

Mere Christianity Study Guide

Mere Christianity by C. S. Lewis

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Plot Summary

C. S. Lewis defends Christianity by building a logical foundation for belief and constructing an entire theology upon that foundation. He begins with the premise that a Natural Law must exist, as humans did not invent it, but humans respond to it and cannot escape its influences. From this he proposes that God must exist, and that this God must be made up of three parts: the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost (or Spirit). Love springs from the relationship between the Father and Son. The Holy Ghost is a conduit for the divine love, and the Son has the responsibility to bring as many human souls to the Father as possible.

Lewis describes what a Christian believes and how a Christian should behave. The beliefs follow the logical argument, and the behavior involves several virtues that should be practiced, with the help of Jesus Christ. The first steps in being a Christian are to accept Jesus Christ and to try to be more like Him. The more closely one can be more like Jesus Christ, the better. However, one does not, and probably cannot, achieve perfection before death. This is acceptable, according to Lewis, and God looks with more favor upon those who struggle harder to be Christian.

There is no other way to everlasting life than through the help of Jesus Christ, and there is no other correct religion. However, Lewis allows that people of other religions or who have never heard of Christianity could be in the process he describes anyway. He extends this possibility to any intelligent being in the universe.

Ultimately, Lewis sees becoming Christian and achieving everlasting life as next step in human evolution. He does not expect any further biological evolution. As a result, new men walk the earth, those who are true Christians and who have achieved a level of perfection. Lewis recognizes these new men and suspects that they recognize each other.

The book consists of four sub-books:

Book I: Right and Wrong as a Clue to the Meaning of the Universe

Book II: What Christians Believe

Book III: Christian Behaviour

Book IV: Beyond Personality: or First Steps in the Doctrine of the Trinity

Final perfection of the human soul occurs after death in a kind of perfection training camp lead by Jesus Christ. Once perfect, Jesus takes a soul to the Father. What happens then is out of Lewis's scope, as it is for every human being. Only the first part of the plan, the part that directly involves human beings, is revealed to humanity.



Book I: Chapter 1 The Law of Human Nature

Book I: Chapter 1 The Law of Human Nature Summary and Analysis

C. S. Lewis lays the philosophical foundation of Book I in the first chapter: there exists a notion of right and wrong that is universal, the Law of Nature. All cultures everywhere agree that this Law of Nature exists, but differ on certain details. One example Lewis uses is marriage. Some cultures allow a single man to marry multiple women, but under the Law of Nature, no one man can have an unlimited number of women whom he desires.

Another argument in favor of the Law of Nature involves how very strange a culture would be if it went against the Law. Lewis suggests that a culture valuing cowardliness over courage would be very strange, as would one overtly rewarding lying and cheating. Lewis brings up our sense of guilt when we break the Law of Nature and how we try to rationalize the guilt away. But the very act of rationalization speaks to the existence of the Law in the first place. We would not feel guilty if there were no Law of Nature.

It matters not that people break the Law regularly. That the Law exists does not mean there are immediate forces that keep people from breaking it. No Law of Nature police exist to stop people from being overly selfish, cowardly, lustful, or any number of ways that the Law can be broken. Lewis also points out that he is not writing for the few people who may never break the Law, indicating a doubt that he will lose any of his audience for saying so. The expression commonly used for this idea is that nobody is perfect.

Lewis's argument does not stand alone, as he wrote an earlier book compiling a great deal more evidence for his Law of Nature premise, which he mentions in the first chapter. He assumes the reader, if curious enough, will examine the earlier work and discover a greater body of evidence. However, the point is made that everyone everywhere has a built-in awareness of the universal law, that this awareness is reflected in the relatively uniform codes of conduct in all societies, and that we are stuck with the situation. The argument is brief but designed to convince through the use of powerful examples, raising anticipated objections and immediately refuting them.

Appeals are also made to emotion, not so much to provoke a reaction, but to encourage the reader to be honest with true feelings. For example, Lewis starts the chapter with a description of a typical argument, an argument normally called an emotional fight between friends, lovers and/or spouses, not the logically arranged, cool-headed type of argument Lewis is constructing. One side of the emotional fight thinks the other side has done something wrong, something against the Law, and the opposing side defends or tries to point out other wrongs done in order to balance the ledger. Yet both sides



operate from the idea that something was done against the Law. Something was unfair, not right, disrespectful, dishonest, selfish, cruel, or so on.

Lewis sums up his logical foundation for Book I in the final paragraph of the first chapter:

"These, then, are the two points I wanted to make. First, that human beings, all over the earth, have this curious idea that they ought to behave in a certain way, and cannot get rid of it. Secondly, that they do not in fact behave in that way. They know the Law of Nature; they break it. These facts are the foundation of all clear thinking about ourselves and the universe we live in," (p. 21).

Whether the author has indeed established two facts of the universe or not is up to conjecture. Certainly people everywhere have moral codes of conduct, as this is the nature of social creatures. Without codes of conduct, there can be no society. But is this truly because of the existence of the Law of Nature, or is it simply a characteristic of social creatures? Might this all depend on how one looks at the evidence, the assumptions of the observer at the beginning? C. S. Lewis is arguing from the Christian position, and so a reader has a good idea of what the underlying assumptions are as he builds his argument. What cannot be denied is that Lewis has laid a secure foundation for what he will be proposing next. Who can deny their own imperfections?

Who has not wished to be free from guilt? Lewis assumes correctly that we all share these traits. We are imperfect beings who often feel badly about our failings, our human condition. The author does observe that we have long strings of excuses for our badness, but for our goodness we tend to congratulate ourselves. Lewis includes himself in this observation, as he is no better than anyone else.



Book I: Chapter 2 Some Objections

Book I: Chapter 2 Some Objections Summary and Analysis

In the second chapter Lewis addresses some of the objections he received after first publishing the book, originally delivered as radio broadcasts. These objections involve the existence of the Law, and are thus an extension of the initial argument. The Law is variously referred to as the Law of Human Nature, of Moral Law, and of Decent Behaviour. The author changes among these depending on the objection he is answering.

The first objection is that humans could be responding to instincts, such as the herd instinct, when they act as social creatures in a cooperative society. Lewis draws a distinction between instinct and action by using our possible responses to a drowning man's cry for help. The herd instinct would urge us to help the man. The self-preservation instinct would keep us away from the risk to our own lives, and herein conflict arises between the two instincts. Some people would follow the self-preservation instinct and ignore the cries for help. Others would follow the herd instinct, which Lewis assumes is the weaker of the two, and help the drowning man. His primary question is what drives the decision to follow the weaker of the two instincts? This cannot be an instinct itself, Lewis argues, and so must be something else. The analogy he uses is how sheet music is not the music itself, nor are the keys on a piano the music itself. The music exists separate from both sheet and piano, and so does the Law which prompts people to follow a weaker instinct rather than the stronger when the two are in conflict.

He argues further that when a man suppresses his sexual instinct, it may be for society's sake, but when he wants to have a baby with his wife, he must suspend the suppression. While a soldier suppresses the fighting instinct while at home, he must encourage it while in war, and in this Lewis is experienced, having served in World War I.

This series of rebuttals points out the weaknesses in the counterarguments. A danger in this method, however, is that the author could set up a straw man, a fictional being with an exaggerated position, solely to knock down the scarecrow and thereby demonstrate how powerful the initial argument is, even when it is not. The straw man argument is a debating trick meant to bolster a weak argument. Lewis, however, refers to actual letters he has received, and uses those objections that do in fact logically spring from his premise regarding the existence of the Law that governs people's instincts.

What if someone grows up isolated from society? Would that person not have any moral guidance since morality is taught by society? Lewis handles this objection with an analogy to mathematics. Surely this isolated person would not know very much about mathematics, yet mathematics does have a reality apart from humans, and so a



rudimentary level of mathematical understanding could be expected to develop. We discover that mathematical reality; we do not invent it, as we invent social conventions, such as which side of the road to drive upon. So it is with the Law. The Law exists apart from humans as mathematics does. Therefore, the isolated person would be aware of the Law at some level, but would not have the vaguest idea about which side of the road is the correct side upon which to drive. Lewis neatly separates what can be expected from what is impossible to expect, touching on a priori knowledge, that knowledge with which we are born. Lewis suggests we are born with the capacity to discover knowledge about both mathematics and the Law at some level, even when isolated from society. The implication is that society accelerates and broadens this inherent capacity to gain knowledge.

Lewis then tackles the objection of good people doing bad things to others out of ignorance, such as burning witches at the stake: "You would not call a man humane for ceasing to set mousetraps if he did so because he believed there were no mice in the house," (p. 26). Conversely, the man who set mousetraps because he believed mice to be in the house would not be considered immoral. Mice carry diseases that threaten his life and the lives of others in the house. The people who burned witches at the stake believed in witches, and those witches were believed to be evil. The witch burners were protecting their homes and their societies, acts within the Law. Ignorance is an excuse when talking about what people do when they think they are working within the Law.

Lewis here brings an argument from the critic's context to the actual context in history, a highly sophisticated way of turning an objection in on itself and thereby demonstrating its lack of logic. People everywhere want to protect their homes and their societies, even from imagined dangers. If we currently imagine witches to be a danger, we take action against those witches. However, we do not believe in witches in the same way any longer. So it is not reasonable to judge those who burned witches as having gone against the Law.

A slight problem stems from this line of argument, and Lewis touches on it. What about the Nazis? Did they not believe they were doing the right thing? Lewis uses a slight-of-hand trick—he appeals to the world's sense of good versus bad morality. The world in general disagreed with Nazi morality, preferring Christian morality over it. Despite using religious principles in their propaganda machine, the Nazis could not fool enough people to control the world because their propaganda preached things that went against the Law. This fits nicely alongside his other rebuttals, but does rest on an assumption that the Nazis were destined to fail. Had the atomic bomb not ended the war with Japan, and had the Russian winter not defeated the Nazis, and not many other circumstances not happened, the Nazi morality might have won. Germany was close to the atomic bomb too.

One of the great problems with religious, or in philosophical terms, metaphysical debates, is that we argue about things with no physical reality. A similar problem has developed in physics, where scientists cannot see subatomic particles directly and must infer their existence from observations done in huge particle accelerators. In string theory, the strings themselves cannot ever be observed, only inferred from balanced



mathematical equations. The arguments that Lewis uses in this chapter have certain weaknesses that can be argued against, but not easily. His use of sleight-of-hand is almost unnoticable, whereas his critics seem to blunder along in the obvious weakness of their own logic. Of course, the author has full control over what to include and what to ignore, and so the advantage naturally goes to him.



