

Mere Christianity - Study Guide

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

I. The Law of Nature

C. S. Lewis makes note of a tendency in humans of appealing to a standard of absolute truth in quarrels and arguments. He calls this standard the Law of Nature or the Moral Law.

1. Looking back, have you ever used an appeal to absolute truth in your discussions with others?
2. Lewis also says that no human appears to be able to keep the Law of Nature at all times but if someone feels that they have, they are an exception and should not read the rest of the book. Do you think you are an exception?

II. Some Objections

Lewis sites two objections to his theory of natural law which have come to him through letters from readers.

1. The law is from instinct. Why does Lewis think that the moral law is not just a result of human instinct?

2. Social convention. Lewis dismisses the idea that moral law is a matter of how we are brought up or educated because...?

III. The Reality of the Law

Lewis concludes that the moral law (or natural law) is alive and active in human lives.

1. According to Lewis, the statement, "Men ought to behave decently in order to benefit society", is a redundant statement. Why?
2. Do you think the Law of Nature as described by Lewis is real and not made by man?
3. How is the law pressing on us?

IV. What Lies Behind the Law

1. According to Lewis, Science cannot be used to discover the mind behind the creation of the universe, why not?
2. What is the one thing that is unique about man that is different than anything else a scientist can study?

V. We Have Cause to be Uneasy

Lewis gives three reasons to consider religion as a means to satisfy the guilt imposed by the moral law.

1. Lewis suggests that one reason to reconsider religion is that humanity is on the wrong road. Do you think humanity is still on the wrong road?
2. Lewis states that if God is like the moral law, he is not soft or sentimental. Why is this shocking? What else points to the existence of God apart from the moral law?
3. According to Lewis, Christianity will not make sense to anyone until they realize...?

Book II: What Christians Believe

I. The Rival Conceptions of God

Lewis discusses the major divisions of belief in God.

1. When discussing the different beliefs in God, they can be divided according to what? Why does Lewis state that Christianity is a more liberal viewpoint than atheism?
2. The two major ideas about God which Lewis discusses are...?
3. The major concepts in Pantheism are...?

4. The major difference between Pantheism and Christianity is...?
5. One of Lewis' major arguments against the existence of God when he was an atheist was that the world is very cruel. What was his answer to this question when he became a Christian?

II. The Invasion

Lewis discusses what he calls Christianity-and-water.

1. There are many people who reject Christian doctrine because it is not simple. What is Lewis' answer to this criticism?
2. There are two views of good and evil that are discussed by Lewis, what are they?
3. Why does Lewis reject dualism?
4. According to Lewis' analogy of being in enemy territory, we go to church in order to...?

III. The shocking alternative

Lewis discusses free will, Satan, and the nature of Christ.

1. What is the analogy that Lewis offers to answer the question of how something can happen that is contrary to the will of a being with absolute power?
2. Do you think it is possible for a creature to have free will and be incapable of doing wrong?
3. What was the sin of Satan and the sin he taught the human race?
4. What are the three things that Lewis suggests were done by God to counter the schemes of Satan? Are you aware of queer stories in other religions mentioned by Lewis?
5. What is the claim of Jesus that Lewis says tends to slip by unnoticed because we have heard it so much? Why is it significant?
6. Why does Lewis think it is foolish to call Jesus just a great moral teacher?

IV. The Perfect Penitent

A theory is proposed as to how the Atonement of Christ works.

1. Christians believe the main thing that Christ came to earth to do was...?
2. If God was willing to forgive us, why didn't he do so without having an innocent man killed?
3. How does Lewis define repentance?

4. Are humans capable of perfect repentance? How does God help us achieve repentance?
5. Many people say that it was easy for Christ to live a perfect life, suffer, and be crucified since he was God. Why does Lewis think this is a silly reason for criticizing Christianity?

V. The Practical Conclusion

The implications of life in Christ are briefly stated.

1. Lewis states that according to Christian belief, by sharing in the humility and suffering of Christ we shall share in...?
2. Lewis states that being a Christian is more than just mental belief, it involves the physical activities of...?
3. According to Lewis, doing good in order to appease God is not the reason Christians do good. Rather, any good that a Christian does is a result of...?
4. Lewis admits to having been puzzled by the idea that the new life is confined to Christians only. What is his answer to this question?
5. Another objection that Lewis sites is the question of why God does not deal openly and decisively with the Devil. What is his answer to this question?

