Mere Christianity

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF C. S. LEWIS

C. S. Lewis was born and raised in Ireland. He attended Oxford University, where he distinguished himself as a scholar of English, Classics, and Philosophy. Lewis fought in World War I, and, partly as a result of the carnage he witnessed, he was an atheist for most of his twenties. For more than thirty years, Lewis taught at Oxford University. During this time, he converted to the Anglican Church, and became an articulate proponent of Christian values. Lewis's love for Christianity, as well as his vast knowledge of mythology and linguistics, inspired him to write his most famous book, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*—the first volume of the Chronicles of Narnia—in 1949. Over the course of his life he wrote poetry, essays, literature, autobiography, fantasy, science fiction, and non-fiction works of academic criticism, philosophy, and Christian apologetics.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Mere Christianity was first written during World War II, when Europe was engaged in a bloody war between the Allied Powers, including Britain and France, and the Axis Powers, including Germany and Italy. Lewis alludes to many of the worst atrocities of World War II, including the Holocaust—Germany's notorious attempt to wipe out the Jewish people and other minorities, which resulted in the murder of more than six million people. Lewis also alludes to some important milestones in Western intellectual history, most notably Darwin's theory of evolution, which revolutionized science and philosophy by portraying the history of the world as a constant, volatile process in which all creatures, including the human species, are gradually changing.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The book takes inspiration from many famous Christian works of literature and philosophy. Two of the most notable are John Milton's long poem *Paradise Lost* (1667), and Boethius's *The Consolation of Philosophy*, which was written in the sixth century A.D. Milton's poem tells the story of the fall of man, partly from the perspective of Satan. Milton's portrayal of Satan as a "fallen angel"—that is, a being who has corrupted good into evil—had a major influence on the composition of Lewis's book, particularly the first part. The late classical philosopher Boethius composed *The Consolation of Philosophy* in the weeks leading up to his execution for treason. While the book makes no specific references to Christ, Christian thinkers have celebrated Boethius for pioneering Christian theology. Boethius's theory that an omnipotent God exists outside of time, and therefore sees humanity's past, present, and future simultaneously, shows up in the fourth part of *Mere Christianity*, and appears in many of Lewis's other books.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Mere Christianity
- **When Written:** Based on a series of radio broadcasts made between 1942 and 1944, published as a book in 1952.
- **Where Written:** London and Oxford
- **When Published:** 1952
- **Genre:** Christian apologetics, Non-fiction
- **Point of View:** First person; the speaker is C. S. Lewis

EXTRA CREDIT

Famous fans. C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* books are some of the most famous children's novels of all time, and they've inspired some other classics of children's literature. Lewis's fans include J. K. Rowling, author of the *Harry Potter* books, Philip Pullman, authors of the *His Dark Materials* trilogy, and Lemony Snicket, author of *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. Pullman, an atheist, claims to despise Lewis's Christian ideas, but has "boundless respect" for the *Chronicles of Narnia*.

Best buddies. Lewis was a popular professor at Oxford University, and had lots of good friends on the faculty. His closest friend, another expert in Classics and English literature, also penned a series of Christian-inspired fantasy novels for intelligent young readers. His name? J. R. R. Tolkien, author of the *Lord of the Rings* books!

PLOT SUMMARY

In *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis argues for the logical validity of Christianity, defends the religion from its critics, and looks in detail at what the life of a Christian is like.

In the first part of the book, Lewis discusses the "law of human nature." When studying human history, he claims, one is struck by how similar different societies' moral codes are, at least at a fundamental level. Lewis argues that moral law isn't just an arbitrary human invention—it's actually a real, timeless thing—invented by an all-powerful being who stands outside the confines of material space and time, and reveals itself to humans through moral law.

In the second part of the book, Lewis discusses a few

competing theories about the all-powerful being's identity. Some religious groups, the Pantheists, believe that the all-powerful being, God, is neither good nor evil. Pantheists believe that God *is* the universe, meaning that everything in the material universe is divine. Other religious groups, such as Muslims, Jews, and Christians, believe that God created the universe, yet is distinct from it; thus, God is good, and wants humans to work hard to make the universe a better place. Christians also believe in the existence of an ultimate evil, the Devil. However, in Christianity, evil isn't equal to good—evil is "spoiled good"; i.e., the perversion or corruption of goodness. Looking around the world, it is obvious that good has been corrupted into evil almost everywhere.

When Lewis was a much younger man, he found it impossible to believe in a just God who would allow Earth to become a sad, unjust place. However, the only way for an atheist to criticize the Christian model of God would be to appeal to some standard for "just" and "unjust"—i.e., the same standard that led us to accept the existence of God in Part One. Lewis then attempts to resolve the apparent contradiction in the existence of a good God who allows evil things to happen by arguing that God gives people the gift of free will: they face the challenge of behaving virtuously in spite of the temptations of evil—a challenge for which they will be richly rewarded in Heaven.

At the end of part two, Lewis introduces Jesus Christ, the cornerstone of the Christian religion. The only way to be truly virtuous, Lewis argues, is to worship Christ. While there are many different Christian sects that worship Christ in different ways, Lewis argues that they can agree on the basic facts about Christ's existence, and therefore can all attain salvation.

In Part Three of the book, Lewis studies the life of a good Christian. To begin with, Lewis proposes that morality consists of three different parts: harmony between people, harmony *within* a person, and constant vigilance in achieving a state of salvation. All virtues uphold the three parts of morality, and all sins contradict at least one of these parts. Lewis briefly discusses the four "Cardinal virtues"—prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude, and explains why they're necessary for living morally.

Lewis spends time defending the most unpopular aspect of Christian morality—the notion of chastity. Modern society, he insists, is overrun with sex and sexuality, to the point where people think that having lots of sex is "normal" and "healthy." Lewis, however, argues that the sexual instinct—like any instinct—must be controlled and subdued. Lewis also defends the institution of marriage. While it's popular to say that "being in love" is the only reason to get married, Lewis argues that being married is actually much more beautiful and majestic than being in love—a married couple must remain together for a lifetime, demonstrating their loyalty and respect for one another as human beings, rather than just following their emotions.

Lewis argues that pride is the most dangerous of all sins, since it encourages humans to place themselves "above God." He suggests that many people who consider themselves to be good Christians actually worship a "false God," and secretly think themselves to be superior to everyone else—a state of mind that will lead them to damnation unless they're careful.

At the end of Part Three, Lewis discusses the three Theological virtues: charity, hope and faith. Charity is a challenging virtue, because it requires humans to be gracious and generous to people they might not necessarily like. But one of the miracles of virtue, Lewis claims, is that when we pretend to respect other people, we eventually *do* respect them. One of the most challenging aspects of Christianity, Lewis writes, is faith, especially in the challenging sense of having faith in God's salvation. After a Christian becomes familiar with obeying the moral law of God, they sometimes reach a point of despair, during which they realize their own sinful nature. But even in their despair, the good Christian will find the strength to carry on, cautiously optimistic—not certain—that God will help them find the way to Heaven. A good Christian must trust their fate to God, while *also* working hard to be good.

In the fourth and final part of the book, Lewis turns to theology, the "science" of God. He analyzes the Holy Trinity, and the strange-sounding idea that God is both one thing and three. Lewis compares the Holy Trinity to a **die**: just as a die "contains" six square sides, and yet is one three-dimensional object at the same time, so too does God "contain" three parts and yet remain one being. Lewis also tackles the apparent contradiction of an all-knowing God who gives humans the gift of free will—one would think that, if God knows everything, then humans don't truly *choose* their fates at all. Lewis resolves this apparent contradiction by arguing that God exists outside of time, meaning that he experiences humans' past, present, and future in the same instant, whereas humans have free will within time as they experience it.

Lewis goes on to write that, by worshipping Christ, humans can transcend their mortal nature and experience the divine life of Christ himself; put another way, by worshipping Christ, they, too, can become "sons of God." Good Christians unite together in their love for God—and yet they don't sacrifice their individuality in doing so. On the contrary, Lewis argues, the only way to truly be an individual and fulfill one's potential is to worship Jesus Christ. In the act of prayer, a human being assumes the guise of Jesus Christ; with practice and faith, prayer can help human beings *become* divine by leading them toward salvation in Heaven. In Heaven, people lose their desires for earthly things, and thus, the basic components of their so-called "personalities" on Earth. But in place of their old personalities, the saved discover their *true* selves: unique, individual, and yet united in love for God, in much the same way that the different organs of the human body are different from one another, and yet united in the facilitation of life. In short,

Lewis argues, one must sacrifice one's earthly needs and desires in order to be a Christian—but as a reward, one will find Christ, and rejoice in Heaven for eternity.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

C. S. Lewis – It might seem odd to refer to C. S. Lewis, the author and narrator of *Mere Christianity*, as a character in the text. We're given little to no information about Lewis's life or personality—his primary role in the book is to present a series of arguments in favor of Christianity and defend these arguments from some potential objections. And yet Lewis is also a character in the book, in the sense that he uses his own life as a springboard for many of the arguments he presents. As a young man, Lewis was a militant atheist; thus, many of the book's potential objections to Christianity are arguments that Lewis claims to have believed himself years earlier. By presenting himself as a Christian convert, Lewis strengthens the legitimacy of his book's arguments, and perhaps makes his book more appealing for non-believers—Lewis is living proof that it's possible for an intelligent atheist to become a pious Christian.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Jesus Christ – In the Christian tradition, the son of God, savior of mankind, and center of the Christian faith.

Henri Bergson – Early 20th century philosopher and Nobel Laureate in Literature who embraced the concept of a "life-force" in his writing.

George Bernard Shaw – Famed playwright and Nobel Laureate in Literature who embraced the concept of a "life-force" in his writing.

George MacDonald – Scottish author whose Christian-themed essays and fantasy books had a strong influence on C. S. Lewis.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

MORALITY, RELIGION, AND REASON

In Book One of *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis attempts to use reason and logic to prove the existence of God—in the sense of an all-powerful, non-material being—and later to argue for the divinity of Jesus Christ. These two arguments—the so-called "argument from morality" and the "Christian trilemma"—are two of the most famous aspects of the book, and reflect Lewis's overall project to justify Christianity through logic—a project that, by Lewis's own admission, is important, and yet can only go so far toward convincing people to embrace Christianity.

Lewis begins Book One of *Mere Christianity* by arguing that morality is a "real" thing; in other words, that it exists independent of humanity, and is the same to all human beings across time. He offers many arguments for why morality must be universal and not a human construct: for instance, across human history, moral codes have been strikingly similar, at least on a fundamental level (for instance, Confucius, Lao Tzu, and Christ all said that humans should treat other people the way they would want to be treated). Having argued that morality is universal and not a human construct, Lewis further argues that the existence of a universal, unchanging morality implies the existence of a God—an omnipotent, spiritual being. It's improbable that a universal, abstract law of right and wrong would come into existence *accidentally*; so it appears to follow that there must be a being who created this law. This being, Lewis further argues, must not be a material being, since the law of right and wrong is not a material thing. Thus, we arrive at the conclusion that there must be a powerful being who creates the laws of right and wrong and interacts with human beings by exposing them to these laws.

Lewis reaches such a conclusion by employing all the steps of a logical argument: premises, a thesis, evidence to support the thesis, and refutations of potential objections to the thesis. However, it must be noted that Lewis's arguments have been widely criticized, even by people who subscribe to another version of an argument from morality. For instance, some critics have argued that the historical ubiquity of certain moral principles like the "Golden Rule" doesn't necessarily prove that morality is universal; maybe it just proves that human self-interest hasn't changed very much in the last five thousand years.

Lewis then builds off of his argument from morality by arguing—again, with a certain amount of logical support—that Jesus Christ was a divine being who came to Earth to teach humans to achieve salvation. Lewis has used the argument from morality to show that there is an all-powerful, moral being; now, he proposes that Christ was the human embodiment of that all-powerful moral being. To test his own proposition, Lewis studies Christ's teachings, as recorded in the Bible, and points out that Christ (who claimed to be able to forgive people for their sins) must have been 1) God, 2) a liar, or 3) insane. Lewis rejects the theory, popular during his own lifetime, that Christ was a great moral teacher, but not divine. There is an inherent contradiction, he argues, between Christ's humanity and his moral teachings—thus, people must *either* believe that Christ was a man, *or* that he was a great moral teacher, but not both.

Lewis's analysis of the Christian trilemma (i.e., that Christ was either God, lying, or insane) illustrates the strengths and the limitations of using logic to argue for Christian. Notice that Lewis does not use logic to *prove* that Christ must have been divine; instead, he uses logic to disprove the hypothesis that Christ was human and just another great moral teacher. In a similar sense, the argument from morality is not an argument for *Christianity*; only for the existence of some kind of powerful being—to believe in a Christian God requires a further leap of faith. In general, logic and reason are—by Lewis's own admission—necessary but insufficient for Christianity. Logic can set readers on the right path toward Christianity, but it cannot by itself *convince* readers to convert to Christianity. By definition, faith in God is unreasonable—thus, all good Christians must make the deeply personal choice to embrace their religion, independent of logic or reason.

GOOD, EVIL, AND FREE WILL

Book Two of *Mere Christianity* is largely concerned with the Christian definition of God—the almighty being who creates the moral law (as discussed in Book One—see above). As Lewis shows, Christians define God as an all-powerful being of infinite goodness. Right away, such a definition raises an important point—if God is infinitely moral and powerful, how could he allow pain, suffering, and other forms of evil in the world? In order to resolve this problem, Lewis will turn to the concept of free will—in other words, human beings' ability to choose what to do and how to act without being controlled by God, Satan, or anyone else.

Lewis's first task is to show that God can be infinitely good and yet create a universe with evil in it. He argues that God exists outside of time and space, meaning that he created the universe from nothing (as described in the Biblical Book of Genesis). It's important to notice that Lewis makes a distinction between God and the universe. Even if the Christian God himself is infinitely good, his creations need not be infinitely good, or even particularly good at all. (In this sense, Lewis claims, Christianity is markedly different from other religions, such as Hinduism, which claims that God *is* the universe and that apparent evils like pain and disease are actually divinely good.) Lewis, following in the footsteps of the philosopher Plato and the theologian Thomas Aquinas, defines evil as a form of corrupted good; a good impulse that has been twisted or blown out of proportion (for example, alcoholism could be considered a "corruption" of the desire to drink and be merry). In this sense, the Christian God creates a "good" universe, but one in which good has the potential to become evil.

But even if it's possible for an infinitely good God to create a universe with evil in it, Lewis hasn't yet shown *why* God would do so. Lewis's answer is that, in a universe containing both good and evil, human beings must make a free choice between two moral options. Some human beings will choose to be good and worship God; these people will ascend to Heaven after they die. Others will exercise their free will and choose to embrace evil; they will be punished for their sins. If human beings had no free will, there would be nothing noteworthy about being good: humans would be like robots, mindlessly carrying out whatever commands God gave them. Interpreted in this way, free will is a kind of "gambit" (a short-term sacrifice that enables some greater result). By giving humans the ability to choose evil freely, God leaves some of his own creations to damnation. However, in doing so, God also gives good Christians the chance to be honest, virtuous, and—eventually—to become partly divine (see Theme Five). In all, the existence of free will in Christian theology achieves more than holding human beings accountable for their actions; it arguably legitimizes and justifies the existence of good and evil themselves. Good and evil exist as moral choices for the human race—the punishment for making the wrong choice is severe, but by freely worshipping good, Christians can purify themselves and achieve a state of salvation.

CHRISTIANITY AND PRACTICE

In the third and fourth parts of his book, Lewis moves from an analysis of the logical bases for Christianity to a discussion of how a Christian lives—i.e., how to translate God's teachings into one's day-to-day existence. Lewis emphasizes the importance of Christian "practice": rituals, ceremonies, and other religious behaviors (e.g., praying, going to church, giving money to charity, etc.) that must be repeated again and again, sometimes against the Christian's own will. It is not enough, Lewis argues, to merely *believe* in God and Christ; one must "exercise" this belief in the real world through the various forms of practice (an interpretation of Christianity that arguably reflects Lewis's Anglican faith).

Lewis offers many different reasons for the importance of practice in the Christian religion. One of his most intriguing and controversial points is that Christianity is a religion of "the body as well as the mind." At various points in the book, Lewis argues that Christianity is unique among world religions in glorifying the human body and encouraging its followers to respect their own bodies. Lewis even suggests that when good Christians worship Jesus Christ, they "feel" his presence in their bodies, not just their thoughts. While Lewis admits that he doesn't know how, exactly, the human body can experience faith, he cites the religious importance of the body as a reason for such Christian rituals as Holy Communion, the act of ingesting wafer and wine that, according to Christian theology, either literally or symbolically become Jesus Christ's blood and body. Lewis does not argue that all Christians must take Communion. However, he defends the practice of Communion on the grounds that it puts mankind's entire being—body and mind—in touch with God. As a general rule, he argues that all Christians,

regardless of their sect or denomination, must participate in some forms of practice as a way of engaging their bodies with God.

Another reason for the centrality of practice in Christianity is that practice is a vital reminder of the strength of Christian tradition. All Christians, regardless of their piety or passion, go through periods where they question their faith. In such times of crisis, Lewis argues, practice can be an important reminder of such doubters own religious belief. By praying in church, celebrating Christian holidays, etc., a reluctant Christian reminds herself that, while her own belief may be weak, the Christian religion itself remains strong.

The final—and perhaps most important—reason that Christianity requires practice, not just belief, is that practice and repetition are the best ways to *foster* genuine religious belief and passion. Lewis argues that Christianity requires various forms of practice and ritual in order to teach its adherents how to love God and Jesus. It is very difficult to start out loving God; however, humans simulate the love of God in the act of prayer, among other rituals. Gradually, the act of *pretending* to love God encourages genuine love for him. The notion that affected love leads to genuine love is one of the most famous ideas in *Mere Christianity*. Indeed, Lewis argues that when people pretend to like one another, they slowly begin to like one another. Thus, while it may be easy to make fun of arbitrary-seeming Christian practices like prayer, Communion, or Mass, Lewis argues that these practices, far from being arbitrary or absurd, are vital parts of the religion. By exercising one's body and mind in praise of God, a good Christian can be reminded of the strength of the church and develop a sincere love for the almighty.

FAITH, WORKS, AND SALVATION

One of the cornerstones of Christianity is the debate between "faith and works." Traditionally, certain Christian sects and denominations (especially Protestant sects) emphasize the importance of "faith alone"—in other words, these sects maintain that Christians need only believe in the divinity and sacrifice of Jesus Christ in order to go to Heaven. Then there are other branches of Christianity (such as Catholicism) that emphasize the importance of good "works"; in other words, performing good deeds and behaving morally. While the history of Christianity has long reflected an opposition between faith and works, Lewis argues that a true Christian must have faith in Christ *and* do good—and, moreover, that faith and works are both vital components of salvation.

Throughout *Mere Christianity*, Lewis characterizes faith as the key component of salvation—and yet something that can only be experienced through the performance of good works. As Lewis argues in parts three and four of his book, a good Christian must believe in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Christ's sacrifice gives the human race a second chance at salvation; in other words, infinite joy and life in the kingdom of Heaven. But Lewis further argues that faith—the belief in Christ and salvation—is a lifelong *struggle* to continue believing in Christ's sacrifice, and one's own potential for salvation. Works help a good Christian to find the strength to continue believing in Christ and adhering to Christian law—but more importantly, true faith in Christ will necessarily result in good works.

Lewis maintains that works and faith are both important for achieving salvation—but they're important in different ways. Lewis argues that Christians will be judged by the strength of their faith in Christ—*not* by the number or magnitude of their good deeds. Even a very, very good Christian cannot go through life without sinning occasionally—and thus, sooner or later, all good Christians realize that, strictly speaking, they do not "deserve" salvation, no matter how many good deeds they perform. Such a realization can cause some Christians to abandon the religion altogether. But those who remain faithful gradually learn to trust that God will lead them to Heaven, in spite of their flaws—a gesture of trust that Lewis considers to be the true meaning of faith. Ultimately, *Mere Christianity* suggests that only true faith can lead Christians to salvation—and yet "true faith" will also lead one to do as much good as possible in the world. Put another way, good works are an unavoidable "symptom" of the faith that eventually leads Christians into Heaven.

CHRISTIANITY AND THE TWO KINDS OF "LIFE"

In the fourth part of *Mere Christianity*, Lewis studies the process by which a human being spends a lifetime preparing for salvation. In Lewis's view, there are two distinct kinds of life: first, the material, biological life of earthly beings (or *bios*); second, the spiritual, eternal life of Jesus Christ and his followers (or *zoe*). Lewis develops a complex theory of how humans transition from *bios* to *zoe*—in short, a scientific (or, depending on your point of view, pseudo-scientific) model of Christianity. Moreover, he argues that *zoe* is ultimately more fulfilling and satisfying than *bios*—essentially, rebutting Mark Twain's famous observation that "singing hymns and waving palm branches" in Heaven would get boring after a while.