Book I: Chapter 3 The Reality of the Law

Book I: Chapter 3 The Reality of the Law Summary and Analysis

Lewis claims we know the reality of the Law by our responses to it. This is similar to knowing subatomic particles by what happens around them, but we do not need huge accelerators to know how we feel about events. Lewis uses several common examples to illustrate his point.

What makes a good rock or a bad tree? We have desires we impose on the rock or tree, such as wanting a rock a certain size, shape and color for a garden or a tree that gives shade during hot days. The good rock would be the perfect one for the garden, and a bad tree would not give enough shade, but the rock and the tree are not aware of our desires. They are simply being a rock and a tree.

People are simply being people when they either follow or go against the Law, but the difference is we are aware of following or going against the Law. It is not some other person imposing their desires upon us which causes us to forgive someone who has taken the good seat on the bus before we arrive, or which makes us angry if someone steals the good seat when we stand for a moment. These are our usual ways of acting, similar to how gravity works upon the garden rock. The rock has no choice but to respond to gravity, and we have no choice but to respond to the Law.

Lewis proposes we do not go far enough in our thinking about human behavior, and as a result we miss the truth, the existence of the Law. For example, attributing human social behavior to our desire to have orderly societies does not explain why we desire orderly societies. He points out the circular argument: we are the way we are because we desire to be the way we are, and we desire to be the way we are because this is the way we are. A similar circular argument is that a rock falls because it is heavy. The theory of gravity destroys the latter argument, and the Law breaks us out of our circular thinking about human behavior.

By paralleling scientific reasoning, Lewis adds more credulity to his premise that a Law of Nature must exist. Building a logical argument must start somewhere, and as Lewis explains, he starts with many observations about human behavior. Then he forms the premise that a Law of Nature must exist to guide human behavior, or at least to make us feel guilty if we go against the Law. We have the Law, disobey it regularly, and cannot escape the bad feelings when we disobey.

Lewis does not resort to mysticism in his argument up to this point. He describes how humans behave and proposes an explanation of why humans behave in certain ways, as natural responses to the Law of Nature. This is similar to the law of gravity except that we are aware of the Law, while a rock is not aware of the law of gravity.



Book I: Chapter 4 What Lies Behind the Law

Book I: Chapter 4 What Lies Behind the Law Summary and Analysis

Materialism and spiritualism are two opposite ways of interpreting existence which have been discussed and argued ever since thinking people began wondering how the universe came to be. Lewis explains materialism in the classic sense—the universe has always been, and mathematical principles of chance, also known as probability, brought about humankind. On the other hand, and dovetailing with Lewis's premise about the Law of Nature, spiritualism maintains that a consciousness brought the universe into existence with a clear purpose of creating other consciousnesses similar to its own. Where materialism does not presuppose a consciousness above the universe, spiritualism does.

Lewis builds his case for spiritualism by analogy. The architect of a house is evidenced by the existence of the house, but the architect is not a wall, a staircase, or any physical part of the house. The same is true about the universe. The builder of the universe is not a part of the universe. The question is begged, however, how does anyone know a builder in fact exists? Lewis answers this question by going within himself for evidence of an architect. He senses the influence of a builder and commands from a builder to behave in certain ways, but can he say everyone else senses the influence also?

He uses the analogy of a postal worker delivering letters. Lewis cannot look at all the letters to find out if they are the same as his, but he can assume the other letters are similar to his. They would have been written by someone, and the writing might be saying similar things.

The use of analogy, an argument that this unknown situation is similar to another known situation, is common. Analogy has the weakness that the two situations might be similar but are never equal. Letters are not the same as an architect's influence, and the universe is not equal to a house.

Finally, Lewis pleads the case that matter cannot give instructions, and so we must accept as fact that the instructions he and others sense in their consciousnesses must come from a higher consciousness. The premise of this argument, that matter cannot give instructions, has been proven to be false. DNA gives instructions, as do the various subatomic forces that act upon extremely tiny particles. String theory holds that even smaller packets of energy vibrating at particular frequencies and patterns instruct the universe to be as it is. Yet Lewis is trying to hit upon a type of instruction that goes beyond physics, and that is our sense of what is right and what is wrong, our morality, our desire to follow the Law of Nature, and our reaction when we fail to do so.



In an ending chapter note, Lewis brings up a view between materialism and spiritualism, known in his time as Life-Force philosophy, Creative Evolution and Emergent Evolution. Today the philosophical stance might be called Intelligent Design. Lewis sees this take on things as an attempt to avoid the responsibilities of morality and belief in God.

The debate regarding the nature of the universe and the existence of God has a very long history. Volumes upon volumes of philosophical treatises have been published on the subject, not to mention the vast literature in theology and science. That Lewis could not put the debate to rest in a short essay meant to be broadcast on the radio is of no surprise, but his technique of appealing to our innermost thoughts and feelings does strike at the truth of the matter—people need to decide for themselves which way they will go, whether it be into materialism, spiritualism, or some form of, as Lewis refers to it, wishful thinking.



Book I: Chapter 5 We Have Cause to Be Uneasy

Book I: Chapter 5 We Have Cause to Be Uneasy Summary and Analysis

The source of unease is, according to Lewis, to be found in the facts he claims to have established—that the Law of Nature exists, that humans have a very hard time following the Law, that God is behind the Law, and that the human condition is in desperate shape unless something is done to bring humans more in line with the Law. The something to be done is understanding that following the Law is difficult, that God is seriously adamant about following the Law, and that we are fooling ourselves if we think an easier way exists.

Lewis uses a few more analogies to make his case. In mathematics, it does not matter if one thinks a certain way to perform the math is easier than the right way. The answer will still be wrong. Only the right way of performing math yields the right answer, and so it is with following the Law. When trying to progress to a destination, taking a wrong turn will bring the traveler farther away from the destination. The only way to again progress is to turn back, and then get on the right path to the destination.

The weakness of analogy manifests once again in the argument Lewis makes, and he embraces the assumption that we all want to follow the Law deep within ourselves, regardless of how we might rationalize our failings to do so. Our common destination is to progress until we ultimately follow the Law of Nature.

Book I ends with, "Most of us have got over the pre-war wishful thinking about international politics. It is time we did the same about religion," (p. 39). This alludes to the horrors of World War II and what Lewis sees as a watering down of religious ethics in order to justify wrong behavior. The war is still fresh in the minds of his contemporary readers, and so he uses the rhetorical technique of an appeal to emotions. The war was horrible, and none of us want more of that, so we should turn back and get on the right path. The implication is that the human race took a wrong turn that led to World War II. Just what this wrong turn was is not stated, however the many references to science and materialism hints that these two related things are characteristic of the wrong turn. Lewis advises that being more spiritual, following the Law of Nature, will get us on the right path to our common destination—God.

Lewis warns that meeting God will not be a comfortable thing, but wonderful too. As the universe has two sides, one beautiful and the other terrible, so does God. The author also explains that coming to the right path for the right destination first involves dismay, which is then followed by comfort. However, only seeking comfort ultimately ends in despair, while seeking truth leads to finding comfort. The dismay comes from our realization that we are inept at following the Law of Nature. The comfort comes from the

knowledge that God will help and, in Christian theology, the help is in the form of God's son, so far unnamed by the author.



Book II: Chapter 1 The Rival Conceptions of God

Book II: Chapter 1 The Rival Conceptions of God Summary and Analysis

The three rival concepts of God are pantheism (God is the universe), Jewish/Christian/Islamic (God made the universe) and atheism (God does not exist). Lewis observes that the greatest division on the God issue is whether people believe God exists or not. The majority of humans believe in the existence of one or more deities. Lewis admits to at one time being an atheist, but after accepting the existence of God, he discovered a form of liberalism which allowed all religions to have some truth to them, rather than trying to demonstrate that all religions are wrong in their promotion of spiritualism.

Having defined these three rival concepts, Lewis moves on to explain that Christians believe in a God who takes sides, who complains that things have gone wrong in the world and insists they be put right. "For Christianity is a fighting religion," (p. 45). In pantheism God does not take sides or make judgments regarding the universe, unlike humans who do, and do so from a particular point of view. Therefore, in the context of pantheism, a cancer is bad in that it kills a human, but a doctor who kills the cancer is bad from the viewpoint of the cancer. Lewis dismisses this idea as nonsense.

He argues that if we can discern unjustness in the universe, we must be able to imagine justness. We must somehow be aware of justness, even if the universe is largely unjust. From this he determines that atheism attempts to prove that the universe is senseless, and therefore God cannot exist, but that the sense of justice Lewis has makes perfect sense. Lewis thinks of atheism as too simplistic because if we can determine the universe has no meaning, we must have a concept of meaning, otherwise we could never make the determination. Another example he gives is if the universe had no light, and as a result no creatures had eyes, the concept of dark would be meaningless. One cannot conceptualize dark without experiencing light.

Lewis's outright dismissal of pantheism may seem too curt and without deep thought, possibly too cute for serious consideration or as a simple sweep of the chessboard to win the game, the action of a bully. However, his purpose is to explain what Christians believe in a few paragraphs, not what other religions believe, and his dismissal reflects a core principle in Christianity that it is more right than other religions. To a Christian, pantheism is by necessity nonsense. One cannot be a Christian and a pantheist at the same time, nor does atheism make any sense. Having once been an atheist, Lewis devotes more space to testing that concept.

Generally speaking, the major world religions certainly have their differences. Many dismiss other religions as being wrong, or not right enough. Objectivity has its place in a

comparative study of world religions, but not in an essay on what Christians believe. It is a core Christian principle that Christians believe themselves to be right. The same can be said for members of other world religions.



Book II: Chapter 2 The Invasion

Book II: Chapter 2 The Invasion Summary and Analysis

The invasion Lewis refers to is a movement to oversimplify Christianity into a religion that worships a good and just God, not the God Lewis thinks is the true one. He argues nothing in the universe is simple, so God cannot be simple either. A chair may appear to be a simple chair, but when closely examined turns out to be made of complex molecules, made of atoms, and even seeing the chair involves reflected light made of photons. His point is that God, although good, created something that turned bad. Actually, two things: the devil and humankind.

Lewis brushes with the straw man fallacy again by arguing against unnamed people who think in certain ways, but we do not know who these people are or if they actually think in the ways described, or if they even exist outside the mind of Lewis. Climbing to more solid ground, he describes dualism as the belief in a good god separate from a bad god, but points out the logical problem in this idea: a greater God must have made the rules about goodness and badness which the lesser gods follow.

