

C.S. LEWIS: MERE CHRISTIANITY

Week Three

Highlights of Book Three: Christian Behaviour

- The Three Parts of Morality
 - There are three parts to morality: relations with other human beings, our internal moral health, how humanity relates to God. It has things to say about three spheres of duty: how we act person to person, what each of us is like inside, and how we relate to God.
 - Morality is to keep us from breaking down, straining or having friction in running our human “machine.” It’s meant to help us, not hinder us.

- The Cardinal Virtues
 - There are four cardinal (pivotal) virtues: prudence (practical common sense); temperance (going the right length and no further); justice (fairness, which includes honesty, give-and-take, truthfulness, keeping promises, etc.); fortitude (courage that faces danger, courage that is strong under pain).
 - There’s a difference between virtuous action and being virtuous. Right behavior for bad reasons won’t help build internal character, and that’s what matters in the end.
 - God doesn’t want only obedience to rules. He wants a particular sort of person.
 - Getting to be a certain kind of person occurs by doing certain kinds of acts. We need the beginnings of certain qualities of character, or heaven is not possible. This is NOT works righteousness.

- Social Morality
 - In social morality, Jesus didn’t bring anything new. Only quacks and cranks do that.
 - Christianity does not intend to have a political agenda for applying the Golden Rule to a specific society at a particular instant.
 - The three great civilizations – Greek, Hebrew, Christian – all warned against lending money at interest. (Not sure what this means for modern civilization.)
 - The reason the New Testament says everyone must work is so that we can give to the poor. Charity is an essential part of Christianity. How much should we give? The only safe rule is that giving involves sacrifice.

- Morality and Psychoanalysis
 - Psychoanalysis and Christianity are not necessarily contradictory. The two are doing different things. Both are concerned with choice, of which there are two components – the act of choosing, and the various feelings and impulses with which a person’s “psychological outfit” provides the “raw material” of his choice.
 - The raw material is either normal or unnatural. Psychoanalysis might cure unnatural fears of things like spiders and cats that “no amount of moral effort can help.” Bad psychological material is a disease, not a sin.
 - A disease needs to be cured; sin needs to be repented.
 - God judges us by moral choices. He doesn’t judge our raw material but what we do with it.
 - In our moral choices we are slowly turning ourselves into either a heavenly or a hellish creature.
 - The right direction leads not only to peace but also to knowledge. As we get better, we understand the evil within us better. As we get worse, we see our badness less and less.

- Sexual Morality
 - The virtue of chastity never changes, but the rule of propriety does.
 - Chastity is the most unpopular Christian virtue; it seems “so contrary to our instincts,” but that’s because our instinct has gone wrong.
 - The sins of the flesh are the least bad of all sins. The worst pleasures are purely spiritual – bossing, patronizing, backbiting, power, hatred.
 - A cold, self-righteous, church-going “prig” may be closer to hell than a prostitute (but, of course, it is much better to be neither one).

- Christian Marriage
 - In marriage, the two become a single organism. Love is a deep unity maintained by will and strengthened by habit.
 - Divorce is like a surgery that dismembers a living body.
 - Marriage is a promise made before and to God. Our sexual impulse, like others, should be controlled by a promise.
 - Marriages need a head, and the man is it.

- Forgiveness
 - Forgiveness is at the center of faith, and it means forgiving even our enemies.
 - Forgiveness doesn't mean liking someone but loving them as we love ourselves.
 - We all know one person whose corrupt actions we can hate without hating that person – ourselves. Give others the same break.

- The Great Sin
 - The great sin is pride, which is at the root of all other sins.
 - The real pleasure of pride is not in having something but in having more of it than someone else.
 - It is our right and duty not to care what others think of us but to care what God thinks.
 - Humble people don't put themselves down. They just take a genuine interest in you.

- Charity
 - Charity is love – not an emotion but a state of the will.
 - Love does not mean we like ourselves or one another but that we desire our own good or the good of another.
 - Don't worry about whether you love your neighbor; act as if you do, and soon you will.
 - Good and evil grow at compound interest. That's why little decisions are of infinite importance.

- Hope
 - Aim at heaven, and earth will be thrown in.
 - What we truly want can't be supplied by this world. We were made for another world.
 - Earthly pleasures arouse heavenly desire but can't satisfy it.

- Faith
 - In the first sense, it's accepting that Christian doctrines are true.
 - Emotion and imagination battle with faith and reason. It's an act of faith to hold onto beliefs even with changing moods.
 - Real Christianity blows to bits the idea that we can simply "perform" and be good Christians. It's only in trying to resist temptation that we learn how bad we are. If we stick with it, God will give us everything we need to please him.

- Faith
 - We must discover that we are bankrupt before we can be right with God. We see then that he must make us right; we can't.
 - "Good actions" and "faith in Christ" are like the two blades of a scissors. It can't cut without both.
 - Some say only good actions matter, some say only faith matters. Both positions are nonsense.
 - We must try to obey God, but in a new, less worried way that knows he loves us and is with us.