



## Mere Christianity

by C S Lewis

A classic in defense of Christianity. If you feel your intellect gets in the way of believing in Christianity, this is a book you should read.

Lewis divides his writings into 4 Books:

- 1) Right and wrong as a clue to the meaning of the universe
- 2) What Christians believe
- 3) Christian behavior
- 4) Beyond personality: or first steps in the doctrine of the Trinity

### Book 1:

Lewis tackles one of the age old questions: Is our conscience, or feelings of right and wrong God given, or a product of social engineering? He takes a logical approach that shows we humans all have desires and moral pulls that can only be God given.

Excerpts from Book 1:

“Every one has heard people quarrelling....They say things like this; ‘How’d you like it if anyone did the same to you?’ - ‘That’s my seat, I was there first’ - ‘Leave him alone, he isn’t doing you any harm’... Now what interests me about all these remarks is that the man who makes them is not merely saying that the other man’s behavior does not happen to please him. He is appealing to some kind of standard of behavior... Quarrelling means trying to show that the other man is in the wrong. And there would be no sense in trying to do that unless you and he had some sort of agreement as to what Right and Wrong are. . . .” (p. 17)

“...but for our present purpose I need only ask the reader to think what a totally different morality would mean. Think of a country where people were admired for running away in battle, or where a man felt proud of doublecrossing all the people who had been kindest to him.” (p. 19)

“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”. . . .(p. 19)

“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 really 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 two facts are the foundation of all clear thinking about ourselves and the universe we live in.” (p. 21)

“When you think about these differences between the morality of one people and another, do you think that the morality of one people is ever better or worse than that of another? Have any of the changes been improvements? If not, then of course there could never be any moral progress. Progress means not just changing, but changing for the better. **If no set of moral ideas were truer or better than any other, there would be no sense in preferring civilized morality to savage morality, or Christian morality to Nazi morality.**”(p. 24, 25)

“...Christianity simply does not make sense until you have faced the sort of facts I have been describing. Christianity tells people to repent and promises them forgiveness. It therefore has nothing (as far as I know) to say to people who do not know they have done anything to repent of and who do not feel that they need any forgiveness. It is after you have realized that there is a real Moral law, and a Power behind the law, and that you have broken that law and put yourself wrong with that Power - it is after all this, and not a moment sooner, that Christianity begins to talk.” (p. 38, 39)

## Book 2:

Lewis make comparisons between believers in a higher power and Atheists. Then he compares the God of the Bible and non-Christian gods. Lewis asks the question that had caused him to abandon Christianity years earlier. "If a good God made the world why has it gone wrong?"

Excerpts from Book 2:

"Christians, then, believe that an evil power has made himself for the present the Prince of this World. And, of course, that raises problems. Is this state of affairs in accordance with God's will or not? If it is, He is a strange God, you say; and if it is not, how can anything happen contrary to the will of a being with absolute power? . . . **God created things which had free will. That means creatures which can go either wrong or right.** . . . If a thing is free to be good it is also free to be bad. And free will is what has made evil possible. **Why, then, did God give them free will?** Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having. A world of automata - creatures that worked like machines - would hardly be worth creating. The happiness which God designs for His higher creatures is the happiness of being freely, voluntarily united to Him . . . **And for that they must be free.**

**Of course God knew what would happen if they used their freedom the wrong way; apparently He thought it worth the risk.**

When we have understood about free will, we shall see how silly it is to ask, as somebody once asked me: "Why did God make a creature of such rotten stuff that it went wrong?" The better stuff a creature is made of - the cleverer and stronger and freer it is - then the better it will be if it goes right, but also the worse it will be if it goes wrong.

[So] how did the Dark Power go wrong? . . . The moment you have a self at all, there is a possibility of putting yourself first - wanting to be the Center - wanting to be God, in fact. That was the sin of Satan; and that was the sin he taught the human race. . . . What Satan put into the heads of our remote ancestors was the idea that they could "be like gods" - could set up on their own as if they had created themselves - be their own masters - invent some sort of happiness for themselves outside God, apart from God. **And out of that hopeless attempt has come nearly all that we call human history - money, poverty, ambition, war, prostitution, classes, empires, slavery - the long terrible story of man trying to find something other than God which will make him happy.**

The reason why it can never succeed is this, **God made us:** invented us as a man invents an engine. A car is made to run on gasoline, and it would not run properly on anything else. Now God designed the human machine to run on Himself. He Himself is the fuel our spirits were designed to burn; or the food our spirits were designed to feed on. There is no other. . . . God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing." (p. 51-54)

**"That is the key to history.** Terrific energy is expended - civilisations are built up - excellent institutions devised; **but each time something goes wrong.** Some fatal flaw always brings the selfish and cruel people to the top and it all slides back into misery and ruin. In fact, the machine conks." (p. 54)

"Then comes the real shock. Among these Jews there suddenly turns up a man who goes about talking as if He was God. He claims to forgive sins. He says He has always existed. He says He is coming to judge the world at the end of time."

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him; 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept His claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic . . . or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice." (p. 54-56)

### Book 3:

Lewis discusses virtues, morality, marriage and "The Great Sin"- pride.

