

The Screwtape Letters by C. S. Lewis

Six lectures (by Jerry Root Ph.D.) for the C. S. Lewis Institute, Washington D. C. September 30-October 2, 2010.

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Each lecture is fully outlined and accompanied by three follow-up discussion questions.

The Screwtape Letters by C. S. Lewis

Lecture One—*The Screwtape Letters*: Background

Introduction

1. Lewis came up with the idea for *The Screwtape Letters* as he was leaving his church (Holy Trinity, Headington) after a Sunday service. One can't help but wonder what that sermon was about on that particular Sunday morning.
2. Concept for the book: one devil, Screwtape, writing to his nephew, training him how to be successful as a tempter.
 - a. He was going to write a sequel featuring an angel encouraging a junior angel on how to be a good guardian angel. Lewis gave up on the idea realizing that it is easy to get into the mind of the diabolical and impossible to get into the mind of the angelic (note the "Preface" to the 2nd edition, Pp. 9-10).
 - b. "I had, moreover, a sort of grudge against my book for not being a different book which no one could write. Ideally, Screwtape's advice to Wormwood should have been balanced by archangelical advice to the patient's guardian angel. Without this the picture of human life is lopsided. But who could supply the deficiency? Even if a man—and he would have to be a far better man than I—could scale the spiritual heights required, what 'answerable style' could he use? For the style would really be part of the content. Mere advice would be no good; every sentence would have to smell of Heaven." (Pp. 5-6).
 - c. The sequel that actually did follow was far less pretentious: *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (one Christian writing to another seeking to encourage him on the pilgrim road—doubts and questions are not expunged—it is an honest book).
 - d. How can anyone become a truly authentic person? Nevertheless, *The Screwtape Letters* allow us a look in the mirror that we might become honest about our inauthenticity, which is the first step towards becoming a truly authentic person.
3. Lewis's remarks in the *Preface* to the second printing: "Some have paid me an undeserved compliment by supposing my *Letters* were the ripe fruit of many years' study of moral and ascetic theology. They forget there is an equally reliable, though less creditable, way of learning how temptation works. 'My heart'—I need no other's—'showeth me the wickedness of the ungodly.'" (P. 5). (This underscores Lewis's excruciating honesty as he writes these letters and also how painful it is to read them, for in the letters Lewis holds up the mirror of "scorn and pity" to his readers).

Lewis's Use of Imaginative Literature to Communicate Truth

1. Imaginative literature.
 - a. In the "Preface" to *The Screwtape Letters*, Lewis observed, "Every ideal of style dictates not only how we should say things but what sort of things we may say." P. x.
 1. "It is easy to forget that the man who writes a good love sonnet needs not only to be enamoured of a woman, but also to be enamoured of the Sonnet." Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, P. 3.
 2. The Letter as a literary form lends itself to advice giving.
 3. The use of Satire as a literary form allows one to look at the foibles of one's culture. But Lewis uses a form of Satire in the *Letters* as well as in *The Great Divorce* known as *Satire Manqué* (explain).
 - b. Lewis saw the value of the imagination as a means to speak of the Spiritual life. In *The Allegory of Love* he notes that Allegory has always been the literary form directed towards speaking of the spiritual life.
 - c. *Definition* means "of the finite".
 - 1) We define things by their limitation and their function. Things and ideas must be small enough to wrap words around them and distinguish them from other things and other ideas if we are to speak of them with clarity of definition.
 - 2) To take this further, now consider: how do we define God? If He is infinite He breaks the categories. We must use other means than exactness.
 - a) Jesus: "The Kingdom of Heaven is like....(He uses simile, figures of speech, analogy, parable, story, etc).
 - b) The Medieval Scholastics spoke of the "Way of Analogy" to speak of God.
 - c) Lewis observed that getting to know God was like taking bearings on the bright blur, he gets brighter and less blurry.
 - d) Elwell: "All theology is an exercise in approximation and we seek better and better approximations".
 - d. Uses of the imagination:

