

C.S. LEWIS: MERE CHRISTIANITY

Four-Week Outline

Week One

Biographical information – C.S. Lewis

Highlights of Book One – Right and Wrong: Clue to the Meaning of the Universe

- The Law of Human Nature
- Objections to the Idea of Moral Law
- The Reality of the Law
- What Lies Behind the Law
- We Have Cause to Be Uneasy

Week Two

Highlights of Book Two – What Christians Believe

- The Rival Conceptions of God
- The Invasion
- The Shocking Alternative
- The Perfect Penitent
- The Practical Conclusion

Week Three

Highlights of Book Three – Christian Behavior

- The Three Parts of Morality
- The “Cardinal Virtues”
- Social Morality
- Morality and Psychoanalysis
- Sexual Morality
- Christian Marriage
- Forgiveness
- The Great Sin
- Charity
- Hope
- Faith
- Faith

Week Four

Highlights of Book Four – First Steps in the Doctrine of the Trinity

- Making and Begetting
- The Three-Person God
- Time and Beyond Time
- Good Infection
- The Obstinate Toy Soldier
- Two Notes
- Let’s Pretend
- Is Christianity Hard or Easy?
- Counting the Cost
- Nice People or New Men?
- The New Men

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Week One

Biographical Information – C.S. Lewis

- 1898 – Lewis born in Belfast, Ireland
- 1908 – Mother dies of cancer; Lewis blames God
- 1911 – Lewis enters Cherbourg House preparatory school, decides he is an atheist
- 1915 – Reads George MacDonald's *Phantasies*, which had a great impact on his thinking
- 1916 – Enters University of Oxford on a classical scholarship
- 1917 – Drafted into British army for World War I; commissioned as second lieutenant
- 1918 – Captured 60 Germans as prisoners; wounded in action
- 1919 – Returned to Oxford, went on to become a career academic
- 1925 – Became lifelong friends with J.R.R. Tolkien (Christian author, *Lord of the Rings*)
- 1929 – Confesses that "God is God"; not yet Christian
- 1931 – Took a motorcycle ride with his brother to a zoo in England. Said that when he began the trip, he did not believe that Jesus Christ was the son of God. When he finished the trip, he did.
- 1933 – Publishes *Pilgrim's Regress*, first of a long series of Christian books
- 1942 – Begins radio broadcasts that later are compiled into *Mere Christianity*
- 1956 – Marries Joy Davidham Gresham, who died from cancer four years later
- 1963 – Dies on November 22 of osteoporosis

Highlights of Book One – Right and Wrong: Clue to the Meaning of the Universe

- The Law of Human Nature
 - Humans everywhere have a "curious idea" that they should behave in a certain way, and they can't shake the idea.
 - As humans, we do not behave in the way we know we should. We know the law of human nature, but we break it.
 - When people quarrel, they appear to share a common standard of behavior. The quarrel is not usually over the standard but some action that is justified by the offending party as an exception to the standard.
 - Not a law of nature like the laws of chemistry or physics, which are "obeyed." People can choose to obey or disobey the law of human nature.
- Objections to the Idea of the Law of Human Nature (moral law)
 - Some say this is just "herd instinct," but Lewis disagrees. Herd instinct may tell you to help someone in trouble, but the instinct for self-preservation will tell you not to get involved. There is a third force – the law of human nature – that judges between the two instincts.
 - When two instincts come into conflict, the stronger does not always win. Moral law usually urges a person to take the weaker instinct and make it the stronger. (Help a drowning person even though you will endanger yourself.) Choosing to help is not acting from instinct.
 - If moral law is only an instinct, then we should be able to point to an instinct that is always good – but none are. Acting on sexual instinct, appetite, even mothering behavior can be good or bad.
 - Moral law is not just social convention. Just because it's learned and passed along doesn't mean it's a mere human convention. Some things we can learn, like multiplication tables, are real truths, not just something people devised.
- The reality of the Law
 - Laws of nature are merely an explanation of how things work.
 - Laws of human nature (moral law) tell us what people ought to do but don't.
 - The point: There is more than one kind of reality.

- The moral law is really there, not something we made up. It's real, but not a physical reality.
- What lies behind the Law?
 - There is something above and beyond the ordinary facts of behavior, something real.
 - Of the two views of the world – materialist and religious – one better explains this reality.
 - Materialist view believes matter and space just happened; no one really knows why.
 - Religious view believes something is behind the universe, something more like mind than anything else – intelligent, conscious, chooses between options. It made the universe, at least in part, so it could create creatures like itself – creatures with minds.
 - Science cannot address or answer this question. Science deals with nature, can't say whether there is something behind nature.
- We have cause to be uneasy
 - Critics of religion say it already has been tried, so don't try to turn back the clock (out of date, old-fashioned, irrelevant).
 - Lewis's three comments:
 - The clock should be turned back if it is wrong.
 - There is something behind the moral law.
 - Christianity will not make sense until a person faces the facts he has identified.
 - The being behind the moral law is intensely interested in right conduct – fair play, unselfishness, courage, good faith, honesty, truthfulness. In this sense, God is good.
 - But he is not good in the sense of being indulgent, soft or sympathetic.
 - Whatever you can learn about God from nature, by observation alone, will not give evidence of a forgiving, personal God.
 - If there is an absolute goodness, it must abhor most of our actions.
 - This puts us in a terrible fix. We're in a universe where God is our only possible source of comfort, but we have made ourselves his enemy.