not God?

Discussion Questions: (pp. 35-39)

1. Some hold that the Old Testament stories of creation, the Fall, the flood, and the ethics of the Law are derived from a prior source. What would Lewis say to that? (p. 35)

2. Are the divisions of religious views fair? Do you see any problems with it? (pp. 35-37)

3. Is Christianity a "fighting religion"? (pp. 37-38)

4. Can God be denied on the grounds that the universe is unjust? (pp. 38-39)



*Mere Christianity*, Book II: What Christians Believe

Chapter 3: The Shocking Alternative

I. Free will.

- A. Even as God is all-powerful, the conditions in the world are contrary to His will.
- B. Free will makes evil possible.
- C. Free will makes love possible.
- D. God made it possible for man to be evil.

II. How the Devil went wrong.

- A. Satan wanted to be the center instead of God.
- B. Man wanted to be independent of God.
  - 1. Man wanted to find or create happiness apart from God.
  - 2. There can be no happiness apart from God.

III. A fatal flaw develops in the best institutions of man.

- A. God sent us conscience.
- B. God sent us "good dreams".
- C. God selected the Jews to reveal His nature to.
  - 1. There is only one God.
  - 2. God cares about conduct.

IV. God sent Jesus

- A. The shocking claim that Jesus is God.
- B. The claim to forgive sins.
- C. The claim that He is humble and meek.
- D. Jesus cannot be described as a "great moral teacher" unless His other claims are granted.

Discussion questions: (pp. 47-52)

1. How free are we? (pp. 47-49)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Is there happiness apart from God? (pp. 49-50)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Utopia is hopeless in life. why? (p. 50)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Is the assessment of Jesus, that he can be either insane, a demon, or Lord, fair? How can He be a great moral teacher? (pp. 51-52)



*Mere Christianity*, Book II: What Christians Believe

Chapter 5: The Practical Conclusion

I. New life via biology

II. Acquiring the Christ-life

A. Via baptism, belief, and Holy Communion

B. True on Jesus' authority

1. Authority is the most common source of knowledge.
2. Authority is necessary to life.

III. Imitation of Christ the main means

A. Baptism, belief, & communion are useful but not sufficient.

B. Christ-life enables repentance.

1. Christ-life is not the same as trying to be good.
2. Christ-life is the source of good.

C. "In Christ" and "Christ in you"

1. Believers constitute the physically present body of Christ.
2. Christ operates in the world through this body.

IV. What about the heathen?

A. None can be saved except through Christ.

B. No information on those who do not know Him by name.

C. This uncertainty is no reason to reject His salvation.

V. Why does not God simply defeat Satan and the wicked, and just clean up the whole mess?

A. He will, but we don't know when.

B. He is granting more people the opportunity to join His side voluntarily.

C. When He does come, the time for voluntarily joining His side will be over.

Discussion Questions: (pp. 60-65)

1. If belief is a means of acquiring the Christ-life, how do we acquire belief? (p. 61) See Romans 10:4.

2. Are there abuses of arguments from authority? (p. 62) How can we distinguish them from valid ones?

3. Can you think of other obstacles to faith, such as, the divisions in the church, or the seeming contradictions between the Bible and science? What would Lewis's response to them be?

*Mere Christianity*, Book III: Christian Behavior

Chapter 1: The Three Parts of Morality

I. Morals are directions for running the human machine.

II. Critique of “ideals”

A. Calling moral perfection an “ideal” can be misleading.

1. Ideals can be different for each individual.
2. Moral perfection is not a matter of personal taste.
3. Moral perfection is not a matter of degree.

B. “Rules” and “obedience” is better language for morality than “ideals”.

III. Three Essentials

A. Areas of failure and the reasons for it

1. Fair play and harmony among individuals, that is, social morals
2. Harmony within the individual
3. An understanding of the purpose for human beings

B. Stopping short

1. Many stop with social morals for two reasons
  - a. Failures lead to obvious consequences in many spheres.
  - b. Most are in agreement about social morals.
  - c. Many do not believe in morals beyond the social morals.
2. Law does not make goodness that is essential to a good society.

IV. Human destiny

A. Do we belong to ourselves or to Another, who made us?

B. Given the Christian view of eternal life, the relative valuations of concerns is different from worldly valuations.

Discussion Questions: (pp. 69-75)

1. Lewis writes, “You cannot make men good by law; without good men, you cannot have a good society.” (p. 73) Do you agree?

2. Whom do you belong to? Yourself? God? Those whom God has given to you to love? (p. 74)

3. What light does Matthew 16:26-27 cast on the questions of morals? (p. 75)

*Mere Christianity*, Book III: Christian Behavior

Chapter 2: The 'Cardinal Virtues'

I. Another way of looking at morality

A. Prudence

1. A child's heart, but a grown-up's head
2. Christianity is an education in itself.

B. Temperance

1. Right use
2. Not restricted to drink

C. Justice

D. Fortitude

II. Virtue as a part of character

A. Perseverance in virtue produces character.

B. Three wrong ideas

1. The right thing for the wrong reason
2. Mere obedience to a set of rules
3. Virtue only for this present life

III. Heaven has a lot to do with what you are becoming.

Discussion Questions: (pp. 76-81)

