



Mere Christianity

Week 1: May 20, 2018

“Our Sense of Right and Wrong”

It All Began with a Letter

On a frosty February morning in 1941, as England began another year of fighting in a war against Germany, C. S. Lewis turned to the stack of mail on his desk and noticed a letter from a correspondent whose name was unfamiliar to him.

Dear Mr. Lewis,

I address you by name because, although we have never met, you cannot be a stranger after allowing me — and many others — to know some of your thoughts and convictions in your book The Problem of Pain.

I write to ask whether you would be willing to help us in our work of religious broadcasting. The microphone is a limiting, and irritating, instrument, but the quality of thinking and depth of conviction which I find in your book ought sure to be shared with a great many other people.

James Welch, Director of Religious Broadcasting for the BBC

Welch suggested two possible topics. The first was for Lewis to speak about the Christian assumptions, or the lack of Christian assumptions, that underlie modern literature. The other topic Welch proposed was a series of talks loosely titled “The Christian Faith as I See It.” Lewis wrote back to thank Welch for his kind remarks. Noting that the first topic about modern literature didn’t suit him, Lewis agreed to try his hand at the second.

Six months later — on Wednesday, August 6, 1941 — Lewis boarded the train for the hour-long trip from Oxford to London. He then traveled on to the BBC’s Broadcast House for the first in the series of five talks. Each week, at precisely 7:45 in the evening, the “On the Air” light would blink on, and Lewis would spend the next fifteen minutes speaking to a weary and war-torn nation about such topics as moral law and humanity’s relationship to One higher than itself.

To the surprise of everyone, including Lewis himself, the talks were a huge success. Lewis’ clear, step-by-step reasoning, his honest and unassuming tone, and his use of commonsense examples drew in listeners of all types. The BBC invited Lewis to present a second series of talks several months later, and then a third the following year, and finally a fourth in 1944. In 1952 they were collected into one volume and published as the book the world today knows as *Mere Christianity*. Christians cite it as having been an essential part of their Christian growth and discipleship...and it all began with a letter.¹

¹ From *Discussing Mere Christianity: Exploring the History, Meaning, and Relevance of C. S. Lewis’ Greatest Book* by Devin Brown (Zondervan, 2015)

Week One

“Our Sense of Right and Wrong”

Mere Christianity chapters covered:

- Book 1, Chapter 1: “The Law of Human Nature”
- Book 2, Chapter 2: “Some Objections”

Further Study for the Week

At the end of the Preface of *Mere Christianity*, Lewis presents a now famous image where he describes mere Christianity as a large hallway in a house and the various denominations of Christianity as the rooms that branch off this hall. Lewis’ hope, he tells us, is to help people come to believe these central beliefs shared by all Christians, to help bring them into the hall. But the journey is not meant to end in the hallway; it is meant to continue on to a specific church. The hall, Lewis explains, is a place to wait in, where a person can “try the various doors” — not a place where anyone should permanently live (xv).

Lewis was critical of the church-shopping which took place in his day. In deciding which door to go through, which church to attend, he urges readers not to focus on the “paint and paneling” or any of the external aspects (xvi), but on whether the doctrines are true and if there is an emphasis on holiness.

Question 1: Do you agree with Lewis that the mere Christianity of the hallway is not a place where Christians should live? Does Lewis’ image still fit today? Why or why not?

Question 2: Why do you think some Christians are reluctant to use their minds when it comes to faith? Why are various people of faith opposed to or suspicious of reason?

Question 3: We explored the idea that humans have an inner sense of right and wrong which Lewis refers to as the Law of Human Nature. What does the following passage from Romans say about our inner sense of right and wrong? Can you think of other Scripture passages that might also be relevant?

For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them... [Romans 2:14-15, ESV]

Reading for Next Week

- Book 1, Chapter 4: “What Lies Behind the Law”
- Book 1, Chapter 5: “We Have Cause to Be Uneasy”