



## Mere Christianity

Week 4: June 10, 2018

“Free Will and the Shocking Alternative”

### To Be...OR...Not To Be

Lewis opens book two, chapter three with a summary of the conclusion reached at the end of the previous chapter: “Christians, then, believe that an evil power has made himself for the present the Prince of this world” (47). He then raises the question of whether or not this situation is in accord with God’s will. Certainly, we would say that evil is contrary to God’s will, but how can something happen that goes against the will of a being who is all-powerful?

Here readers might be reminded of the point Lewis made a few pages earlier that it is no use asking for a simple religion.

Why does a good, all-powerful God allow evil to exist in such a prevalent way? Christianity’s answer, Lewis explains, is that God wills for His creatures to be free to obey him or not. And given this freedom, some have chosen, and continue to choose, not to. Lewis concludes, writing, “If a thing is free to be good, then it is also free to be bad” (48).

In the opening pages of chapter three, Lewis argues that the best explanation for the evil and wickedness in the world is that God wills for His creatures to have a choice of whether to obey Him or not. In fact, we all — in ways large and small — have chosen not to obey and instead, as Lewis puts it, have chosen to put ourselves at the center and to be our own masters.<sup>1</sup>

### This Week

“Free Will and the Shocking Alternative”

*Mere Christianity* chapters covered:

- Book 2, Chapter 3: “The Shocking Alternative”
- Book 2, Chapter 4: “The Perfect Penitent”

### Further Study

**Question 1:** In your own words, can you walk through Lewis’s famous “Liar, Lunatic, or Lord” statement? After we have come to the decision that Jesus was not a legend, what are the only choice available to us?

**Question 2:** Lewis returns to this topic near the very end of *Mere Christianity* in the chapter titled “Nice People or New Men.” There he points out that while redemption always improves someone, “mere improvement is not redemption” (216). Christ came to earth, suffered, and died

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

not to produce better people of the old kind but to produce a new kind of person. Lewis compares repentance to a rebel laying down his arms — someone who had been trying to “set up on his own” and behaving “as if he belonged to himself” (56). He also compares repentance to starting life over again from the ground floor and to undergoing a kind of death. Do these comparisons match your own experience? Can you think of other images you might use to describe repentance?

**Question 3:** Lewis proposes a fundamental formula that Christians have to believe: Christ died for us; His death washes our sins away; and, by dying, Christ disabled death itself. *Who do you say I am?* This question is as important today as when Jesus first asked it of His disciples (Matthew 16:13-16). What does this passage from Matthew tell us about attitudes toward Jesus during His earthly ministry? To what extent are attitudes about Jesus today similar or different?

## A Look Ahead

### June 17, 2018

“Christian Behavior and the Great Sin of Pride”

*Mere Christianity* chapters covered:

- Book 3, Chapter 1: “The Three Parts of Morality”
- Book 3, Chapter 8: “The Great Sin”

### June 24, 2018

“The Christian Virtue of Hope”

*Mere Christianity* chapters covered:

- Book 3, Chapter 10: “Hope”

### July 1, 2018

“God In Three Persons”

*Mere Christianity* chapters covered:

- Book 4, Chapter 1: “Making and Begetting”
- Book 4, Chapter 2: “The Three-Personal God”

### July 8, 2018

“Counting the Cost”

*Mere Christianity* chapters covered:

- Book 4, Chapter 9: “Counting the Cost”
- Book 4, Chapter 10: “Nice People or New Men”

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