1. How does perseverance relate to each of the cardinal virtues? (pp. 77-79)

2. How does perseverance relate to character? (pp. 79-80) See Romans 5:3-4 and James 1:2-4.

3. Consider the following statement: "Heaven has a lot to do with what you are becoming." (p. 81) Do you agree?

*Mere Christianity*, Book III: Christian Behavior

Chapter 3: Social Morality

I. Christianity teaches no new social morality—the Golden Rule

II. Christianity has no detailed political program

A. Christianity is a director for human arts and efforts

B. On the Church's leadership

1. The members of the Church should be finding ways to implement the Golden Rule in their disciplines.

2. It does not mean that clergymen should run the state or businesses.

III. A Christian Society

A. Features

1. Everyone works with their own hands producing something useful and good—no silly luxuries.

2. There would be respect for elders and obedience to leaders.

3. It would be cheerful.

B. No one likes the whole plan.

IV. Two particular issues

A. Usury—right or wrong?

B. Charity—when is it enough?

V. How to get there

A. To get a Christian society we must desire it.

B. To desire it, we must become fully Christian and love our neighbor.

C. To love our neighbor, we must love God.

D. To love God, we must obey Him.

E. In other words, the way to a Christian society is through inward transformation.

Discussion Questions: (pp. 82-87)

1. Is it within our power to build a Christian society? (pp. 84,87)

2. How can we overcome our fear for our security and be more complete in our charity? (pp. 86-87)

3. Is the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) a sketch of a Christian society?

Chapter 4: Morality and Psychoanalysis

I. Two jobs that must be begun at once:

- A. Understanding how to apply the 'Golden Rule' in detail to modern society.
- B. Becoming the sort of people who would want to apply it if we knew how.

II. Psychoanalysis

- A. The medical and scientific theory of curing psychic disease must be respected.
- B. The philosophical accretions by Freud need not be respected.

III. A moral choice

- A. The choice itself
- B. The raw materials that precede and influence the choice
  - 1. Case 1: natural feelings
  - 2. Case 2: abnormal feelings and fears
    - a. Curing abnormal feelings is possible through psychoanalysis.
    - b. The patient is still free to make a moral or immoral choice.
- C. Bad psychological material is a disease to be cured.

IV. How man and God judge

- A. Man judges by externals.
- B. God judges the heart, taking into account all the raw material.
- C. God's judgements may be very different from our own.
- D. Much of the raw material is physical and will depart.
- E. These are the reasons we are told not to judge.

V. The consequences of choices

- A. The result of each choice is a minute change of character.
- B. The net trajectory of character is either heavenly or hellish.
  - 1. The effect of choices is cumulative.
  - 2. God's grace alone can straighten out the fault that bad choices leave.
- C. Knowledge of good and evil
  - 1. Those who are improving understand good and evil better.
  - 2. Those who are getting worse understand neither.

Discussion Questions: (pp. 88-93)

1. Compare Romans 7:14 with Lewis's statement, "God does not judge [one] on the raw material...but on what [one] has done with it." (p. 91) Does God judge us on a "sliding" scale?

2. What are Freud's philosophical assertions, that Lewis would reject?

3. Is progression towards a heavenly (or hellish) creature (p. 92) related to the "becoming" Lewis discussed on p. 81?

Note: V.C. stands for the Victoria Cross, the highest British military award for bravery (p. 91).

Chapter 5: Sexual Morality

I. The virtue of chastity

A. Chastity and modesty

1. Chastity distinct from modesty/propriety, which is cultural.
2. Chastity is uniform across all times and cultures.
3. Confusion between these has led to discomfort and misunderstanding.

B. The standard for Christian chastity

1. Christian chastity is marital fidelity or total abstinence.
2. Chastity is contrary to our instincts and the most unpopular of virtues.
  - a. Sexual appetites greatly exceed the biological purpose.
  - b. Contraception has permitted far more sexual activity.
  - c. Society has become far more tolerant.
  - d. Sexual appetite grows with indulgence.

C. "Sex is nothing to be ashamed of."

1. As a means of propagation and that it is pleasurable, Christians agree.
  - a. Christians hold the body to be one of God's good creations.
  - b. Without the fall, sexual pleasure might be greater.
  - c. Christianity glorifies marriage.
2. As rampant sexual license in today's culture, Christians disagree.
  - a. There is endless propaganda against chastity.
  - b. Industries use our sexual instincts to make money.

II. The desire for chastity

A. Today it is difficult to summon the desire for chastity.

1. We are told that sex is healthy and normal in all circumstances.
2. No help is given to distinguish the obsessions and excesses of sex.
3. We are told that perfect chastity is impossible.
4. For controlling natural instincts, we need God's help.
  - a. For each failure we ask forgiveness and try again.
  - b. We must not be satisfied with failure.

III. Confusion over sexual "repression"

- A. Repression is a technical term of psychology, distinct from suppression.
- B. Resisting sexual desire is not repression.
- C. Attempting virtue brings light; indulgence brings fog.

IV. Chastity is not the center of Christian morals.

Discussion Questions: (pp. 94-103)

1. What is the evidence that, "If it feels good, do it," is wrong? (pp. 97-98)
  
2. Explain the role of God's forgiveness in unchastity. (p. 101)
  
3. Why do people think that Christians regard unchastity as the worst sin? (pp. 102-103)

Chapter 6: Christian Marriage

I. Definitions for marriage

- A. Married partners are a single organism.
- B. Marriage is for life.
- C. The union has aspects that go far beyond the sexual.