The Christian belief Lewis emphasizes is there is only one God. The devil is an angel, created by this one God, who fell from grace, which is putting it mildly in Lewis' estimation. The devil rebelled against God, and the universe has become the battlefield of a gigantic civil war. The overall point is that evil is goodness gone sour. Lewis argues that most bad people are actually trying to do good things in bad ways. The methods are evil, not the intentions. In addition, the measure of victory of the grand civil war, is whether or not the universe returns to God's original intention. As such, Lewis believes any attempt to simplify the grand civil war helps the wrong side. He extends the analogy of civil war by referring to our part of the universe as occupied territory, and the church as being a meeting place for the resistance.

These arguments address questions of theology. Where metaphysics studies questions of whether or not realities exist beyond or behind the known physical, theological study examines the nature of things existing beyond or behind the known physical, or in this context, the Christian God and the fallen angel. Lewis acknowledges that he is not a theologian. His primary argument is that Christians ought to ignore modern attempts to simplify Christian belief, as this sort of change helps the devil rebel against God, and we should know from our sense of right and wrong (the Natural Law) that this is so.

Simply put, Lewis advises Christians to retain a more traditional Christianity to avoid doing, though unwittingly, the devil's handiwork.



Book II: Chapter 3 The Shocking Alternative

Book II: Chapter 3 The Shocking Alternative Summary and Analysis

The opening of this chapter deals with free will—why it was given to human beings and higher beings, a rebellious angel for example. This line of thought then progresses into why Jesus Christ must be considered an equal to God. The shocking alternative is that God came to earth as Jesus Christ in order to help humankind regain divine love.

Lewis argues that all humankind has free will because God decided that free will is necessary in order for His creations to love Him in any meaningful manner. The risk is that evil might develop, as Lewis maintains it has, and so God allows the risk in the hope that love will also develop, or perhaps this was an expectation of an all-knowing deity rather than a hope. Lewis admits that he, and all humans, have a hard time understanding the ways of God.

The question is posed, why did the devil go wrong? Lewis states we can only guess at the answer from our own experiences. He proposes that the devil wanted to be equal to God and refers to the Book of Genesis as supporting the idea. The devil tempted humankind to be like gods, perhaps in a reflection of the devil's own mistake. Lewis attributes all the evils in the world to this desire of humankind to be like gods, but the reality of the situation is we can never experience the divine love we crave through our own efforts. Evil comes from our attempts to gain satisfaction on our own, an impossibility.

But God did not leave humankind to fend for ourselves, according to Lewis. Using the Old Testament, he tells the story of how God selected a group of people to work upon in order to help them rediscover the divine love that humans crave. He then argues from the New Testament that Jesus Christ must be God because He claimed to be able to forgive sins. This claim is irrational if Jesus was only a human. Lewis argues that he cannot forgive anyone for anything not done to him personally. Only God can forgive in the way Jesus claimed He could.

As an explanation of Christian beliefs, Lewis's arguments are logical. He moves beyond the original logical foundations of his argument and erects the framework on Scripture and personal experience. How well the structure stands under scrutiny depends upon how solid the logical foundation proves. Some might consider the foundation to be sound, while others might point to the use of analogy as being less than convincing. The straw man fallacies also raise questions about the validity of Lewis' interpretation of Scripture. Lewis's more traditional religion is not necessarily the right religion, as the old theology was first developed by interpreting Scripture. No guarantee exists that the early theologians were any more accurate than those living today.



Let us review the argument to this point. Lewis proposes a premise that a Law of Nature exists, based on his observations of the physical world. He then states that humans have a difficult time following the Law. The existence of the Law is therefore evident from humankind's reaction to it. Lewis then points out the Law must exist outside of humankind, and in fact the physical universe, and therefore is evidence of God. There is only one God because Lewis says so, and he says so because he is Christian. In other words, this is what he believes, but just how he arrived at this belief is vague. He began as an atheist, so something happened that caused him to embrace Christianity, possibly something dramatic. Lewis asserts he found atheism to be too simple for him. This must be taken at face value at this point, but there does seem to be more to this story than is being told. However, Lewis then moves into Scripture to support his beliefs about the nature of God, the devil, the universe, humanity and Jesus Christ. This is a very important move in the argument because it brings in the interpretation of Scripture, and thus theology. Since Lewis admits to not being a theologian, the reader can assume he is relying upon the work of other theologians. Otherwise the argument begins to crumble as simply the opinions of a layperson, although a highly educated and experienced layperson. Lewis is not a fool simply repeating what he has been told to believe by another human maintaining an illusion of authority. The author is a critical thinker who examines what he believes to be true and why. All arguments have weaknesses—the absolute truth of even physical reality is still unknown. However, when context is considered, quantum mechanics works just fine for electrical engineers despite the fact that it contradicts relativity. For Lewis, belief in Christianity works just fine regardless of contradictions between theological ideas.



Book II: Chapter 4 The Perfect Penitent

Book II: Chapter 4 The Perfect Penitent Summary and Analysis

The perfect penitent is one who repents even without needing to because he is perfect. Lewis gives his layman's opinion, admittedly so, on the meaning of Christ's death.

Central to Christian belief is that God walked the earth as a man in the form of Jesus Christ, that He taught many principles for leading a good life (following the Law), died for our sins on the cross and rose from the dead three days later. Lewis objects to the Ascension as the most critical part of Christian belief, as his church, the Church of England, does not adhere to this theology as strongly as the Church of Rome (Roman Catholic). Lewis claims that in fact his church adheres to no theological theory this strongly. All are considered, and no one is considered to be more right than the others.

Following this exposition, Lewis explores the importance of Christ's death. For a human to do perfect penance, the human needs to be perfect. However, this is impossible because only God is perfect. Meanwhile, humans have gotten themselves into a huge problem with God, having turned away from the Law of Nature in favor of being gods themselves. God wants to give humans a way out of the huge problem, but how? According to the rules of creation, humans need to turn back to God by an act of their own free will, something which requires an enormous amount of repentance, an amount which most people cannot generate, if any. Some humans have to repent perfectly, but only God is perfect. The solution? God comes down to earth as a human and does the perfect penance, called the Atonement, for humans, as only God can accomplish this. In effect, Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay the great amount of debt to God which humans accrued. Lewis writes:

"But supposing God became a man—suppose our human nature which can suffer and die was amalgamated with God's nature in one person—then that person could help us. He could surrender His will, and suffer and die, because He was man; and He could do it perfectly because He was God. You and I can go through this process only if God does it in us; but God can do it only if He becomes man. Our attempts at this dying will succeed only because it is a drop out of the ocean of His intelligence: but we cannot share God's dying unless God dies; and He cannot die except by being a man. That is the sense in which He pays our debt, and suffers for us what He Himself need not suffer at all," (pp. 60-61).

Logically, God cannot die or suffer, or be confused, or feel despair, or be fearful. God knows everything and is eternal. However, God wants to give humans an means to reduce suffering, confusion, despair and fear. He wants to offer a little bit of Himself so we can be more successful in our living and dying. The one condition is that humans need to accept God's help voluntarily through the use of free will.



Lewis compares this situation with a drowning man and another man on the riverbank offering help. To refuse God's help is like refusing the help of the man on the riverbank. Such a decision does not make sense, especially if the rationale is that the man on the riverbank has an unfair advantage because he is not also drowning.

Another comparison Lewis makes is between his explanation on how this all works and a model of an atom. The model of the atom is just a representation of reality, not the reality itself. Mathematics describes the reality, and this is really what scientists think about when envisioning what an atom might look like. The model is highly simplified from what the math describes. Lewis invites us to use his explanation as model. If it helps in understanding, fine. If not, we are to ignore his explanation.

This invitation likely stems from the weaknesses which can be found in his argument, as mentioned in the analysis of the last chapter. However, no argument is perfect, just as no scientific math is perfect either. How an atom actually works is still mysterious at the sub-atomic level, as how life, death and salvation work are still mysteries. However, we can accept a couple of facts without knowing how the mysteries work, and this is the important part of Lewis's argument. We can accept God into our lives and feel fulfilled without fully understanding the mysteries involved. Lewis compares this to feeling satisfied from eating a good meal without knowing how the body nourishes itself. Another implied comparison is that we do not need to understand everything about atoms before putting the knowledge to practical use, and in fact we have done just that in numerous ways. Accepting what God offers leads to a better life and a meaningful death, and we do not need to know how every little detail of this process works.

Lewis recognizes that some people find it difficult to ask for help. He compares this to a child learning to write with the help of an adult who already knows how to write. The adult guides the child's hand while making characters. The child might refuse the help of the adult and claim the adult has an unfair advantage. The child might then seek out the knowledge of writing from other children, but none of the others know how to write either. The outcome is obviously that the child never learns to write from other children. And so, humans must accept God's help in order to find God.



Book II: Chapter 5 The Practical Conclusion

Book II: Chapter 5 The Practical Conclusion Summary and Analysis

After establishing Christ as God, Lewis takes the idea to the next level by describing how Christians become a literal part of God by becoming a part of Christ, or in another sense, by Christ becoming a part of Christians. Yet humans are still humans and therefore imperfect. Christians still make human mistakes and go against the Law of Nature; however, as a physical body heals after injury, the spirit of a Christian heals after sinning because Christ enables the healing. Lewis brings forth the idea that only Christians can do this healing because only Christ can enable it.

In regard to the physical trappings of Christianity—the use of bread and wine, the Mass, baptism by water—Lewis explains the physical world is not against God. God created the physical, and thus must like it. That the devil occupies some of this territory makes no difference to how God feels about the territory, and so the use of physical objects during Christian ceremonies does not contradict the spirituality of those ceremonies.

Lewis justifies the appeal to authority, a debating technique which runs the risk of being considered a fallacy. Yet, he argues, we accept authority as the justification for most of our knowledge, although these authorities must be trustworthy. History is given as an example, as is geography. We trust historians to be accurate to a degree that we believe the Norman Conquest actually happened, although we have no direct experience of the Norman Conquest. Similarly, if one has never been to New York, one trusts a geographer what such a city exists on the East Coast of the United States.

The appeal to authority can be easily used in debate to confound and confuse. Just because an expert witness testifies in court does not mean the expert witness is correct or telling the truth. A school teacher might say something is true when in reality it is not. When it comes to religion, this sort of fallacy is often used to separate fools from their money, but in this case Lewis asks the reader to understand how the acceptance of authority for knowledge is necessary to move into what he is about to propose.

Lewis at one time thought that if only Christians attain eternal life and happiness, is this not unfair to the rest of humanity who might never have heard of Jesus Christ? He puts this objection to rest, for himself, by stating this is the way God planned things, and we are not able to question God's planning. This thinking only makes sense if one accepts the authorities who claim Christ is the only way and God exists—the thinking only makes sense in the context of Christian belief, Lewis's own context. Other authorities expound on other beliefs, and other people accept the beliefs as strongly as Christians, but this does not fit into the scope of this book.



