

## C.S. LEWIS: MERE CHRISTIANITY

### Week Two

#### Highlights of Book Two: What Christians Believe

- The Rival Conceptions of God
  - Christians, unlike atheists, don't have to believe that every other religion is completely wrong. But where Christianity differs from another religion, Christians are obliged to believe Christianity holds the correct view. (In math, even though there is only one correct answer, some wrong answers are closer than other wrong answers.)
  - When discussing humanity as a whole, there are two big divisions. The majority – ancient Greeks and Romans, Platonists, Stoics, Hindus, Muslims, animists, Christians – believe in some kind of God or gods. The minority – materialists, atheists – believe in no God (and are a relatively new viewpoint).
  - Within the camp that believes there is a God or gods, there are two big divisions. One, called pantheism, believes that God is beyond good and evil. Jews, Muslims and Christians hold another view. This view is that God is completely good or righteous, really cares for people and takes sides, and wants humans to behave in a certain way. This is very different from pantheism.
  - In the Christian view, God created the universe. He made all things, but he is separate from the created world.
  - Christianity teaches that many things have gone wrong with the world and that God “insists very loudly” on putting everything back the way it was, putting it right again.
  - Atheism is too simple. How could we assert that the universe has no meaning if it truly had no meaning? (We would have no concept of “meaning” if there were no such thing.)
  
- The Invasion
  - Atheism is too simple, and so is “watered-down Christianity,” which states that everything is all right because God is God. It omits the difficult doctrines of sin, hell, the devil and redemption.
  - Simple religion is no good because real things are not simple, even if they appear to be so. A table is much more complex than it appears, as is a child's prayer.
  - Reality is complicated, and not neat, obvious or what we anticipate. This is one reason Lewis believed Christianity; it's not something we could have guessed, not something anyone would or could have made up. It has the “queer twist” one would expect real things to have.
  - Here's the problem – a universe that contains such bad and meaningless things but also has people who know that bad is bad and meaningless is meaningless.
  - Only two views face all the facts. **Christianity** says we live in a good world in which things have gone wrong and are not as they should be. **Dualism** believes there are two equal and independent forces, one good and one evil, behind everything.
  - Dualism has a catch in it. We must say that one of the two powers is good, the other bad, not that we merely prefer one to the other. When we say that, we have added a third thing to the formula – a law or standard to which one of the two conforms. The, the Standard, which stands farther back or higher than the other two, is the real God. Good and bad turn out to be in relation to the real God.
  - Even from the viewpoint of the bad power, this is true. The bad is bad against a standard; it (he) is part of the good power's world. That's why Christianity teaches that the devil is a fallen angel.
  - A bad man, to be bad, uses things that are good, like resolution, cleverness, persuasiveness. But he uses them to bad ends. This is why dualism doesn't work.
  - Christianity believes in a dark power that was created good but went wrong (maybe through the sin of pride).
  - The universe is at war. Christianity says it's not a war between independent powers but rather a rebellion.

- The Shocking Alternative
  - An evil power occupies the world. Is this God's will or not?
  - If it is, there's something strange about this. If it's not, how can this be accounted for if God is an absolute power? The answer lies in the idea of free will.
  - God gave us free will, which means we have a real option to choose bad or good. Why did he give it to us? Because, even though evil is made possible, it's also the only way that love, goodness or real joy is possible.
  - God knew the risks involved in free will; he believed it was worth taking. If we disagree, we're saying that we're better able to reason than the source of our reason. This is impossible; a stream can't rise higher than its source.
  - We can't be sure how the dark power (Satan) went wrong. But, once we have a self, it's possible to put that self at the center instead of God. The sin Satan taught the human race was just that: You can be like God, independent from him and happy apart from him.
  - God gave us three things: a conscience, "good dreams" that things can be better, and a chosen people whom he taught an understanding of the kind of God he is.
  - Then he gave us himself in the person of Jesus Christ, who said he forgives sins, has always existed and claims he will judge the end of the world. He either is who he says he is, or he is a lunatic. He is not just a good human teacher; he's either way more or way less. Make your choice!
  
- The Perfect Penitent
  - The central Christian belief is that Jesus, in dying, put us right with God and gave us a new start. Only Jesus, the Christ, God incarnate, can be the Perfect Penitent.
  - Jesus' purpose in coming to our enemy-occupied world? To teach, but also to do something far more important – to die and to come to life again.
  - The "formula" of Christianity is this: Jesus was killed for us; his death cleansed our sins; through his death he conquered death itself. No one knows fully how this works; some theories are worth exploring.
  - The idea that we are "let off" because of Jesus' death seems silly. Why didn't God just let us off? It doesn't make sense to punish an innocent person. But it does make sense if we think of Jesus paying off a debt for us, as a person with resources pays a debt for a person who has none.
  - A fallen man isn't just needing improvement; he is a rebel who must lay down his weapons. He rebelled against his very best self. The only way out of this hole is surrender, actually killing a part of ourselves.
  - The more evil a person is, the more he needs repentance, yet the less able he is to do so. The only person who can do so perfectly is a perfect person – who doesn't need to do so.
  - It's what we must do to get back to God, but the only way we can is if God helps us. We must die to self, but we can only do so if God dies for us, and He can die only if he is a man. This is atonement.
  
- The Practical Conclusion
  - Jesus cleansed our sins and conquered death for all who accept him.
  - This new life is spread through baptism, belief and the Lord's Supper.
  - We know that no man can be saved except through Christ; we do not know that only those who know him can be saved through him. But in the meantime, we are meant to be part of the body of Christ, reach out to others and spread the Good News of Christ.
  - Why isn't God landing in force, bringing the world to an end? He wants to give us the chance of joining his side freely. God is holding back to give us that chance.