II. Divorce

- A. Christian churches have a high view of marriage.
- B. Popular culture calls for easy divorce.
- C. Keeping marriage vows places the question in the realm of justice.
- D. Control of sexual impulses is a duty, as with all other impulses.
- E. Unbelief in permanent marriage should dissuade people from it.

III. Being in love

- A. Being in love causes people to bind themselves with promises.
- B. When being in love ceases
  - 1. Being in love is a feeling.
  - 2. Feelings change and diminish.
  - 3. Being in love yields to actual love.

IV. Actual love

- A. Actual love is a deep unity, willed, strengthened by habit, reinforced by grace.
- B. Myth: Being in love continues indefinitely.
- C. The thrill of being in love is displaced by the commitment of love.
- D. Myth: Falling in love is irresistible.
- E. Like any feeling or impulse, it can and should be resisted by married people.

V. There should be a sharp distinction drawn between civil marriage and church marriage.

VI. The head of the family

- A. There must be one head, because equality can result in deadlock.
- B. There is something unnatural about a man being dominated by his wife.
- C. A woman's interests lie within the family, whereas a man can be more just to the outside world.

Discussion Questions: (pp. 104-114)

1. "Love is the great conqueror of lust." Do you agree? Why? (p. 108)
  
2. Can 'being in love' give way to committed love? How be this fact be conveyed to young people, especially given the focus in popular culture on 'being in love'? (p. 108-109)
  
3. Leaving aside St. Paul's other remarks about the role of women, for the moment, do Lewis's reasons for male headship make sense? (pp. 112-114)

*Mere Christianity*, Book III: Christian Behavior

Chapter 7: Forgiveness

I. Nice in theory, hard to practice

- A. We argue from difficult cases.
- B. Begin with something easier: a family member or co-worker.

II. To love as one loves self

- A. One loves self, not because one is nice or lovable.
- B. Hate the sin but not the sinner.
- C. We love ourselves despite our sins and failures, constantly forgiving ourselves.
- D. We ought to hate evil, but we can hope that the sinner, like ourselves, is not entirely evil.

III. Hatred and hope

- A. Hatred wrongly directed, destroys.
- B. Hatred consumes our universe.
- C. Even of the worst person, one can hope for a better ultimate outcome.

IV. Problem with 6th Commandment

- A. The Hebrew word is “murder”.
- B. One is not prohibited from justifiable killing.
- C. The key is not to hate, when killing is necessary.

V. The meaning of loving our enemy

- A. To love someone means to wish his good, as we wish our own good.
- B. God wants us to love all selves the way we love ourselves.
- C. God loves us in this way.

Discussion Questions: (pp. 115-120)

1. Dag Hammarskjöld wrote, “Forgiveness breaks the chain of causality because he who ‘forgives’ you—out of love—takes upon himself the consequences of what you have done. Forgiveness, therefore, always entails a sacrifice.” [Markings, tr. Leif Sjöberg & W. H. Auden, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1964 (post.), p. 197] Does this idea conform to Lewis’s idea of forgiveness? Jesus’s idea? (pp. 115-116)

2. Does hope help us to separate the sin from the sinner? (pp. 117-118)

3. “I can forgive, but I can’t forget.” How is this idea related to Christian forgiveness? (p. 120)

Chapter 8: The Great Sin

I. The vice of pride

- A. We despise it in others.
- B. We are unconscious of it in ourselves.
- C. It is the complete anti-God mind-set.
- D. Pride is inherently competitive.
  - 1. Pride is only satisfied in being above others.
  - 2. Pride acts for its own sake, not for the sake of acquiring.
  - 3. The actions of pride are about power.

II. Consequences of pride

- A. Pride results in enmity; pride is enmity.
- B. The proud cannot know God.
- C. Pride and religion
  - 1. The worship of the proud is to an imaginary God.
  - 2. The proud believe they have God's approval.
  - 3. Consequently, they think they are better than others.
  - 4. The spiritual sin of pride can enter into the heart of religious life.
  - 5. One should watch for the attitude of superiority in oneself, an indicator of pride.

III. Pride and other vices

- A. Pride can be used to defeat other vices, but to terrible effect.
- B. Pride is spiritual cancer.

IV. Four possible misunderstandings of pride

- A. Pleasure in being praised is not necessarily pride.
- B. Pride in another's accomplishments is not necessarily pride.
- C. Humility is a doorway to knowing God.
- D. A truly humble person is not self-deprecating.

Discussion Questions: (pp. 121-128)

1. Identify the role of pride and the lesson to be obtained from the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican in Luke 18:10-14. (p. 124-125)

2. Why does Martin Luther write, "I am more afraid of my own heart than of the pope and all his cardinals. I have within me the great pope, Self"? (pp. 122,124)

3. How can pride be defeated? (p. 128)

Note: "Two of a trade never agree." A proverb dating back to the 16th century. Meaning: two people in the same business will always disagree about the proper service to offer the customer, each regarding his own opinion as superior to the other. (p. 122)

Chapter 9: Charity

I. Charity, love in the Christian sense

- A. Charity is more than alms.
- B. Charity is not an emotion.