The world will end, according to Christian belief, after Jesus returns to earth. Lewis touches on this subject as the practical conclusion. Either a person is with Christ or not. Upon the return of Jesus, it will be too late to make the choice, so everyone must make the choice now, or soon, before it is too late.

The importance of Lewis' argument strength is clear. If the argument stands on a solid foundation and has been built with care from the ground up, then one might be convinced to immediately become a Christian. After all, Armageddon is just around the corner. On the other hand, if the argument does not hold up, one might be inclined to make no change. A third possibility is that Lewis might have struck a chord in some people, stimulated curiosity and even brought forth a strong desire to learn more about Christianity.

Argumentation has another side—persuasion. Where pure argumentation is a quest for truth through disciplined inquiry and solid logic, persuasion is an attempt to change people's minds. Sales pitches come under the heading of persuasion. Lewis claims he is not trying to sell Christianity through his work, but to explain what he believes and why. If taken as sincere, the argument he builds is what works for him, but it does not need to work for anyone else. Certain parts of the argument require leaps of faith rather than objective analysis, for example the existence of God, the idea that there is only one God, and that Scripture is indeed trustworthy authority. Lewis has made these leaps of faith, others might or might not follow, but in the end Lewis does succeed in explaining what he believes and why.



Book III: Chapter 1 The Three Parts of Morality

Book III: Chapter 1 The Three Parts of Morality Summary and Analysis

Morality is made up of three parts, according to Lewis. The first part is the relationships between human and human, the part of morality that most people think about. The second is the inner human, an individual's care of self. Lewis likens this to an ocean-going ship and how well the engines run, the steering gears work, and everything which makes the craft seaworthy. The third part of morality consists of the relationship between a human and the power that made the human.

Lewis believes that the problem with morality is that most people only think about the first part, their relationships with each other. A common rationalization is if a person does no harm to another person, the behavior in question must be moral. Lewis uses two analogies to point out the problem with this narrow thinking, a convoy of ships and a band playing music. If the only thing to be concerned about in the convoy is not running into each other, then the internal mechanics of each ship might be ignored, and the ultimate destination might turn out to be wrong. The convoy might end up in Calcutta instead of the desired destination, New York. As for the band, each musician might not get in the way of the others, but the overall musical piece could be wrong for the occasion. The two metaphors sometimes mix during this explanation.

The way Christians think about morality involves all three parts, with the third part being the most important. Through Christ, Christians have eternal relationships with God. The realization that death is only the beginning of the eternal relationship changes how important it is to lead a moral life while on earth, because what develops here will continue on for eternity. So, if Lewis were to become a bad person over his seventy or so years on earth, he would continue to develop into a bad person throughout eternity, and that is what Lewis considers the Christian hell.

Christians will receive eternal life after death, but it is how Christians behave in this world that will determine whether they continue to be good souls developing into better souls, or miserable souls who become ever more miserable. The way to achieve the eternal goodness is to work on all three parts of morality in this lifetime. If only the first part is worked upon, the destination will likely be hell.



Book III: Chapter 2 The Cardinal Virtues

Book III: Chapter 2 The Cardinal Virtues Summary and Analysis

The four Cardinal Virtues are Prudence, Temperance, Justice and Fortitude. These are cardinal because they are pivotal, the early Latin meaning of the word, a door hinge. Lewis thinks they are the most important virtues for a Christian to maintain. He expands the interpretation of these virtues.

Where Prudence might be thought of as being prudish, or one who never takes risks, Lewis thinks its actual meaning is closer to using common sense and staying out of trouble. He also addresses the issue of being like a child to enter Heaven. The point is to have the faith of a child, not be a child in the mind. Christians should use every piece of intelligence available to them. Lewis warns that in taking on Christianity, the whole of the person is challenged, including the intellect.

Temperance usually brings to mind the smashing of illegal stills and the chopping of beer kegs. Lewis argues this is an unfortunate modern association from the days of Prohibition. The real meaning of temperance is to be moderate, not to drink to excess and not to encourage others to drink too much. Temperance also should extend to all things. Christians need to be temperate in games, such as golf, or when engaging in sports, such as motorcycling. Making anything the overpowering central focus of one's life is wrong. However, engaging in all things with temperance is the right approach, and this includes alcohol.

As Lewis explains what justice means, he brings out an underlying principle of all virtues. The act of being virtuous is not simply following a set of rules, but the training of a person's character. The more virtues are practiced, the more the quality of virtuousness becomes a part of a person's character. Thus, if a person practices justice—and by this he means honesty, give and take, truthfulness and keeping promises—then justice eventually becomes a significant part of the person's makeup.

However, if virtues are practiced with the wrong attitude, as obligations that are distasteful, then no matter how often he or she practices, the person never gains the quality of being virtuous. Additionally, Lewis thinks God wants virtuous people, not obedient people. Finally, the quality of virtuousness is one of the few things we get to take with us to the next world.

The virtue of fortitude is, in the modern vernacular, having the guts to do what is right. All the other virtues take a great deal of fortitude to maintain, and fortitude becomes stronger with use.

Unlike some branches of Christianity, the Christianity Lewis practices allows drinking, dancing, golf, motorcycles and all other activities humans are free and able to do, as



long as these activities are done with Prudence (being careful), Temperance (not going overboard), Justice (with integrity), and with the Fortitude (guts) to do what needs to be done. While money and property must stay behind, character will accompany the soul into the afterlife and should be capable of handling Heaven, even if only at a minimal level. This implies mastering the joys of Heaven can come later.



Book III: Chapter 3 Social Morality

Book III: Chapter 3 Social Morality Summary and Analysis

The Golden Rule begins this chapter, do as you would be done by, or in its more familiar form, do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Lewis offers this as the quintessential Christian social morality. It is an old social morality, and rather than being exclusively Christian, it is a more generic reminder about how we should treat each other.

The politics of Christianity is then discussed, or more accurately, how Christian politicians should make laws and rule as Christians. Lewis does not try to define what political party would be Christian or what party a Christian politician should belong to.

He then attempts to imagine a fully Christian society. He has his doubts if anyone would like it. For one thing, the old laws against charging interest for borrowed money would not work in a modern society. Most modern people would find a fully Christian society too strange for them, very much like a socialistic society except with everyone working. Also, everyone would be giving to charity.

He sums up the problem succinctly: "A Christian society is not going to arrive until most of us really want it: and we are not going to want it until we become fully Christian. I may repeat 'Do as you would be done by' till I am black in the face, but I cannot really carry it out till I love my neighbour as myself: and I cannot learn to love my neighbour as myself till I learn to love God: and I cannot learn to love God except by learning to obey Him. And so, as I warned you, we are driven on to something more inward—driven on from social matters to religious matters," (p. 83).

A fully Christian society is probably impossible due to the requirements which would necessarily be imposed on the society, and such external requirements would contradict the more perfect reality of obeying God from within, rather than simply by following social laws that humans enforce. The human condition is such that training, experience and discipline varies from person to person. Not all people can become perfect simultaneously and thereby attain a fully Christian society.



Book III: Chapter 4 Morality and Psychoanalysis

Book III: Chapter 4 Morality and Psychoanalysis Summary and Analysis

The difference between psychoanalysis and morality is psychoanalysis seeks to cure a disease of the mind, while morality involves the choices made by a healthy mind. Using this definition, Lewis argues sexual perversion is not a sin, and literally any bad behavior caused by a diseased mind is never a sin. However, once the sufferer of a mental disease is cured and is able to make sane choices again, then morality plays an important part.

Lewis then explains why Christian writers sometimes seem to overly condemn a small sin, while a huge sin is brushed off as something which needs repentance to set right. The touchstone is the piece of a human which makes the moral choices. This is the piece that goes on to Heaven or hell. So, if a madman tries to commit mass murder, the madman cannot have sinned because of his madness. But if an angry man commits mass murder, that is a great sin, and as great a sin as a man becoming angry and not harming anyone. Of course the mass murder part of the equation should be considered, but Lewis does not consider it. He conveys his point better toward the end of the chapter, where he lists the ways people can be unaware of the evil within them: "Good people know about both good and evil: bad people do not know about either," (p. 88).

Just what is and what is not moral from the viewpoint of God depends on how well a person can put self into the place of God looking upon humankind. Lewis assumes that God that is more concerned about how a soul develops on earth than the actual actions of that soul. The actions count as well, but what seems like horrible crimes against God, and which are in fact horrible crimes against humanity, might not be so important to God. On the other hand, a person can commit horrible crimes against God and be completely innocent of crimes against humanity.

The understanding that Lewis has about psychology is, by today's standards, very crude. Much has been learned about how the brain works and how chemical imbalances can cause illnesses like bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, clinical depression and a host of others. However, his distinction between what might be and what might not be important to God still stands. A mentally ill person is not responsible to God for immoral or illegal acts done to humanity, although humanity will likely punish the acts.

The mention of homosexuality as being a mental disorder is an old attitude that is rejected in modern psychology. Just how Lewis would interpret homosexuality today is unknown, but his description of how God views morality gives some clues. If homosexuals are not mentally ill, then are they morally responsible for their choices? Lewis would answer yes. However, are homosexuals actually making moral decisions,

or are they following their sexual orientation, and if so, what gave them this orientation?
This could be a harder issue for Lewis if he were alive today.



Book III: Chapter 5 Sexual Morality

Book III: Chapter 5 Sexual Morality Summary and Analysis

Lewis first draws a distinction between sexual morality and sexual standards within a society. While it might be fine for a woman to be in public without wearing many clothes on a South Seas island, it would not be fine in Victorian England. Regarding sexual morality, either women might be chaste or unchaste. The amount of clothing does not matter in regards to sexual morality. He then gives a nod to what might be called the generation gap, an instance in which young people have different ideas about sexual morality than older people.

The idea of being chaste, not engaging in sex before marriage and being faithful during marriage, Lewis estimates is the most unpopular of the Christian virtues. He points out sexual desire has risen, mostly due to the cultural influences that promote sex, and this rise in appetite is unhealthy for body, mind and spirit. Comparing a strip club to one which might slowly expose food, Lewis argues that even though both sex and food are necessary for survival, the strip club will draw a much larger audience than the food club.

Addressing the idea that modern sexual dialog helps develop healthy sexual relationships, Lewis proposes an alternative interpretation. He thinks people did not talk so much about sex in the past because they had healthier sexual appetites. In modern times, all the talk about sex illustrates how obsessed people have become. He also thinks the attitudes about sex have liberalized far too much, to a point where any sexual act desired is also acceptable.