Book III: Christian Behavior

I. The Three Parts of Morality

Lewis proposes three concerns of morality

1. Fair play and harmony between individuals. According to Lewis' ship analogy, why is it not useful to stop with the first concern of morality?
2. Harmonizing the things inside each individual. How is the second morality achieved? What causes differences between people in regards to the second concern of morality?
3. The general purpose of human life as a whole. Why is the idea "as long as I don't hurt others, what I do is OK", a non-Christian philosophy?

II. The "Cardinal Virtues"

Lewis discusses what he calls the cardinal virtues.

1. Lewis says that according to old writers, there are seven virtues. Four of the virtues are called cardinal and the other three are theological. What are the four cardinal virtues?
2. Does being child-like mean that a Christian can be foolish?
3. Does temperance apply only to drinking? Does it mean complete abstinence?

4. What word does Lewis use to describe justice?
5. Fortitude is described in two ways, what are they?

III. Social Morality

A discussion of morality between man and man and what a society would be like if it were completely Christian.

1. Lewis states that Christ did not preach anything new in regards to morality. The real job of every moral teacher is...?
2. Why can Christianity not have a political program to apply the golden rule to a particular society at a particular time?
3. "The Church ought to give us a lead" is a legitimate statement if by Church we mean...?
4. Lewis speculates that if we were to visit a Christian society, we would come away with a curious impression. What is this curious impression?
5. Lewis states that three great civilizations have condemned the very thing we have based ours on. What were the three civilizations and what is the thing they have condemned?
6. Lewis states that charity (giving to the poor) is an essential part of Christianity. How can we gauge our level of charity according to Lewis?

IV. Morality and Psychoanalysis

The Christian specification for the human machine

1. According to Lewis, psychoanalysis and Christianity are not in contradiction. How does psychoanalysis affect a person's ability to make moral choices?
2. How is a man who is in a position (due to anger) to kill thousands similar to a man whose anger only causes laughter?

V. Sexual Morality

A discussion of the Christian virtue known as chastity.

1. How is Christian chastity different than social rules of modesty?
2. Lewis uses an analogy with food to prove that our sexual instinct has gone wrong. Describe the food analogy.
3. In regards to sex, does Christian philosophy contradict the following statement: "There is nothing to be ashamed of in the fact that the human race reproduces itself in a certain way, nor in the fact that it gives pleasure."?
4. Do you think that our sexual instinct has been corrupted?

5. Do you think that Christian chastity is impossible? According to Lewis, what is the most fatal thing we can do when faced with this seeming impossibility?
6. Is unchastity the supreme Christian vice? If not, what is?

VI. Christian Marriage

A discussion of Christian marriage and its many implications..

1. The sexual impulse in man works best in ...
2. The words "one flesh" could be translated __ in modern English.
3. Using another food analogy, Lewis compares the isolation of sexual pleasure with...
4. All Christian denominations agree that divorce is more like having both legs cut off than...
5. According to Lewis, the most common reason for people who get married in church as a mere formality is...
6. According to Lewis, living together outside of marriage causes one to be guilty on two accounts which are...
7. According to Lewis, what does the passion of love impel two people to do?

8. Why does ceasing to be "in love" need not mean ceasing to love?
9. Why is Lewis against forcing the laws of Christian marriage on people through government regulation?
10. What example does Lewis site to support the idea that the headship of man over women is natural in marriage?
11. Why is a man better suited for dealing with the family's foreign policy?

VII. Forgiveness

A discussion of forgiveness and its difficult relative: loving your enemies.

1. One of the most terrible duties of Christianity is ...
2. What are the two things we can do to make loving our enemies easier?
3. How did Lewis come to accept the straw-splitting distinction of hating what a man did and not hating the man himself?
4. Does loving your enemy mean not punishing him?
5. In Lewis' mind, why is the command 'Though shalt not Kill' not a moratorium against fighting in war or the death penalty?