II. Loving neighbor as self

- A. Charity is like self-love but directed towards another.
- B. Liking or affection are natural, not a sin.
- C. Liking and affection can aid charity.
- D. Taken to the extreme, they can undermine charity.

III. Becoming charitable

- A. Affectionate feelings are not the path to charity.
- B. Feelings are hard or impossible to manufacture and are of little use to charity.
- C. Rather than waiting for feelings of love, act as though you love.
- D. Loving actions lead to love.
- E. Likewise, cruel actions lead to hatred.

IV. The increase of good and evil

- A. A small action of love can have great results for good.
- B. A small indulgence or negligence can have disastrous results for evil.

V. Love of God

- A. Love of God is not a feeling.
- B. To act as God wills is the love of God.
- C. God's love for us is relentless.

Discussion Questions: (pp.129-133)

1. How can one master natural affections and disinclinations in order to love in the Christian way? (p. 130)

2. Is acting as though one loves another a pretense? Is praying for another a help in loving? (p. 131)

3. How does 1 John 5:3 line up with Lewis's thesis? (p. 132)

Chapter 10: Hope

I. The theological virtue of hope

- A. For the Christian, hope is not escapism or wishful thinking.
- B. Christians should think of the eternal world while working in this one.
- C. What the Christian hopes for is not available in this world.

II. A peculiar observation

- A. Those Christians who achieved the most occupied their minds with thoughts of Heaven.
- B. Since Christians largely ceased to think of Heaven, they have become less effective.
- C. Often, to arrive at a worthy goal one must aim at a better one.

III. Hope for Heaven

- A. Hope for Heaven is difficult.
  - 1. Most of our hopes are worldly.
  - 2. Heavenly hopes are often unrecognized.
- B. Heavenly hopes can lead to earthly disappointment.
- C. Three ways of dealing with the inadequacy of earthly fulfillment of hope
  - 1. Fool's way — continually to try different things to reach fulfillment.
  - 2. 'Sensible' way — to lower one's expectations.
  - 3. 'Christian' way —
    - a. ... is to recognize that hopes and longings are meant to be fulfilled;
    - b. ... is always to be thankful for what one has;
    - c. ... is never to forget the desire for true fulfillment.

IV. Do not be fooled by the contempt some people have for Christian imagery for the inexpressible.

Discussion Questions: (pp. 134-137)

1. Can you think of an example of the rule, "to arrive at a worthy goal, one must aim at something else, something better"? (pp. 134-135)

2. What does Jesus say about hopes, as in Matt. 5:6 and elsewhere? (p.137)

*Mere Christianity*, Book III: Christian Behavior

Chapters 11: Faith (I)

I. The first kind of faith: belief

- A. Belief is based on reason.
- B. Why is this virtuous?
  1. The mind is not ruled exclusively by reason.
  2. Moods change.
  3. Moods can undermine belief without reason.

II. Our bodies tell us something different than our minds do.

- A. Desires
- B. Temptations
- C. Emotions
- D. These attack our reasoned beliefs in a kind of blitz.

III. Overcoming moods and emotions

- A. The habit of faith
  1. Church-going, daily prayers, religious reading contribute.
  2. Belief must be nourished.
- B. Without nourishment, faith drifts away.

IV. Faith in another sense, preliminaries

- A. A lesson about virtue
  1. Effort is not sufficient to persist in virtue.
  2. No one knows himself to be bad until he tries very hard to be good.
  3. Until one resists temptation, one cannot know how strong it is.
  4. We fail.
  5. We cannot live up to any bargain with God.
- B. You cannot do anything for God.
- C. God knows and owns you and everything about you.

Discussion Questions: (pp. 138-143)

1. Are the emotions, temptations, and desires that militate against belief the same as what St. Paul calls “the flesh” (Rom. 8:3-8)? Elaborate. (pp. 139-140)

2. Besides weekly worship, daily prayer, and Bible reading, what other practices support and nourish belief? (p. 141)

3. What does personal effort at virtue demonstrate? What conclusions must one draw from that? (p. 142)

4. Who owns you? (p. 143)

*Mere Christianity*, Book III: Christian Behavior

Chapters 12: Faith (II)

I. The second sense of faith

- A. Not everyone who believes, in the first sense, has come to believe in the second sense.
- B. The second sense of faith is not comprehensible to those who have not come to it yet.
- C. The second sense of faith arises after
  - 1. failure at virtue,
  - 2. recognition that God owns everything,
  - 3. recognition of personal bankruptcy.
- D. Then a right relationship to God can begin, namely, leaving our failure to God.

II. Trust in God

- A. Faith is trusting that God will instill Christlikeness and make good our deficiencies.
- B. To have faith is to trust that God will make us ‘Sons of God’.
- C. Faith in the second sense means to be transformed by receiving Christ’s free gift.

III. Faith vs. works—an insoluble puzzle

- A. Faith consists in giving in, stop striving, rely on God.
- B. When faith leads to devotion, good works will come.
- C. Two parodies
  - 1. Do good works to purchase your salvation—Pelagianism, 4th century
  - 2. Faith guarantees salvation; sin as much as you want—Antinomianism, Rom. 3:8
- D. The true, though paradoxical, situation is given in Phil. 2:12-13.