Lewis calls for all Christians to try chastity. He admits this is a hard thing to do, what with all the influences of a society obsessed with sex, but he insists it can be done if Christians try. In the end though, being unchaste is not as bad as other evils: "The sins of the flesh are bad, but they are the least bad of all sins. . . . That is why a cold, self-righteous prig who goes regularly to church may be far nearer to hell than a prostitute. But, of course, it is better to be neither," (p. 95).

Lewis encourages personal changes to help one control sexual cravings, in order that Christians may concentrate on other, more important and often ignored parts of morality. Putting the focus on sex is not only unjustified, it brings a danger of becoming a truly evil person. What Lewis does not say is also significant. He does not call for a banning of all strip clubs. He does not demand society change its ways. He looks inward for the answer, and there he finds his solution. Life has many temptations, and sex is just one. Christians should pray for the ability to be chaste, but all the other temptations should never be ignored in an obsession with this relatively minor sin. The plea is to be more careful about the whole of morality, rather than becoming stuck on one minor aspect.

Book III: Chapter 6 Christian Marriage

Book III: Chapter 6 Christian Marriage Summary and Analysis

Can a life-long bachelor, as of the writing of this chapter, have anything to say about Christian marriage? Lewis claims he does have things to say about the subject, and he proceeds to do so. His first observation is that Christian marriage is really the melding of two people into one at a spiritual level. As such, divorce is an especially terrible thing for a Christian marriage, as the melded spirit must be torn apart. Therefore, Christian churches do not like the idea of divorce and some forbid it, except possibly for very rare circumstances. Lewis is also against legislating Christian marriage, and thereby imposing Christian values on everyone. He argues he would not like to be restricted from drinking wine under legislation influenced by Islamic law, and he points out most of his fellow citizens are not Christian in the way he has defined the term.

Lewis challenges Christians to keep their promises. He condemns those who do not take the marriage promises seriously as being treacherous cheaters, not in the sexual sense, but in the honesty sense. Do not make vows without the serious intention of keeping them, and if one thinks one cannot keep the promises, then stay away from marriage. Lewis suggests living together as an alternative, but not a very good one for Christians as this involves the sin of fornication.

He then draws a line between the fiery romantic love which usually precedes marriage and might go on for a time afterward, and the quiet love which develops after the marriage has matured. Always being in the fiery love would be exhausting, Lewis observes, and he compares it to other thrilling feelings like learning to fly, and how always being this way would distract from the other discoveries to be made in life.

People have the wrong idea about love, marriage and life in general from novels and the cinema, according to Lewis. Expectations are blown out of proportion to reality, and he goes to his observations as an outsider looking into the marriages of his acquaintances for supporting experience, as he has no direct experience.

This chapter wraps up with an explanation why in a Christian marriage, the man is always the head of the family. Lewis argues that someone has to be the decision-maker in a two-way relationship because a majority vote is impossible to achieve if only two votes exist, and the two parties disagree. He builds a weaker case for the man being more diplomatic than the woman, due to the woman's loyalty to family first.

Forming opinions and building arguments about a situation that has never been experienced is indeed difficult. Lewis gives it a try though, and whatever mistakes he makes can be easily forgiven or dismissed due to his lack of experience. As for knowing the difference between fiery romantic love and the quiet love of a long-term relationship,

he seems to know of what he speaks, and he also knows what it means to be honest with others and self.



Book III: Chapter 7 Forgiveness

Book III: Chapter 7 Forgiveness Summary and Analysis

Forgiveness might be more unpopular than chastity, Lewis begins, because it means loving our neighbors, whether they are good or bad, as we love ourselves. How do we love ourselves, and can that sort of love be extended to others? Christians can do this, but it is not easy, Lewis says. He considers how a Polish or a Jewish person could ever forgive the Gestapo of World War II and concludes this would be asking too much. Christians need to practice forgiveness at an easier level first, the everyday transgressions one meets. As with other virtues, gaining strength for their practice comes from exercising the virtue on a smaller scale until enough strength is gained to handle the larger challenges.

A phrase sometimes heard today is, "hate the sin but love the sinner." Lewis ponders this and finds a parallel. If he can forgive himself for sinning, and quite easily at that, he should be able to forgive others for their sins. Meanwhile, he can go on hating what the sins are, especially when they involve things like murder.

This leads naturally to considering the Commandment not to murder each other. Lewis makes the common distinction between killing for good reason, such as defending one's country, and murdering, which is killing for all the wrong reasons. He points out that in Greek and Hebrew, distinct words are used, as they are in English, for killing and murder, and that the distinctions are the same. So murder can be hated without any harm to a Christian, but hating the murderer is wrong. Also, soldiers defending their country can kill the enemy without endangering their souls' journeys toward Heaven. What will hurt a person is to get into the habit of hating other people because they sin so terribly, as this will lead to hating everybody and everything until life is nothing but hate.

Lewis certainly demonstrates an ease in forgiving himself his trespasses and thinks hard on how he can be as easy with this forgiveness for everyone else. This is the love for others he must develop, the same kind of love he has for himself. This does not mean others should not be punished, because Lewis punishes himself as well.



Book III: Chapter 8 The Great Sin

Book III: Chapter 8 The Great Sin Summary and Analysis

Lewis believes that the greatest sin in Christianity is pride. He sees other serious sins emerging from pride: greed, conceit and power lust. The other sins involve some level of goodness about them. Drinking to excess could also involve laughter, illicit sex might involve a level of love, but pride has nothing good about it. It is at its essence competitive, with one person wanting to be better than others, or richer, or more powerful, and this becomes an all-consuming desire that leads away from God and directly into the devil's arms.

Lewis sees apparently pious people eaten up by pride. He predicts they will not attain Heaven, as Jesus has never known these people. They may have preached in His name, but that does not matter.

On the other hand, deriving pleasure from being praised is not pride unless one starts to take on pride as a result. This allows for Christians to seek the praise of God.

The virtue opposite pride is humility. False humility, as often practiced in modern life where self-deprecation is part of a smarmy act, is simply pride masquerading as humility. Vanity, the kind which wants praise and attention, is the least offensive acts of pride, and Lewis says it is humble in a way. The truly humble person does not think of self at all, and the qualities of such a person include listening carefully, showing interest, and having an air of ease with life. This is because a great burden of false dignity has been dropped, and this comes from the humbling experience of truly knowing God.



Book III: Chapter 9 Charity

Book III: Chapter 9 Charity Summary and Analysis

Lewis considers charity to be a sub-virtue of forgiveness, as charity does not mean simply giving to the poor. That can be part of the whole virtue, just as rhyme is a part of the whole of poetry, but charity involves more than this. Being charitable also does not mean having any particular affection for others, but more of a concern for their well-being. Lewis compares this to a doting mother who might spoil her child to satisfy her own affectionate impulses, which is the wrong way to be charitable.

Although charity is not an affectionate feeling toward others, it is the start of affection, or fondness, or something better than not feeling anything at all and definitely better than feeling hatred toward others. But the charity needs to be genuine, not a down-payment on expected returns. Lewis observes that people can detect false charity very quickly. Along these lines, he maintains performing charitable acts is better than trying to manufacture positive feelings toward others. The results of these good acts increase, as do the results of bad acts, so it is more profitable from a spiritual viewpoint to do good acts, however small. Similarly, it is highly damaging to perform bad acts, however small. If affection is to be developed, it will on its own accord, or as Lewis puts it, if God is willing. Lewis also thinks that charity itself is an act of human free will.

In this chapter Lewis is clearer about what charity is not than what it really is. Giving money or goods to the poor is a part of charity, but Lewis implies developing good feelings toward others, and God, is another part, and perhaps the most important part, considering what charity truly means. Lewis states that although our feelings about God come and go, the love God has for us remains steady. This could be what the author means by charity, the ability to love regardless of the behavior of others, also known as unconditional love. The behavior of others can hurt or please us, but those emotions do not change love. This seems to be what Lewis means by charity, a sub-virtue of forgiveness and a way to learn how to love.

A modern parallel might be seen when a person is driving on the freeway and another motorist cuts that person off. If practising charity, the person would forgive the other driver for the trespass on right-of-way and continue driving in a safe manner. Besides the physical return on this act of charity, such as arriving to the destination safely and keeping insurance costs down, Lewis maintains the simple act of charity leads to a greater ability to forgive down the road. Thereby, if another driver does something even more dangerous, the charitable person's ability to extend charity toward that driver is stronger due to his response to the first incident. The more charity is extended, the stronger the ability to forgive grows until something very big comes along, say an actual accident caused by another motorist. Perhaps through charity which leads to a strong ability to forgive, the charitable person will maintain temper and deal with the aftermath better. Imagine how someone with highly developed road-rage might behave (none of

the possibilities are pretty). According to Lewis, the extreme of road-rage is the result of earlier small failures to act charitable toward others.



Book III: Chapter 10 Hope

Book III: Chapter 10 Hope Summary and Analysis

Lewis writes that hope is when a Christian keeps the vision of Heaven squarely in mind all the time, and whatever successes happen in this world are incidental to keeping the vision. The key idea here is that only Heaven will satisfy us. Everything of earthly existence, although possibly satisfying at first, cannot last. Only the satisfaction Christians will receive from Heaven is eternal.

Three approaches to satisfying our need for Heaven are the fool's way, the disillusioned sensible person's way, and the Christian way. The fool's way involves the movement from one thing to another in this world on an impossible quest to find anything here that satisfies forever. The disillusioned sensible person's way is to give up the quest altogether and accept life as one big disappointment. The Christian way is to look at the burning desire for satisfaction and to realize only Heaven can satiate. Meanwhile, keeping Heaven in mind allows Christians to move on through life realistic expectations of what can be attained, and without giving up the quest.

Lewis believes the simple vision of Heaven is very wrong. He takes the simple vision as a set of metaphors which attempt to get an idea across which is, to a large extent, far beyond our capacities to understand. This is why the visions of angels playing harps, crowns and gold are mentioned in Scripture. Without them, some Christians could have no vision. Trouble occurs when other people take the metaphors literally, and who can blame someone who hates playing a harp for not wanting the metaphorical Heaven? The idea is to not want the metaphors but the reality, and the paradox is that the metaphors are all some Christians have to inform their vision. One can assume Lewis has quite different ideas of what Heaven might be like, and that playing a harp has nothing to do with them.