- 1) Possibility of abuse (“The road into Jerusalem is also the road out.”)
- 2) Categories of imagination (Lewis has ten; let us look at three from *The Discarded Image* P. 203):
 - a) Transforming—Wordsworth (Projection). Screwtape is a master of the Transforming Imagination. This feature of the imagination is consistently encouraged by Screwtape.
 - b) Penetrating—Shakespeare and Dante (Going Deeper)
 - c) Realizing—Medieval (Going Wider)
- e. Specific imaginative forms:
 - 1) Metaphor (Pupil’s and Master’s)
 - 2) Transposition
 - 3) Longing for a form
2. Further note: Sometimes fiction works best to penetrate the heart in ways non-fiction cannot.
 - a. George MacDonald’s “We do not have souls; we are souls we have bodies.... *Annals of a Quiet Neighbourhood*.”
 - b. Traditional views of the soul: it possesses a choosing function—the will; a thinking function—the reason, a feeling function.
 - a. Of these features the reason is by far the weakest.
 - b. It is marshaled by the volition to make excuses for poor choices; it is marshaled by the emotion to keep suppressed those things that would be better left to grieve and forgive.
 - c. When this occurs reason stands like Dragon centuries over the heart.
 - d. Lewis explains that the only way one can pierce through and get past those “watchful dragons” is through imagination and story. (cf. Nathan and King David: Nathan uses a story).

Screwtape Letters as a Mirror Imaged Source for Spiritual Guidance

1. Lewis as a spiritual guide (he said he was not a theologian; but he was unquestionably a wise and helpful spiritual guide and director cf. his actual letters and the use of letters for spiritual direction; note Paul Ford's collection).
 - e. *The Screwtape Letters* are a mirror into our souls: like the pond in which Eustace Clarence Scrubb discovered himself a dragon; and, like the pond in which Queen Orual of Glome discovered herself to be everything she hated; and like the mirror in which Dymer discovered himself to be a coward.
 - f. In a sort of backhanded way, as *Screwtape* reveals to us the truth of ourselves he becomes a sort of John the Baptist who prepares us for the coming of Christ. Note this is not his intention and yet it is done, nonetheless due to Lewis's craftsmanship of the literary form and his use of *Screwtape* as a kind of comedic character (albeit a very nefarious one). Satan's plans always play into the Sovereign purposes of God at the end of the day. The book ends, appropriately with the tempter experiencing great frustration. This is as it should be as Lewis reminds his readers in *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, "God shows His benevolence in creating good Natures, He shows His justice in *exploiting* evil wills.... Whoever tries to rebel against God produces the result opposite to his intention." (Chapter 10, para. 2-5).
 - g. Note: Anne Lamott's *All New People*
 - 1) What sound does a one handed clap make?
 - 2) What sound does rain make? It doesn't make a sound until it hits something: an umbrella; a hat; a puddle [A Japanese Proverb]
 - 3) What sound does grace make? It doesn't make a sound until it hits something: a broken life; a broken relationship; a deeply embedded fear or insecurity.
2. Lewis's *Screwtape Letters* are painted across the larger canvas of Lewis's idea of Hell. Without some background in this regard one will not make as much of the *Letters* as he might. This will be the topic of the next lecture.

Discussion questions following session one:

1. Was Lewis accurate to suppose it easier to write a book approximating the devilish than one approximating the divine? Explain your answer. How can literature, of any sort, portray good without appearing contrived or pretentious? Do you know any authors who seem to succeed in Portraying good characters? Lewis thought George MacDonald did this as well as anyone. If you can think of

an author whose good characters seem believable, what qualities in the good characters make them successful?

2. Why does Lewis's *Screwtape*—with all of his nefarious advice—appeal to readers so successfully? Does Lewis, through *Screwtape*, hold up “the mirror of scorn and pity” so that we see ourselves with a clarity we've not seen in ourselves before? Or, does Lewis through *Screwtape* defuse the time bombs within by allowing us laughter at our own expense? Perhaps the real question should be, “Are *The Screwtape Letters* tragic or comedic? Why?”
3. Is Lewis right to suggest that fiction and the use of the imagination works best to describe the twists and turns of the spiritual life? Why, or why not? Why do you think that Lewis used letters as the literary form for this book? What is it he can say rhetorically through the letter-form that he could not say through an essay, novel, or poem? Why do you think this?

Lecture Two—*The Screwtape Letters* and C. S. Lewis's Concept of Hell

Introduction

Why does it even matter what C. S. Lewis thinks about Hell?

Lewis wrote, "If our religion is something objective, then we must never avert our eyes from those elements in it which seem puzzling or repellent; for it is precisely the puzzling or the repellent which conceals what we do not yet know and need to know." *The Weight of Glory*, P. 31. [Similarly, Lewis writes, "Where we find a difficulty we may always expect that a discovery awaits us." *Reflections on the Psalms*, p. 28]. Take note: Those who are ready to reject an idea simply because it is puzzling to them may be rash, especially when history reveals many reasonable people less quick to discard that very idea. Furthermore, an understanding of a moment, when it silences discussion and prevents further thought and contemplation may lead to a self-referential and utilitarian approach to truth.