IV. Through faith, beyond

Discussion Questions: (pp. 144-150)

- 1. Where does faith, in the second sense, come from? (p. 149) (Eph. 2:8-9)

2. Brother Lawrence: He had no qualms; “for,” said he, “when I fail in my duty, I readily acknowledge it, saying, ‘I am used to do so; I shall never do otherwise if I am left to myself’. If I fail not, then I give God thanks, acknowledging that the strength comes from Him.” [The Practice of the Presence of God, New York, Revell, 1895, Second Conversation, p. 13.] Does this express the idea of faith Lewis describes on p. 147?

- 3. How is faith of the second kind related to the "becoming" Lewis writes about on pp. 82 & 91?

Note: The two parodies mentioned in the middle of p. 148 are historic as well as current.

- 1. Do good works to purchase your salvation—Pelagianism, 4th century, identified as a heresy.
- 2. Faith guarantees salvation; sin as much as you want—Antinomianism, condemned by Paul in Rom.

3:8

## *Mere Christianity*, Book IV: Beyond Personality

### Chapter 1: Making & Begetting

#### I. Why theology?

A. Theology is not the same as the experience of God.

B. Theology is like a map.

1. Theology includes the experience of many people.

2. But a mere feeling about God is insufficient.

#### II. Theology is practical.

A. Preventing bad ideas about God, like popular religion.

B. Avoids wrong ideas about Christianity.

C. Preserves correct ideas about Christianity.

1. Christianity is not just a collection of good advice.

2. Christianity says the we can become sons of God.

3. Christianity says that Christ's death saves us from our sins.

#### III. Begotten vs. created

A. We are created; Christ was begotten before all worlds.

1. "Make" produces something different from self.

2. "Beget" produces something like self.

B. Man is made in the image of God but does not have the kind of life God has, *i.e.*, spiritual life.

1. *Bios* is biological life, which reaches its zenith in man and is finite.

2. *Zoe* is the spiritual life that God has and is eternal.

C. Christianity presents the means to obtain *Zoe*.

#### Discussion Questions: (pp. 153-159)

1. How has theology touched your personal experience of God? (p. 155)

2. How dangerous are non-orthodox ideas about God? (pp. 155-156)

3. Is coming to faith for you like coming to life? How? (Eph. 2:4-5,10) (p. 159)

## *Mere Christianity*, Book IV: Beyond Personality

### Chapter 2: The Three-Personal God

#### I. What is God?

##### A. God beyond personality

1. Most mean God is impersonal.
2. Christians mean God is a person and much more.

##### B. Becoming part of God

1. Most mean being absorbed into God, therefore ceasing to exist.
2. Christians mean entering into the life of God and becoming more oneself than before.

#### II. Practical theology

##### A. Dimensionality as metaphor for understanding God

1. One dimension exists only as a line.
2. Two dimensions exist only as a plane.
3. Three dimensional objects cannot be imagined in a two-dimensional space.
4. That situation is like trying to understand someone who is 3 persons and 1 being.

##### B. The analogy of Christian prayer

1. The Christian prays to God.
2. God is within, motivating the Christian to pray.
3. God is also the vehicle for prayer.
4. When praying, the Christian is being caught up in *Zoe*, pulled by God, into God, while remaining oneself.

#### III. Theology is experimental, discovery not invention.

##### A. The doctrine of the Trinity arose from the experiences of the first believers.

##### B. Knowing God

1. The initiative is all on God's side.
2. God shows Himself more to some than others, based on their capacities.
3. The instrument by which one sees God is oneself.
4. One sees God more clearly with a clean, obedient life.
5. God shows Himself most of all to a Christian community.

#### IV. Theology, based on fact, is not simple.

#### Discussion Questions: (pp. 160-165)

1. Using the analogy of dimensions, how does God see us? (p. 162)
  
2. How does *Zoe* expand our understanding of God? (John 10:10) (p. 163)
  
3. How has the doctrine of the Trinity helped (or hindered) your understanding and the church's understanding of God? (p. 165)

*Mere Christianity*, Book IV: Beyond Personality

Chapter 3: Time & Beyond Time

I. The problem of simultaneity

- A. Time series is our only way to understand reality.
- B. Time-like expressions are the only way we can talk about events.

II. God and time

- A. God does not live in time.
- B. All times are present for God.

III. The analogy of the novel-writer

- A. Time moves within the novel at the novelist's discretion.
- B. The writing process moves along in the novelist's time-frame.
- C. The analogy breaks down because—
  - 1. the novelist is constrained by his own time-series.
  - 2. God is not constrained to time-series at all.
- D. Conclusion: God has infinite attention for each person.

IV. The analogy of a line on a sheet of paper

- A. As beings constrained to the line, we must pass through the points in order.
- B. God, living outside the line, sees and participates in it all at once.
- C. This idea removes some of the difficulties.
  - 1. How Christ could be God as a baby—
  - 2. How Christ could not know “who touched” him—
  - 3. How God's life as Christ is a period of time out of God's overall lifespan.
- D. God has no history and no anticipation of the future.

V. God's foreknowledge

- A. The past is gone for us, but not for God.
- B. God sees our future as the present.
- C. It is hard to see how we could act in a different way from what God has foreseen.
- D. This idea about God and time is helpful, consistent with Christian doctrine, but not essential.

