

January 2011 - *The Key to History*

Have you ever thought about why the world has gone so desperately wrong? C.S. Lewis thought about this question and offers us a helpful perspective:

Here, no doubt, we ask a question to which human beings cannot give an answer with any certainty. A reasonable (and traditional) guess, based on our own experiences of going wrong, can, however, be offered. 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. Some people think the fall of man had something to do with sex, but that is a mistake.... 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. That is why it is just no good asking God to make us happy in our own way without bothering about religion. God cannot give us a happiness and peace apart from Himself, because it is not there. There is no such thing.

That is the key to history. Terrific energy is expended—civilizations 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. It seems to start up all right and runs a few yards, and then it breaks down. They are trying to run it on the wrong juice. That is what Satan has done to us humans.¹

Whether we look at the political or economic systems that are under such stress today or at our own lives and families, Lewis’s insights provide a solid biblical framework for understanding why things are in such a mess. And, at least on a personal level, Lewis points the way to recovery: forsaking our self-centered approach to life, embracing a radically God-centered life, and walking humbly with the One who made us.

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1952), pp 53-54.