1. There are mysteries of faith to be sure but, one must not play the mystery card too quickly.

2. Revelation 19:1-6 The Last Judgment: Even Hell, in the Scriptures, becomes an occasion of worship. What do the redeemed see that it is harder for us mortals to attend to? Lewis, in *Reflections on the Psalms*, makes the observation that while "Christians cry to God for mercy instead of justice; they [the Psalmists] cried to God for justice instead of injustice." p. 12.

3. Borrowing from a selection of Lewis's works we can piece together something of a Lewisian Systematic Theology of Hell.

Making creatures with the capacity for 'real choices' makes something like Hell possible and, perhaps, necessary.

Lewis and Thomas Aquinas: "Nothing which implies a contradiction exists in the Divine Omnipotence" (*The Problem of Pain* and the *Summa Theologica*).

Frederick Buechner, observed that the existence of Hell reveals that it is possible for us to make damned fools of ourselves forever. *Wishful Thinking*. Pp. 37-38.

Lewis believed that "evil is fissiparous" *The Pilgrims Regress*. P. 180. Therefore, Lewis says that Hell is the tourniquet God places on evil; you can go this far and no farther. "It is the Landlord's [God's] last service to those who will let him do nothing better for them." *The Pilgrim's Regress*. P. 180.

Hell as a place for the Eternally Incurable. It is a prison where the prisoners hold the key.

“The gates of Hell are locked from the inside.” *The Problem of Pain*, p. 115. The Book of Job seems to affirm this point of view for it speaks of those who go down to Sheol, saying to God, “Depart from us; we do not even desire the knowledge of thy ways. Who is the Almighty that we should serve Him?” Job 21:14-15

“There may be a truth in saying that ‘hell is hell, not from its own point of view, but from the heavenly point of view.’” *The Problem of Pain*, p. 114.

“It is only to the damned that their fate could ever seem less than unendurable.” *The Problem of Pain*, p. 114.

Lewis, in *The Great Divorce*, quotes Milton’s Satan from *Paradise Lost*, “Better to reign in hell than serve in Heaven” (Chapter 9). This is incorrigibility turned to madness!

Transition: Such rebellion requires self-justification and rationalization. Lewis writes “...continued disobedience to conscience makes conscience blind”. *A Preface to Paradise Lost*, P. 10. [Note Aristotle’s doctrine of *Akrasia* (ακρασία) which literally means: “without command” and was used to speak of a person who, knowing the right thing to do does something else and then rationalizes the action justifying it to the point of moral blindness]

Hell as an Eternal Asylum

It is a place where the central reality of the universe is denied to the point of madness. That is, God is God and His creatures are not.

1. “A man who admits no guilt can accept no forgiveness.” *The Problem of Pain*, p. 110. [Lewis’s essay on Christian Apologetics says the Apologist must awaken in others a sense of sin and he indicates the best way to do it is to begin with one’s own.
 - a. Buechner *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy, and Fairy Tale*. “Before the Gospel can be Good News it must be Bad News.”
 - b. Illustration: Conversations surrounding: the bombing of Dresden; the bombing of the Myrrh Federal Building in Oklahoma City.
2. Those in Hell are diminished by the fact that they have denied reality. Lewis writes that, “A damned soul is nearly nothing: it is shrunk, shut up in itself. Good beats down upon the damned incessantly as sound waves beat on the ears of the deaf, but they cannot receive it. Their fists are clenched, their eyes fast shut. First they will not, in the end they cannot, open their hands for gifts, or their mouths for food, or their eyes to see.” *The Great Divorce*. Chapter 13.
3. “To be a complete man means to have the passions obedient to the will and the will offered to God: to *have been* a man—to be an ex-man or ‘damned ghost’—

would presumably mean to consist of a will utterly centered in its self and passions utterly uncontrolled by the will.” *The Problem of Pain*, pp. 113f.

Lewis’s subjectivist villains lose their humanity: Weston, for example, becomes the “Unman”.

Lewis’s imaginative depiction of diminishment in Hell:

The Grumbler in *The Great Divorce*. Chapter I. A Grumbler or just a Grumble. P. 71.