Book III: Chapters 11 - 12

Book III: Chapters 11 - 12 Summary and Analysis

This chapter is the first part of a two-part essay on faith. The next chapter completes the essay. The reason Lewis separates the essay is faith has two parts, and the second of these parts consist of two lesser parts. Altogether, these parts make up what he believes to be the virtue of faith.

The first part of faith is an ability to stick with a conviction, in this case Christianity, even though moods might change or desires arise that turn one against the conviction. Lewis states that in a calm mood and without any particular strong desire for the contrary, a person such as himself can accept Christianity as being a reasonable choice. He also thinks this about the atheistic stance. Both can be reasoned choices, but without faith, temptations will come to abandon the choice made in favor of some other belief, or no belief, to fit a whim or desire. Faith is not the strength of conviction, but the strength to maintain conviction.

A very similar situation can be seen in any long-term commitment. A house buyer might stop making payments due to financial difficulties, possibly not due to mismanagement of funds, but due to loss of a job. A married person might file for divorce, not due to laziness, but because of abuse. However, when it comes to being a Christian, the conditions are known up front, the job never goes away, and God does not abuse Christians. Nevertheless, trying to develop the virtues can be difficult. Faith is what Christians need for the strength to keep on being Christian.

The second part of faith has two subcomponents, the working toward virtue, something the human does, and letting Christ take over when a certain level is attained. The two subcomponents seem to be contradictory, and Lewis mentions that among Christians, there can be serious differences regarding them. The second part of faith is so important, it can cause rifts within the Christian religion.

Lewis terms the two subcomponents of the second part of faith as the two blades of a scissors. One blade is not more important than the other, and both must work together in order for the scissors to be effective. Working hard to be virtuous takes the first part of faith, but is not enough. Christ must be accepted to pick up the slack our very humanity demands. Christians cannot be perfect enough for Heaven without Christ, and Christians must work hard to become virtuous.

Faith starts with conviction, then the strength to keep that conviction, then the effort to become more virtuous, and then the completion of faith, when the Christian accepts Christ's help. Lewis is not sure if he has reached this level of Christianity. He is not sure he has recognized it, or if such an event is recognizable without the help of others looking on, but he is convinced this is the correct progression.



Book IV: Chapter 1 Making and Begetting

Book IV: Chapter 1 Making and Begetting Summary and Analysis

The difference between making and begetting is begetting is being born of the same kind, whereas making is the creation of something after the birth. Thus, a bird begets an egg in a nest that turns into a chick. The chick matures and creates its own nest, and so it goes throughout sexual reproduction in the natural world.

Lewis compares this to how God begat Jesus Christ before creating the universe. Notably absent from this simile is how some creatures in nature do not beget by sexual reproduction. They split into two identical beings or produce little clones of themselves which mature into identical beings. However, Christian theology asserts that God begat Jesus Christ before creating the universe, and subsequently, humankind.

The first part of the chapter deals with how theology resembles a map of the Atlantic Ocean. Lewis's point is the map represents many people's experiences with the ocean, the same way theology represents many people's experiences with God. So, if one wants to cross the Atlantic to a specific destination, one should take a map. Lewis says the same thing about theology. If one wants to cross over to God, take theology along as the map. This defense of theology as superior to a single person's experience with God sets the stage for the remainder of Book IV.



Book IV: Chapter 2 The Three-Personal God

Book IV: Chapter 2 The Three-Personal God Summary and Analysis

The three-personal God is in a different dimension than our three-dimensional universe, where a single personality can be made up of three others, and so Christians have the Trinity: the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Lewis begins this argument by dismissing all other forms of God conceptualization as invented by humankind, and the evidence he puts forward is the simplicity of the human inventions. God cannot be simple. God must be of a higher dimension, one where more than one being exists as a single whole.

The idea of reaching enlightenment and becoming one with God is not right, according to Lewis. He imagines this as losing the sense of self, and in the Christian conceptualization of God, the sense of self is maintained. When Christians go to Heaven, they remember who they were on earth, though in a heavenly manner. Lewis does not discuss what is normally thought of as self—the ego and super-ego, also known as the actualized or self-actualized person. Humans have a sense of self which Lewis might not be referring to when he talks about the nature of God and how Christians will experience Heaven.



Book IV: Chapter 3 Time and Beyond Time

Book IV: Chapter 3 Time and Beyond Time Summary and Analysis

Time is a concept which has meaning in our existence, but no meaning in God's existence. Lewis briefly explains how time, a familiar concept in our three-dimensional universe, is relative to us existing in this universe. However, God is not restricted by time. To God, time is meaningless. What has happened and will happen here is always the present in the presence of God. This explains the all-knowing, or omniscient, nature of the Christian God.

For most Christians this is not a very important matter, but Lewis explains it anyway in case anyone wonders how God can hear hundreds of millions of prayers at once, or how God can know what will happen tomorrow even while we are stuck in today. Outside the universe, time does not exist. Modern physics acknowledges that time began shortly after the universe began, which is a difficult concept to grasp. How can anything happen shortly after something else if time does not yet exist? The concepts of before and after have no meaning without time.

This is why Lewis, at the beginning of the chapter, suggests that it can be skipped entirely, unless the reader sees a need to examine the nature of time and how this relates to God. Language does not wield enough power to clearly express what it is like to not have time, in a literal sense.



Book IV: Chapter 4 Good Infection

Book IV: Chapter 4 Good Infection Summary and Analysis

The three persons who make up God have no beginning or end. All three exist in eternity in a kind of parallel relationship, except for what Lewis describes as a primary relationship between the Father and the Son. He calls this love, as love requires at least two persons. The outcome of the primary relationship is the Holy Ghost, although without time, a cause does not lead to an effect, nor can an effect precede a cause.

Being touched by God has an effect like catching a good infection. The spark of God grows in Christians until it takes over the Christian. The Christian becomes a little Christ. Lewis states that to be any other way than Christian is to wither and die, whereas becoming a little Christ ensures eternal life.

Of high importance is how the love of God becomes greater when Christians join together. Lewis likens this to how any gathering of humans has a personality of its own, although the personality is not someone who can walk away from the group to be alone. But since God consists of three persons, the love of God has an existence apart from the gathering of Christians.



Book IV: Chapters 5 - 10

Book IV: Chapters 5 - 10 Summary and Analysis

What if as a child you possessed the power to bring one of your tin soldier toys to life? Lewis presents this hypothetical scene to suggest that the tin soldier would not want to become alive and would rebel as humans had done against God before the coming of Christ. He then moves into a description of what it was like for Christ to become a human, be spiritually attacked during his life, be tortured to physical death at the end, and rise from the grave in His human body.

In the closing paragraph Lewis calls for all Christians to stop bickering among themselves about how to describe what Christ did for them. It does not matter what formula one uses, only that the formula works.

Lewis addresses an observation a critic has made: if God had wanted sons instead of toy soldiers, why did He not beget many sons at the beginning instead of making many toy soldiers? By sons, the critic means Christians becoming little Christs, and by toy soldiers they mean humans before becoming Christians. Lewis answers that the criticism is meaningless due to the nature of God. God can have only one Son, and that is that.

The second note has to do with the interrelationships of the entire human race, including non-Christians. Lewis claims that the birth, life and death of Christ changed humankind, regardless if one is Christian or not. However, the devil brings errors into the world in twos. So if one wants everyone else to be the same, this is totalitarianism. If one believes individual thoughts and actions do not impact the whole, this is individualism, and both are errors from the devil. Christians need to ignore both errors and move ahead to what really matters—to acknowledge individuals in humankind and to realize that everyone is connect in an organism.

Pretending to be something that you are not is usually a mistake, but not for Christians. Pretending to be Christ results in the person actually becoming like Christ, according to Lewis. When the pretending is done, one is left with the actual presence of Christ. Lewis also contributes all help from others, whether Christian or not, to Christ's influences on them. However, the Christian should not depend on other humans, as they are destined to disappoint and die, whereas Christ lives on forever.

Lewis describes himself as an ill-tempered person, and the only way he can improve himself is through the help of Christ. The higher thing raises the lower, as a mother talks to her child before her child can understand the words. Eventually the child learns to speak, and eventually Lewis will lose his ill-temper, through pretending to be Christ and through Christ's help.



Counting the cost means Christians should realize giving their whole over to Christ is not a temporary situation. It is accepting Christ's commitment to them, which involves the perfection of the humans into beings worthy of becoming gods in the afterlife. Lewis warns that troubles will still be a part of life, but assures that troubles are for the purpose of perfection, to what extent that is possible before physical death.

Some Christians become saints, some less than saints, and some not anywhere close to sainthood. However, each progresses as each can, and the destination is the same. This implies that the perfection continues after death until Christ is satisfied to present to His Father all the perfected souls gathered together.

Lewis argues the validity of Christianity cannot be found in the way Christians are, or how they are perceived to be. Becoming Christian does not mean an automatic conversion into a nicer person, although such a conversion is bound to happen. Some proceed at different rates than others, due to the gifts they have received from God at birth, or due to not receiving gifts from God. Some are moving into the Christian way, and others are drifting away from the Christian way.

Lewis observes the complexity of societies on earth, both past and present. He allows for good people in other faiths, including the ancient religions which developed before Christianity. He also attributes this goodness to these people's unwitting acceptance of Christ. This fits into an earlier idea: The Father, Son and Holy Ghost have always existed.



Book IV: Chapter 11 The New Men

Book IV: Chapter 11 The New Men Summary and Analysis

Unlike those who speculate how the human species will evolve to the next level physically, Lewis believes that the next level is already happening with people giving themselves to Christ. Lewis does not deny evolutionary theory, nor does he try to argue for any alternative theory for how humans and other organisms developed into what they are today. Instead, he brushes away the theory in favor of a fact in his Christian belief system.

Sex has not disappeared, but sexual reproduction is not as important as it once was for humankind's evolution into the body of Christ. Additionally, each human has the choice to join or not to join, and this is a unique part of this stage of evolution. No other species has had the choice. Heredity plays no role in the evolution Lewis describes, but rather the good infection he writes about earlier. The speed of this evolution is but a blink of an eye in comparison to the slow biological evolution which brought humans into being, and the change has a persistence which vexes those who resist it. Also, the stakes are higher in this evolution, for without it there is only death. With it, there is eternal life.

The new men are people who have begun this evolution. Lewis can recognize them, and he supposes that they can recognize each other. Their messages are the same, but said in ways unique to their individual personalities. The analogy Lewis uses is that salt enhances the flavor of food, as Christ enhances the personality of those who accept Him. However, where too much salt spoils the stew, too much Christ is impossible. Finally, Lewis states that in order to gain life, eternal life in Christ, we must hold nothing back and let the old self die, and, eventually, let the body die also.