As Lewis sees it, earthly life, or *bios*, is selfish, materialistic, and ultimately self-defeating. By default, humans exist "for themselves"; in other words, they prioritize their own survival and happiness over the survival and happiness of other people. Partly as a result, humans living in a state of *bios* tend to accumulate material possessions: they'd rather pursue money, food, property, etc., than share these things with other people. Furthermore, the pursuit of worldly possessions forms the basis for what we typically call "personality." When we describe

someone's "personality," Lewis argues, we're largely describing which material possessions they prefer (as well as some more abstract matters, such as one's religion, personal ambitions, etc.). But the critical flaw in *bios* is that material pleasure is, by its very nature, transient. As humans go through life, the material things that give them pleasure invariably become less and less satisfying. Thus, the human being who lives an ordinary, strictly material life will gradually become less happy with his or her existence, and feel a deep yearning for longer-lasting sources of joy. In the end, Lewis argues, *bios* points the way toward *zoe*.

In Lewis's view, the Christian religion is a set of instructions for moving from earthly life to a divine, selfless form of existence—*zoe*. By worshipping Christ through prayer and ritual, human beings move from *bios* to *zoe* in two senses: first, they begin to feel a selfless love for Christ, God, and the Holy Trinity; second, and even more radically, they gradually *become* divine; in other words, their entire spiritual and material nature changes, so that when they die, their souls rise to Heaven.

As Lewis freely acknowledges, the fact that he hasn't yet experienced the afterlife weakens his theory of *bios* and *zoe*; he doesn't know exactly what *zoe* is like. However, based on the glimpses of *zoe* that he's experienced in the act of prayer, he argues that *zoe* is the most satisfying, fulfilling form of life that humans are capable of: *zoe* provides Christians with a deep, joyful connection to God and to their fellow Christians; a connection whose pleasures never fade. Lewis further claims that it is *only* possible to be one's true "self" in Heaven, independent of material things or material desires. To clarify the point, he compares the heavenly state of *zoe* to the "life" of the different organs in the human body: each organ "unselfishly" works for the common good of the body, and yet the various organs are entirely different from one another. In much the same way, saved souls in Heaven are united in their common love for God, and yet are utterly different from one another. In all, Lewis uses his theological study of *bios* and *zoe* to reinforce the importance of prayer and worship, and to refute one of atheists' most nagging criticisms of Christianity—"wouldn't Heaven get boring after a while?"

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE DIE

In order to explain the concept of the Holy Trinity, Lewis uses the symbol of a die (the six-sided object used for gambling or games of chance). Just as the die "contains" six squares, and yet is also one three-dimensional object, so, too, does God "contain" the Son and the Holy Spirit while remaining one almighty being. Thus, the die symbolizes the complexities of the Holy Trinity and of God in general.

THE PIANO

At many points in the first part of the book, Lewis uses the symbol of a piano to describe the relationship between humanity and moral law. He argues that the relationship between human instinct and moral law is like the relationship between notes on a piano and sheet music—no instinct is "right" or "wrong" one hundred percent of the time, just as no note on a piano is always right or wrong, either. Notes, like instincts, are guided and controlled by the overarching authority of moral law (sheet music). In all, the piano symbolizes the different levels of human morality: our specific behaviors, our instincts to obey or disobey moral law, and the moral law itself.

LIGHT

Like many Christian writers, Lewis associates the state of Christianity with light. To be a good, pious Christian, is to "see the world for the first time," illuminated by the light of faith and salvation. Thus, light represents the inner peace, joy, and profound wisdom that the worship of Jesus Christ affords the human race.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the HarperOne edition of *Mere Christianity* published in 2015.

Book 1, Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ It looks, in fact, very much as if both parties had in mind some kind of Law or Rule of fair play or decent behavior or morality or whatever you like to call it, about which they really agreed [...] If they had not, they might, of course, fight like animals, but they could not quarrel in the human sense of the word. Quarrelling means trying to show that the other man is in the wrong. And there would be no sense in trying to do that unless you and he had some sort of agreement as to what Right and Wrong are.

Related Characters: C. S. Lewis (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 4

Explanation and Analysis

In the first part of his book, Lewis makes a counterintuitive argument: the fact that so many people argue and fight over the "right thing to do" actually proves that there must *be* a right thing to do; in other words, there must be some objective, universal standard for how human beings should treat one another. Any two beings—human or animal—can argue and fight with one another; what distinguishes humans from animals is that human beings can cite the existence of moral law and attempt to obey it (or shame others for not obeying it). Thus, Lewis argues, all human beings are innately aware of the moral law of the universe (i.e., God's laws), and are trying to approximate this law in their own lives.

It's useful to set Lewis's argument (the "argument from morality," one of the traditional proofs of the existence of God) in the context of the 1940s. At the time when Lewis was writing *Mere Christianity*, Europe was engaged in World War II—a brutal, bloody conflict that challenged the faith of millions of Christians. In response to the conflict, Lewis offers the argument from morality—implicitly encouraging his contemporaries to continue believing in the universality of moral law instead of rejecting it in the face of World War II. It's also worth mentioning that Lewis was reacting to earlier philosophers such as Nietzsche, who had argued that morality was a human invention. Lewis strongly reiterates the universality of the moral code—and with it, the existence of a good, moral God. Many thinkers have criticized Lewis's claims on the grounds that arguing, contrary to Lewis's claim, does not presuppose the existence of an objective law. Nevertheless, the argument from morality continues to challenge and inspire many thinkers and theologians.

Book 1, Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ Or put it the other way round. If there was a controlling power outside the universe, it could not show itself to us as one of the facts inside the universe—no more than the architect of a house could actually be a wall or staircase or fireplace in that house. The only way in which we could expect it to show itself would be inside ourselves as an influence or a command trying to get us to behave in a certain way. And that is just what we do find inside ourselves.

Related Characters: C. S. Lewis (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 24

Explanation and Analysis

In Book One of *Mere Christianity*, C. S. Lewis makes the controversial argument that moral law is a real thing—a universal, timeless set of guidelines for how human beings are meant to behave. But toward the end of Book One, Lewis goes even further and makes the argument that the existence of a universal moral law implies the existence of a powerful being who created the moral law. As Lewis argues, moral law is an abstract concept—therefore, it seems likely that its creator is a non-material being. Or, "put the other way round," a non-material being, like God, can only reveal itself to humanity through nonmaterial messages, such as a moral law.

The passage is noteworthy for what it suggests about material science. If God tried to reveal his majesty to all of humanity through any material means (for example, a miracle like a burning bush), then science would come up with a scientific explanation for the miracle, diluting its power to make people believe in religion. Thus, the only appropriate way for God to reveal himself to all of humanity is to communicate through morality—God "speaks" to all human beings in the form of laws of Right and Wrong. Notice that the "God" we're talking about need not be a Christian God—for the time being, Lewis's goal is just prove that there *is* an almighty, nonmaterial being, Christian or otherwise.

Book 1, Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ Of course, I quite agree that the Christian religion is, in the long run, a thing of unspeakable comfort. But it does not begin in comfort; it begins in the dismay I have been describing, and it is no use at all trying to go on to that comfort without first going through that dismay.

Related Characters: C. S. Lewis (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 32

Explanation and Analysis

As Lewis comes to end of the first part of his book, he's reached some important conclusions about God. He's shown that God is an all-powerful, deeply moral being: he creates a code of Right and Wrong that all human beings instinctively follow (or feel guilty about breaking). And yet Lewis ends Book One explaining that it is impossible to become a Christian simply in order to reap God's rewards. It's surprising that Lewis makes this point, since Christianity often seems to advertise Heaven and salvation as rewards for belief in God and Christ (as it says in the New

Testament, whoever believes in Jesus Christ will live forever—a clear example of the "quid pro quo" of the Christian religion).

Lewis's point is that it wouldn't be entirely ethical (or even sincere) to believe in Christianity simply to get the eternal reward of Heaven. Implicitly, Lewis's argument responds to the famous thought experiment, Pascal's Wager—the argument that an atheist "might as well" believe in God, on the off-chance that Heaven turns out to be a real place. Lewis would disagree with Pascal on the grounds that no true Christian can worship God primarily for the sake of a reward. True Christians choose to worship God as a way of escaping their own sinful nature. In the third part of *Mere Christianity*, Lewis will explore the methods by which a good Christian can escape sin through ritual, prayer, and belief.

Book 2, Chapter 1 Quotes

❝ For Christianity is a fighting religion. It thinks God made the world—that space and time, heat and cold, and all the colors and tastes, and all the animals and vegetables, are things that God 'made up out of His head' as a man makes up a story. But it also thinks that a great many things have gone wrong with the world that God made and that God insists, and insists very loudly, on our putting them right again.

Related Characters: C. S. Lewis (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 37-38

Explanation and Analysis

In Book Two of *Mere Christianity*, Lewis studies the Christian view of God, and contrasts the Christian religion with Hinduism, Judaism, and Islam, among other religions. One of Lewis's most important points is that Christianity believes that evil is a real thing, and that God wants us to fight it with the "weapons" of morality. Lewis acknowledges that not all religions see the world in Christianity's terms. Hinduism, he claims, is a pantheistic religion, according to which everything in the universe is divine, and therefore beyond the petty categories of "good" and "evil." The implication would seem to be that a Hindu person cannot conceive of fighting evil—since even evil, in the Hindu religion, has some redeeming good behind it.

There is much to praise in this passage, and also plenty to criticize. Notice that Lewis offers no *proof* that Christianity's philosophy of good and evil is superior to that of Hinduism—Lewis simply states that Christianity differs from pantheism in the way it schematizes these concepts. Even though *Mere Christianity* is a defense of Christianity, Lewis has a lot of respect for non-Christian religions, and one can sense his respect here. However, Lewis's description of other religions seems overly narrow and even uninformed (he calls Muslims "Mohammedans," an obsolete term, based on the false view that Muslims worship Mohammed in the same sense that Christians worship Christ). Hinduism, one could certainly argue, is a "fighting religion," too—it encourages its followers to do good in the world and help other people.

❝ Atheism turns out to be too simple. If the whole universe has no meaning, we should never have found out that it has no meaning: just as, if there were no light in the universe and therefore no creatures with eyes, we should never know it was dark. *Dark* would be a word without meaning.

Related Characters: C. S. Lewis (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 39

Explanation and Analysis

In *Mere Christianity*, Lewis seeks to defend the Christian religion from its atheist detractors. Here, he attacks atheism on the grounds that it offers an overly simple, facile view of the universe. Atheists, Lewis suggests, are eager to criticize Christianity for being contradictory, overly complicated, and illogical. In place of religion, atheism offers up a deceptively simple view of the world—there is no God, everything is a construct, nothing has meaning, etc. Lewis's point is that such a worldview is more complicated—and contradictory—than it seems to be. In order to argue that the world is meaningless, he says, one would have to have some notion of what "meaning" is; thus, the atheist's attacks against Christianity only have the effect of reinforcing Christian doctrine.

A further implication of this passage is that doubt strengthens faith. It is only possible to question Christianity, to feel a nagging sense of dissatisfaction with the faith, *because* God creates human beings to crave salvation and enlightenment. Implicitly, Lewis encourages doubters and nonbelievers to interrogate their own feelings further; Lewis is confident that if they do so, they will "come around"

to the Christian point of view. (Lewis himself was an atheist for many years, until—by his own account—he saw reason and converted to Anglicanism.)

Book 2, Chapter 2 Quotes

❝ Reality, in fact, is usually something you could not have guessed. That is one of the reasons I believe Christianity. It is a religion you could not have guessed. If it offered us just the kind of universe we had always expected, I should feel we were making it up.

Related Characters: C. S. Lewis (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 41-42

Explanation and Analysis

This is one of the most famous passages from *Mere Christianity*; in it, Lewis offers a deceptively simple defense of the complexity of Christianity. During his time as a Christian, Lewis claims, he has often been challenged by Christian doctrine. There are many times when God and the Bible instruct him to do something that seems vaguely wrong or irrational. And yet, as Lewis explains here, it's *good* that Christian doctrine challenges his moral instincts from time to time. If a religion simply confirmed one's instincts, it wouldn't be a very strong religion—in fact, it would likely be a human invention. The world is a complicated place, and therefore, doing the right thing is a complicated undertaking. Thus, it's only fair that religion and morality should be complicated, too.

The implicit message of the passage is that, sooner or later, Christianity will impel a good Christian to do something that *feels* wrong. Grappling with one's instincts—and yet having the faith in God to ignore these instincts and obey the Christian doctrine—is an important rite of passage for any mature believer. Lewis will continue to talk about the importance of doubt and uncertainty in Book Three of *Mere Christianity*.

❝ Badness cannot succeed even in being bad in the same way in which goodness is good. Goodness is, so to speak, itself: badness is only spoiled goodness. And there must be something good first before it can be spoiled.

Related Characters: C. S. Lewis (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 44

Explanation and Analysis

In this passage, Lewis argues that badness and goodness are not equal opposites, as they're sometimes said to be. Lewis is trying to refute the so-called Dualistic view of the universe; the idea that an all-powerful God is fighting against an all-powerful Devil for control of life. Lewis's rebuttal to the Dualistic worldview is that Bad is inherently different from and inferior to Good; unlike Goodness, Badness by definition cannot exist "for its own sake"—put another way, people either do bad things with the full awareness that they're being bad (for example, a shoplifter who feels guilty later on) or because they're trying to achieve good things (for example, a criminal who robs a bank because he's deluded himself into thinking that he deserves the money, or who gets pleasure—a good thing—from the robbery or money). In Lewis's view, badness can never exist on its own terms; badness is just a kind of "spoiled goodness."

Lewis's ideas might seem unusual or contradictory, because we're so used to thinking about evil people as the people who are "bad for the sake of being bad." Lewis insists that it's impossible to be bad for the sake of badness, though; goodness must be corrupted or spoiled to produce evil. To illustrate his ideas metaphorically, Lewis points to the story of Lucifer—the "fallen angel" who becomes the Devil. In the same way that the Devil was once a good being before he became corrupted, all bad behavior began with the recognition of good or a good instinct of some kind.

Book 2, Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse.

Related Characters: C. S. Lewis (speaker), Jesus Christ

Related Themes:

Page Number: 52

Explanation and Analysis

This is another one of the most famous passages in *Mere*

Christianity; to understand it, one has to keep in mind that, during the time when Lewis was writing his book, it had become somewhat trendy to praise the 'historical Jesus Christ" in theological and academic circles. According to such a point of view, it's possible to respect and admire Jesus Christ as a moral teacher without necessarily believing in the resurrection, or any of the miracles he is said to have achieved. (Notable advocates of the "historical Christ" argument include Thomas Jefferson, who published a version of the Bible with all descriptions of Christ's divinity omitted!)

Lewis's response to the "historical Christ" movement is simple: he argues that we must either believe that Christ was divine and a great moral teacher, or that he was mortal and a lunatic or liar—it's impossible to believe that he was a mortal and a great moral teacher. If Christ were "just a man," then he must have been insane or lying—who else would claim to be divine, to forgive people for their sins, etc.? In all, the passage reinforces Lewis's dissatisfaction with modern trends in theology, reminds us that one cannot be a true Christian without believing in the divinity of Jesus Christ, and argues that one *must* reckon with Jesus in some manner—and by his very nature he must either be condemned or believed.

Book 2, Chapter 4 Quotes

❝ What [science textbooks] do when they want to explain the atom, or something of that sort, is to give you a description out of which you can make a mental picture. But then they warn you that this picture is not what the scientists actually believe. What the scientists believe is a mathematical formula. The pictures are there only to help you understand the formula. They are not really true in the way the formula is; they do not give you the real thing but only something more or less like it. They are only meant to help, and if they do not help you can drop them. The thing itself cannot be pictured, it can only be expressed mathematically. We are in the same boat here.

Related Characters: C. S. Lewis (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 55

Explanation and Analysis

Lewis has been talking about the divinity of Jesus Christ, and the notion that Christ died for mankind's sins. Lewis argues that it's not strictly necessary for Christians to understand how, exactly, Christ's sacrifice redeemed mankind's sins—the important point is that human beings get a second chance; we can go to Heaven if we worship Christ. Lewis offers his own theory of how Jesus Christ died for mankind's sins, but qualifies it by saying that he's just guessing. Much as physics textbooks offer convenient approximations of the shape of the atom in order to educate budding scientists, religion offers convenient metaphors and stories to convey complex theological concepts.

In effect, Lewis is saying that it's possible to be a good Christian without understanding every detail of the faith—grasping the essential points is enough. Moreover, the passage is important because it allows Lewis to qualify the arguments he will make throughout the book. Lewis suggests that his arguments aren't always the exact truth; they're designed to give his readers a general understanding of the way Christianity works. Put differently, the passage suggests that the "spirit" of Lewis's arguments and illustrations are more consequential than the "letter" of these arguments and illustrations; even if Lewis's points are flawed from time to time, his book is still worth reading.

Book 2, Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ There are three things that spread the Christ-life to us: baptism, belief, and that mysterious action which different Christians call by different names—Holy Communion, the Mass, the Lord's Supper. At least, those are the three ordinary methods [...] I am not saying anything about which of these three things is the most essential. My Methodist friend would like me to say more about belief and less (in proportion) about the other two. But I am not going into that. Anyone who professes to teach you Christian doctrine will, in fact, tell you to use all three, and that is enough for our present purpose.

Related Characters: C. S. Lewis (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 61

Explanation and Analysis

Lewis claims that a Christian needs to believe in God, be baptized, and engage in some kind of concrete ritual, such as Communion or Mass, in order to truly be considered a Christian. His definition of a "true Christian" is both rigorous and loose: he insists that all Christians must be baptized (a rigorous interpretation of Christianity that many Christian sects would disagree with), and yet he also suggests that different religious sects can take different approaches to worshipping God, as long as they're clear on the three main points he's outlined in the passage.

In some ways, the passage is a good example of Lewis's liberal, accommodating interpretation of Christianity. Unlike many Christian thinkers, Lewis believes that many different Christian sects worship Christ in meaningful ways (in other words, just because Lewis is an Anglican doesn't mean he wants everyone else to be an Anglican). But at the same time, the passage is a good example of Lewis's own specific interpretation of Christianity, which contradicts that of many other theologians. Many Christian thinkers have argued that faith in Jesus Christ ("faith alone") is sufficient for salvation; Lewis seemingly disagrees with such a point of view, arguing that most Christians must engage in Christian *practice*, not just believe in Christian ideas.

Book 3, Chapter 1 Quotes

Morality, then, seems to be concerned with three things. Firstly, with fair play and harmony between individuals. Secondly, with what might be called tidying up or harmonizing the things inside each individual. Thirdly, with the general purpose of human life as a whole: what man was made for: what course the whole fleet ought to be on: what tune the conductor of the band wants it to play.

Related Characters: C. S. Lewis (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 72

Explanation and Analysis

Lewis offers a three-part definition of morality: to be "good," people must 1) cooperate and get along with one another; 2) be good and moral as individuals; and 3) remember the goal of life and for humanity in general—to achieve salvation in Heaven.

One interesting implication of the passage, which Lewis will explore in the rest of Book Three, is that it's possible to abide by only one or two of the three elements of morality. For example, Lewis suggests that modern politicians and political scientists have largely given up on the second and third aspects of morality and focused their efforts on helping people get along with one another—a necessary but insufficient part of morality. Similarly, Lewis will show that it's possible to focus too exclusively on parts one and two of morality; in other words, it's possible to be a good person and get along with other people, and yet lack faith in the possibility of divine salvation.

The passage is important because it provides the framework for the remainder of Book Three of *Mere Christianity*. Lewis will use his three-part division of morality to talk about many different kinds of sin and immoral behavior.

Book 3, Chapter 3 Quotes

The application of Christian principles, say, to trade unionism or education,

must come from Christian trade unionists and Christian schoolmasters: just as Christian literature comes from Christian novelists and dramatists—not from the bench of bishops getting together and trying to write plays and novels in their spare time.

Related Characters: C. S. Lewis (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 83-84

Explanation and Analysis

Historically, there has been a lot of controversy over the proper way for Christians to run a society. At various times, Christian thinkers have argued for theocracies—in other words, societies in which holy leaders are responsible for deciding all matters of state—and at other times, theologians have argued that church and state should be separated very strictly. In this passage, Lewis offers an interesting compromise between these two points of view. He rejects the notion that a society's religious leaders (bishops, priests, etc.) should be that society's political leaders. However, Lewis does *not* advocate for the total separation of church and state. Instead, he argues that a society's political leaders should be godly, pious people—but also well-trained in matters of state. Lewis makes an analogy—just as we should leave writing to the writers and teaching to the teachers, we should leave politics to the politicians, even if we would still expect them to be good, Christian people.

Book 3, Chapter 4 Quotes

Most of the man's psychological makeup is probably due to his body: when his body dies all that will fall off him, and the real central man, the thing that chose, that made the best or the worst out of this material, will stand naked. All sorts of nice things which we thought our own, but which were really due to a good digestion, will fall off some of us: all sorts of nasty things which were due to complexes or bad health will fall off others. We shall then, for the first time, see every one as he really was.

Related Characters: C. S. Lewis (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 91-92

Explanation and Analysis

In this interesting chapter, Lewis addresses the practice of psychoanalysis, which was in vogue in England at the time when Lewis was writing *Mere Christianity*. First pioneered by the Viennese psychologist Sigmund Freud, psychoanalysis presupposes that all human beings have an unconscious mind with its own independent thoughts, feelings, and desires. Moreover, Freud argued that human beings' decisions reflect their conscious decision-making process, but also their unconscious, irrational decisions.