Discussion Questions: (pp. 166-171)

1. How does 2 Pet. 3:8 begin to express the relationship of God to time? (p. 168)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Does Lewis's hypothesis about God and time help you? (pp. 168-169)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What are the implications of Lewis's hypothesis for Jer. 31:34? (p. 171)

## *Mere Christianity*, Book IV: Beyond Personality

### Chapter 4: Good Infection

#### I. Analogies for the begetting of the Son

##### A. The stacked books from forever

1. The position of the upper book is caused by the lower book.
2. There was never a time when this was not so.
3. Causes need not precede effects.
4. There was never a time before the Son was begotten by the Father.

##### B. Imagination

1. No time passes between the will to imagine and the picture appears in the imagination.
2. Cause and effect can be simultaneous.
3. The Son constantly streams from the Father, like heat or light.

#### II. Understanding the Father and the Son

##### A. The Son is the self-expression of the Father, what the Father has to say.

##### B. Hermeneutical caveat

1. Analogies are helpful in understanding particular points, but analogies may also distort.
2. One must always return to the words of Scripture.

##### C. Father and Son best describe the relationship between these two Person.

##### D. The relationship is one of love.

#### III. On love

##### A. Two parties are required for love.

##### B. Distortions of “God is love”

1. “Love is God”?
2. Love must be treated with great respect.
3. Christians mean that a living, dynamic activity of love has been going on in God forever.
4. Everything has been created as a consequence.

#### IV. The Spirit

##### A. The activity of the Father and the Son is like a drama or a dance.

##### B. This activity produces the Holy Spirit, a Third Person.

##### C. The analogy of camaraderie

1. Among a dynamic group grows an understanding we call a “spirit”.
2. With God, this is a real Person.

##### D. The Spirit acts through us.

#### V. Entering the dance

##### A. The three-person drama of love is to be played out in us.

##### B. Peace, joy, and eternal life are to be found only in God.

##### C. To ‘catch’ them, like a ‘good infection’, we must enter into God.

##### D. Once united with God, how could anyone die?

#### VI. Becoming a little Christ

##### A. We are made, not begotten, and having only *Bios*, not *Zoe*, must die.

##### B. Christianity offers an opportunity to share in the life of Christ.

##### C. We thus share in a life that was begotten, not made.

##### D. Then we can become sons of God.

##### E. Jesus came to spread His kind of life, a kind of ‘good infection’.

##### F. The ultimate goal of becoming a Christian is to become a little Christ.

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Discussion Questions: (pp. 172-177)

1. Why does John use 'the Word' (*logos*) for Christ in John 1:1? (pp. 173-174)
2. Give an instance of the 'dance' Lewis writes about. (p.176)
3. What is Christlikeness? (p. 177)

## *Mere Christianity*, Book IV: Beyond Personality

### Chapter 5: The Obstinate Toy Soldiers

#### I. The opposition of the *bios* to *zoe*

- A. *Bios* wants to be left alone.
- B. *Bios* is threatened by *zoe*.
- C. *Zoe* will kill the self-centeredness of *bios* if allowed.

#### II. The analogy of the tin soldiers

- A. Suppose one wanted the tin soldier to come alive.
- B. That would require replacing the tin with flesh.
- C. If the tin soldier did not like that, he would resist.

#### III. What God did

- A. The Son, the second person of the Trinity, was born into the world as a human being.
- B. In Jesus, human, created life became divine, begotten life.
- C. The human life of Jesus was killed.
- D. The natural life was taken into the divine life and restored.
- E. By analogy, a tin soldier came to life.

#### IV. The human family

- A. Individuals are not as separate as they look, but they are connected, like a single organism.
- B. Because God sustains them, individuals are not separate from God, either.
- C. Christ becoming man affects the whole mass of humanity.
  - 1. It affects those who came before Christ as well as those who came after.
  - 2. It affects those who have never heard of Him.
- D. The task of changing from a created being to a begotten one has been done for us.
  - 1. Humanity has been saved, in principle.
  - 2. We do not have to carry out that change by our own efforts.
  - 3. We have only to appropriate salvation.
  - 4. This is the “good infection” that we can “catch” from Christ if we get close to Him.
- E. Do not quarrel about which formula best expresses this idea.

#### Discussion Questions: (pp.178-182)

1. In what sense must the natural life in us be killed? (Gal. 2:19-20) (p. 179)

2. How does the Incarnation make a difference to those who came before Christ? and to those who have never heard of Christ?

(pp. 180-181)