Excerpts from Book 3:

"There is a story about a schoolboy who was asked what he thought God was like. He replied that, as far as he could make out, God was 'The sort of person who is always snooping around to see if anyone is enjoying himself and then trying to stop it. . . .In reality, moral rules are directions for running the human machine. Every moral rule is there to prevent a breakdown, or a strain, or a friction, in the running of that machine. That is why these rules at first seem to be constantly interfering with our natural inclinations.'"(p. 69)

"What is the good of drawing up, on paper, rules for social behavior, if we know that, in fact, our greed, cowardice, ill temper, and self-conceit are going to prevent us from keeping them? I do not mean for a moment that we ought not to think, and think hard, about improvements in our social and economic system. What I do mean is that all that thinking will be mere moonshine unless we realize that nothing but the courage and unselfishness of individuals is ever going to make any system work properly. . . . You cannot make men good by law; and without good men you cannot have a good society. That is why we must go on to think of the second thing: morality inside the individual." (p. 72)

"Again, Christianity asserts that every individual human being is going to live for ever, and this must be either true or false. Now there are a good many things which would not be worth bothering about if I were going to live only seventy years, but which I had better bother about very seriously if I am going to live for ever."(p. 73)

"...We might think that, provided you did the right thing, it did not matter how or why you did it - whether you did it willingly or unwillingly,... through fear of public opinion or for its own sake. But the truth is that right actions done for the wrong reasons do not help to build the internal quality or character called a 'virtue,' and it is this quality or character that really matters." (p. 77)

"The first thing to get clear about Christian morality between man and man is that in this department Christ did not come to preach any brand new morality. The Golden rule of the New testament (Do as you would be done by) is a summing up of what everyone, at bottom, had always known to be right. Really great moral teachers never do introduce new moralities: it is quacks and cranks who do that." (78)

"Does loving your enemy mean not punishing him?... It is, therefore, in my opinion, perfectly right for a Christian judge to sentence a man to death or a Christian soldier to kill an enemy. I always have thought so, ever since I became a Christian, and long before the war, and I still think so now that we are at peace. It is no good quoting "Thou shalt not kill." There are two Greek words: the ordinary word to kill and the word to murder. And when Christ quotes that commandment He uses the murder one in all three accounts, Matthew, Mark, and Luke. And I am told there is the same distinction in Hebrew. All killing is not murder any more than all sexual intercourse is adultery. ...the Christian in arms for the defense of a good cause - is one of the great Christian ideas. War is a dreadful thing, and I can respect an honest pacifist, though I think he is entirely mistaken." (p. 106, 107)

"...power is what Pride really enjoys: there is nothing makes a man feel so superior to others as being able to move them about like toy soldiers." (p. 110)

## Book 4:

Lewis states that "Theology is practical" and discusses if converts to Christianity can be changed or transformed.

Excerpts from Book 4:

"Theology means 'the science of God,' and I think any man who wants to think about God at all would like to have the clearest and most accurate ideas about Him which are available." (p. 135)

"Doctrines are not God: they are only a kind of map." (p.136)

"In fact, that is just why a vague religion - all about feeling God in nature, and so on - is so attractive. It is all thrills and no work..." (p. 136)

"It is quite true that if we took Christ's advice we should soon be living in a happier world. You need not even go as far as Christ. If we did all that Plato or Aristotle or Confucius told us, we should get on a great deal better than we do. And so what? We never have followed the advice of the great teachers. Why are we likely to begin now? Why are we more likely to follow Christ than any of the others? Because He is the best moral teacher? But that makes it even less likely that we shall follow Him. If we cannot take the elementary lessons, is it likely we are going to take the most advanced one? If Christianity only means one more bit of good advice, then Christianity is of no importance. There has been no lack of good advice for the last four thousand years. A bit more makes no difference." (p. 137)

"You have noticed, I expect, that Christ Himself sometimes describes the Christian way as very hard, sometimes as very easy. He says, 'take up your Cross'. . . . Next minute he says, 'My yoke is easy and my burden light.' He means both. And one can just see why both are true." (p. 167, 168)

"Laziness means more work in the long run." (p. 168)

". . . the Church exists for nothing else but to draw men into Christ, to make them little Christs. If they are not doing that, all the cathedrals, clergy, missions, sermons, even the Bible itself, are simply a waste of time. God became man for no other purpose. It is doubtful, you know, whether the whole universe was created for any other purpose." (p. 170)

"I think this is the right moment to consider a question which is often asked: If Christianity is true why are not all Christians obviously nicer than all non-Christians? What lies behind that question is partly something very reasonable and partly something that is not reasonable at all. The reasonable part is this. If conversion to Christianity make no improvement in a man's outward actions . . . then I think we must suspect that his "conversion" was largely imaginary; . . . In that sense the outer world is quite right to judge Christianity by its results. Christ told us to judge by results. A tree is known by its fruit;" (p. 175)

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**About the author.** Clive Staples Lewis was born in 1898 in Belfast, Northern Ireland. In 1908, his entire family died, first his mother, then his father and then his brother. In 1911, Lewis developed respiratory problems and was sent to Malvern, England, which was famous as a health resort. He stayed here until June, 1913. During his two year stay at Malvern, he abandoned his Christian faith which he had been raised on.

When WWI erupted, Lewis enlisted in the British Army and was wounded in the Battle of Arras. He spent the rest of the war in England and was discharged in December 1919.

In 1929, Lewis came to the conclusion that there was a God and 2 years later, became a Christian.

Mere Christianity was originally delivered as talks on the BBC during WWII and published in 1943 as 3 separate books. Later condensed into one book, Mere Christianity became a classic in defense of Christianity.

In 1954, Lewis accepted the Chair of Medieval and Renaissance literature at Cambridge University in England. CS Lewis died on November 22, 1963, the same day President Kennedy was assassinated.