It's understandable that Lewis would devote an entire chapter of his book to psychoanalysis (even though, in the 21st century, the scientific basis of psychoanalysis has been largely debunked), since Freud's ideas could be interpreted to clash with the Christian doctrine of free will; if one's decisions are subject to irrational, unconscious influences, then humans arguably can't be held fully accountable for their own decisions. Lewis's response is that a human being's psychological makeup isn't truly a part of that human being's "self." For Lewis, the existence of an unconscious mind doesn't interfere with the concept of free will—unconscious mind or not, a human being still has the power to choose between good and evil. Therefore, the existence of an unconscious mind doesn't preclude humans from being held morally accountable for their actions and being rewarded in Heaven or punished in Hell.

Book 3, Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ Now suppose you come to a country where you could fill a theatre by simply bringing a covered plate on to the stage and then slowly lifting the cover so as to let every one see, just before the lights went out, that it contained a mutton chop or a bit of bacon, would you not think that in that country something had gone wrong with the appetite for food? And would not anyone who had grown up in a different world think there was something equally queer about the state of the sex instinct among us?

Related Characters: C. S. Lewis (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 96

Explanation and Analysis

In this controversial chapter, Lewis vigorously defends the Christian doctrine of chastity—in other words, refraining from sex before marriage (and, a little less controversially, engaging in nothing but monogamous intercourse afterwards). Chapter 5 is one of the most dated in *Mere Christianity*, not only because of the arguments Lewis presents, but because of the prim, evasive tone that Lewis adopts while making them; one has the uncomfortable sense that even writing about sex makes Lewis feel dirty.

Lewis offers the following analogy as "proof" that something is wrong with modernity's conception of sexuality: imagine a hypothetical country in which people fetishized food. If there were a "strip-tease" in which someone slowly raised up a dish with a piece of bacon on it, it would be reasonable to say that there was something deeply wrong with that society. By the same logic, Lewis concludes, there must be something deeply wrong with Western society, in which the strip-teases involve actual human bodies instead of pieces of bacon. (Lewis seems not to consider the possibility that coyness, fetishization, and theatricality could all be *aspects* of the sexual instinct, not perverse corruptions of it.)

It's important to keep in mind that Lewis does *not* argue that sexuality is evil; his point is that society celebrates sexuality to excess. From a contemporary perspective, it's a little amusing to read Lewis's critiques of 1940s British society—which was practically Victorian by comparison with 21st century America. Nevertheless, even if Lewis is too quick in his condemnations of the "celebration of sexuality," perhaps he's right to suggest that sex and sexuality should be enjoyed in reasonable moderation.

Book 3, Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ Let the thrill go—let it die away—go on through that period of death into the quieter interest and happiness that follow—and you will find you are living in a world of new thrills all the time. [...] It is much better fun to learn to swim than to go on endlessly (and hopelessly) trying to get back the feeling you had when you first went paddling as a small boy.

Related Characters: C. S. Lewis (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 111

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Lewis discusses the Christian practice of marriage, and argues that marriage is one of the most moral

acts a human being can engage in. In this passage, Lewis defends marriage from one of its most persistent criticisms: that it's impossible to stay "in love" with one's partner for a lifetime. Lewis's response to this criticism is to agree with it—of course it's impossible to retain the same passion for one's lover for decades. However, this doesn't mean that marriage is flawed. Rather, Lewis argues, the beauty of marriage is that unites together young, passionate lovers, and slowly replaces their passion with a different *kind* of love—a love based on respect, friendship, and loyalty as much as lust or passion. Lewis compares the difference between love and being in love to the difference between swimming as an adult and learning to swim as a child. One could argue that swimming is more fun when you're a child than it is when you're an adult—but perhaps adults experience a sense of calmness and peacefulness while swimming that a child could never feel, and they can also swim farther and faster. By the same token, a couple that's been married for fifty years might not feel the same passion that they felt when they were getting married—but that certainly doesn't mean that their marriage is a failure, or that they don't continue to love one another.

Book 3, Chapter 7 Quotes

❝ Christianity does not want us to reduce by one atom the hatred we feel for cruelty and treachery. We ought to hate them. Not one word of what we have said about them needs to be unsaid. But it does want us to hate them in the same way in which we hate things in ourselves: being sorry that the man should have done such things, and hoping, if it is anyway possible, that somehow, sometime, somewhere he can be cured and made human again.

Related Characters: C. S. Lewis (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 117

Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter 7, Lewis confronts the concept of forgiveness—traditionally, one of the most important aspects of Christianity, but also one of the most challenging. Throughout history, some Christians have interpreted the doctrine of forgiveness to mean that one should never feel hatred of any kind for other people; others have interpreted it to mean that pacifism is the only moral option for a pious Christian. Lewis offers a slightly different theory of forgiveness: he says that good Christians should, in fact, hate sins, but refrain from hating the *people* who sin. In practice, it can be very difficult to distinguish one's feelings for a sin from one's feelings for a sinner. However, Lewis encourages Christians to think of sinners in the same way that they think of themselves. In other words, Christians should hope and pray that sinners will be "made human again."

Lewis admits that it's very difficult for even the best Christians to practice forgiveness as Christ wanted them to practice it. However, they can begin to practice forgiveness by contemplating their own sinful natures. Once Christians realizes that they are sinners, in spite of their piety, they'll have an easier time forgiving sins in other people and praying for their salvation.

Book 3, Chapter 8 Quotes

❝ That raises a terrible question. How is it that people who are quite obviously eaten up with Pride can say they believe in God and appear to themselves very religious? I am afraid it means they are worshipping an imaginary God. They theoretically admit themselves to be nothing in the Presence of this phantom God, but are really all the time imagining how He approves of them and thinks them far better than ordinary people.

Related Characters: C. S. Lewis (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 124

Explanation and Analysis

In Chapter 8, Lewis tackles the sin of pride—arguably the most dangerous and seductive sin of all. Lewis defines pride as the self "raising itself up." A prideful person believes herself to be superior to others, perhaps even God. The great danger of pride is that it can "infect" even the most pious Christians. Indeed, it could be argued that the better Christian you are, the more likely you are to feel pride with your own piety.

Lewis is harsh in his condemnation of pride, recognizing that pride is a horrible sin. There are too many so-called Christians who profess to worship God, but in fact worship an imagined God who seems to approve of them and elevate them above others. Christians who think that their faith makes them better than everyone else aren't really Christians at all.

Book 3, Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ Do not waste time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets. When you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him.

Related Characters: C. S. Lewis (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 131

Explanation and Analysis

This is another famous passage from *Mere Christianity*; in it, Lewis offers up the controversial theory that by pretending to love other people, Christians can gradually teach themselves to love other people. With this idea, Lewis is arguably ahead of his time. The psychology of "positive thinking" and "positive reinforcement" hadn't yet come into vogue when Lewis was writing *Mere Christianity*, but its premises are essentially the same as the argument Lewis makes in this chapter: if we imagine ourselves doing things, we'll be able to do them in real life.

The passage also reiterates the importance of ritual and practice in the Christian faith. While some Christian thinkers have argued that "faith alone" will redeem mankind, Lewis offers a much different assessment of the religion; he claims that good Christians must engage in ritual, prayer, etc. One reason why Christian practice is so important is that it helps to make us better Christians—for instance, by affecting a love for God in prayer, we come to love God sincerely.

Book 3, Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ Crowns are mentioned to suggest the fact that those who are united with God in eternity share His splendor and power and joy. Gold is mentioned to suggest the timelessness of Heaven (gold does not rust) and the preciousness of it. People who take these symbols literally might as well think that when Christ told us to be like doves, He meant that we were to lay eggs.

Related Characters: C. S. Lewis (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 139

Explanation and Analysis

At the end of Chapter 10, Lewis offers a brief discussion of the traditional tropes of Heaven—clouds, harps, crowns, etc. As in Book Two (see quote above), Lewis argues that the Biblical imagery of Heaven isn't meant to be taken literally. For example, the "crowns" that souls are said to wear in the afterlife aren't really crowns at all; they represent the majesty and splendor with which virtuous souls are rewarded in Heaven.

The passage is notable because it reiterates one of Lewis's key points: Christianity isn't always meant to be taken literally, and therefore there is some inevitable ambiguity in human understanding of religious doctrine. But even if we don't know exactly what Christianity denotes (for example, what, precisely, awaits us in Heaven), it's possible for us to be good Christians. The passage is also notable because it reiterates Lewis's attack on atheism—that it's too simplistic. It's all-too easy for a smug atheist to ask, "Who wants to spend eternity sitting on a cloud, playing a harp?" Lewis's point here appears to be that atheists' attacks on the Christian faith are often as simple-minded as they believe Christianity itself to be.

Book 3, Chapter 12 Quotes

❝ What matters is the nature of the change in itself, not how we feel while it is happening. It is the change from being confident about our own efforts to the state in which we despair of doing anything for ourselves and leave it to God.

Related Characters: C. S. Lewis (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 146

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Lewis makes one of his subtlest points. He is discussing the true meaning of the word "faith," and argues that, sooner or later, any good Christian will reach a point of doubt or despair. A Christian will despair because they realize that no matter how loyally they obey God's laws, they cannot help but behave sinfully—humans are by their very nature sinful creatures, meaning that, technically speaking, nobody "deserves" to go to Heaven. Many people who reach this point of despair abandon their faith, certain that nothing they do will lead them to salvation. Some Christians, however, will continue to have faith in God's salvation—in a word, they will find the courage to believe that God will bring them to Heaven, in spite of their sinful natures.

In all, Lewis suggests that faith is an act of supreme humility—the recognition that one's own abilities are always insufficient for achieving salvation. It could be argued that Lewis's claim that a good Christian should "leave it to God," means that good Christians don't have to *try* to achieve salvation—they can simply put their feet up and wait for God to save them. However, Lewis *isn't* saying that salvation doesn't take any work. In the end, good Christians must leave it to God—but in the time leading up to this act of total submission, they must work hard to obey the Christian law.

❝ The Bible really seems to clinch the matter when it puts the two things together into one amazing sentence. The first half is, 'Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling,—which looks as if everything depended on us and our good actions: but the second half goes on, 'For it is God who worketh in you'—which looks as if God did everything and we nothing.

Related Characters: C. S. Lewis (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 148

Explanation and Analysis

In this interesting passage, Lewis offers his own interpretation of a famously ambiguous Bible verse—"Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who worketh in you"—and in the process, he attempts to bridge the gap between the two main branches of Christianity, Catholicism (which traditionally emphasizes the importance of good works and moral actions) and Protestantism (which traditionally emphasizes the importance of faith and belief in Christ). As Lewis sees it, salvation is largely out of human hands—it is almighty God who decides whether or not humans will be saved. And yet, humans must endeavor to *achieve* their own salvation by working hard to obey the moral law. Although humans are ultimately judged by their faith in God, they're unlikely to have any genuine faith in God unless they exercise this faith through good deeds.

As Lewis acknowledges in this chapter, both Catholicism and Protestantism have been caricatured for the way they present salvation. Catholicism, with its emphasis on good works, has been attacked as a corrupt religion in which rich people can essentially buy their way into Heaven. Similarly, it's been suggested that, if Protestantism (with its emphasis on "faith alone") were true, anyone could go to Heaven, provided that they claimed to believe in God just before dying. Lewis argues that neither criticism is strictly fair—faith *and* good works are important for salvation; in a sense, they're two sides of the same coin, and one is impossible without the other. Bridging the divide between Protestantism and Catholicism is an important part of Lewis's overall project in *Mere Christianity*, and in this passage, he arguably takes a big step toward doing so.

Book 4, Chapter 3 Quotes

❝ You never supposed that your actions at this moment were any less free because God knows what you are doing. Well, He knows your tomorrow's actions in just the same way because He is already in tomorrow and can simply watch you. In a sense, He does not know your action till you have done it, but then the moment at which you have done it is already 'Now' for Him.

Related Characters: C. S. Lewis (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 170

Explanation and Analysis

In this short chapter, Lewis tries to address one of the most common and nagging criticisms of Christian doctrine—the apparent contradiction between free will and an all-knowing God. The notion that human beings can choose freely whether to embrace good or evil is one of the most basic Christian beliefs. But how, some theologians have wondered, can we say that humans' choices are "free" if God knows everything? For example, how could it be said that Adam and Eve" "chose" to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, given that God knew what they were going to do? On some level, it might seem, their choice was forced or pre-determined.

To respond to these apparent contradictions, Lewis cites the philosophy of the late classical thinker Boethius, whose book *The Consolation of Philosophy* is often taken to be one of the first great works of Christian philosophy. Boethius posited that God exists outside time and space, meaning that he can perceive humanity's past, present, and future at the same time. Thus, there is never a moment when God knows "in advance" what choices humans are going to make; that moment is always "now" from his perspective. In short, Lewis suggests, there's no real contradiction between God's omniscience and humans' freedom—any apparent contradiction arises from humans' inability to conceive of God as a being outside of time.

Many notable thinkers have attacked Boethius's theory of omniscience, and Lewis doesn't offer a robust defense against these attacks here. His tone is light and hypothetical—he never claims that his theory of free will is the truth; he just suggests that it might be a convenient way to think about free will for people who are having trouble understanding Christianity.

Book 4, Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ And the present state of things is this. The two kinds of life are now not only different (they would always have been that) but actually opposed. The natural life in each of us is something self-centered, something that wants to be petted and admired, to take advantage of other lives, to exploit the whole universe. And especially it wants to be left to itself.

Related Characters: C. S. Lewis (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 178

Explanation and Analysis

In the final part of *Mere Christianity*, Lewis offers an intriguing theory for how human beings move from Earth to Heaven. He posits that there are two distinct kinds of life—one which is material and self-centered (*bios*), and one which is spiritual, infinite, and heavenly (*zoe*). As Lewis sees it, good Christians spends their lives learning how to transition from the first form of life to the second. The problem with doing so is that *bios* is, by its very nature, difficult to change. By default, human beings live selfish, materialistic lives—they don't think about other people or try to help those in need. The only way for humans to overcome their own fundamental selfishness is to lose themselves in love for Jesus Christ.

Lewis's theory of the two kinds of life is necessarily weakened by the fact that it's easier for him to speculate about *bios* than *zoe*—he has lots of experience with earthly, selfish life, and much less with spiritual life. So perhaps it's inevitable that Lewis's observations about *bios* are more insightful and specific than his observations about *zoe*. Whether or not one believes in Christianity, one can agree with Lewis's diagnosis of human existence—by default, humans want to survive and protect themselves.

Book 4, Chapter 10 Quotes

❝ Do not misunderstand me. Of course God regards a nasty nature as a bad and deplorable thing. And, of course, He regards a nice nature as a good thing—good like bread, or sunshine, or water. But these are the good things which He gives and we receive.

Related Characters: C. S. Lewis (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 212

Explanation and Analysis

In this chapter, Lewis confronts another one of the persistent criticisms of Christianity—if Christianity is the best religion (or the best way of life in general), why are so many Christians nasty or mean? Why doesn't their faith make them more pleasant to be around?

In response, Lewis makes a few key points. He argues that Christianity doesn't simply make people *likeable*; it purifies their souls—a process which might take a whole lifetime. Furthermore, Lewis takes issue with the question itself—he argues that a "nice nature," while important, isn't the be-all, end-all of human existence. It is possible to be "nice" and have a sinful soul at the same time; indeed, there are plenty of nice atheists who arrogantly assume that they are responsible for their own niceness (when, Lewis would say, their nice nature is actually a gift from God) and therefore veer off in the direction of sin. Thus, Lewis concludes that Christianity doesn't necessarily make people *nice*; it actually goes much further by saving their souls from damnation—a process from which anyone, nice or nasty, can benefit.

Book 4, Chapter 11 Quotes

❝ Imagine a lot of people who have always lived in the dark. You come and try to describe to them what light is like. You might tell them that if they come into the light that same light would fall on them all and they would all reflect it and thus become what we call visible. Is it not quite possible that they would imagine that, since they were all receiving the same light, and all reacting to it in the same way (i.e. all reflecting it), they would all look alike? Whereas you and I know that the light will in fact bring out, or show up, how different they are.

Related Characters: C. S. Lewis (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 224

Explanation and Analysis

In the final chapters of his book, Lewis discusses two distinct forms of life: the earthly life into which all humans are born, and the spiritual life that humans can attain through worship of Jesus Christ. Here, Lewis defends spiritual life from the criticism that it's de-individualizing. In other words, Lewis wants to make it clear that humans will be "themselves" in the afterlife; they won't just be "sheep" or minions of God. According to his analogy, salvation is like light—it shines on everyone equally, and yet it brings out their fundamental differences, rather than making everyone the same.

Lewis acknowledges that his analogy is necessarily imprecise—he hasn't yet been to Heaven, and therefore can't say exactly what it's like. However, he insists that, because God loves human beings, he will respect their uniqueness and personality (after all, he created them with such uniqueness). Elsewhere, Lewis makes another analogy: the people of Heaven will be like the different organs of a human body—each organ is unique, and yet all organs are united in support for the body.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

BOOK 1, CHAPTER 1: THE LAW OF HUMAN NATURE

Lewis begins by asking us to imagine two people arguing about some trivial matter. The two people might say things like, "You promised," "I was there first," etc. The interesting things about arguments of this kind is that in all cases, the two people who are arguing appeal to some "standard of behavior"—some preexisting rule for how people *should* behave. Sometimes, the two people will argue for two different standards of behavior. But more often, the two people will agree on the same standard, and one of the two people will try to argue that their behavior hasn't really contradicted that standard at all. There would be no sense in having an argument unless both parties can agree on some idea of what Right and Wrong are.

Lewis offers an interesting interpretation of a familiar scene—two people arguing about something. Where most people might see only disagreement, Lewis says that the two arguing parties must first agree on some idea of Right and Wrong; in other words, they must first agree that morality exists before they disagree about who has supposedly been immoral. It's also worth noting that Lewis wrote these words in the midst of World War II. Many thinkers of the era took World War II as proof of the fundamental "godlessness" of the universe, but Lewis continued to argue for the existence of a just, moral God.

Long ago, educated people believed that human behavior was governed by "laws" of nature. Nowadays, a "law of nature" refers to a phenomenon like gravity—an unbreakable rule of the natural world. However, when Lewis refers to a "law of nature," he's talking about a law for how human beings *should* behave—not necessarily how they do. Counterintuitively, the fact that people disagree about the right thing to do suggests that there must be some Law of Nature—some preexisting idea of Good.

Lewis sees moral law as breakable and yet unalterable—people might disobey the rules of the law, but they can't do so without feeling instinctively that they've done something wrong. Some thinkers have taken issue with Lewis's argument for objective moral law—two people disagreeing about morality doesn't prove that morality is real, any more than two children disagreeing about the color of Santa Claus's beard proves that Santa is real.

There are many objections to the notion of a universal Law of Nature. One objection is the idea that, throughout history, human beings have believed in many different moralities. But this isn't true; it's striking how *similar* different civilizations' moral codes are. It's almost impossible to imagine a country in which people are praised for fleeing battle or lying to their loved ones. There are many superficial differences between moral codes, but deep down, they are more or less the same.

Lewis distinguishes between superficial and fundamental traits of a moral code, arguing that all moral codes are, fundamentally, more or less the same. For example, Confucius, Lao Tzu, and Christ all taught some version of the "Golden Rule," even though they lived hundreds of years apart and thousands of miles away from each other.

Many people say they don't believe in a "real" Right and Wrong—these people insist that Right and Wrong are just myths that people have invented. But even people of this kind *behave* as if they do believe in a universal Right and Wrong; when they feel they've been wronged, they say, "that's not fair"—implying that there must be some objective standard of fairness.

Instinctively, people subscribe to the theory that morality is real and objectively true—otherwise, people wouldn't feel that they'd been treated "unfairly."

Lewis moves on to a new point: "None of us are really keeping the Law of Nature." All human beings, no matter who they are or how kind and fair they might be, are guilty of some misdeeds. Lewis himself is no better. And yet even when people behave immorally, their behavior suggests that there is a "true" morality—otherwise, "why should we be so anxious to make excuses for not having behaved decently?"

Lewis argues that human beings are aware of moral law, and yet don't follow it perfectly—even very "good" people break some of the rules, some of the time. The question, which Lewis will try to answer in the following chapters, is, why do people instinctively feel bad when they misbehave, if everyone misbehaves?

BOOK 1, CHAPTER 2: SOME OBJECTIONS

Lewis claims that he has now established a "foundation" for his argument: there is such a thing as a moral Law of Nature. In this chapter, he will strengthen this foundation by discussing moral law in more detail.

Lewis usually begins a chapter with a brief overview of the previous chapter or chapters, reflecting the fact that this book was originally delivered as a series of nightly radio broadcasts.

Some people might say that Moral Law is a kind of "herd instinct"—an intuition that has evolved over centuries, just like every other human instinct. To respond to this idea, Lewis imagines hearing a cry for help. If he were to hear such a cry, he'd feel three emotions—first, a desire to help; second, a desire to keep out of danger. But there would also be a third emotion—an intuition that the *first* emotion is "right" and the second emotion is "wrong." So moral *behavior* may indeed be the product of instinct—but that doesn't follow that morality itself is just instinct: that would be like saying that a sheet of music is the same thing as a **piano** key.

The idea that morality is a form of instinct became increasingly popular during the 19th and 20th centuries—many notable thinkers and philosophers, such as Friedrich Nietzsche, argued that ideas of right and wrong were just "human customs." Lewis's rejoinder to Nietzsche and other similar philosophers is that humans feel many different instincts at once—so there must be some overarching moral law telling us which instincts to obey and which ones to ignore.