6. Is giving up hatred as hard for you as giving up beer or tobacco?

VIII. The Great Sin

Lewis describes the great sin as one in which no man in the world is free, which every one in the world loathes when he sees it in another, and which hardly any people except Christians ever confess to being guilty of.

1. Have you ever recognized the great sin in yourself?
2. What is the virtue that is opposite of pride?
3. What is Lewis' suggested method to test how proud you are?
4. What part does competition play in pride?
5. What is another word that can be used to describe pride?
6. According to Lewis, what is the real test of being in the presence of God?
7. What are the 4 misunderstandings which Lewis discusses concerning pride?
8. What is the first step to acquiring humility?

IX. Charity

A discussion of the part of charity known as "alms" or giving to the poor.

1. Is having a cold temperament a sin?
2. What is one of the great secrets about cultivating charity?
3. What is Lewis' advice for a person who has no feelings of love toward God?
4. What is the great thing to remember about God's love for us?

X. Hope

Lewis describes hope as one of the Theological virtues.

1. Lewis mentions some accomplishments of men who left their mark on earth because their minds were set on heaven. Can you name these accomplishments and some others?
2. What are some symptoms of real desire for Heaven that are present in all of us?
3. Although we may experience some of the greatest gifts in life, still something has evaded us. What are the two wrong ways of dealing with this? What is the one right way?

XI. Faith

Lewis discusses the two levels of Faith.

1. Lewis admits to being puzzled by the concept of simple belief being a virtue. How did he resolve this puzzlement?
2. Lewis defines Faith as ...
3. How does one train the habit of Faith?
4. Before discussing the second level of Faith, Lewis returns to cultivating humility and suggests that one try to live the Christian life for a while. One will then discover by failure that ...

XII. Faith, level II

Lewis discusses the two levels of Faith.

1. An understanding of the second level of faith comes only after a man has ...
2. What is a way of thinking which identifies a man who is not in a right relationship with God?

3. Lewis states that a man who watches himself to see when he will fall asleep is very likely to remain awake. How does this relate to growing in faith?
4. In handing ourselves over to Christ, we desire to obey him. But we must obey in a new way of obedience. What is this new way?
5. What are the two parodies of truth which Christians have been accused of believing?

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

I. Making and Begetting

A discussion about life and how it relates to God.

1. What does the word Theology mean? Are you interested in having the clearest and most accurate ideas about God?
2. Lewis makes an analogy between Theology and a map, can you describe this analogy?
3. Do you think a person can gain eternal life by experiencing some kind of feeling of the presence of God? What are the criticisms that Lewis has regarding feelings about God?

4. Lewis describes the popular religion of his day as being an acknowledgment of the excellent moral teachings of Jesus. Why does Lewis say that this religion is unable to make any difference in the world?
5. What is the difference between begetting and creating?
6. Think of some things (objects biological or non-biological) in the Universe. How are they like God?
7. How is the life of man different from the life of God?
8. Lewis uses the terms Bios and Zoe. Can you describe the meaning of these terms?

II. The Three-Personal God

A discussion of the divine personality, it's qualities, and how it works in our lives.

1. With respect to concepts of God and personality, how is Christianity "the only one on the market" as seen by Lewis?
2. Lewis describes God's personality as being on a divine level. How is the divine level of personality different than the human level of personality?
3. Why does Lewis say it isn't any good talking about a three-personal being?
4. Lewis says that when a Christian kneels down in his bedroom to pray he is being caught up into Zoe, what does he mean by this?

5. Why is the Christian community the one really adequate instrument for learning about God?

III. Time and Beyond Time

A discussion of how God exists outside of time.

1. Do you have trouble with the idea that God listens to prayers from many people all at the same time?
2. Lewis makes an analogy to God's existence being like a writer of a novel. Describe this analogy. Where does the analogy break down?
3. If we picture life as a straight line along which we walk moment by moment then God is ...?
4. Why does having a history mean losing part of your reality?
5. How did Lewis resolve the dilemma of God knowing exactly what decisions we will make in the future and people still having free will?

IV. Good Infection

Lewis discusses how the persons of God are connected.