3. How do we appropriate salvation? (p. 181)

## *Mere Christianity*, Book IV: Beyond Personality

### Chapter 6: Two Notes

#### I. Why did God not beget many Sons?

A. Transformation into sons might have been easy or automatic if mankind had not turned away from God.

B. Contingency (what if) is absurd as applied to God.

C. Many begotten Sons would have to be distinguishable.

#### II. The organism of humanity

A. While humans are alike in many ways, they can differ, like the organs in an organism.

B. The value of individuals must not be subordinated in collectives.

C. We are all parts of an organism with individual roles to play.

1. Forgetting that we are all parts of an organism leads to Individualism.

2. Trying to make everyone the same leads to Totalitarianism.

3. We must avoid both errors.

#### III. Error often come in pairs of extremes.

#### Discussion Questions: (pp. 183-186)

1. Lewis asserts that there could only be one begotten Son of God. Does the Bible agree? (Heb. 1:3) (p. 184)

2. How can viewing the church as an organism, rather than an organization, help its function? (1 Cor. 12:12-31) (p.185)

3. How can judgments, particularly unnecessary ones, lead to pairs of errors of extremity (fissiparation)? (p. 186)

## *Mere Christianity*, Book IV: Beyond Personality

### Chapter 7: Let's Pretend

#### I. Two analogies to transformation

- A. Beauty and the Beast
- B. The Mask

#### II. The Lord's Prayer

- A. We address "Our Father" as though we were the Son of God.
- B. We are not like the Son of God, but we are ordered to do so anyway.
- C. Two kinds of pretending
  - 1. The bad kind that is a deception.
  - 2. The good kind that leads to the real thing.
  - 3. The latter can make one better than one really is.
  - 4. Pretending or playing the role of the Son of God immediately stimulates changes.
  - 5. Conscience is not a reliable guide.

#### III. The reality of Christ beside us

- A. Christ works a transformation by placing his life within us.
- B. Christ works on us through our experience.
- C. Christ works on us through others, particularly the church.
- D. Seek the true Giver behind those others who give to you.

#### IV. Transformation

- A. The New Testament describes elements of transformation.
- B. Christ himself is carrying out this transformation.
- C. The transformation proceeds stepwise until one becomes a "little christ".

#### V. Two observations

- A. We need to change not only in what we do but what we are.
  - 1. We have no control over our basic motives.
  - 2. Only God can bring about the changes we need.
- B. In the end, it is God who does everything.

#### Discussion Questions: (pp. 187-194)

- 1. Can one's conscience be improved? (p. 189)

2. Find the places where the New Testament speaks of "being born again", "putting on Christ", Christ "being formed in us", and "having the mind of Christ". From the context, how are these saying what Lewis is describing? (p. 191)

- 3. Must God do it all? (p. 193)

## *Mere Christianity*, Book IV: Beyond Personality

### Chapter 8: Is Christianity Hard or Easy?

#### I. Putting on Christ vs. Morality

A. A moral code limits behavior but leaves the natural man unchanged.

1. By following conscience, one has little left for self.
2. Bitterness or frustration will follow, unless one gives up.

B. By contrast, Christ demands the whole self, which is both harder and easier.

1. "Take up your cross and follow me."
2. "My yoke is easy."

3. Granting Christ less than the whole self is like hanging on to personal desires while trying to be good.

4. The laziest person works the hardest in the end.

5. Analogy to a field that must be plowed and sown to produce a crop.

#### II. The new kind of life

A. Worldly demands compete with the new life.

B. At first, the new life only prevails for moments.

C. The new life ultimately results in perfection.

D. The analogy of the egg—compromise is impossible.

#### III. The ultimate purpose

A. Christianity exists solely to turn people into "little christs".

B. Just as the State exists to guarantee ordinary happiness, so God's Church exists to draw men to Christ.

C. We are to become part of the gift Christ offers to His Father.

#### Discussion Questions: (pp. 195-200)

1. How much of our own desires and aims can we keep? (pp. 195-196)

2. How does the "all or nothing" character of Christianity make it hard? Easy? How does the Bible speak of the "all or nothing"? (Matt. 6:24, Rom. 14:23) (pp. 197-198)

3. What should the Church's program be? (p. 199)

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Chapter 9: Counting the Cost

I. “Be ye perfect”

A. Not that being perfect is a prerequisite for Christ’s help, but that Christ’s help is solely towards being perfect.

B. The analogy of the dentist.

C. Jesus warned people to count the cost, because everything necessary will be sacrificed to making one perfect.

D. God is pleased with our smallest efforts—easy to please, hard to satisfy.

II. God’s plan

A. God will persist even when we fail or object.

B. Not the perfection that we want or anticipate, but the perfection that God wants and intended.

C. To be satisfied with less (e.g., decent people) is laziness; to submit to the full treatment is obedience.

D. Unaided, we cannot accomplish perfection, but God aims to make us more perfect than the greatest saint.

E. The process or transformation to perfection entails great difficulties.

F. We cannot yet imagine His destiny for us.

III. The objective

A. The analogy of rebuilding the house.

B. We shall be made into something like ‘gods’.

Discussion Questions: (pp. 201-206)

1. What does “Be ye perfect” mean? How perfect, and in what ways? (Matt. 5:48) (p. 203)

2. How are we to become God’s habitation? Where does the Bible teach this? (p. 205)

3. How are we “gods”? (Ps. 82:6, John 10:34) (p. 205)

Note: On page 202: “Give him an inch, and he will take an ell.” An ell is an (English) archaic linear measure of six handbreadths, about 45 inches.

*Mere Christianity*, Book IV: Beyond Personality

Chapter 10: Nice People or New Men

I. The goal is perfection.

II. Reasonable: being a Christian should result in improvement.

A. Religion means nothing if it does not result in improved behavior.

B. Christ said to judge by results.

C. Bad behavior make the world doubt Christianity.

III. Unreasonable: Christians as a whole should be nicer than non-Christians as a whole.

A. False because division of the world into two well-defined camps is faulty.

1. There are people in various stages of Christian life, approaching or departing.

2. The categories are too vague.

3. It is only reasonable to compare two particular representatives of the classes.

B. Comparing two representatives

1. The standards

a. Any Christian should be nicer than he would have been as a non-Christian.

b. Anyone who becomes a Christian will be nicer than before.