Characters

C. S. Lewis

C. S. Lewis, the author, is a Christian apologist who writes about what Christians do and should believe. An apologist is not somebody who apologizes for something, but a defender of a particular theology, in this case Christianity. Lewis begins his work with a logical argument in support of Christianity. He then describes the major Christian beliefs, followed by Christian behavior, also known as virtues. He then paints a picture of how humanity is evolving into a state of perfection which exists beyond the physical.

The author is a convert from atheism and alludes to that several times. He has seen the idea of God from both sides and is quite familiar with the arguments against the existence of any deity. Lewis displays a certain amount of arrogance on behalf of his chosen religion, a tone which might upset some readers. However, when seen in light of his overall philosophy and the point of view from which he argues—the apologist, the defender—his arrogance might be forgiven for what it is, a strong belief that pushes aside doubt, sometimes forcibly.

Lewis considers himself and most Christians to be imperfect. He does not pretend to be anything but Christ, and he realizes this is an act. Unlike other acts, this one actually transforms the Christian into a smaller version of Christ. The new men he concludes the book with are also playing this role of Christ here on earth, not as Christ want-to-be types who gather people together for mass suicides, but as evolving humans who desire the next level of existence. When physical death comes, it will come in its own time.

God

Lewis carefully constructs an argument for the existence of God by first proposing the existence of Natural Law. The existence of Natural Law is evidence that God must exist.

The nature of God is explained as being of three parts: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. This is traditional Christian doctrine. There must be three parts to God because in God is love, and love cannot exist other than between parts. Love cannot exist alone. So, the Father loves the Son, and the Son admires the Father. The Holy Ghost arises as a third part, for what purpose or why is not completely clear.

Of these parts, it is the Son who is all-important to Christians while on earth. Once departed from earth, a perfection process continues until all are ready to be presented to the Father through the Son.



Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ is the Son of God who came to earth and died for our sake. This can be expressed in many different ways, but Lewis keeps to the one important way in which Christ continues to help humans to achieve the next level of evolution. Christ wants humans to freely accept Him. By this Lewis means to become little Christs as much as possible during life on earth. However, Jesus Christ is a demanding sort of God. Once accepted, He does not let go unless pushed away.

Accepting Christ and letting our old selves die is highly beneficial because humans will then achieve the everlasting life promised. Not only is Jesus Christ the Son of God but also the model for all humanity, the next level of evolution for which to strive.

Jesus Christ and God have existed forever and will exist beyond time. Time is meaningless to God in all its parts, and will be meaningless to Christians who die physically but go on after death and toward perfection.

Holy Ghost (or Spirit)

The Holy Ghost is the third part of the three-person God. Lewis does not spend much time on how the Holy Ghost operates, but he does write about how when people gather together, a larger personality seems to result from the gathering, and this happens whether the gathering is for religious purposes or not. An implication is that the Holy Ghost may be this larger personality which manifests itself when humans gather. It may be the love shared among humans in these gatherings, an amplification of the love. In any case, Lewis is less interested in the Holy Ghost than he is in Jesus Christ. This is because the Holy Ghost cannot do for humans what Jesus Christ has promised to do.

Christians

Christians share many beliefs, as Lewis points out, but the one thing which separates Christians from all non-Christians is the acceptance of Jesus Christ. Lewis claims this can happen even with people who do not consider themselves to be Christians, because Christ is eternal, so acceptance of him could have occurred before Christ came to earth. It can also happen anywhere in the universe where life similar to humans exists. Lewis implies the name is not so important as the acceptance of the spirit.

Becoming Christian is difficult, but once Christ is accepted, things get easier. Once the old self dies out and Christ takes over, life becomes very easy for Christians. Lewis considers these Christians to be the new men, the next level of human evolution.



Theologians

Lewis defends theologians as the necessary cartographers of God's plan to bring humanity into its next level of evolution. Lewis himself is a certain type of theologian, an apologist—a defender of Christianity. Much of what Lewis has to say about Christianity is not directly cited as from theologians or philosophers, but the reader can assume quite a bit of study has gone into what he thinks and believes.

Critics

Lewis acknowledges his critics and answers some of their questions. He had been a critic of Christianity and virtually all other religions in his earlier years, and so he clearly understands the objections. The power Lewis has as an author is in picking which critics he addresses in the book. One can safely assume he does not pick any critic whom he cannot answer.

Non-Christians

Lewis brushes aside all other religions but allows for non-Christians to accept Christ as he describes Him. The terminology humans invent to represent God and the process of evolution from a Christian standpoint is not important. The same thing can happen without the terminology or with different language which describes the same ideas and process. An interesting extension Lewis draws is to extraterrestrial life with intelligence levels similar to humankind. This extension agrees with modern science's assumption that life is probable on other planets, and it agrees with the idea that God is outside or behind the universe. If Christ is the equivalent of God, then His spirit must be available to all capable beings in the entire universe, not only humans on earth.

Pre-Christians

Lewis extends the Christian evolution to pre-Christians too. Some humans might not have rebelled against God and could have started the evolutionary process early. Time has meaning only in the physical universe. God and all its three parts are eternal, without beginning or end, something nearly impossible to imagine for three-dimensional beings trapped within time.

New Men

Humankind is in the midst of an evolving from living creatures bound for death in this universe to immortal beings in another dimension, the dimension of God. These new humans are often recognizable and might recognize each other. They have accepted Christ and become more like Him. Lewis describes these new men as being relaxed and comfortable with life.



The Devil

The devil is a rebellious angel, created by God, who tempts people to try to be gods themselves without seeking the help of Jesus Christ. The devil occupies a part of God's creation, but God does not like the creation any less because of this. Lewis warns that the devil presents temptations in twos, and the proper way for Christians to handle them is to ignore both errors at once.



Objects/Places

The Universe

The universe is where physical reality exists in three dimensions. Time exists in the universe and is a critical feature, as the universe has a beginning and end. Humankind lives on a planet in this universe and experiences physical death, along with all living things.

God's Dimension

God's dimension is where God exists beyond human understanding. Creatures from a simpler dimension cannot fully understand what a more complex dimension would be like. However, some humans have been able to understand parts of God's dimension, including some of the nature of God. Time is meaningless in God's dimension.

Physical Life

Physical life is what all humans, and all other living things, know of life while in the universe. It is not the true life and should be abandoned in favor of the spiritual life. The penalty for not doing this is a permanent end to physical and spiritual life.

Spiritual Life

Spiritual life is the true life which humankind has the opportunity to choose. Free will must be used to choose this life, as it would be meaningless if dictated from God. The choice is difficult at first but becomes easier with time, despite the usual setbacks in life.

Imperfection

All humans are imperfect beings. The point is to become more perfect with the promised help of Jesus Christ. Most people will die with imperfections, but the idea is to become as perfect as possible before death through the help of Christ.

Perfection

Perfection is impossible to attain in the universe, because the universe is imperfect. Humans can come close, but total perfection can only happen in the spiritual life and with the help of Jesus Christ.



Humankind

Humankind has been chosen as the animals with enough intelligence and fortitude to eventually become perfect beings after death and through the help of Jesus Christ.

Churches

Churches are gathering places for the resistance, people caught in occupied territory who are fighting the occupier, the devil.

Scripture

Lewis rarely quotes Scripture but accepts the authority of Scripture. This is one of his leaps of faith taken in the first sub-book, but not highlighted. Scripture is the Bible and other writings which have been inspired by God and written down by humans.

Temptation

Temptation comes in twos from the devil, according to Lewis. Christians should simply plow through the temptations by keeping focused on becoming more like Christ.

Heaven

Heaven is a place, or possibly more accurate, a state of perfect being in God's timeless dimension. This state can only be attained through the help of Christ. Humans who do not accept Christ are doomed to spiritual death at physical death.

Hell

Hell is similar to Heaven, except the state of being does not include God. It is eternal like Heaven because it exists in God's timeless dimension. This is where Christians go if they do not achieve a minimum amount of perfection before physical death.



Themes

Natural Law

Lewis points to the existence of a Natural Law, or a universal knowledge of right and wrong, as the first evidence that God exists. The supporting evidence for the Natural Law is all human civilizations, including the early forms of tribal societies, have similar codes of ethics which arise from the Natural Law. Thus, murdering each other is not ethical, but killing other humans is allowed for defense of the society from other societies. Stealing is not allowed, but trading is.

Along with this, Lewis observes that humans have a difficult time following Natural Law, and this point is as important as the existence of Natural Law. Humans are by nature imperfect. Lewis believes humans were created imperfect on purpose, in order that perfection might become their goal, if chosen through free will. The motivation for selecting perfection over remaining imperfect starts with the discomfort humans feel while breaking the Natural Law. Humans want to follow the Natural Law, but cannot without help. This help must come from somebody who is perfect, Jesus Christ.

The Existence of God

Lewis argues if Natural Law exists, something must have created it. The Natural Law has built within it a level of intelligence and power which could not simply be a part of the universe. It is also a law which cannot be perceived in the universe without an organism attaining a certain level of intelligence, that of human beings. Human beings could not have invented Natural Law, as the nature of human beings is to disobey the law and feel guilt after disobedience. Some other intelligence greater than humans must exist, and so Lewis proposes God is the source of this higher intelligence.

God does not exist in our three-dimensional universe, but outside of it or behind it in another dimension which humans cannot understand very well. Time has no meaning in God's dimension, whereas time is very important in the three-dimensional universe. Everything has a beginning and end, as with human life, but God has no beginning or end. Additionally, God knows what has happened and what will happen in the universe because in God's dimension, all events in the universe that have happened or will ever happen can be seen all at once.

The existence of God as a proposed explanation for the existence of Natural Law is a key point in Lewis' argument in support of Christianity. Either God exists or God does not. During his childhood and for the greater part of his young adulthood, Lewis took the position that God does not exist. One cannot prove a negative, so this position must stand on the lack of evidence for God's existence. Later in life, Lewis takes the opposite position that God exists, and from this foundation he builds the case for Christianity.



The Three-person Nature of God

If God exists, and if love comes from God, there must be at least two parts to God which love each other, the Father and the Son. Lewis argues love cannot exist without at least two persons loving one another. Humans, due to their imperfections, cannot approach the Father without help from the Son part, and so the Son has the task of perfecting human beings to the point when the Father will accept them. Another factor is imperfect humans could not appreciate or survive the Father, and so must attain perfection beforehand. This three-part nature of God is as important to Christians as the existence of God.

The Holy Ghost is the third part of God, which comes from the love between the Father and Son. It is a carrier of sorts for love, and the power which love entails. According to Lewis, the Holy Ghost can be detected when humans gather together and have love for one another. It is the greater personality which groups of humans have, the whole which is greater than the sum of the parts.