1. How does Lewis relate two books, one on top of the other, to God eternal and Christ the Son?
2. As Lewis explains the Father and the Son, he points out one of the problems of getting away from the words of the bible. What is the problem he encountered and why is it good to go back to the bible?
3. Why does the phrase, "God is love" have no meaning without at least two persons?
4. How is the phrase, "love is God" different from "God is love"?
5. What does Lewis say is perhaps the most important difference between Christianity and other religions.
6. According to Lewis, where does the third person of the Trinity come from?
7. Lewis describes the relationship of the Father, Son, and Spirit as a dance. He also says that we acquire life by "good infection". Can you describe the dance and the concept of good infection?

V. The Obstinate Toy Soldiers

Lewis uses a toy soldier analogy to describe how Christians are transformed into the likeness of Christ.

1. Lewis opens this chapter by reminding us of the current state of mankind and reiterating the purpose of the Son of God becoming a man. Can you describe these two things?

2. Describe in detail the natural life in each of us. Why does the natural life want to be left to itself? Do you see the natural life at work in your self?
3. Lewis makes an analogy with a tin soldier and Christ. Can you describe the analogy?
4. Can you describe how Christ had to kill his human desires at every turn of his earthly career?
5. Where does the tin soldier analogy break down?
6. What is the difference that God has made to the mass of humanity? Why is it not necessary for us to climb up into spiritual life by our own efforts?

VI. Two Notes

Two explanations on ideas from chapter V.

1. Lewis refers to one of his critics who asked why God did not beget many sons at the outset instead of using the method of transformation described by Christianity. What are the answers which are given to these questions?
2. Lewis describes Christian doctrine as teaching that human beings are like organs in a body. Trying to make people all the same is called ? Trying to make people forget that they are part of an organism is called?
3. Which is worse, Totalitarian thinking or Individualist thinking? (trick question!)

VII. Let's Pretend

Lewis uses two stories to illustrate the concept of Christian New Birth.

1. According to Lewis, what do the words "our Father" which open the Lords prayer mean?
2. What good is there for a person to pretend by dressing up like Christ?
3. How does Christ turn our pretense into reality? How is this different from listening to our conscience?
4. How does "good infection" work through people? Why should we not pin our whole faith on any human being?
5. Is Christianity simply a matter of reading what Christ said and trying to carry it out?
6. What are the two discoveries which Lewis made as he began to be transformed by Christ?

VIII. Is Christianity Hard or Easy?

An attempt to harmonize the hard and easy aspects of the Christian life.

1. According to Lewis, what is the whole of Christianity?
2. What happens to a person (who is not a Christian) when they attempt to obey their conscience completely?
3. Lewis says the Christian way is both harder and easier than the "give in to conscience" way. Can you explain why? Can you cite some of the bible verses which give support to the way of Christ being harder and easier than life outside of Christ?
4. The first thing a Christian should do every morning is...

IX. Counting The Cost

Counting the cost means understanding the command "Be ye perfect" and it's implications.

1. According to Lewis, the Lords words, "Be ye perfect" mean...
2. How is the Lord like a dentist in regard to perfection?
3. Why should Gods demands for perfection not discourage our feeble attempts at doing good?
4. What is the plan that God is determined to carry out in our lives? How does it manifest itself in our lives?

5. Describe the house analogy Lewis borrowed from George MacDonald.

X. Nice People or New Men

Discerning genuine Christian life from the life of an unbeliever.

1. Should all Christians be obviously nicer than all non-Christians? What is the result of careless lives displayed by Christians?
2. Why can the world not be divided into Christian and non-Christian by observed behavior?
3. Describe the factory analogy which Lewis uses when comparing lives in and out of Christ.
4. Do nice people need Christ as much as mean tempered people? What is God watching and waiting for in each person?
5. According to Lewis, the only things we can keep are...
6. Lewis wonders if a nice world would be harder to save than a miserable one, why?

XI. The New Men

Lewis uses the idea of evolution to describe the Christian transformation.

1. What is the next step in the evolution of man that Lewis describes?
2. How does this "new step" differ from previous ones?
3. How is Christ not merely a new man but the new man?
4. How are the new men recognized?
5. Are all people in Christ the same? How is being in Christ like light or salt?
6. What is the principle which runs through life from top to bottom?