Another rebuttal to the theory that morality is instinct: if morality were a form of instinct, then most of the time, the instinct for self-preservation would trump it. When we hear someone in danger calling out for help, our instincts to save ourselves from the danger are probably stronger than our instincts to save others—yet often, we choose to risk our lives to offer help.

Lewis argues that morality is often irrational—there seems to be no rational reason why humans would want to endanger their own lives to save other people. Therefore, it follows that morality cannot be a human invention—how could humans "invent" something so irrational and potentially dangerous as morality?


One final rebuttal: morality can't just be a form of instinct, because there are no instincts that we consider to be moral one hundred percent of the time (e.g., some of the time, our instinct to love our mothers is moral; sometimes it isn't). If morality were instinctive, then there probably would be some instinct that was always moral. By the same token, there is no such thing as a **piano** key that is right or wrong 100 percent of the time—sometimes a key can be right, and sometimes the same key can be wrong, according to the directions of the sheet of music. It's worth emphasizing that no instinct is moral all the time. A lot of people build their entire lives around one specific instinct—to love one's family, to protect one's country, to have sex, etc. Such a life is deeply misguided, because people need morality to tell them when their instincts are good and when they're not.

Lewis argues that if morality were a human invention, based on instinct, then morality would agree with human instinct (or at least one specific human instinct) one hundred percent of the time. The purpose of morality, in short, is to teach human beings when to obey their instincts, and when to ignore them. Notice that even in Book One, Lewis expresses his opposition to absolutism of (almost) all kinds—it's morally wrong, he argues, to prioritize one's family, one's sex drive, or one's country all the time. As we'll see, the only form of absolute thinking that Lewis accepts is worship of God.


Another potential objection to the theory of moral law: moral law is just a social convention, something that we all learn from our schoolteachers. But just because we learn something from a schoolteacher doesn't mean that it's *just* a human convention—after all, two plus two equals four, whether we learn it in school or not. Strange though it might sound, moral law falls into the same category as a mathematical law: it's a universal truth that transcends humanity.

Just because we learn morality in school doesn't meant that morality isn't also *a universal truth. Lewis reiterates the idea that morality is a "law"—like mathematics, morality cannot be changed. Just as two plus two equals four no matter where or when you are, murder and theft are wrong and always will be wrong.*

Lewis now asks us to consider in more detail the idea that all moralities are fundamentally the same. Clearly, people over time have had some different ideas about what it means to be a good person. But the very fact that people *do* disagree on this matter suggests that there really is a correct answer to the question of what it means to be good. Consider the history of witch-burnings in England. For centuries, women were murdered for the supposed crime of witchcraft. One might point to witch-burnings as evidence for how greatly morality has changed over time—and therefore, how arbitrary it can be. But remember that the witch-burners of the past *believed* that witches were real. If modern-day people believed that certain human beings made pacts with the devil, they'd probably burn those people, just as their ancestors did. There is, in short, no real difference between a modern person's morality and a witch-burner's morality—the difference is that modern people have more *knowledge*.

Some people would point to atrocities like the Spanish Inquisition or witch burnings and say that humans have no universal morality—how could the people who burned innocent women believe in the same morality (and even religious doctrine) as modern churchgoers? Lewis's point is that witch-burners and modern Christians do *believe in the same laws of right and wrong; they just have different information about the world. Put another way, witch burners didn't burn innocent women because they were evil; they did so because they sincerely believed those women to be witches. Moral codes have changed very little over history, and basic moral law is exactly the same as it ever was (according to Lewis).*

BOOK 1, CHAPTER 3: THE REALITY OF THE LAW

The Law of Nature as Lewis describes it is very different from a law of nature, understood in the ordinary sense. When we speak of a law of nature such as gravity, we usually say that the law describes the world as it *must* be. When we drop a stone, the stone doesn't "remember" gravity or "choose" to obey it; the law of gravity describes what all stones do, all the time. Nobody could ever criticize a stone for falling the "wrong" way, except as a joke. With the Law of Nature as Lewis defines it, however, humans have a choice. They can choose to obey the Law, or not. Put differently, there is a "gap" between the way people should behave and way they do behave.

The laws of morality are similar to laws of science, but with the one crucial difference that humans are capable of breaking laws of morality. The challenge of being a human being, at least from a Christian perspective, is that humans are aware of the moral law, but can never obey it perfectly—they will always sin or misbehave in some way.

It might be objected that the Law of Nature is just a reflection of what is and isn't harmful; in other words, society invented the idea of "evil" as a way of prohibiting actions that caused harm to other people. To prove this theory wrong, Lewis imagines a person who tries to trip him and fails. Naturally, Lewis would be irritated with this person, even though no harm came to him. In other words, the Law of Nature does not *merely* reflect what is and isn't harmful to us—there's more to it than that.

Lewis continues to rebut objections to the idea that morality is universal. One could argue that morality is just a system for avoiding pain and harm. However, it's clear that morality encompasses far more than just *pain—when we pass moral judgment on people, we take things like intent into account, suggesting that morality is rooted in more complex criteria than the mere avoidance of harm.*

Another, similar objection: the so-called laws of Right and Wrong are just reflections of what is and isn't harmful to society as a whole. So even if, on specific occasions, Lewis might get angry with someone who tried to trip him and failed, it could be argued that society as a whole benefits from the presence of a rule that discourages tripping people—overall, fewer people will fall on their faces. In response, Lewis argues that the "good for society" explanation of morality is circular. To say that the point of morality is that it's good for society is like saying that the point of football is to score goals—such a statement is technically true, but tautological; it doesn't really tell us anything new. Similarly, it could be argued that people "should" be generous because it's good for society. But why, then, should people care about what's good for society? The Law of Human Nature isn't a law in the same sense as gravity, but it's not a human invention, either—it must be "a real thing."

Some thinkers have argued that Lewis's rebuttal here isn't strictly logical; perhaps the truth is that, in a Darwinian sense, societies that practiced some form of collective morality survived over time, while their "immoral" counterparts collapsed and died out (from not taking care of each other, probably). In this way, morality could be considered a kind of random "mutation," which leads certain societies to be more successful in the long run.

BOOK 1, CHAPTER 4: WHAT LIES BEHIND THE LAW

In this chapter, Lewis will draw conclusions about the universe itself, based on the reality of the Law of Human Nature.

In this chapter, Lewis will complete his "argument from morality"—the idea that the existence of a universal moral law proves the existence of some kind of moral God.

There are two basic ways of conceiving of the universe: the materialist view and the religious view. Materialism proposes that "matter and time just happen to exist, and always have existed; nobody knows why." The religious view maintains that the universe was created by a conscious being—a being with a plan for what the universe should be. For as long as there have been people, both the religious and materialist views have been in existence.

Lewis divides human thought into two distinct viewpoints—religious and materialist. Notably he doesn't address the many religious traditions (for example, ancient Greek mythology) that offer no explicit explanation for how matter was created from nothing—and therefore, by Lewis's own definition, are materialist.

In modern times, the materialist view of the universe is usually scientific. Lewis argues that science, at the most basic level, is about observing the tangible world and recording how things behave. The question of *why* the world exists is not itself a scientific matter; even if science reached the point where it could describe every single object in the universe, it would be no nearer to answering such a question. There is one subject that science can't study fully—humanity. Scientific studies of humanity cannot, for example, explain *why* people obey moral laws; they can only record *how* people follow moral laws.

Science, Lewis argues, can study the material components of the universe, but it cannot offer an explanation for why the universe exists in the first place. Lewis's point is that religion and philosophy study the abstract question of why *humans do things, while science measures the concrete, material world.*

The fact that humans feel an innate desire to obey moral laws tells us a lot about the universe. Science cannot explain whether or not there is a being that created and controls the universe. However, if there were such a being, that being could only make its presence known to humans through non-material means, because any material evidence of the being's existence could be "explained away" by science. The only way for an all-powerful being to make its presence known to humanity would be through non-material means. And, as Lewis has discussed, human beings *do* feel the presence of a powerful, non-material being, thanks to the Law of Human Nature. The fact that all humans feel a sense of Right and Wrong indicates that there is a powerful being, whose existence cannot be explained in scientific ways.

In this section, Lewis proposes that there is an all-powerful being (not necessarily a Christian God), and then asks how this being would reveal itself to humanity. Lewis argues that the being could not reveal itself in any material way, because science would "swoop in" and offer a material explanation for the phenomenon in question. The only way for a nonmaterial being to reveal itself to humans would be through a nonmaterial, ordered system—and Lewis argues that this "system" is morality.

It might be objected that Lewis is making a huge conceptual "leap" here. But Lewis hasn't yet shown that there is a God—he's merely shown that there must be "something" that directs the universe and reveals itself to human beings through moral law. In the following chapters, Lewis will explore whether "we can find out anything more about" this being.

Lewis has outlined the "argument from morality," one of the classic Christian proofs of the existence of God. However, Lewis is careful to note that he hasn't yet demonstrated the existence of a Christian God (and, in fact, he never really does).

There are some other views of the universe, in addition to the Religious and Materialist views; for example, there is a kind of "in-between" view called the Life-Force philosophy, practiced by thinkers such as Henri Bergson and George Bernard Shaw. The principle of the Life-Force view is that humans evolved from earlier life forms in Earth, due to the "striving" and "purposiveness" of a powerful Life-Force. The question is, does this "Life-Force" have a mind or not? If believers of the Life-Force view say that the Life-Force being does have a mind, then their view is really just the Religious view. If believers says that the Life-Force doesn't have a mind, then their view is just the Materialist view, since it doesn't make sense to say that a mindless being "strives" for anything.

Lewis ends the chapter with a footnote—in recent decades, some thinkers have begun to subscribe to a belief that Lewis calls the "Life-Force Philosophy." The problem with such a philosophy, as Lewis sees it, is that it's inconsistent: the all-powerful being who creates the world, according to such a philosophy, is both conscious and unconscious—and therefore, both a being and a nonbeing. Lewis seems to have a special dislike of this "Life-Force" philosophy, and criticizes it in other works as well.

The appeal of the Life-Force view is that it's not consistent—the Life-Force offers people all the spiritual sustenance of a religious God, but also the moral laxness of science. A believer of the Life-Force view can, in short, feel all the religious thrill of a beautiful day, without any of the guilt that usually accompanies religious belief. Lewis concludes, "Is the Life-Force the greatest achievement of wishful thinking the world has yet seen?"

Thinkers turned to the Life-Force Philosophy because they like religious ecstasy but don't want to do the hard work of believing in a religious God with rules and expectations. Later on, Lewis will analyze what this "hard work" consists of.

BOOK 1, CHAPTER 5: WE HAVE CAUSE TO BE UNEASY

So far, Lewis says, we've reached the idea that human beings derive their sense of a Moral Law from a powerful being of some kind. Lewis acknowledges that some people probably find this idea to be very irritating—they might even say that it's logically flawed. Perhaps some people have been reading Lewis, thinking that he'll have some new philosophical ideas to add to the same old "religious nonsense"—only to find that he's been peddling the same old nonsense all along.

One of Lewis's important arguments is that the fundamentals of life—like morality and faith—are rarely new and exciting, but require us to simply pay renewed attention to what we already know or have heard.

Lewis has a few things to say to readers who are annoyed with him for spouting religious nonsense when he promised philosophy. So far, he points out, he hasn't actually written about God—merely a "Somebody or Something behind the Moral Law." The only things he's suggested about this being are that "it" is 1) a tremendous artist, since the universe is beautiful, and 2) interested in doing the right thing—since otherwise, "it" wouldn't have endowed human beings with a strong sense of right and wrong.

Lewis reiterates that one can believe in the existence of an all-powerful being without actually believing in a Christian God—in effect, he's trying to convince as many non-believers as possible by drawing them in to his argument, step-by-step.

Lewis also apologizes to readers who feel that they've been "bait-and-switched" into reading a work of religion. The reason that Lewis waited until the last chapter to bring up a divine being is that Christianity doesn't make any sense until people accept the existence of a Moral Law. When people recognize that there is an unbreakable law, then they realize, sooner or later, that they are living in violation of the Moral Law, in some way or other, and that they had better change their behavior to avoid violating it any more. In other words, Christianity begins out of dismay, not a desire for comfort. One cannot become a true Christian by looking for a way to be happy.

Lewis denies that he was trying to trick his audiences into reading a book on Christian doctrine. Instead, he claims that one can only become a Christian if one first accepts that one is not a perfect moral being. Christianity, he argues, arises from the gap between moral law and humanity's failed attempts to live morally. As we'll see, humans turn to God and Christ in the hopes that they can somehow bridge this gap.

BOOK 2, CHAPTER 1: THE RIVAL CONCEPTIONS OF GOD

Lewis has hinted that he is a Christian—but what does this mean? First, he says, let's talk about what a Christian is *not*. Christians need not believe that all other religions are totally wrong. When Lewis was an atheist he believed that all religions were profoundly wrong about the world; now that he's a Christian, however, he thinks that religions have many good points. To make an analogy: there is only one right answer to a math problem, but some wrong answers are closer to being right than others.

The implication of this passage is that religion can actually lead one to take a more fair-minded, nuanced view of the world. to look at life. Lewis's own past as an atheist arguably gives his points more weight for the skeptical reader.

Human beings believe in many forms of "God." One of the most basic questions we can ask about God is whether he is good or evil. Some believe that the division of good and evil is just a "human point of view," meaning that true wisdom entails the recognition that God is beyond all good and evil—such a belief is called Pantheism. Hinduism, for instance, is a Pantheistic religion. On the other hand, there are many who claim that God is infinitely good, and always favors good over evil. Jews, Muslims (or Mohammedans, as Lewis calls them) and Christians subscribe to such a view.

Lewis divides religions into the pantheistic view and the moral view. His division has been criticized for being overly simplistic and old-fashioned—there are many scholars of Hinduism who would disagree with Lewis's claim that Hinduism sees divinity as being beyond good and evil. (Lewis also calls Muslims Mohammedans, based on the mistaken idea that Muslims worship Mohammed in the same sense that Christians worship Christ.)

There is a further difference between the Pantheist and the Christian ideas of God. Pantheists often claim that the relationship between God and the universe is a lot like the relationship between a person and their body—so that, in a way, God *is* the universe. It is because Pantheists believe that God is the universe that they reject the division between good and evil—if God is the universe, then every part must be divine—even something that seems utterly horrid, like a disease or a war. By contrast, Christians say that God created the universe and is distinct from it. Because the universe itself is not God, Christians can say that certain things are good or evil. They believe that God has created a world where "many things have gone wrong," and that God wants them to make the world right again.

Lewis's analysis of Hinduism has been criticized for being too simplistic—Lewis wasn't a scholar of Hindu religion by any means. However, it's important to note that Lewis never says that Christianity is "right" and Hinduism is "wrong"—he gives Hinduism credit for offering its own unique interpretation of God and the universe.

The difference between Christians and Pantheists leads us to an important question—if God is good, and God made the universe, then how can anything in the universe be "wrong?" When Lewis was an atheist, he kept on returning to such a question. Surely, he thought, the existence of pain and suffering prove that there cannot be a good God—and surely, any attempts to explain otherwise are avoiding the obvious.

Lewis arrives at one of the most basic objections to Christianity—how could a just, moral God create a universe in which bad things happen to good people? For the rest of Book Two, he'll try to provide an answer.

The contradiction in the young Lewis's view was that he continued to believe that the universe was "unjust." But where did Lewis get his ideas of justice, if not from a non-material, powerful being? Of course, Lewis could have given up on the concept of justice—he could have argued that justice was just an illusion. But in that case, he would have had to abandon his *initial* argument for God's nonexistence, since it rested on the contradiction between a just God and an unjust world. In all, atheism is riddled with contradictions. Atheists claim that the world is "meaningless"—but such an idea is impossible to formulate unless some concept of "meaning" really does exist.

Before he offers his own theory for why a just God created an immoral universe, Lewis points out that an atheist's *answer to such a question—that God is a fiction—is riddled with contradictions. One cannot believe that God is a fiction and believe that the world is unjust, because, as long as one believes in the concept of "injustice" one must also accept that there is a God (see Book One). Critics have taken issue with Lewis's argument in this section—perhaps it's possible to say that the world is meaningless without also reconfirming some overarching form of "meaning."*

BOOK 2, CHAPTER 2: THE INVASION

Lewis has shown that atheism is "too simple" to be true. Another overly simplistic worldview is the worldview that claims, "God is good," and ignores the existence of sin, hell, and the devil. In this chapter, Lewis will discuss the relationship between good and evil.

To believe in the existence of good, Lewis suggests, one must also accept the existence of evil.

The problem with critics of Christianity, Lewis says, is that the religion they're criticizing is "suitable for a child of six." But whenever intelligent Christians try to explain their positions, critics of Christianity complain that this version of religion is "too complicated"—since, surely, a Christian God would make his religion simple. This idea is, of course, not true—the world is a complicated place, and so religion must be complicated, too. Indeed, one of the reasons that Lewis likes Christianity is that "you could not have guessed" it. In other words, Christianity is a somewhat unpredictable religion—sometimes, it instructs people to do strange things and go against their instincts. If Christianity were perfectly simple and straightforward, then Lewis would probably think "we were making it up."

Lewis praises Christianity for its genuine moral complexity and strangeness—mirroring, he believes, the complexity and strangeness of reality itself. This is one of his subtler and less logical arguments, but essentially he's saying that he partly believes in Christianity because it feels right and true to him on an aesthetic level.

There are two distinct ways to think about the evil we see in the world. The first is the Christian view: "this is a good world that has gone wrong, but still retains the memory of what it ought to have been." The second way is the Dualistic view that the universe is a "battlefield" in which Good and Evil are constantly fighting one another. While Lewis has a lot of respect for the Dualistic view, it has some notable problems.

Dualism posits that Good and Evil are on an equal level, and constantly striving with each other. One of the earliest religious incarnations of this idea was Zoroastrianism, a religion of ancient Iran.

According to Dualism, there are two gods: one good, one bad. The two gods are independent of one another—presumably, one is hateful and cruel, while the other is kind and merciful. A question arises—how can humans judge which god is the "good" god, and which one is the "evil" god? What standard can they appeal to in their judgment? There seems to be no way to answer the question without introducing a third thing—a law of some kind, which one god obeys and the other does not. Then, the question becomes, who made the law? In this way, Dualism points to the idea that there must be some being who doesn't just wield power over the material universe but who also makes and controls the laws of right and wrong.

This passage is very similar to the argument that Lewis made in Book One about human instinct. If there are two opposing gods (or, in Book One, two opposing instincts) then there must be some third term, explaining which one of the two is right and which one is wrong.

Looking at Dualism from another perspective: if there is a good god and a bad god, then the bad god is presumably a being who loves badness for the sake of badness. But even on Earth, there is no such thing as a person who truly loves badness for its own sake. There are people whose badness consists of enjoying good things *to excess* (food, money, love, etc.), or getting good, happy feelings from bad deeds. Thus, a bad deed *implies* the existence of goodness—or, as Lewis puts it, badness is just "spoiled goodness." Even the "bad god" in the Dualistic worldview must have some understanding of goodness and must, in a sense, be "part of the Good Power's world," taking good ideas and deeds and perverting them into evil.

Lewis makes the interesting argument that it's impossible to be bad for its own sake—or to make badness one's good. When people behave badly, one of two things happens: 1) they feel guilty, because, deep down, they continue to believe in morality; 2) they get a thrill from breaking the rules—because, once again, they're still aware *of morality. Put another way, one can be ignorant of evil, but one cannot be ignorant of good. Thus, badness isn't a "worthy opponent" for good; it's just "spoiled goodness."*

In all, the Dualistic worldview winds up looking a lot like Christianity: there are two powerful beings, but they're not on an equal footing. Instead, the evil being is a "parasite," perverting the powers of goodness. It's no coincidence that in Christianity, the devil is described as a "fallen angel"—in Christianity, evil itself is a kind of "fallen good"; i.e., good that has been corrupted into something else.

The passage explains that in Christianity, Satan (or evil) is just a fallen angel; a corrupted version of God's goodness. The passage is also a good example of how Lewis analyzes Christian doctrine and shows that it's less arbitrary and more morally sophisticated than many people give it credit for.

Dualism and Christianity aren't as far apart as some people say—for, in a sense, God and the Devil *are* fighting one another. The difference between Christianity and Dualism, however, is that in Christianity, the Devil isn't God's equal; he's a petty, inferior being.

Lewis sums up his findings in this chapter: evil presupposes the existence of good, but good doesn't presuppose the existence of evil. Thus, evil is an inferior form of corrupted good.

BOOK 2, CHAPTER 3: THE SHOCKING ALTERNATIVE

To be a Christian, Lewis claims, one must accept that the Devil has come to power on Earth. It's very hard for people to believe this. In order to believe that God is good and the human world has become mostly evil, one must believe in the concept of free will. God makes human beings with a choice about how to behave—they can choose to obey God or disobey him.

In this chapter, Lewis confronts the concept of free will—in other words, that human capacity to choose between good and evil.

The great advantage of free will is that it makes love, goodness, and joy possible—if humans had no choice but to all behave the same, then there would be nothing special about their actions, and therefore no sense of pride or pleasure in them.

If humans didn't have the gift of free will, then they wouldn't have any choice in their actions—and therefore, there would be nothing impressive or even meaningful about their obeying moral law.