2. Cases

a. A given non-Christian may be nicer than a given Christian because of natural gifts.

b. The question is, what would the subjects be like were the situation reversed.

c. The analogy of the factory.

3. Both the Christian and the non-Christian need Christ.

IV. Gifts

A. From nature

1. Natural goodness is a gift from God.

2. Natural failings are allowed by God, which He intends to set right.

B. The real question is, will one turn to God, regardless of gifts or the lack of them?

C. To gift is easy for God; to convert rebels cost the Crucifixion.

D. All natural gifts perish.

E. The only gifts we can keep are those freely given to God.

V. The difficulty of entering the Kingdom.

A. Money can be an obstacle.

B. Similarly, natural gifts can be an obstacle.

C. Those who lack natural goodness

1. Far more likely to see their salvation in Christ.

2. They are the lost sheep.

D. If virtue comes easy, beware.

E. The defective are blessed by Christ, who can save them from themselves.

VI. Redemption

A. Niceness is not redemption.

B. God's desire is to turn men into sons, new kinds of men.

C. We cannot judge men, let alone Christianity as a whole, from externals.

D. The world is passing away; the only lasting truth is in God.

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Discussion Questions: (pp. 207-217)

1. That some Christians are not (yet) nice people is an excuse for denying Christianity. What other excuses do people come up with? (p. 208)

2. In the light of Lewis' ideas in this chapter, compare the stories of the rich, young ruler (Luke 19:2-10) and Zacchaeus (Luke 18:18-23). What can we keep? (p. 213)

3. Who are the lost sheep? (Luke 15:4-7) (p. 214)

## *Mere Christianity*, Book IV: Beyond Personality

### Chapter 11: The New Men

#### I. Not improvement but transformation

- A. The analogy to biological evolution
- B. Guessing the next step in mankind's development
- C. Different in a different way

#### II. The Christian view of the next step

- A. The next step has already appeared in Christ.
- B. The next step is transformation of creatures of a God to sons of God.
- C. The next step differs from all previous evolutionary steps.
  - 1. It does not no level sexual reproduction.
  - 2. It is voluntary.
  - 3. It can only result from contact with Christ.
  - 4. It has occurred far more quickly.
  - 5. The differences are far greater and more significant than ever before.
- D. The new men are in fellowship all over the world.

#### III. The character of the new men

- A. The new men have the mind of Christ.
- B. The new men are not all alike but have distinctive characters: analogies of seeing light & salt
- C. Becoming ourselves
  - 1. With Christ, we can become the selves he made us to be, all different.
  - 2. Without Christ, we are totally subject to our natures, which are often drearily similar.

#### IV. Real personalities

- A. Only in God: wicked men are highly similar; saints are highly individual.
- B. A real personality can only come by giving up the self.
- C. Give up self and one will find the true self.
- D. Only that which has died can be resurrected.
- E. Turn away from self and seek Christ.

#### Discussion Questions: (pp. 218-227)

1. Lewis points out how futile it is to look for the next step (or any clue to the future) by relying only on structures from the past. Apart from evolution, what other systems of thought exhibit that futility? (p. 218-219)

2. How can one give up self? (pp. 223-226)

3. How is Lewis' thought like Jesus' in Matt. 6:33? or Paul's in 1 Cor. 15:44? (pp. 227)

Note: On p. 220, an "Irish bull" is a statement so absurd or contradictory as to be amusing or satirical, though sometimes revealing an underlying wisdom or truth.

## $\infty$ : a quick guide to infinity

Mathematicians do not use the word *infinity* much. They speak of “infinitely many” and “infinitely (that is, infinitesimally) small” more often. The word *infinite* simply means “not finite”, the latter being the word from which we get the familiar word *definite*. A finite collection of objects has a definite quantity; a finite distance has a definite extent. To both of these, we can attach numbers. For the infinite, this is not so.

Note that *infinity* is not a number. This is illustrated by the following:

For any number  $n$ , there is a number  $n+1$ .

Clearly there can be no largest number, and therefore  $\infty$ , which by definition is larger than all numbers, cannot itself be a number. The same kind of argument applies to smallness of numbers (excluding 0):

For any number  $n$ , there is a number  $n/2$ .

Thus, the *infinitesimal*, that which is smaller than all non-zero numbers, cannot itself be a number.

All these ideas are useful in mathematics for studying spaces and algebras. There are two important notions to remember about them: (1) they are ideas, in that they exist only in our minds, and (2) no one has discovered anything in nature to correspond to these ideas.

There is, so far as we know, no such thing as an infinite extent in the cosmos. Nor is there known to be an infinitesimal extent in the particle physics world. Both are also true of time. Time and space are infinitely divisible in our geometry studies, and may be so in reality, but no one has demonstrated this to be true, and it may be false.

Even numbers themselves are not native to nature: they are extremely simple ideas that we use to organize our thoughts about natural phenomena. They have not been shown to have independent existence. Were all people to suddenly disappear, there could not be any such thing as a *number* without anyone to think it.

While it may be useless to ask the world to be careful in its use of such slippery and ephemeral ideas, one who is pondering these matters should be cautious in drawing conclusions, for there are many pitfalls. This is particularly true in evaluating Lewis's timelessness hypothesis for God. We are the ones living on a line (time), trying to discover what life off our timeline would be like.