

## **The Problem of Pain**

**C.S. Lewis**

**Week Five**

### **Chapter Seven – Human Pain, Continued**

There are six additional propositions about human pain that need to be considered to round out the discussion.

1. There is a paradox about tribulation in Christianity. Blessed are the poor, but by social justice and alms, we are to remove poverty wherever possible. Blessed are we when we are persecuted, but we may avoid persecution by fleeing, and we may pray to be spared. (p. 110)
  - a. If suffering is good, shouldn't we pursue it? Suffering is not good in itself. What is good is the occasion it allows for the sufferer to surrender to God, and for observers, the compassion and the acts of mercy it inspires. (pp. 110-111)
  - b. We can distinguish between the simple good that comes from God; the simple evil we produce; the exploitation of that evil by God for His own purpose; and the complex good to which accepted suffering and repented sin contribute. (p. 111)
  - c. The fact that God can make complex good out of simple evil does not excuse (though it may save) those who do the evil. If a cruel man oppresses his neighbor, the neighbor may serve God as a son, the oppressor as a tool. It matters whether you serve like Judas or John. (p. 111)
  - d. People are sometimes entitled to hurt others – a parent, a magistrate or soldier, a surgeon. But this is not a general charter to inflict pain, and if it is taken as such, you're doing Satan's work, not God's. (p. 112)
  - e. Self-torture is different from pain sent by God. Fasting, for example, asserts the will against the appetite; the reward is self mastery, the temptation is pride. Involuntary hunger subjects appetite and will to the divine will and offers an occasion for submission or rebellion. (p. 112)
  - f. Asceticism is useful only insofar as a preparation for offering the whole self to God. (p. 113)
  - g. Our Lord seems to reduce all virtue to active beneficence; that is sufficient to place beyond doubt the basic social principles of Christianity. (p. 114)
2. If tribulation is necessary for redemption, it will not cease until God sees the world as redeemed or as beyond redemption. (p. 114)
3. The Christian doctrine of self-surrender and obedience is purely theological, not political. Lewis has nothing here to say about civil authority and civil disobedience. No inference can be drawn from the Christian doctrine of obedience to any political proposition. (p. 115)
4. God withholds settled security and happiness from us so we don't rest our hearts in this world. But we still have plenty of fun to refresh us on our journey. (p. 116)
5. When we have reached the maximum that one person can suffer, we have reached all the suffering there can ever be in the universe. (pp.116-117)
6. Pain has no tendency, in its own right, to proliferate. When it is over, it is over, and the natural sequel is joy. (p. 117)

### **Chapter Eight – Hell**

- The Divine labor to redeem the world cannot be certain of succeeding as regards every individual soul. (p. 119)

- The doctrine of hell has the full support of Scripture and, specially, of our Lord's own words; it has always been held by Christendom; and it has the support of reason. (p. 120)
- This doctrine is one of the chief grounds on which Christianity is attacked as barbarous and the impunity of God impugned. (p. 120)
- Christianity presents us with something knottier and more ambiguous than a God who consigns some of his creatures to final ruin – a God so full of mercy that he becomes man and dies by torture to avert that final ruin from his creatures, and who yet, where that heroic remedy fails, seems unwilling, or even unable, to arrest the ruin by a mere act of power ... so much mercy, yet still there is hell. (p. 121)
- The doctrine is not tolerable, but it can be shown to be moral. (p. 121)
- (In the case of a treacherous, cruel man), you are moved not by a desire for pain, but by a truly ethical demand that, soon or late, the right should be asserted, even if no fuller and better conquest is to follow ... It is better for the creature itself, even if it never becomes good, that it should know itself a failure, a mistake. Even mercy can hardly wish to such a man his eternal, contented continuance in such ghastly illusion. (p. 123)
- If evil is present, pain at recognition of the evil, being a kind of knowledge, is relatively good. (p. 124)
- The demand that God should forgive a man while he remains what he is, is based on a confusion between condoning and forgiving. To condone an evil is simply to ignore it, to treat it as if it were good. But forgiveness needs to be accepted as well as offered if it is to be complete, and a man who admits no guilt can accept no forgiveness. (p. 124)
- We are at liberty to think of a bad man's perdition not as a sentence imposed on him but as the mere fact of being what he is. The characteristic of lost souls is 'their rejection of everything that is not simply themselves.' (pp. 124-125)
- (The unrepentant) has his wish – to lie wholly in the self and to make the best of what he finds there. And what he finds there is hell. (p. 125)
- Another objection to hell turns on the apparent disproportion between eternal damnation and transitory sin. And it's true, if we think of eternity as a mere prolongation of time. But if time is a line, think of eternity as a plane or a solid. And if our timeline/life on earth is the baseline, and it's not corrected, then our plane or solid in eternity will be off. (p. 125)
- How about the idea of a second chance? A master knows it is really useless to send a boy for a certain examination again. Finality must come some time; omniscience knows when. (p. 126)
- If souls can be destroyed, must there not be a state of having been a soul? And isn't that, perhaps, the state described as torment, destruction and privation? The saved go to a place prepared for them, while the damned go to a place never meant for men at all. To enter heaven is to become more human than you ever succeeded in being on earth; to enter hell is to be banished from humanity. (p. 127-128)
- Another objection – no charitable man could be blessed in heaven while he knew that one human soul was still in hell. But hell may be more finality than duration. (p. 129)
- Hell means the defeat of omnipotence. But is this defeat or miracle, that God is capable of being resisted by his own handiwork? (p. 130)
- If you object to the doctrine of hell, what are you asking God to do? To wipe out past sins and give them a fresh start? He has done so on Calvary. To forgive them? They will not be forgiven. To leave them alone? That's what he does. (p. 130)
- This chapter is not about your wife or son; not about Judas or Nero; it's about you and me. (p. 131)