One might want to "disagree with God" about the problem of free will and say that the evil in the world isn't a fair "price to pay" for our free will. The problem with disagreeing with God, however, is that God is the source of the disagreeing person's brainpower. Put another way, arguing against God is like "cutting off the branch you are sitting on." Perhaps we should just accept that God is right about free will and evil and leave it at that.

Here, Lewis doesn't offer a logical defense of the concept of free will itself; he points out the fallacy of disagreeing with (an assumedly omnipotent) God about free will. For Lewis, it is only possible for a human being to object to the concept of free will because *God gave that human free will in the first place—and so it would just be best to accept the doctrine of free will.*

But how did Satan come to pervert God's goodness into evil? While the Bible doesn't specifically answer this question, we can guess, based on our own human experiences, that Satan wanted to "be God"—or, rather, be more powerful than God. Some people say that Satan corrupted mankind through sexuality, but the Bible says otherwise. Satan corrupted Adam and Eve by convincing them that they should be more powerful than God and eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge. All human suffering is the result of Adam and Eve's selfish desire to be as powerful as God.

Lewis sees the original human sin as a desire for power and superiority—Adam and Eve wanted to rise above God, and therefore they accepted Satan's advice to eat from the Tree of Knowledge. Lewis does, however, acknowledge that not all Christians agree with his interpretation, and that the Bible is not explicitly clear about the nature of Satan's sin.

The great flaw in Satan's revolt against God, and in Adam and Eve's desire to be more powerful than God, is that it's impossible to be happy and independent of God. God is the source of all happiness; he is like the "fuel" that supplies our pleasure. Therefore, all attempts to be happy independent of God are bound to fail. Human history is, in a sense, the story of humans' failed attempts to find something with which to replace God. Every time humans try to find an adequate replacement for God, something goes horribly wrong.

Throughout human history, Lewis claims, people have tried to find alternate sources of happiness, but in the end, they've found that the worship of God is the only true source of joy. Lewis here arguably alludes to the atrocities of World War II, including the Holocaust—which have sometimes been analyzed as the result of mankind's turning away from God.

We can study the presence of God throughout history. Over the course of millennia, Lewis claims, God "scattered" different versions of the story of Christ throughout different civilizations: in each version, a young god sacrifices his life for the good of others. God also chose the Jews to carry his laws for millennia. The Old Testament of the Bible, Lewis argues, is the account of how God "hammered" into the Jews' heads what his laws were.

Lewis gives the impression that God had to spend thousands of years preparing humankind for the coming of Jesus Christ: first by scattering Christ-stories around the globe, and then by teaching the Jews the moral code of the Old Testament (which Christ would largely reject). However, Lewis doesn't go into detail about why, *precisely, all these thousands of years of "preparation" were necessary on an individual level.*

The next step in history was the birth of Jesus Christ. Christ was unique because he claimed that he forgave sins and that God would judge the world at the end of time. Christ also claimed to be a "part of God." For a Hindu, the idea of being a part of God wouldn't be very surprising, since, by definition, everyone is a part of God. But Christ was a Jew, meaning that his claim to be a part of God was truly radical.

From the beginning, Lewis portrays Christ as an utterly unique being—both human and superhuman. Though Christ walked on the Earth as he preached to his followers, he also made claims about himself that suggested that he was supernatural.

Lewis now looks at Christ's teachings in more detail. First, he claimed that he could forgive sins. The idea that a man could forgive other people their sins would be arrogant, and "asinine"—unless that man were a part of God. When we read the Gospels, it's interesting to notice how humble Christ is. If Christ were "merely a man," Lewis argues, nobody could possibly describe him as humble, though, considering what he said. The idea that Lewis has been getting at is that it's impossible to believe in Christ's teachings *and* believe that he was anything other than a part of God. There are too many people, Lewis claims, who say that Jesus was a great moral teacher, but not divine. Lewis insists that people must decide—*either* Christ was a great teacher, or he was just a man, and a madman at that. The notion that Christ was a great *human* teacher is nothing but "patronizing nonsense."

Christ could not have been a mere man and also been a humble man—since he made many statements that alluded to his own divinity. Lewis's point is to respond to the often-popular theory of "the historical Jesus." During Lewis's lifetime, many of his peers gravitated toward the idea that Christ, while a great moral thinker, was not divine. Lewis's rebuttal to such a theory is that it's inconsistent: Christ can either *be a great moral teacher* or *a man, but not both at once. The passage is one of the most famous in the book, and it's sometimes called the "Christian trilemma"—the idea that one must make a decision about Christ: either he was divine, lying, or crazy.*

BOOK 2, CHAPTER 4: THE PERFECT PENITENT

When discussing Jesus Christ and his teachings, we have to face a basic fact: Christ came to Earth to "suffer and be killed." When Lewis was an atheist, he thought that Christians had the same theory about why, exactly, Christ sacrificed himself: after the fall of man, Christ volunteered himself to "absorb" the punishment of man—thus, Christ died for mankind's sins. Now that he's a Christian, though, Lewis realizes the truth: the important feature of Christianity is not *why*, exactly, Christ died for our sins, but rather the fact that mankind has a "fresh start" thanks to Jesus Christ. Theories about the circumstances of Christ's sacrifice may be important, but it's not necessary to believe in any one of them to be a Christian.

In this chapter, Lewis turns to the central truth of Christianity: Jesus Christ died so that human beings could achieve salvation in Heaven. Interestingly, though, Lewis doesn't offer a specific answer to the question of how, *precisely, Christ sacrificed himself for mankind's sins. In declining to do so, Lewis refuses to support any specific Christian sects (many of which have different interpretations of Christ's sacrifice), and instead emphasizes the common kinship of all Christians.*

Lewis now talks about the relationship between theory and reality. In science textbooks, we're often given a metaphor that's said to "explain" a complicated phenomenon, such as atomic motion. But metaphors aren't exactly the truth: they're just guidelines. The truth about atoms—or, for that matter, Jesus Christ—cannot be pictured or totally understood; humans can just try to *approximate* the truth.

Lewis emphasizes that his book shouldn't be interpreted as the "be-all, end-all" explanation of Christ, God, and the universe. There are many concepts, he argues, that are beyond human comprehension. Thus, Lewis will sometimes offer convenient stories and analogies that help Christians wrap their minds around the complexities of their religion.

Even though it's not necessary to believe in any single theory for why Christ sacrificed himself, it's worth looking at some of these theories more closely. Lewis has already gone over the theory that Christ volunteered to bear mankind's punishment for sinning in the Garden of Eden. But this seems to be a "very silly theory," since it suggests that Christ "convinced" God to let mankind off easy. Furthermore, the theory implies that, had Christ not sacrificed himself, innocent human beings would have gone on being punished for the sins of their ancient ancestors, Adam and Eve—an idea that seems almost barbaric.

Lewis entertains the theory that Christ sacrificed his life to redeem the sins that mankind accrued because of Adam and Eve's sinful behavior in the Garden of Eden. He admits that, on the surface of things, the idea that human beings should be punished for their ancestors' sins seems deeply immoral.

Lewis now backs up to try to understand how it's morally sensible for people to be punished for Adam and Eve's sins. Lewis compares mankind's "burden" to a financial debt—when somebody has lost a lot of money, he'll lean on his friends to help him pay off the debt. Similarly, Adam and Eve got mankind "into a hole"—by trying to be greater than God, they sinned greatly, dooming their descendants to a life of pain.

One could certainly disagree with Lewis here—it seems like a basic tenet of moral law that humans shouldn't be punished for crimes they didn't commit. But this is another instance where Lewis takes a more aesthetic view of Christian doctrine and human history, and doesn't really have a logical argument to defend it.

In order to escape the life of pain with which God punished the human species, humans must repent their sins. But repentance is difficult—the people who need to repent most urgently (i.e., really evil people) are least likely to do it. However, God helps humans repent by giving them the gifts of reason and love. The problem with repenting is that God, as an all-powerful being, cannot really *teach* humans to repent, because God himself never needs to repent; the entire concept of repentance is foreign to him. Therefore, God sent a material version of himself to Earth—Jesus Christ—in order to teach humanity how to repent sin. Christ repented in order to set an example for future generations of human beings.

Lewis speculates that part of why God sent Jesus Christ to Earth was to teach human beings how to repent their inherent sinfulness—a task that God, as a perfectly moral (and spiritual) being, was not equipped to perform himself. Jesus Christ, a man, was able to connect to human beings on their level and instruct them on how to repent and achieve salvation.

It might be objected that Christ's repentance was "easy," because he was divine. It's certainly true that it must have been easier for Christ to repent because he was a virtuous man with a divine nature. But why should this mean that we shouldn't be impressed with Christ's sacrifice? One might as well say that children shouldn't respect a teacher who shows them how to write, because "it's easy for grown-ups"—easy or not, the teacher passes on an important lesson. Lewis has just given a "picture" of Christ's sacrifice. But of course, his picture is just another theory—"if it does not help you, drop it."

Christ's sacrifice may have been "easier" (though not easy) than it would be for an ordinary man—but this doesn't mean that it shouldn't be impressive or crucial for humanity. Lewis closes by reiterating one of his main points from the chapter—sometimes, his ideas are just theories, designed to help humanity understand God's mysteries. One can be a good Christian without agreeing with Lewis.

BOOK 2, CHAPTER 5: THE PRACTICAL CONCLUSION

Jesus Christ, Lewis begins, was a new kind of man, who introduced a new way of life to the world. The new, Christian way of life is spread and perpetuated in three different ways: baptism, belief, and ritual, "that mysterious action which different Christians call by different names—Holy Communion, the Mass, the Lord's Supper." Different kinds of Christians believe that these three acts have differing levels of importance; for example, a Methodist might say that belief is more important than baptism or Communion.

In this chapter, Lewis begins to describe some of the specific aspects of Christian doctrine and their connection to belief. Lewis's definition of the Christian way of life is both specific and open-ended: he acknowledges that there are many different sects of Christianity, each with its own unique interpretation of how to worship Christ, but he also identifies these three practices as fundamental aspects of Christian life (thus taking a more Catholic or Anglican view than a Protestant one).

Lewis admits that he doesn't know exactly why the three forms of Christian life he mentions above should be the "conductors of the new kind of life"—but he takes it on Christ's authority that they are. The notion of taking an idea on someone else's authority might seem frightening; but in fact, the majority of the things we "know" are things we believe on authority. Lewis has never been to New York, and couldn't use science to prove that it does exist; but he takes it on his friends' authority that it's a real place.

As Lewis acknowledges, it might seem strange for him to accept an idea without being able to understand it (particularly after he's spent so many pages analyzing the argument from morality, step by step). However, he cleverly points out here that human beings already take most things "on faith"—otherwise there would be very little we could ever trust.

Christians must try to be virtuous by submitting to the three forms of Christianity—belief, baptism, and ritual. Christians are different from atheists who try to be good, because atheists believe that they, and they alone, are doing good, while Christians believe that their goodness is only possible because of the "Christ-life inside" them. What does it mean for "Christ-life" to be inside us? To be clear, it *doesn't* just mean that people respect Christ or think about him often; rather Christ is "actually operating through them," and Christians are like a "physical organism through which Christ acts." It is because Christians are a physical organism that they must engage in literal, physical acts like baptism and Communion. Put another way, humans cannot be spiritual simply by using their minds; they must also engage in physical actions to achieve spirituality. That's why God uses material things like bread and wine to give Christians the "new life."

The passage can be frustrating because Lewis introduces the concept of "Christ-life," but then admits that he doesn't know how it works or what, precisely, it is. Lewis only concludes that Christianity is a religion of the body, not just the mind—to believe in Christ is to feel his physical presence. Lewis was an Anglican and also flirted with Catholicism—and according to Catholic doctrine (and some Anglican interpretations) all human beings must physically "accept" Christ by taking communion—ingesting wine and wafer, which literally become Christ's body and blood. This very physical ritual, then, surely informs Lewis's notion of "Christ-life."

Lewis used to worry about the people who didn't worship Christ. But now he realizes that God doesn't say what will happen to these people—God never said that the *only* way to be "saved" was to worship Christ. Lewis urges those who worry about non-Christians' salvation to go out and try to convert as many people as possible.

This chapter is filled with disclaimers. Here, for example, Lewis points out that God never once said that non-believers would be damned—perhaps it's possible to achieve salvation even without believing in Christ (a rather liberal view for many Christian sects). In any event, Lewis believes that the most certain *way to go to Heaven is to believe in Christ.*

Another potential objection to Christianity: if God is all-powerful, why doesn't he smite Satan and destroy sin? Christians *do* think that one day, God will destroy evil altogether; however, in the meantime, God is giving humans a chance to join his cause freely—and humans who do so will achieve salvation. At some point in the future, it will be too late for humans to choose sides—thus, humans must choose the "right side" as soon as possible.

Lewis ends Book Two by reiterating the importance of free will. God could *make it easier for human beings to be good and moral—but instead, he gives them the freedom to choose between good and evil. It is imperative that humans choose good before they are punished for their immorality.*

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 1: THE THREE PARTS OF MORALITY

A lot of people, Lewis says, believe that God is "the sort of person who is always snooping around to see if anyone is enjoying himself and then trying to stop it." Furthermore, many people believe that morality itself is a way to limit happiness. But the truth is that morality is a set of rules for running the "human machine"—sins, Lewis argues, might seem to be fun in the short-term, but they also distract us from salvation and thus from long-term happiness.

In Book Three of Mere Christianity, *Lewis will study the rules of Christian morality in more detail. He wants to fight the stereotype that Christianity is concerned with limiting human happiness; in order to do so, he'll try to show that Christianity actually leads to the ultimate form of happiness—salvation.*

Some people prefer to say that they believe in "moral ideals," rather than moral law. The problem with such a mindset is that it makes morality sound like an arbitrary, personal taste. The notion of moral idealism may also be dangerous because it suggests that overall "ideals" are more important than adhering to morality at every step of the way. By discussing moral *law*, we remind ourselves to obey the rules at all times.

Before he gets into the details of Christian moral law, Lewis emphasizes that it's important to have moral laws, *as opposed to vague ideals, because morality is a constant struggle to do the right thing—and hazy things like ideals rarely speak to specific situations and the difficult choices of daily life.*


There are three ways that the "human machine" goes wrong. First, humans drift apart; second, an individual human being's desires interfere with morality; third, humans forget about salvation. To make an analogy: morality resembles a fleet of ships. The voyage will fail if the ships drift apart, if there is a mutiny on one ship, or if the ships forget their destination. Thus, morality is concerned with three things: 1) harmony between individuals; 2) the inner harmony of the individual; 3) the general purpose of life (salvation). In modern times, people focus too exclusively on the first component of morality, ignoring the latter two. Politicians think that "morality" means everyone getting along together. While the harmony of the group is important, people cannot be called virtuous unless individuals behave morally and aspire to salvation.

Morality is both internal and external: it's concerned with an individual's piety and righteousness, but it's also concerned with how different people get along with one another. Furthermore, Christian morality is concerned with the overall direction of a person's life—namely, salvation in Heaven. The implicit message of this passage, which Lewis will make explicit later on, is that it's possible to be immoral by concentrating too exclusively on only one or two facets of morality and neglecting the others. Morality, then, is a constant balance between individual, society, and salvation.



For the rest of the book, Lewis is going to "assume the Christian point of view, and look at the whole picture as it will be if Christianity is true."

By this point in the book, it's pretty clear that Lewis is explicitly advocating for a Christian worldview and a Christian God—he's no longer speaking of an "all-powerful, abstract being." Notice that Lewis never offers any logical *proof (other than, arguably, the "trilemma" of Christ) that Christianity is the "right" religion and others are wrong; he mostly just makes a jump from one subject to another.*


BOOK 3, CHAPTER 2: THE CARDINAL VIRTUES

The previous chapter, Lewis explains, was originally meant to be broadcast on the radio—therefore, Lewis missed his chance to mention some important points. In this chapter, Lewis will fill in some of the details about Christian virtue. Christian thinkers have divided virtue into seven categories: four Cardinal virtues and three Theological virtues. For now, he'll look at the Cardinal virtues: prudence, temperance, justice, and fortitude.

In the previous chapter, Lewis spoke about the concept of virtue in general; now it's time for him to get into the details of specific virtues, including the seven virtues he names here.


Prudence is defined as "taking the trouble to think out what you are doing." Critics argue that Christians celebrate stupidity and childishness; Christians are discouraged from understanding the universe. But although God wants people to be innocent and, in a sense, child-like, he also wants them to be intelligent during the course of their time on the Earth. One cannot be very moral without prudence.

It's no coincidence that Lewis begins his discussion of virtue with a discussion of prudence. Lewis dislikes the stereotype that Christians are somehow ignorant or naïve in their view of the world; he wants to make it clear that good Christians can also be highly intelligent and insightful.


Temperance, nowadays, means teetotalism, but it used to mean restraint and moderation in all pleasures, not just drinking. Christianity never says that it's necessary to be a teetotaler. Indeed, it's generally not the Christian way to say that anything is inherently bad; when a good Christian gives up drinking, meat, or cinema, they recognize that *they* have a problem with the item in question, rather than saying that drinking, meat, or films are intrinsically "evil."

Lewis spends as much time talking about what temperance isn't *as he does defining what temperance is. In general, he suggests that true Christianity doesn't demonize any specific objects or activities—as we saw in Part One, Christianity argues that material things are sometimes good and sometimes bad.*


Justice encompasses many different ideas, including honesty, truthfulness, and fairness. Fortitude represents two distinct kinds of courage: first, the kind of courage that faces danger; second, the kind of courage that remains under pain (i.e., "guts").

Lewis will explore justice in more detail in the chapter on marriage—for now, he just offers a cursory overview of this virtue.

There's a difference between moral behavior and being a moral person, Lewis says, just as there's a difference between occasionally making a good shot in tennis and being a good tennis player. The problem with mixing up moral behavior with being a moral person is that it creates the mistaken impressions that 1) it doesn't matter why we do things, provided that we do them; 2) God wants his followers to obey him blindly instead of understanding why they obey moral law; and 3) the only reason for moral behavior is to resolve a problem of some kind (e.g., if there's no danger, there is no need for the virtue of bravery). In general, humans should engage in moral actions in order to reshape themselves into moral people.

Lewis makes a subtle distinction between behavior and intention. It's not enough simply to do *good things; one must also be a good person (even though, as we'll see later on, Lewis thinks that being a good person is fundamentally tied to doing good things consistently). Humans are more than just the sum of their actions; Lewis believes that there is an innate "self" (arguably, the soul) that makes decisions, absorbs life experiences, and becomes either better or worse over the course of a lifetime.*



BOOK 3, CHAPTER 3: SOCIAL MORALITY

When discussing the morality of Christ, it's important to keep in mind that Christ didn't teach humanity any brand new morality. Indeed, he taught his followers the familiar "Golden Rule" ("Do as you would be done by"). Generally, great moral teachers never introduce complicated new ideas; only quacks do. The business of a moral teacher is to *remind* people of what they know, deep down, to be true.

Lewis again makes the point that all humans fundamentally understand the basic tenets of the moral law. The revolutionary thing about Christ wasn't that he introduced a new morality, but just a new way of achieving the morality we already know.

Another key point about Christ's teachings: there is no detailed program for how to build a Christian society; in other words, the purpose of Christianity is not to *replace* ordinary society. Learning about Christianity doesn't teach us how to cook food or build a house; Christ's teachings are rather designed to direct humans as they carry on with their ordinary lives.

Lewis begins his analysis by acknowledging the limits of his religion: Christianity was never intended to teach people how to run a government or organize a worker's union; rather, Christianity is meant to guide people through their day-to-day lives on a moral and spiritual level.

Some people make the mistake of saying that priests and other religious leaders, rather than politicians and statesmen, should control politics. Frustrating though it might sound, it is up to ordinary people to apply Christian principles to their own societies, rather than depending on their priests. Asking a priest, rather than a politician, to make good, Christian political decisions would be like asking a priest to write a good, Christian novel—it would be better to leave politics to the politicians and writing to the writers, even if we would still hope that the writers and politicians are good Christians.

While some people have interpreted the Bible to justify theocratic forms of government, Lewis insists that the Bible says nothing of the kind; rather, it would be best to leave politics to politicians. Lewis is advocating for the separation of church and state when it comes to overarching policies, but he clearly would still prefer it if more politicians were Christians at heart.

Even if we shouldn't turn to priests for political guidance, the Bible offers a picture of what a Christian society (i.e., a society in which everybody is a pious Christian) would look like. Such a society would be cheerful, polite, hardworking, and generous. There would be no "passengers or parasites," since "if man does not work, he ought not to eat." In all, a perfectly Christian society would be somewhat economically socialistic, yet very old-fashioned in its code of behavior and family life.

Lewis takes a moderate view of politics: liberal in some ways, conservative in others. Notice also that he defines a Christian society as a place where every individual *is piously Christian, rather than a place with any particularly religious form of government or organization. Lewis's point seems to be that good Christians should concentrate on treating other people with respect and improving their own souls, rather than imposing their beliefs on other people.*

Most of the great Christian thinkers subscribed to the idea that we should not lend money with interest. And yet lending money with interest is one of the cornerstones of modern society (i.e., banking and the stock exchange). Lewis acknowledges that he is not an economist, but feels compelled to point out that the ancient Greeks, the Old Testament Jews, and the Christians of the Middle Ages would have been revolted by "the very thing on which we have based our whole life."