Acceptance of Jesus Christ

Humans have a challenge: accept Jesus Christ and thereby attain eternal life, or reject Jesus Christ and die. This challenge is what Christians take on when accepting Jesus Christ as their model and guide to eventual perfection. Lewis gives many illustrations on how the process works, including how the process does not work.

A Christian cannot accept Jesus Christ for the moment and then drop Him. It is an all-or-nothing proposition, a commitment for eternity. Lewis points to some humans who claim to be Christians but cannot be so due to this lack of commitment. He also suggests that non-Christians might make the commitment without realizing it. Within Christianity, there are people moving toward the full commitment and those moving away from it, most notably the clergy from Lewis' viewpoint.

Accepting Jesus Christ is difficult. Once this commitment is fully made, life becomes easier even with the usual setbacks. Lewis explains once eternal life is assured, what happens in this universe becomes nearly irrelevant. The effort to become more like Jesus Christ, as perfect as possible, before physical death and the beginning of eternity is the important thing to sustain.

Human Evolution

Lewis accepts the scientific theory of evolution, but this theory has no importance in what he sees as the ultimate in human evolution. His idea of the new man is one who has fully accepted Jesus Christ and displays some of the characteristics of a perfected being in this universe. The evolution is rapid and very different from the evolution of species. It is a complete transformation from a human being to a spiritual being which eventually becomes perfect, through Jesus Christ.



Upon achieving perfection, the Son will present the perfect beings to the Father, and an entire cycle of existence, biological evolution and spiritual evolution will be complete. If anything further is to happen, Lewis has no idea what it might be. The author freely admits when he is certain, when he has his doubts, and when he simply does not know. He is certain about human spiritual evolution, and the next step for humans has nothing to do with biological evolution.

The evolution which Lewis believes is happening started with the death and resurrection of Christ. The evolution gained momentum, was pounded down, regained momentum and was pounded down again. Each time other humans tried to kill Christianity, it arose once again. This history of Christianity not only shows its resilience, but also its parallel to the life of Christ.

Virtue

Christians must work to become virtuous, Lewis states. However, becoming virtuous is not the goal but a means to the end. A virtuous person who has not accepted Jesus Christ is still doomed to death. The acceptance of Jesus Christ is the nature of Christianity, the whole point. Either choose eternal life through Jesus Christ or suffer death—it does not matter how good a person one becomes. This situation develops out of Christian theology about the three-person nature of God, the need for humans to become perfect, and the necessary help from the Son.

Once Christians accept Jesus Christ, the work of becoming more virtuous becomes easier. Lewis expounds on the virtues of forgiveness, charity, faith and others. He emphasizes the importance of understanding what these virtues really mean, as humans can become confused and often make mistakes. Lewis admits he has trouble controlling his temper at times, especially when surprised by a situation, but in the long run all that matters is that he and other Christians try to be more virtuous. Perfect virtue is not possible for most humans, nor is it a requirement for everlasting life. Perfect virtue is a requirement for meeting the Father.

Lewis believes that God is looking for a certain kind of person, one who has the courage to try, and one who has achieved at least a minimal level of virtue, considering the conditions of biological life. Some people might have the inherent ability to be virtuous, while others must struggle. The people who have a more difficult time of it are favored more by God, Lewis thinks, as supported by Scripture.

Style

Perspective

C. S. Lewis (Clive Staples Lewis, 11/29/1898-11/22/1963) grew up in Ireland and later worked at Oxford University as a professor of English. He turned away from his childhood religion at the age of 13, after his mother died of cancer. J. R. R. Tolkien and others influenced Lewis' conversion to Christianity, and *Mere Christianity* is a compilation of his radio broadcasts on the subject of Christianity.

The meaning of the term "mere" in the book title can be taken in its more obscure definition of being completely developed or absolute, or the common usage of having just enough, such as making a mere living. The content of the book supports both interpretations. Lewis presents Christianity as a completely developed religion, the absolute religion and the only correct one, and as a religion for all people, no matter what their capacities might be.

Lewis admits he is not a theologian, but he bases his analysis of Christian beliefs on logic and his own studies of philosophy, literature and theological works. He has a unique view as a former atheist, then a theist starting in 1929, then a Christian in 1931. He joined the Church of England, also known as the Anglican Church. Lewis considers himself to be an orthodox layman in his church, and for a long time he only attends services to receive communion. Later in life he enjoys going to church with the people he formerly thought repulsive, the working class still wearing boots but singing all the verses of the hymns.

Lewis writes for Christians wanting to understand the faith better and for non-Christians who might be interested in becoming Christian. He gently tries to urge conversion in the first sub-book, where he makes the logical argument for Christianity. In later sub-books, he lays down the gauntlet: either become a Christian or die, either be a good enough Christian or suffer in hell.

Tone

The author's tone varies from calm and assured to strident. He injects what might have come off over the radio as humor, but in the printed version of the scripts, the humor might be too dry for American readers to catch. Some of the words Lewis uses have special meanings in British English, such as "ell" for the length of 45 inches. Lewis uses the term in this context: Give them an inch and they want an ell. Overall the book's tone is appealing as each short script, written to cover 10 minutes of air time, appeals to the intellect more than the emotions.

At times the tone becomes nearly monotonous. The author is usually quick to bring in something to wake the reader up, or in the case of the radio version, recapture attention.

Structure

Mere Christianity was originally a set of radio scripts broadcast during World War II. As such, each chapter is around five pages long, enough space to fill up 10 minutes of radio air time. The scripts are arranged into four sub-books, each with a specific purpose. The first book lays out a logical argument in support of Christianity. The second book draws the inevitable beliefs which spring from the argument. The third explains Christian behavior, and the fourth describes what the ultimate implications of Christianity are. The sub-books flow logically from one to the next, building toward the climactic idea that only through Jesus Christ can humanity attain everlasting life, and thus move into the ultimate level of human evolution.

The structure works very well to quickly move from one end of the spectrum to the other, but it lacks in supporting citations. This is a book for the masses, not for scholarly inquiry or philosophical elucidation. It is a book for laymen by a layman, albeit a highly educated one.



Quotes

"Whenever you find a man who says he does not believe in a real Right and Wrong, you will find the same man going back on this a moment later. He may break his promise to you, but if you try breaking one to him he will be complaining 'It's not fair' before you can say Jack Robinson," (p. 19).

"It may be a great advance in knowledge not to believe in witches: there is no moral advance in not executing them when you do not think they are there. You would not call a man humane for ceasing to set mousetraps if he did so because he believed there were no mice in the house," (p. 26).

"It begins to look as if we shall have to admit that there is more than one kind of reality; that, in this particular case, there is something above and beyond the ordinary facts of men's behaviour, and yet quite definitely real—a real law, which none of us made, but which we find pressing on us," (p. 30).

"My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line," (p. 45).

"Christianity agrees with Dualism that this universe is at war. But it does not think this is a war between independent powers. It thinks it is a civil war, a rebellion, and that we are living in a part of the universe occupied by the rebel," (p. 51).

"The point is not that God will refuse you admission to His eternal world if you have not got certain qualities of character: the point is that if people have not got at least the beginnings of those qualities inside them, then no possible external conditions could make a 'Heaven' for them—that is, could make them happy with the deep, strong, unshakeable kind of happiness God intends for us," (pp. 77-78).

"I have said that we should never get a Christian society unless most of us became Christian individuals. That does not mean, of course, that we can put off doing anything about society until some imaginary date in the far future. It means that we must begin both jobs at once—(1) the job of seeing how 'Do as you would be done by' can be applied in detail to modern society, and (2) the job of becoming the sort of people who really would apply it if we saw how," (p. 84).

"The Christian idea of marriage is based on Christ's words that a man and wife are to be regarded as a single organism—for that is what the words 'one flesh' would be in modern English. And the Christians believe that when He said this He was not expressing a sentiment but stating a fact—just as one is stating a fact when one says that a lock and its key are one mechanism, or that a violin and a bow are one musical instrument," (p. 96).



"I said in a previous chapter that chastity was the most unpopular of the Christian virtues. But I am not sure I was right. I believe the one I have to talk of today is even more unpopular: the Christian rule, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' Because in Christian morals 'thy neighbour' includes 'thy enemy,' and so we come up against this terrible duty of forgiving our enemies," (p. 104).

"Good and evil both increase at compound interest. That is why the little decisions you and I make every day are of such infinite importance. The smallest good act today is the capture of a strategic point from which, a few months later, you may be able to go on to victories you never dreamed of. An apparently trivial indulgence in lust or anger today is the loss of a ridge or railway line or bridgehead from which the enemy may launch an attack otherwise impossible," (p. 117).

"There is no need to be worried by facetious people who try to make the Christian hope of 'Heaven' ridiculous by saying they do not want 'to spend eternity play harps.' . . . 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," (pp. 121-122).

"Christians have often disputed as to whether what leads the Christian home is good actions, or Faith in Christ. I have no right really to speak on such a difficult question, but it does seem to be like asking which blade in a pair of scissors is most necessary," (p. 131).

"This world is a great sculptor's shop. We are the statues and there is a rumor going round the shop that some of us are some day going to come to life," (p. 140).

"If Christianity was something we were making up, of course we could make it easier. But it is not. We cannot compete, in simplicity, with people who are inventing religions. How could we? We are dealing with Fact. Of course anyone can be simple if he has no facts to bother about," (p. 145).

"Every Christian is to become a little Christ. The whole purpose of becoming a Christian is simply nothing else," (p. 154).

"But, of course, none of these illustrations really works perfectly. In the long run God is no one but Himself and what He does is like nothing else. You could hardly expect it to be," (p. 157).

"What we have been told is how we men can be drawn into Christ . . . It was the only thing we were made for. And there are strange, exciting hints in the Bible that when we are drawn in, a great many other things in Nature will begin to come right. The bad dream will be over: it will be morning" (p. 172).

"Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in," (p. 191).



Topics for Discussion

Describe the Heaven and hell in which Lewis believes.

Analyze Lewis' argument for Christianity and compose a rebuttal.

Why does Lewis accept the biological theory of evolution?

How does Lewis justify the idea of a perfect Creator making an imperfect world?

How should a Christian behave, according to Lewis?

Define the new man.

Compare and contrast another Christian view with that of Lewis.

Write a 30-second commercial for Christianity based on the views of Lewis.

Why must God have three parts?

How virtuous must a Christian be before earning everlasting life?

What are the Cardinal Virtues, and why are they named Cardinal?

According to Lewis, what role does the devil play in the story of humanity?