Lewis modestly admits that he doesn't have the economic expertise to pass judgments on things like banks and stock exchanges—nevertheless, he hints that such a system of society is out of step with traditional Christian ideals.

Another point about Christianity and society: the New Testament celebrates hard work, but also charity. Indeed, charity is one of the cornerstones of Christian morality. Lewis argues that people should give away "more money than we can spare." Charity should be much more common than it is; people should donate a sizeable portion of their income instead of spending money on frivolities and luxuries.

One of the few specific political points Lewis is willing to make is that people should give more money to charity than they do. Giving money to charity isn't supposed to be easy, either—people have to fight against their own greedy and selfish inclinations.

Lewis guesses that this chapter of the book has irritated almost everyone who's read it. Left-wing people will probably be angry with Lewis for not going far enough, while people on the political Right will probably think that he has gone too far. Perhaps this is because people look to Christianity for a confirmation of their political beliefs, rather than for real political instruction. If we are to improve society, we must begin by turning inward to our own souls, rather than trying to influence other people's actions.

For many people, Lewis notes, the Bible is a way to support preexisting political viewpoints, rather than a basis for political viewpoints. Perhaps, rather than imposing political ideas on other people, good Christians should take care of their own souls and help other people wherever it's possible to do so.

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 4: MORALITY AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

In this chapter, Lewis will discuss the Christian idea of "a good man." In order to do so, Lewis will study the technique of psychoanalysis. It's important to keep in mind that although Freud and Jung (the two most influential psychoanalysts) had theories about morality, their true area of expertise was psychology. Therefore, we should take Freud and Jung with a grain of salt whenever they try to generalize their conclusions and speak about life in general.

This is one of the more dated chapters in Mere Christianity. *At the time when Lewis was writing, psychoanalysis—defined very briefly, the study of the unconscious mind—was popular in Europe and the U.S., and its founder, Sigmund Freud, was widely considered to be one of the greatest modern scientists. In the 21st century, Freud is more often considered a brilliant but ultimately misguided thinker, who made many legitimate discoveries about the human mind, but also many errors.*

Lewis argues that psychoanalysis is not really contradictory to Christianity, though some have claimed that it is. In Christianity, the act of choosing what to do has two distinct steps: first, weighing various thoughts and feelings; second, translating these impulses into an explicit choice or action.

Although Lewis doesn't spell it out, many of his contemporaries argued that Freud's belief in the unconscious—a part of the mind that influences human decision-making without betraying its presence—contradicted the Christian belief in the doctrine of free will. In short, if there is a silent, invisible part of the mind that influences our choices, then can we really say that our choices are "free?"

Imagine three men being shipped off to war. The first man has a natural fear of battle; the other two have irrational fears of war, triggered by childhood traumas. Now assume that a psychoanalyst examines the latter two men and cures them of their neuroses. Even though all three men are now mentally "equipped" for battle, it doesn't change the fact that they all must choose whether or not to fight. In short, psychoanalysis can cure neurosis, but it doesn't interfere with the essence of morality: free choice.

Lewis argues that the existence of an unconscious mind doesn't change anything about the doctrine of free will. Whether or not the unconscious is real, humans ultimately make decisions with their conscious minds. True, it might be easier for a non-neurotic person to make certain moral choices, but Lewis also assumes that a just God would take such things into account in judging a person.

Sooner or later, every human being wonders if they would have turned out the same if they'd been born in a different country, had a different upbringing, or been bullied (or not) as a child—in short, humans wonder whether their behavior is the result of a free choice or their upbringing. Lewis's answer is that upbringing, and most of a person's psychological makeup, is just "raw material," not the essence of a person. In the end, the only thing God cares about is a person's free choices, which are free from mental baggage.

Lewis makes an important distinction between a person's "circumstances" (e.g., their family, their income, their education, etc.) and their "essence" (e.g., their choices, character, etc.). As Lewis himself will later acknowledge, it can be surprisingly difficult to make such a distinction in practice. Nevertheless, he maintains that all human beings have some "raw material"—an unchanging "self" that makes decisions, independent of psychological baggage. Psychologists would probably disagree with the idea that it's possible to distinguish the "self" from its "psychological baggage," and indeed, Lewis doesn't provide any further information about how this is possible.

As a young man, Lewis was always puzzled when he read Christian philosophy: Christian thinkers seemed to think that "sins of the mind" were more dangerous than murder or rape—sins that, one would think, are far worse. Now that Lewis is an older man, he realizes that the Christian philosophers were right. Sin, at its most basic level, is a mental choice. The external "bigness" of a sin (e.g., how many people are killed or harmed) "is not what really matters" to God; in the end, humans are judged for their secret, internal decisions.

In this passage, Lewis argues that God judges our innermost state of mind, not our actions. Ultimately the weight of a sin has nothing to do with the number of people who are harmed and everything to do with the sinner's inner state of mind. This is a strange idea, since, in our society, people are punished for their actions based on a combination of action and state of mind. For example, if a man is being tried for murder, the judge would consider the man's intent (whether he meant to kill or not) and the number of people he killed (the more people, the higher the man's sentence). Effectively, Lewis is saying that when God judges, he only looks to our choices.

Lewis makes one final point: the more moral we become, the more clearly we see that we are immoral. A truly evil man doesn't realize how evil he is (just as a man who is fast asleep doesn't realize he's asleep). "Good people know about both good and evil: bad people do not know about either."

Lewis again connects goodness with insight and wisdom, rejecting common criticisms of Christian goodness as narrow-minded or naïve.

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 5: SEXUAL MORALITY

In this chapter Lewis will discuss sex and the Christian virtue of chastity. Chastity is the most unpopular of all virtues, he says. It would seem that either our innate sexual instincts are wrong, or Christianity itself is wrong. Lewis, of course, claims that our instincts are wrong. To begin with, he says, let's agree that the biological purpose of sex is to produce offspring. If healthy young people were to follow their sexual instincts without any caution, they'd produce enough children to populate a village. So for practical purposes alone, there needs to be some kind of prohibition on sexuality.

This is one of the most controversial chapters in Mere Christianity. *In it, Lewis argues that humans should refrain from having sex before marriage, even if their biological instincts urge them to do so. Clearly, there is some practical reason for humans to refrain from sex—if everybody had sex constantly, the world's population would explode and people would starve to death.*

Imagine a hypothetical society in which audiences would pay to see a "strip-tease" except with food instead of a naked performer (so the audience would salivate as someone slowly lifted up a tray of bacon or chocolate). Clearly, Lewis argues, something would be deeply wrong with this society.

Lewis uses this somewhat perplexing analogy to suggest that his society is deeply "ill" because it fetishizes sexuality. Lewis seems not to consider the possibility that coyness, fetishism, and theatricality could be vital components of human sexuality, not just "perversions" of it.

For many years, Lewis claims, he's been hearing nothing but lies about sex. He's been told that the sex instinct is just a natural, healthy instinct, no different from hunger or thirst. The problem with such an idea, however, is that when we permit sex and normalize it, nothing gets better. For twenty years at least, Lewis argues, sex has not been "hushed up," and yet sex is still "a mess." Lewis is also tired of hearing that Christianity condemns sex and the human body. On the contrary, Christianity glorifies the human body and encourages people to "be fruitful and multiply."

In retrospect, Lewis's argument that normalizing sex just makes sex more of "a mess," based on English society in the 1940s, could be considered short-sighted—since, by 21st century standards, Lewis's society was still very repressed and ignorant of sexuality. Nor does Lewis acknowledge the anxiety and self-hatred that the Christian prohibitions against having sex out of wedlock have caused.

Even if sex itself isn't inherently evil, the state of human sexuality in modern society is shameful. (Similarly, there's nothing wrong with eating food, but "if half the world made food the main interest of their lives," there would be a problem.) People are obsessed with sex, to the point where they can't think about anything else. Movies, books, and plays tell us that having a lot of sex is glorious, fun, and happy. This is a lie—there's nothing automatically joyful about sex or having sex frequently. If humans gave into their instincts at all times, the world would fall apart—the sexual instinct is no different.

This passage could be considered an example of the "false dichotomy" logical fallacy. Lewis seems to believe that society must choose between two extremes: 1) constant sex and sexual perversion, and 2) Christian chastity. The possibility of a compromise between 1) and 2) does not come up here.

Few people try to practice Christian chastity. There are several reasons why: 1) the modern media makes sex seem completely normal; 2) people don't think that Christian chastity is possible, so they're convinced that they'd never be able to sustain it; 3) people believe that chastity leads to "repression" and neurosis. Such a belief is based on a misinterpretation of modern psychology, Lewis claims. There is nothing inherently unhealthy about refusing to give in to an urge; indeed, it is perfectly possible to deny oneself sex without becoming neurotic.

Lewis argues that the modern media glamorize sex and sexuality to the point where most people believe that it's "normal" to have sex all the time. (You can't help but wonder what Lewis would have to say about 21st century American society.) Lewis also insists that one can refrain from sex without becoming a neurotic—but he doesn't really address how such repression often does *lead to real psychological harm.*

One final note—although the denial of sex has been one of the most notorious features of Christianity, it's not a particularly important part of the religion. True Christians don't really believe that sex is one of the worst sins; indeed, it's possible for a priggish virgin to be more sinful than a prostitute.

Lewis seems eager to end his discussion of sex as soon as possible. Even if his ideas about sexuality seem dated by today's standards (even among many 21st century Christians), he ends with a characteristic display of moderation—sexual sins might get more attention than most, but they're far from the worst of sins.

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 6: CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE

It's now time for Lewis to talk about marriage. Lewis has never been married himself, but he recognizes that, since he's writing a book on Christianity and marriage is an important Christian act, it's important to talk about marriage.

Lewis is up-front about the fact that he's never been married—although later in life he would marry (and then become a widower) and write more about marriage from a Christian perspective.

Christ said that a married man and woman are "one flesh"—they become two parts of the same whole, in the same sense that a lock and key are two parts of the same machine. The union between a husband and wife is very different from mere sexual union, because marriage, according to Christianity, is a lifelong bond between two people. Some sects say that divorce is permissible, while others do not; however, all sects see divorce as something unnatural—a kind of "surgical operation."

As before, Lewis acknowledges that different Christian sects have different ways of dealing with divorce—some (such as Roman Catholicism) forbid it altogether. However, Lewis emphasizes the common kinship between all Christians by noting that all Christian sects treat divorce as something unnatural.

The key aspect of a marriage is the promise that the husband and wife make to one another. In this sense, marriage exemplifies the virtue of justice: two people keep their word over a lifetime. Some people make the promise to remain married, but don't really mean what they say. Some of them are lying to God, some are lying to themselves, but perhaps most are lying to the public—they want the respectability of marriage without any of the challenges.

Lewis returns to a discussion of the virtue of justice (which he briefly mentioned at the beginning of Book Three). Justice in marriage can be a difficult virtue for many people because it involves keeping a promise for an entire lifetime: there are times when it's easy for people to keep their promises, and times when it becomes very difficult to do so.

Some people say that the only reason to get married, or to stay married, is being in love. But this simply isn't true, Lewis says—there's a lot more to marriage than love. Indeed, the point of marriage is that it *compels* people to stay together, even at times when they don't love each other as much as usual. There are many good practical reasons for a couple to stay married even if they're no longer in love: to take care of children, to protect the woman (who probably gave up a career to get married), etc.

There's a massive difference between being in love and getting married. Getting married cannot be a purely romantic decision—it must also be practical. Thus, Lewis lists some of the practical reasons for people to get married—including his dated and rather sexist assumption about wives giving up careers.

Marriage exemplifies the difference between love and being in love. Being in love is a wonderful thing, and it makes people happy, kind, and brave. However, love isn't the be-all, end-all of life—"there are many things below it but there are also things above it." After people get married, they sometimes stop feeling the same passion for one another. But there is a quieter, less intense kind of love, which is arguably better and more beautiful than the experience of being "in love." Life is full of experiences in which we start out with one intense feeling, which is gradually replaced with a quieter but equally marvelous feeling.

It's characteristic of Lewis's distrust for absolutism that he praises love, and yet insists that it's not always a good thing in every situation or context. Even if being in love is wonderful, it can't last forever—to be a mature, married adult, one must experience the thrill of being in love, but also the quieter feeling (and even act of will) of simply "loving" someone, independent of lust or passion.

One problem with love is that movies, books, and plays distort its meaning. Fiction has conditioned us to believe that falling in love is an utterly irresistible experience. The truth is that we have a lot of choice in the people with whom we fall in love; we can choose to give in to our emotions or not.

Lewis wants to correct people's misconceptions about love—misconceptions that they've acquired from books and movies.

It's an important question how strongly Christian politicians or voters should force their views of marriage on other people. Some people say that a good Christian will vote for laws that make it difficult for all people to get divorces. Lewis strongly disagrees. Not all people in England are Christians, and it's unfair to force them to live in accordance with Christian law, even if he believes Christian law is morally right.

As in the previous chapters of Book Three, Lewis argues for a uniquely Christian worldview, and yet doesn't argue that Christians should impose their worldview on other people. Christianity may be morally right, but Christians should focus on their own lives and relationships instead of forcing their beliefs on others who don't want to accept them.

Another important question—why, in Christian tradition, is the man considered the "head" of the marriage? Lewis gives three answers: 1) Someone needs to be the head of a marriage, because in situations where the husband and wife disagree, someone needs to make the final judgment; 2) The head of the marriage should be the man, not the woman, because women, as far as Lewis can tell, are always ashamed when they're put into positions of "headship," and usually hate their husbands when they "rule" the marriage; 3) "Quite frankly," men are better at ruling a marriage than women because they're capable of being fairer with other people, whereas women are more heavily biased on behalf of their children.

Here Lewis argues that the man should be the "head" of a Christian family. This argument seems dated and overtly sexist, playing on the old stereotype that women are petty, overly emotional, and generally inferior to their logical, rational husbands. It's worth keeping in mind that Lewis is far from a perfect moral teacher, and separating his valuable insights about religion from his more problematic views is part of the intellectual and moral challenge of reading Mere Christianity.

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 7: FORGIVENESS

Chastity may be the most unpopular Christian virtue, but it has some stiff competition from forgiveness. Everybody loves forgiveness in theory, but most people hate to practice it. And it seems that there must be some limits to forgiveness—one wouldn't, for instance, expect a Jew to forgive the Nazis. Lewis acknowledges that forgiveness can be a "hard pill to swallow," but insists that it's an important part of the religion.

One of Lewis's most common rhetorical strategies is to begin by acknowledging the difficulty of the argument he is about to make, and then proceeding to make that argument. People pay lip service to forgiveness, he says here, but they rarely practice it in their daily lives. Nevertheless, it's important to try *to forgive one's enemies, as we'll see.*

To wrap our heads around forgiveness, Lewis says, let's start with a simple point: how do we go about loving our neighbors "as we love ourselves," as Christ taught us? Lewis confesses that he doesn't really feel a strong sense of affection or desire for himself, nor is he always happy with himself. It would seem that, if we take Christ's advice literally, we should love our neighbors even if we disagree with them, dislike them, or feel no affection for them. Christianity doesn't tell people to lessen their hatred for sinful behavior. But perhaps we should hate sin in the same way that we hate our own mistakes: feeling sorry for the people who sin, while also hoping that somehow they can be "cured."

Lewis chooses to take the Golden Rule very literally here. Thus, he advises his readers to love other people without affection or desire, but simply because they're human beings (much as we "love" ourselves simply because we are ourselves—even when we don't like *ourselves). Lewis's argument reflects the familiar Christian principle that we should "hate the sin and love the sinner"—Christ wanted people to forgive one another, even as they fought sinful behavior.*

A question arises: how should we punish our enemies while staying true to the doctrine of forgiveness? Lewis claims that we should punish our enemies when they do wrong, just as we punish ourselves on occasions. There are times when the proper penalty for a crime is death—being a Christian doesn't necessarily mean refraining from killing people. The sixth commandment in the Old Testament is usually translated, "Thou shalt not kill," but a more accurate translation would be, "Thou shalt not murder." Not all killing is murder, in the same sense that not all sexual intercourse is adultery.

Lewis's interpretation of Christ's teaching is that there are many occasions when a good Christian is morally justified in taking another life—in spite of the Old Testament's insistence that "Thou shalt not kill." It's worth noting that, contrary to Lewis's interpretation, there are many Christian sects that prohibit killing in any capacity (and indeed, the earliest Christians appear to have been radical pacifists).

It might be objected that, if killing is sometimes allowed in Christianity, then there's no real difference between Christianity and the everyday view of killing. But Lewis claims that in fact, there is. Christianity teaches that we must not enjoy the act of killing even when we're executing a horrible criminal. It's hard to avoid the pleasure of punishing others, but we must try our hardest to do so.

As in the previous chapters, Lewis makes an important distinction between the literal act of killing and one's state of mind while carrying out the act. It is difficult but possible, he insists, to kill reluctantly, hating the sin but loving the sinner.

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 8: THE GREAT SIN

Of all vices, nobody is completely free of pride. Yet strangely, people never ever *think* that they're prideful; they can only recognize pride in others. In Christianity, pride is the central evil, far more wicked than anger, greed, etc. One's own pride is always clashing with the pride of others—there isn't enough "space" for everyone to be prideful. Pride, by its very nature, is competitive—for example, people are proud of being *richer* than their neighbors, not of being rich.

Lewis suggests that although sexual or violent sins might seem worse or more sensational, the worst sin of all is often very normal and petty-seeming: pride. Lewis has already laid much of the groundwork for this chapter in Book Two, where he argued that Satan's great sin, and Adam and Eve's "original sin" was the desire to stand above God.

Because pride is a competitive emotion, it interferes with our ability to know God. God, by definition, is immeasurably superior to humanity. Proud people find it difficult to recognize God's power because they're so overcome with love for their own beauty, intelligence, wealth, etc. Many of the prideful people who claim to worship God are really worshipping "an imaginary God"—and this imaginary God praises them for being better than other people.

As the most basic level, pride is a form of infatuation with oneself—prideful people believe themselves better than others in some capacity. Lewis introduces the frightening possibility that there are people who believe they're worshipping God, but are actually being seduced by the Devil (or, effectively, "worshipping" themselves).

So how do we know that we worship the real God and not, in our prideful ignorance, an imaginary God? Lewis proposes a simple test: whenever we think that our religious beliefs make us better than other people, "we are being acted on by the devil." If, however, our beliefs make us feel small and insignificant, then we know the true God.

Lewis celebrates the virtue of humility—the exact opposite of pride. To contemplate God, the most powerful being in the universe, you must accept your own inferiority. Thus, if you think about "God" and feel big and powerful, you're not really thinking of God at all.

Lewis makes a few qualifying remarks about pride. First, there is nothing inherently prideful or sinful about being happy when someone praises you. The problem arises when people who receive praise begin to believe that they are more worthy of praise than other people. Second, it's important to distinguish between being "proud" of someone else and feeling arrogant pride for oneself. Often, when people say they're "proud" of their children or friends, they just mean that they feel a "warm-hearted admiration." Sometimes, though, people are irrationally proud of belonging to a famous family or club—and this form of pride is, indeed, a sin.

The word "pride" has been used in many different senses, so it's necessary for Lewis to clarify exactly what he means when he says that pride is sinful. The final sense in which he defines pride here—a sense of superiority because of belonging to a group—could be applied to patriots and those who are fanatically loyal to their state government (an especially relevant definition, given that Mere Christianity *was written during World War II and published at the dawn of the Cold War).*

Third, it's important to realize that pride isn't a sin because it "offends" God or makes him jealous. God wants humans to worship him, not because he needs praise, but because he wants humans to achieve salvation. Fourth and finally, humble people aren't necessarily meek or self-deprecating. Usually, humble people are just cheerful and normal-seeming, and take a genuine interest in other people. To become humble, we must begin by recognizing that we are proud. "If you think you are not conceited," Lewis closes, "you are very conceited indeed."

A common cliché about humility is that one must be self-deprecating or shy to be humble. In fact, humility means nothing of the kind. One need not deny one's own talent or abilities to be humble; the point is to deny that one's talent is one's own achievement (since, in truth, God "gives" people their talent and abilities). One reason that pride is so deadly is that it's invisible—many people are prideful, but few people think *they are.*

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 9: CHARITY

Lewis has discussed the four Cardinal virtues—now it's time to discuss the three Theological virtues: faith, hope, and charity. He begins with charity. Nowadays, "charity" just means alms for the poor and needy. But in its full, Christian sense, "charity" refers to the ability to help and respect other people. As we saw earlier, Christ wanted us to love other people as we loved ourselves. The same is true when it comes to charity: we must treat other people with respect, even if we don't particularly "like" them.

The argument of this chapter parallels the argument that Lewis made in the chapter on forgiveness—we must push ourselves to care about other people, recognizing that Christ instructed us to love others as we love ourselves. Notice that Lewis distinguishes between loving one's neighbor and liking *one's neighbor—something that makes the act of really loving others all the more difficult.*

Strangely, it is not necessary to feel strong affectionate feelings in order to be charitable. Some people are naturally cold—coldness might not be a very pleasant personality trait, but it's not necessarily sinful. As long as cold people use their willpower to practice charity, they can be virtuous. Even more surprisingly, cold people who "go through the motions" of being charitable will sometimes become sincerely warm people. This brings us to an important rule: "when you are behaving as if you loved someone, you will presently come to love him." In this way, Christian charity (which might sound like a cold, austere thing to an atheist) usually leads to affection and kindness.

Just as it's possible to love someone without particularly liking them, it's possible to be charitable without being affectionate. Charity, one could argue, is a Christian duty. Good Christians, regardless of their temperament, must push themselves to help other people who need their help. And in fact, Lewis argues, it's possible to become *more affectionate and loving by pushing yourself to help others. Lewis will use a similar argument in Book Four.*

We've discussed how to treat other people. But how should humans feel about God? Christians are told that they must love God—and countless children have made the mistake of trying to force themselves to feel affection for God. The truth, as we've just seen, is more complicated: we must act *as if* we loved God, and over time, we will begin to love God sincerely. God's love for humanity, by contrast, is unceasing. No matter how we sin or misbehave, God will love us.

What was true of people is true of God, as well—by "rehearsing" our affection for God, we can engender genuine affection for him. But it's important to recognize that God need not rehearse his love for humans in the same way—his love for humanity is boundless.

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 10: HOPE

Hope is another one of the Theological virtues: Lewis defines it as the ability to continually "look forward to the eternal world." Hope gets a "bad rap" these days—people associate hope with naiveté and escapism. In fact, the Christians who look forward to Heaven most fervently are often the same people who celebrate life on Earth with the greatest enthusiasm, and do the most to improve it.

One of the most persistent criticisms of Christianity is that it's overly concerned with Heaven, to the point where it encourages its adherents to neglect their time on Earth. (Or, Karl Marx wrote, "religion is the opiate of the masses.") Lewis's reply is that good Christians care deeply about their lives on Earth.

It is difficult for most people to "want" Heaven—our desires are too focused on material, earthly things. However, our desires for earthly things—marriages, vacations, jobs, etc.—usually fade away over time. There are three distinct ways of responding to such a phenomenon, Lewis says. First, people foolishly assume that earthly desires need to be replaced with other earthly desires. For example, a person who goes on a vacation and has a bad time will delude herself into thinking that she'll just have to go on a more expensive vacation next summer. Second, people conclude that there is something inherently unsatisfying about life itself, and that people should learn not to expect too much from it. Third, and best of all, people conclude that earthly things are never entirely satisfying, but spiritual things are.

As Lewis approaches the fourth and final part of his book, he begins to focus on the difference between life on Earth and life in Heaven. The fundamental thing about life on Earth—or at least ordinary, day-to-day life, as Lewis sees it—is that it's concerned with material things, both for survival and for pleasure. The problem, then, with earthly, material life is that its pleasures are transient—material things, whatever their nature, will gradually become less exciting or fulfilling. Religion allows people to find a new, higher form of happiness—the worship of Jesus Christ.

Some people smugly say that Heaven sounds boring—who wants to sit on a cloud and play a harp forever? Lewis responds by saying that the traditional imagery of Heaven (clouds, white robes, harps, etc.) is just that—imagery; a way of expressing the expressible. One might as well say that when Christ instructed his followers to be like doves, he wanted us to lay eggs.

Lewis acknowledges that he doesn't know what Heaven is like—but he strongly criticizes people who take the traditional description of Heaven literally. Christianity is full of heavily symbolic language—and for atheists to take such language literally is to make a straw man argument.

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 11: FAITH

When Christians speak about faith, they usually mean one of two things. First, "faith" refers to belief in the truth of the doctrine of Christianity. It's somewhat surprising that faith in this sense could be considered a virtue—how could there be any virtue in one's ability to believe? But Lewis argues that belief also takes a tremendous amount of willpower. For example, when Lewis is about to undergo a painful surgery, he has to force himself to continue believing that the anesthetics will keep him from feeling pain. By the same token, it takes effort to keep up one's faith in Christian doctrine.

Faith could be considered a precondition for Christian virtue, rather than a virtue itself. In other words, people have to believe that their good behavior has some greater meaning, some consequence—acceptance in Heaven—before they embark on a lifetime of morality. The problem here is that even the most devout Christian wavers in their belief sooner or later—it is human to doubt (particularly since God doesn't show himself to human beings in concrete ways, as Lewis discussed in Book One).

Even if readers believed everything Lewis has said in his book so far, they might not necessarily become a Christian—the following week, they could get some bad news and decide to abandon their new faith altogether. Faith in Christianity takes conscious effort—that's why there are lots of "convenient Christians" who are only religious when things are going well. Put differently, faith is the ability to hold "onto things your reason has once accepted, in spite of your changing moods."

As we near the final portion of Mere Christianity, *Lewis goes over some caveats in his argument thus far. It is not enough to just accept the logic of Lewis's writing; one must also make the leap of faith and choose to live by that faith. There is, in short, a huge difference between accepting Christianity (i.e., recognizing that there is a God and that Jesus Christ died for mankind's sins) and* living *Christianity.*

How does one hold onto faith over time? The first step is to accept that one's mood changes constantly. The next is to engage in Christian practice. Prayer, worship, and religious readings are vital parts of Christianity because they remind people that their beliefs remain strong.

One of the reasons that prayer and ritual are vital parts of Christianity is that humans need concrete, real-world reminders of the strength of their religion—and rituals provide such a reminder.

To begin to understand the second sense of the word "faith," consider someone who's newly converted to Christianity. It can be very difficult to keep the faith for a long time. Even very good Christians live in constant danger of being tempted into sin. Thus, a new Christian convert must accept how hard it is to be good. Furthermore, new Christians must realize that everything they do is "given" to them by God. It is impossible to give God anything that was not his to begin with. In a sense, then, a human practicing Christian virtue is like a child asking his father for some money to "buy" the father a birthday present. Once a new Christian accepts these basic truths about virtue, "God can really get to work." Lewis will then explore the second definition of faith in the following chapter.

Ultimately, it is not enough to just live a good, moral life—even the most devout Christian will sin sooner or later. Thus, the strict truth is that human beings don't "deserve" to go to Heaven—even a very, very moral human being is a sinner. Furthermore, "good Christians" must accept that their accomplishments and achievements in life don't truly "belong" to them—God provided them. Good Christians must accept, in short, that their virtue is really God's, and their sins are theirs alone.

BOOK 3, CHAPTER 12: FAITH (PART 2)

Lewis begins by telling readers to "drop" this chapter if they can't relate to it. There are certain aspects of Christianity that can only be understood "from the inside," once one is already a Christian.

Lewis knows that many different kinds of people will be reading his book—some of whom are already Christians, and some of whom aren't. This chapter is intended for the former, not the latter group.

Lewis will now talk about faith in a second, higher sense of the word: the kind of faith that emerges when a person realizes that they are "bankrupt," can never obey God's laws perfectly, and have nothing to offer God that is not his already. In such a moment of crisis, a Christian can exemplify the second kind of faith, in which they will "despair of doing anything for [herself] and leave it to God."

In Book One of Mere Christianity, *Lewis said that Christianity must begin with "despair." Here, he returns to the same theme; paradoxically, good Christians must come to accept the fact that they really aren't good people at all. In such a moment of crisis, they must surrender their agency and accept that God will take care of them.*

The idea of "leaving it to God" is complicated and easily misunderstood. It might sound lazy to leave everything to God, but in fact, one must keep trying to be a good Christian, even as one surrenders to God. Put another way, good Christians will try their hardest to be moral, while also placing their trust in God's salvation. The only true way to leave things to God is to feel "a first faint gleam of Heaven" inside oneself; henceforth, a good Christian will continue to behave morally, but a little less urgently and nervously, cautiously optimistic about going to Heaven.

Lewis arrives at a nuanced point: he suggests that good Christians eventually reach a point where they're no longer consciously trying to be good (because they trust that God will see them through), and yet the only way for them to reach such a point is by trying to be good. Faith, as Lewis defines it, is a lifelong struggle—first a struggle to be good, then, a struggle to accept one's own inner flaws and offer them up to God.

There has long been a debate among Christian thinkers about whether faith or good works are more important for salvation. Lewis's answer is that they're equally important and indispensible. In the past, people have argued that the idea that good works alone can lead to salvation is absurd—by such logic, a wicked man who donates a million dollars to the church could go to Heaven. Similarly, people have criticized the "by faith alone" interpretation, pointing out that, if such an interpretation were true, a wicked man could go to Heaven provided that he believed in Christ. The truth is that we need to believe in God *and* work hard in order to go to Heaven—hence the famously ambiguous Bible verse, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who worketh in you." Lewis interprets the verse to mean that Christians must work hard, always unsure if they're going to Heaven, while also trusting that God will help them stay on the right path.

In this important passage, Lewis addresses one of the quintessential arguments within Christianity: the debate over whether "works" or "faith alone" can redeem the soul. There are certain sects of Christianity (often Catholic) that emphasize the importance of "works"—i.e., good deeds, performed in the concrete, real world. There are other Christian sects (often Protestant) that emphasize faith—understood in the sense of a personal, private relationship with God. As Lewis explains here, it's impossible to have faith without good works, or good works without faith; they are two sides of the same coin. It's characteristic of Lewis's inclusive, balanced approach to defining Christianity that he gives both Catholicism and Protestantism partial credit for outlining the path to salvation.

At some point, Lewis guesses, truly good Christians will reach a point where they no longer think in terms of duties or rules, but where they are simply filled with goodness, like a mirror that is "filled with **light**." But, Lewis admits, it is difficult for us to talk about salvation, since "no one's eyes can see very far."

Lewis admits that his knowledge of salvation is necessarily limited (as he hasn't gone to the afterlife yet), but he speculates that good Christians reach a point where good works become second nature; where they stop concentrating on obeying *God and start just naturally living as he would want them to.*

BOOK 4, CHAPTER 1: MAKING AND BEGETTING

In the final part of his book, Lewis discusses theology, the "science of God." Some might object that theology doesn't really teach anything that matters about God—it's more important to "feel" God spiritually than it is to understand how he works. But even if theology is no substitute for "feeling" God, it can still be a useful way to think about God and Christianity.

The final section of Lewis's book concerns the "science" of religion (understood in a loose sense). While theology isn't strictly necessary for being a Christian, it can help some people be better Christians by giving them an idea of how the transition from Earth to Heaven works.

One of the most surprising statements in all of Christianity is that by worshipping Jesus Christ, the Son of God, we too can become "sons of God." In order to understand this statement fully, we need to look at it through a theological lens. In the Bible, we are told that Christ was "begotten, not created" by God. Connotatively, people "beget" things of the same kind as themselves; however, they "create" things that are not of the same kind. Thus, the phrase "begotten, not created" refers to the fact that Christ is, fundamentally, the *same* as God.

While some aspects of Christianity should be taken figuratively (for example, the idea that Heaven is a place with clouds and harps), Lewis argues that the notion that humans can become "sons of God" should be taken in a more literal sense: as we're about to see, God will help good Christians move from base material life to a higher spiritual form of life.

When the Bible says that people become "sons of man," it suggests that humans can assume the same kind of being as God, provided that they respect the rules of Christianity—they can change from something "created" to something "begotten." Humans are capable of leading two different kinds of life—an ordinary material life, and a spiritual Christian life, the kind that God himself lives. Most people never get to lead the second kind of life, but if they worship God, they will. Lewis likens the relationship between ordinary and spiritual life to the difference between a statue of a man and a real, living man—when a Christian worships God, he undergoes a change as massive as if he were transformed from a statue into a real man.

Since the first chapter of Mere Christianity, *Lewis has suggested that humanity is, by its very nature, sinful. Here, he builds on this idea by suggesting that humans can transcend their innate sinfulness by casting aside material things and worshipping Jesus Christ. The transition from materiality to spirituality (or, in another sense, from Earth to Heaven) involves nothing less than the discovery of a different kind of life. Lewis can only say so much about what this "new life" is like (since he's not in Heaven yet), but he'll attempt to analyze it in the following pages.*


BOOK 4, CHAPTER 2: THE THREE-PERSONAL GOD

Many of the people who claim to believe in God say that they find it hard to believe in a personal God, with thoughts, ideas, and plans. Christians agree that it is impossible to understand, fully, what God is like—however, Christians do offer *some* idea of what God must be like.

Characteristically, Lewis begins this chapter with a modest admission that his theories about God are just that—theories. He will, however, still attempt to make some hypotheses about what God is like.

Christian theology teaches that when humans die and go to Heaven, they become part of God, and yet also remain separate from him, retaining their thoughts, memories, and personalities—a difficult concept. To understand this idea better, Lewis asks us to consider the three dimensions of space. A two-dimensional shape is composed of many one-dimensional lines, just as a three-dimensional object is made of countless two-dimensional surfaces. It could be said that in Heaven, souls become a "part" of God and yet retain their essence in the same way that a square is a "part" of a **die**—the square is still recognizably a square, but it's also part of a greater thing. Following this logic, God exists as three separate "persons," yet is also one overarching being, in the same sense that a die consists of six squares, and yet is one three-dimensional shape.

The final Book of Mere Christianity *(like the more mystical aspects of religion itself) is full of paradoxes and contradictions. Here, for example, Lewis theorizes about how souls in Heaven are both one with God and separate from him. Lewis's analogy for such a concept is that souls in Heaven are connected to God in the same way that squares are connected to a six-sided die. As with many of the other analogies in the book, Lewis presents his comparison as a rough approximation of a highly complicated truth—an image only, and not something to cling to or over-analyze.*

It is very difficult to speculate about the nature of God, since God is unfathomably complex and majestic. But there are ways for people to begin to understand God. For instance, on Earth, humans can communicate with God through prayer. In the act of reaching out to God, human beings transcend earthly life (which Lewis calls *bios*) and experience the higher, spiritual life (which Lewis calls *zoe*). The intellectual discipline of theology arose from humans' limited experiences of *zoe* during the act of prayer. Indeed, one could even argue that theology is an experimental science, in which humans use an "instrument"—their whole selves—to study God and *zoe*.

Lewis sums up what he's been alluding to so far: there are two forms of life, one base and earthly, the other pure and spiritual. Mortal life is defined by the first kind of life, bios, *while the afterlife (assuming one's soul goes to Heaven) is defined by the second,* zoe. *However, it's possible to experience fleeting moments of the second kind of life in the act of prayer. One could certainly disagree with Lewis for characterizing theology and prayer as forms of "science"—science, after all, is concerned with the testing of hypotheses, whereas prayer and faith stem from the certainty of Christ's existence.*

Every few years, Lewis says, someone peddles out a new, simplified religion that tries to compete with Christianity. People who sell such religions are wasting their time, however—Christianity is the only religion that's as complicated as life itself. False religions are appealing because they're simple, but in the end, Christianity, with its difficult distinctions—like those described in this chapter—is more valuable.

It can be frustrating that Christianity offers mortal humans nothing more satisfying than momentary snatches of zoe. *But the fact that spiritual salvation is so difficult to achieve is a part of the challenge and the struggle of Christianity. It is, of course, difficult to achieve* zoe, *but this makes* zoe *all the more valuable and satisfying.*

BOOK 4, CHAPTER 3: TIME AND BEYOND TIME

Lewis explains that this chapter can be skipped if readers don't connect with its subject. Lewis will address a common objection to Christianity—the idea that God could attend to the lives of billions of people at the same time. While such an objection seems reasonable, the phrase "at the same time" indicates how little people understand the universe. People experience time as a series of moments. But many thinkers have argued that God experiences these moments simultaneously; he can perceive past, present, and future all at once.

Lewis uses this chapter to discuss the Christian conception of God as a being who exists outside of time (God created time and space; therefore, he isn't confined by either one). Still, Lewis admits that he's just theorizing; there's no way to be certain about God's relationship to time.

Another similar possibility is that God exists outside of time altogether. To illustrate such a concept, Lewis says, imagine that he is writing a story. Within the "universe" of the story, the characters might "live" two or three days. But from the perspective of Lewis, the author, the story might take a couple weeks to write. Even in the middle of a sentence—i.e., an instant to the characters in the story—Lewis might eat dinner, have a bath, and then get back to writing. Lewis admits that his analogy isn't perfect; nevertheless, he wants to suggest that God exists outside of time, can suspend it and change it however he wishes, and therefore can attend to many different people and places in what seems *to us* to be a very short amount of time.

Lewis offers an interesting comparison between his own profession, writing, and God's power over human beings. Perhaps God isn't just a talented "multi-tasker," capable of attending to billions of people in the same instant—perhaps the fact that he exists outside of time allows him to carry out his work in what, from our perspective, is no more than the blink of an eye.

It's important for theologians to study time, because doing so can resolve some familiar religious problems. Some have wondered how God can have absolute knowledge of the future and yet leave humans the power of free will—if God knows what will happen to us, then, it would seem, we're not truly deciding what to do; we're just "going along" with what God has already decided. Again, the problem originates from humans' limited capacity to conceive of existence outside of time. Perhaps God experiences humans' present and future at the same time; thus, the moment when humans act is always "now" to God.

Here, Lewis addresses one of the most famous criticisms of Christianity—that there is an inherent contradiction between an all-knowing God and a free human race. If God really is all-knowing, it would seem, then one's choices aren't truly "free" at all; God knows in advance what we're going to do, and thus seems to control our actions. Lewis's reply (borrowed from the late classical philosopher Boethius, whom Lewis admired greatly), is that this contradiction only seems like a contradiction because of our limited understanding of time. If God perceives the past, present, and future simultaneously, then there is never a moment in which God knows what we're going to do "before" it happens—that moment, strictly speaking, is always "now." Thus, it seems possible for humans to make free choices and for God to also be all-knowing and all-powerful.

Lewis says that his ideas about time have helped him understand the concept of free will a little better. But if his readers find his ideas about time unhelpful, they should just ignore them; Lewis is just guessing how God perceives time.

This was a particularly short chapter—it would take much, much longer for Lewis to expound on the topic of free will thoroughly (and he does so in some of his other works). As a result, Lewis is characteristically measured in his arguments—he's just guessing about the nature of free will, and if his guesses bring some Christians satisfaction, all the better.

BOOK 4, CHAPTER 4: GOOD INFECTION

We're asked to imagine two books, one lying on top of the other. The bottom book, book A, is supporting the top book, book B. Imagine, also, that books A and B have always been lying in such a position, and that A's position did not exist *before* B had its position on top of A. Lewis will return to this analogy in a moment.

The gist of Lewis's analogy is that it's possible for book A to "hold up" book B without having been there before book B—a good approximation for the relationship between God and Christ.

In an earlier chapter, Lewis tried to argue that God was a being who contained three beings (the Holy Trinity). But it is difficult to define God as such without implying that one of the beings was there before the others—indeed, our words for God and Christ, the "Father" and the "Son," clearly suggest that God came "before" Christ.

Lewis will spend a few chapters dissecting the Holy Trinity: the Christian concept that God consists of three beings, God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit. It's worth noting that not all Christian denominations believe in the Holy Trinity; Unitarians, notably, worship only one unified God.

Lewis now returns to books A and B. Sometimes, when we speak of a cause and an effect, we make the mistake of assuming that the cause originates before the effect. But in fact, cause and effect often occur simultaneously. When we imagine something, for example (like the two books in this analogy), the act of imagining doesn't come *before* the mental picture we see in our minds; on the contrary, the cause and the effect occur simultaneously. The same is true of the relationship between God and Christ: God is the cause of Christ, but there was never a point in time when God existed and Christ did not.

Here, Lewis's argument parallels the writings of the American pragmatists John Dewey and William James: cause and effect, contrary to our intuition, often occur in the same instant. But just as a cause is more "basic" and "fundamental" than its corresponding effect (i.e., it would seem that you can have a cause without an effect, but not an effect without a cause), God is more fundamental than Christ, even if God and Christ have been in existence for the same period of time.

One of the defining features of Christianity is that it defines God as a "dynamic, pulsating activity" as well as a person. Lewis suggests that, while God and Christ are definite beings, the *relationship* between God and Christ is also a person. Such an idea, Lewis admits, sounds very strange, but perhaps God and Christ's relationship is like the "spirit" of a family or a club; a strong, intimate connection. The connection between Christ and God, the Holy Ghost, is the third of the three beings in the Holy Trinity. It is harder to speak of the Holy Ghost than Christ or God, because the Holy Ghost resembles a process more than a person. The Holy Ghost "acts" through us, more than it appears before us; it is the state of love and closeness between the Father and the Son.

Lewis defines the Holy Ghost as the "link" between God and Christ. Strictly speaking, the Holy Ghost often refers to the spirit of God present in the world in the time between Christ's resurrection and the Final Judgment; however, Lewis (following Christian doctrine on the subject), also characterizes the Holy Ghost as the personified relationship between God and Christ—and, perhaps, between all human beings.

The Holy Trinity unites the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost in a kind of "dance." The only way to achieve lasting peace is to get close to the three aspects of the Trinity—"once a man is separated from God, what can he do but wither and die?" If we worship God, however, we will win the gift of *zoe*, a Christ-like spiritual life.

The analogy of a "dance" is significant because it suggests that worshipping God is a constant process, rather than a rigid, unchanging status quo. *The passage also foreshadows Lewis's analysis of* zoe, *the spiritual life awaiting human beings in Heaven.*

BOOK 4, CHAPTER 5: THE OBSTINATE TOY SOLDIERS

Christ became a man in order to help humans learn how to become sons of God, Lewis says. And in the process, he helped humanity transition from one kind of life, *bios*, to another, *zoe*. The two forms of life Lewis describes are opposites. *Bios* is selfish, concerned only with its own survival; *zoe* is selfless and effortlessly moral.

The chapter begins with a point Lewis made in Book Two: Christ came to Earth to teach mankind. Here, however, he expands on his point by reiterating his theory of the two forms of human life (a theory he's outlined in previous chapters).

Lewis asks readers to imagine being a child and making an army of tin toy soldiers come to life. It's possible that some of the toy soldiers wouldn't be very happy about coming to life; they might prefer being made of tin. Indeed, if only one of the toy soldiers became real, the other soldiers might not care. The notion of one toy soldier becoming real is similar to the notion of Jesus Christ showing men the new kind of life—but with one key difference. Christ's divinity was "contagious"—his wisdom spread across the world and inspired people to change their lives. The reason that Christ's example was so powerful is that humans are "one," even if they seem to be separate entities. In life, humans are connected to their friends and families through bonds of trust and love.

Christ's teachings were like a beautiful benevolent "virus," spreading across the world. One further implication of this point is that Christianity is more than just a personal belief in God and Christ; it's also a connection with other people, based on mutual love and respect (as Lewis argued in Book Three). Notice that Lewis's description of Christians' relationships with one another parallels his analysis of the Holy Trinity in the previous chapter: Christians are separate and yet united—unique individuals drawn together by their love for Christ.

Humans must choose for themselves whether they want to experience Christ's spiritual life, or whether they want to remain "tin soldiers." But the hardest part of all—Christ's coming to Earth to introduce humanity to spiritual life—is over. Humans could never have discovered spiritual life on their own.

Humans could not have discovered zoe *on their own because, by default, they exist in a self-perpetuating state of* bios. *All it took was the "spark" of Christ's sacrifice to teach the human race that it, too, could achieve spiritual salvation.*

Lewis concludes by urging his readers not to quarrel over the details of why, precisely, humans are "saved"—whether Christ died for our sins, we are washed in the blood of the lamb, etc. Good Christians will choose a "formula" that works for them, and respect other people who choose a different formula, so long as they believe in Christ's divinity.

Lewis reiterates his point from the beginning of Book Two: the specificities of how *Christ sacrificed himself for mankind are far less important than the fact that mankind has gotten a second chance at redemption, and can achieve salvation in Heaven.*

BOOK 4, CHAPTER 6: TWO NOTES

Lewis offers two notes in this chapter. First, a potential objection to his argument would be, "Why did God create human beings and tell them to become divine, rather than simply making them divine?" Lewis answers the question in two ways. First, God gave humans the power of free will: he gave them the choice of becoming Sons or not. God prefers to challenge human beings, rather than creating them to be perfect already. Second, Lewis guesses that God could not have begotten an infinite number of Sons from the beginning of eternity—there could only be one. The only way to conceive of an infinite number of Sons would be to imagine them as "human forms standing about together in some kind of space." In other words, the only way to conceive of infinite sons is to think of them existing in the universe—whereas one *can* conceive of a single Father and Son existing outside the material confines of the universe.

Lewis makes two points in this section; one familiar, the other a little strange. The familiar point (which Lewis has already made in Book Two) is that God wanted salvation to be difficult, not easy, so that humans could exercise their powers of free will and earn salvation in Heaven. The second, arguably stranger point is that God couldn't have made an infinite number of Christs (i.e., sons of God), because they wouldn't have fit in three-dimensional space. Lewis acknowledges that he's speculating about God's motives—in other words, he is not offering the theory of infinite Christs as the undisputed truth, but simply a hypothesis.

Lewis's notions of unity among humans could be interpreted to mean that individuals don't really matter, as if all people are interchangeable. But in Christianity, human beings are like the different "organs in a body"—they are different from one another, and each one plays a unique part, but they are still all operating as one on some level. Lewis then says that there are two ways that the Christian mindset can be corrupted. If people think of themselves as utterly different from one another, without any common bond of religion, then they become individualists. If, however, they come to think that all people are just the same, their way of thinking becomes Totalitarian. Christianity, and Christianity alone, defines human beings as different yet also united—any step toward Totalitarianism or individualism is a dangerous perversion of the faith.

Lewis's analogy between human beings and the organs of a body reinforces the difference between earthly life and spiritual life: an organ of the human body is "alive" insofar as it's united with the other organs of the body. By the same token, to embody the state of zoe is to be united with other saved souls, even as one remains a fully functioning individual. Keep in mind that Lewis was writing at the start of the Cold War between the United States and the Totalitarian Soviet Union—at the time, the dangers of Totalitarianism were on everyone's mind.

BOOK 4, CHAPTER 7: LET'S PRETEND

Lewis tells us to imagine the children's story *Beauty and the Beast*, in which the girl kisses a monster, only to witness the monster turn into a handsome man. Now, imagine a story about an ugly man who wears a handsome mask; after years of wearing the mask, he takes it off, only to discover that his ugly face has become handsome because it now "fits" the mask. The two stories can help us understand religious practice.

Lewis reiterates a point he made in Book Three: repetition and performance can engender sincere feeling. For example, an unkind person who goes through the motions of being kind will often eventually become genuinely kind.

The first words of the Lord's Prayer are "*Our Father*," suggesting that, by reciting the Lord's Prayer, a good Christian "plays the part" of Christ the Son. But what is the point of pretending to be Christ? Sometimes, by pretending to do something or believe something, we can teach ourselves to be or do that thing, if given enough time. The Lord's Prayer is a great example of the "power of pretending"—humans play the part of Christ to prepare for their future spiritual lives, in which they will become Sons of God.

The premise of Lewis's argument here is that the Lord's Prayer was meant to be spoken by a son of God (hence the word "father"). Thus, by reciting the Lord's Prayer, Christians mimic the actions of Jesus Christ himself, rehearsing the part of Jesus so that, in the afterlife, they can become actual Sons of God.

Human beings also have the power to "infect" other people with the spirit of Christ. Indeed, when two people unite in their love for Christ, they increase their Christianity exponentially. But sometimes, people claim that they get spiritual joy from other people—not contemplating Christ. The problem with such a claim is that Christ is the only source of spiritual life; the only reason it's possible to feel joy when helping other people is that Christ inspires us. Christ is a living being, who continues to influence our behavior.

This chapter is full of analogies—here, for instance, Lewis compares spreading Christianity to spreading a virus. Lewis also reiterates a point he's made many times in his book: Christ (and God, the Father) is the only true source of happiness. People who say that they get happiness from their friends and family are vicariously getting joy from Christ himself.

It might be objected that it's possible to lead a moral life without believing in Christ. But a Christian life is unique in two ways. First, Christians doesn't just perform good deeds; they recognize that their own nature is deeply sinful. During prayer, they become conscious of their own sins, and gradually realize that the only way to become truly moral is to worship God. Second, Christians realize that God is reaching out to them *as if* they were morally pure already. God treats humans as if they're "little Christs," in the manner of a mother talking to her baby before the baby can understand. God assumes the best of us, in the hopes that one day, we will become divine.

As Lewis pointed out in Book One, one can only enter into Christianity by accepting one's own sinful nature—in other words, by realizing that one can never achieve true purity and goodness by oneself. Nevertheless, a good Christian must aspire to be good and pure, against all odds. By "performing" goodness and purity, humans eventually can achieve these ends in Heaven.

BOOK 4, CHAPTER 8: IS CHRISTIANITY HARD OR EASY?

So far Lewis has been talking about the act of assuming the role of Christ, so that one day, we can achieve divine life. Indeed, Lewis claims that "assuming the role of Christ" sums up the entirety of Christianity.

Christianity consists of following the moral law and worshipping Christ—approximating a state of perfect virtue, so that, one day, one can achieve this state of perfection in Heaven.

Lewis summarizes how an ordinary person might progress from atheism to Christianity. Non-believers have their own desires and selfish interests; some of these people discover morality and a code of decent behavior. But when people merely *accept* a moral code, they continue to behave selfishly; they're just doing the right thing in the hopes of achieving a reward later. The only way to graduate from mere moral obedience to true, selfless moral enlightenment is to worship Christ. And in the end, worshipping Christ inspires people to give up their selves; to surrender to Christ's majesty and become united with God.

One of the most common misinterpretations of Christianity—or, arguably, religion—is that being a good Christian consists of simply obeying a set of rules and laws in order to get into Heaven (for example, there is a famous philosophical problem called "Pascal's Wager," which proposes that atheists might as well convert to Christianity, since the rewards of salvation are so enormous). Lewis's point is that mere obedience, in the interest of achieving a reward, is not enough—one must accept that one's obedience will always be insufficient, and that humanity is inherently flawed. When humans accept that they're imperfect, they can truly worship Jesus Christ and give up their selves to him.

Giving up one's self can be extremely difficult; indeed, humans instinctively want to protect their selves and remain selfish. And yet, in the end, the only way to be truly happy is to "hand over" ourselves. Atheists and non-believers are like lazy schoolchildren who think they don't have to do the hard work of learning equations and memorizing dates. But when it's time for an exam, the lazy schoolchildren realize how ignorant they are, and frantically try to "cram" for their exams. By the same token, a good Christian might get less short-term pleasure than a non-believer, but in the end, a Christian will be "prepared" for salvation in a way that an atheist literally cannot conceive of.

In essence, being a good Christian means giving up on one's own selfish desires. Humans instinctively want to protect themselves and favor their own interests; therefore, becoming a Christian can be extremely difficult. And yet the long-term payoffs of worshipping Christ are undeniable—good Christians who humbly surrender their own desires will achieve salvation, while atheists and nonbelievers will be (presumably) damned.

In the end, the only purpose of Christianity is to make mankind one with Christ. The church has many projects—charity, education, etc.—but in the end, these projects are just means to the ultimate end of uniting man and the Son of God. When man and Christ unite, "the bad dream will be over; it will be morning."

One implication of this passage is that all human problems are caused by the absence of a "oneness with Christ." If humans could only surrender their self-interest and greedy desires, Lewis suggests, the world would be a much better place.

BOOK 4, CHAPTER 9: COUNTING THE COST

On of the great challenges of Christianity is that God wants humans to be perfect; indeed, the Bible tells us, "Be ye perfect." Some have criticized Christianity on the grounds that perfection is an unrealistic goal, and that it's unfair for God to punish humans when they fail to be perfect. To clarify the issue, Lewis recalls being a child and getting toothaches. Whenever this happened, Lewis was afraid to tell his mother. He know that she would give him an aspirin for the pain (which he wanted), but also that she would take him to the dentist to cure his toothaches permanently (which Lewis didn't want at all). For Lewis, the Christian directive, "be ye perfect," is not a challenge, but a simple statement of fact. If humans agree to believe in Christ, then Christ will *make* them perfect. The problem is that most people are afraid of becoming perfect—they don't want to change their old lives or give up on their favorite sins. Like Lewis with his toothache, most people want to cure a couple of their sins, but they don't want the "full treatment."

In response to the criticism that Christianity makes unrealistic demands by telling human beings to "be perfect," Lewis argues that it is possible, but very challenging (and only with God's help), to eventually be perfect. Like children who don't want to go to the dentist, most people simply don't want to be perfect—their self-interest and apathy compel them to continue their bad habits and sinful ways. Achieving perfection, or at least committing to strive for it, can be frightening, even painful.

It is possible for any human being to become perfect by worshipping Jesus Christ—but most humans are unwilling to commit to the "full treatment" of religion. Humans might think that the purpose of Christianity is to make then into "nice, decent people," but in fact, Christianity goes much further—it aims to make people into saints. It might seem arrogant to aspire to become a saint, but in fact, a good Christian should aspire to nothing less.

The stereotypical representation of a "good Christian" is a nice, cheerful, pleasant person. However, Lewis argues that a truly good Christian is much more wonderful: a good Christian is "saintly" (a somewhat difficult concept that Lewis will define in the rest of the chapter).

The path to salvation can be difficult. Just when people think that Christianity has cured their smaller sins, they realize how sinful they really are and begin to despair. Lewis cites the author George MacDonald, who argued that people are like living houses, and God is like the man who rebuilds them. At first, a house might understand *how* it's being rebuilt. But eventually, the man will begin knocking down walls and tearing out pipes—hurting the house enormously. Gradually, the house realizes that it's being converted from a tiny cottage into a palace, just as a human is converted into a divine being.

George MacDonald was a major influence on Lewis: like Lewis, MacDonald was a highly educated scholar and theologian who also wrote a series of highly successful fantasy books. Lewis cites MacDonald when writing about the difficulty of achieving salvation. Even if salvation is the most wonderful thing in the universe, people are still frightened of it because they don't want to abandon their old, selfish lives.

In all, the commandment, "Be ye perfect" isn't just "idealistic gas." It's an order for humans to trust in God's authority, sacrificing their short-term happiness, and even enduring a great deal of pain, so that in the long run they can experience salvation.

Ultimately, human beings can attain perfection and sainthood: but in order to do so, they must be willing to sacrifice their desires, their instincts of self-preservation, and their entire ways of life.

BOOK 4, CHAPTER 10: NICE PEOPLE OR NEW MEN

Lewis addresses a nagging question—if Christianity is such a wonderful thing, then why aren't Christians always nicer than non-Christians? Lewis argues that the question is half-reasonable, and half-unfair. First of all, it is reasonable to expect a moral awakening to alter a person's external attitude—presumably, such an awakening would make them kinder.

In this chapter, Lewis tackles a difficult question, which he states upfront: why aren't Christians necessarily "nice" people?

The question of why Christians aren't always nicer than non-Christians is unreasonable for three reasons, though. First, the world isn't divided into Christians and non-Christians. There are many people who are *trying* to be Christians—people who accept some aspects of the religion, but not others, and who are trying hard to achieve salvation. Thus, the question is imprecise. A second, more important reason why the question is unreasonable is that Christianity tends to *improve* people, rather than simply "making them nice." It would be utterly unfair to expect Christianity to make all people nice—rather, Christianity helps troubled people recognize their own limitations and become *better*.

Lewis clarifies the question by pointing out that there are many people who are "on the fence" with Christianity—indeed, part of the purpose of his book is to sway such people toward Christianity. Another problem with the question is that it assumes that Christianity helps all people become equally kind and loving—a better question, Lewis implies, would be, "Does Christianity make people better than they would otherwise *be?"*

The final and most important reason why the question is unreasonable it that it implies that Christianity is something that nasty people need and nice people can do without. Christianity's ultimate goal is not to make people nice; it's to make them holy and show them a new kind of life. All people, whether they're nice or not, can benefit from Christianity—they can learn to recognize their own flaws and sins, and seek forgiveness in God.

As Lewis argued in the previous chapter, the purpose of Christianity isn't to make people nice; it's to purify their souls and lead them to surrender all selfish, sinful desires. One can be saved without being particularly nice; moreover, both nasty people and nice people can benefit from Christian salvation.

Lewis isn't denying that it's important to be nice. Niceness should be one of the aims of human society. However it would be a mistake to assume that, when everyone is "nice," humanity will be saved. Furthermore, it would be a mistake to say that people are the cause of their own niceness; on the contrary, God provides them with the temperament to be nice. In this way, a nice person who doesn't embrace Christianity can make the mistake of taking credit for their own niceness, leading them to feel sinful pride.

Niceness is important, but it's not the be-all, end-all of human nature. One reason why niceness is arguably overrated is that some externally "nice" humans can become arrogant and self-centered internally. Good Christians—whether they're nice or nasty—must accept that their temperaments come directly from God, and that it's their choices that really matter.

It shouldn't be surprising that Christians can be nasty people. Arguably, nasty people are more likely to embrace Christianity than kind people; nasty people are probably more conscious of their own sins and problems, and therefore more likely to seek religious help. Atheists and narrow-minded non-believers cite nasty Christians as proof that there is something deeply wrong with the religion, when in truth, the very fact that nasty people are turning to Christianity for help is a sign that Christianity can help anyone.

In conclusion, Lewis argues that the question, "Why are some Christians so nasty?" misses the point. The fact that nasty people accept their flaws and turn to Christianity for help and guidance is actually a testament to the beauty and openness of the Christian faith.

BOOK 4, CHAPTER 11: THE NEW MEN

Nowadays, there is a lot of talk about the theory of evolution, the idea that human beings evolved from earlier life forms. Some imaginative writers have tried to imagine what the next step in evolution will look like—but usually these writers, in trying to describe a "superman," wind up imagining something "a good deal nastier than man." Mostly, they imagine humans become smarter or stronger than they are now.

In the final chapter, Lewis offers a controversial interpretation of the theory of evolution. Lewis's argument may be surprising, since many Christian thinkers have rejected Darwin's theory of evolution as an affront to the text of the Bible. Lewis, however, believes that it's possible to see Christianity through a Darwinian lens (or, perhaps, to see Darwinism through a Christian lens).

Lewis speculates that the next step in evolution has already happened, and didn't involve people becoming smarter or stronger, but rather transitioning from being creatures of God to sons of God. After Christ's example, people learned how to embrace God and become divine.

The crux of Lewis's point is that Christianity is an evolutionary leap forward. This point needs a lot of explanation and qualification, which Lewis will attempt to provide.

The "evolution" of man to Christianity is different from earlier forms of evolution in several ways. First, Christianity isn't perpetuated through sex, but rather through prayer, baptism, and ritual. Second, Christianity isn't a biological certainty or a genetic inheritance; it's a choice that all humans must make. Third, Christianity is predicated on the immortality of Christ; he continues to inspire humans and lead them to salvation. Fourth, the Christian "jump" in evolution didn't happen gradually; compared to earlier evolutionary changes, it diffused across the planet in "a flash of lightning." Fifth, the stakes of Christianity are higher than those of previous evolutionary changes, because Christianity concerns the survival of the soul, not just the body.

In Darwin's theory of evolution, useful traits recur over time because the creatures that possess these useful traits survive to have sex and produce offspring. For Lewis, the "useful trait" of Christian salvation perpetuates itself very quickly over time thanks to ritual (another reason why ritual is such an important part of the faith). Even though Lewis's Darwinian interpretation of Christianity concerns the human soul, not the body, his point in this chapter essentially mirrors Darwin's concept of "survival of the fittest." Christianity has survived over the centuries because it makes human beings holier and more compassionate, and because humans pass on this faith to other people.

Christianity has, in short, created a group of "new men." These people are united in their worship of Christ, even if they're very different from one another. Many people are frightened that God's salvation will destroy individuality altogether. In response, Lewis compares the human race to a group of people blundering around in the dark, none of whom have ever seen **light**. If one were to explain to this group that a light was about to turn on, they might be worried that the light would "destroy" their personalities by shining equally on all of them—when in reality the light would illuminate everyone and show how different they all were.

One of the key themes of Book Four is that people are often frightened of salvation, even though salvation is, by definition, the most wonderful thing that could happen to a human being. One reason that people fear salvation is that they want to preserve their individuality—however, Lewis argues that one can only be a true individual *in Heaven, when one is united with God.*

Lewis proposes a second analogy: imagine a foreigner who's never tasted salt before. If you offer this person a pinch of salt, and then explain to him that many English dishes contain salt, he might reply, "I suppose all your dishes taste exactly the same." In fact, the great thing about salt is that it enhances the tastes of many different foods instead of making them taste the same. By the same logic, Christ's salvation will make humans into "little Christs"—but it won't make everyone the same. Lewis further suggests, "The more we get what we now call 'ourselves' out of the way and let Him take us over, the more truly ourselves we become."

The notion that Christians can only be truly true individuals when they've achieved salvation seems contradictory. To clarify the issue, Lewis compares salvation to salt—the beauty of salvation is that it "brings out" and fulfills different people's true, God-given personalities.

Humans are too hasty to say that their tastes, beliefs, and styles define their "personalities." But "personality," as it's generally understood, is something of an illusion. People base their personalities on all sorts of external influences—propaganda, their friends, alcohol, books, movies, etc. Christianity strips away so-called personality and reveals a person's true character. Lewis argues, "Unless you have given up your self to Him you will not have a real self."

Lewis distinguishes between a person's "personality" as the word is generally understood, and that person's true self, which can only be revealed in Heaven. Although Lewis does not elaborate here, he suggests that "personality," understood in the usual sense, is an illusion because it's rooted in material, earthly things, such as possessions, people, etc.

The strange thing about Christianity is that if people worship Christ in order to "find their true selves," they never will. In the same way that writers will never be original if they try to be original, or party guests will never make a good impression unless they stop fixating on making a good impression, Christians will only be able to achieve enlightenment, shedding their old selves, when they stop thinking about the rewards of Christianity, and instead just "submit."

Even though Christianity leads people to salvation, happiness, and a "true self," one cannot be a Christian simply to achieve these rewards. As Lewis has argued since Book One, Christianity often emerges from a sense of despair—a sense of moral inadequacy, for which the only "cure" is Jesus Christ.

To be a true Christian, a human being must be willing to sacrifice everything—self, ambition, earthly desires, etc. The only thing good Christians must desire is Jesus Christ himself—and when they desire Christ, they will "find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in."

Becoming a good Christian can be immensely challenging—doing so involves surrendering one's entire way of life and selflessly submitting to Christ's authority. While Christians cannot choose to worship Christ simply because they want to reap the rewards of salvation, good Christians will, *in fact, achieve eternal salvation, along with many other rewards, if only they will give up the goal of such rewards and focus on God alone.*

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