Lewis’s first impression of Hell, “I never met anyone.” P. 1.

Lewis’s arrival in Hell and the search for Napoleon. Pp. 8-11. (“Astronomical distances” P. 9.)

The Midget and the Tragedian.

In the end Lewis discovers that Hell is the size of a grain of sand. Remember the dimensions of Hell from the inside and what it means in Lewis’s imaginative depiction relative to the potential for near infinite diminishment.

God’s punishments in Scripture: he gives people over to what they want.

1. Pharaoh hardens his heart and God gives him a hard heart permanently. [It suggests the horrifying possibility of permanent Reprobation].

2. Romans 1 “God gave them over...”

3. Leviticus 26.

Hell appears to be place where one reaps what he has sown. If you sow corn you reap corn; if you sow wheat you reap wheat; if you sow barley you reap barley; if you sow self, you reap self.

Hell is a Fortified and Frustrated Assault on the Purposes of God. [See Quotes]

Charles Williams writing of Satan, in his play, *The Golden Legend*:

The Son of Mystery,
And since God suffers him to be,
He, too, is God’s minister,
And labours for some good
By us not understood!

C.S. Lewis’s Latin Letters 20 September 1947

“Satan is without doubt nothing else than a hammer in the hand of a benevolent and severe God. For all, either willingly or unwillingly, do the will of God: Judas and Satan as tools or instruments, John and Peter as sons.” [Of course it makes a great deal of difference to us if we are functioning as mere tools or instruments to accomplish God’s will, or as daughters and sons.]

Note: the “Preface” to *The Screwtape Letters* where Lewis wrote in a similar vein, “God turns tools into servants and servants into sons”. P. 7

Augustine *Enchiridion* XI.

“Since God is the highest good, He would not allow any evil to exist in His work unless His Omnipotence and Goodness were such as to bring good even out of evil. This is part of the infinite goodness of God, that He should allow evil to exist and out of it produce good.”

George MacDonald *Phantastes* (the last lines of the book).

“Yet I know that good is coming to me – that good is always coming; though few have at all times the simplicity and courage to believe it. What we call evil is only the best shape, which, for the person and his condition at the time, could be assumed by the best good.”

Augustine *The City of God* XI. 23.

“The sinful will, though it violated the laws of its own nature did not on that account escape the laws of God who justly orders all things for good.

Conclusion Concerning Lewis’s View of Hell:

“In the long run the answer to all those who object to the doctrine of Hell, is itself a question: ‘What are you asking God to do?’ To wipe out their past sins and, at all costs, to give them a fresh start, smoothing every difficulty and offering every miraculous help? But He has done so, on Calvary. To forgive them? They will not be forgiven. To leave them alone? Alas, I am afraid that is what He does.” *The Problem of Pain*, p. 116.

Perceptively, Lewis also wrote: “I believe that if a million chances were likely to do good, they would be given.” *The Problem of Pain*, p. 112.

“It is not a question of God sending us to Hell. In each of us there is something growing up which will be *Hell* unless it has been nipped in the bud. The matter is serious: Let us put ourselves in His hands at once—this very day—this very hour.” “The Trouble with X”, *God in the Dock: Essays in Theology and Ethics*. Paragraph 10.

Lastly: Lewis observes that the mark of Hell is, “The ruthless, sleepless, unsmiling concentration upon self.” “Preface” *The Screwtape Letters*. Paragraph 15. This is the tread upon which all of the letters are strung. If Screwtape has his way with us, we will become self-referential and utilitarian in our demeanor. If God has His way with us, we will become self-aware and empathetic; that is, we will become more like Christ.

Discussion questions following session two:

1. What do you think are the chief characteristics of Hell and why do you think this is so? From what do you draw these impressions on what do you base your assessment: Scripture? Church History? Literature such as Dante’s *Divine Comedy* or Milton’s *Paradise Lost*? Conversations? Fire and Brimstone Preachers? Hearsay? Etc.
2. Of the Characteristics Lewis attributes to Hell—a prison for the incorrigible, an asylum for the deniers of Reality, a tourniquet on evil, the best God can give to those who will have Him on no other terms, etc.—which one makes the most sense and why?
3. Can the Doctrine of Hell ever be reconciled to the Doctrine of the Love of God? If not, why not? If so, what probable ways could you image this might be possible?

[Transition: While there are numerous themes in *The Screwtape Letters*, the next three lectures look at major themes that seem to run throughout many of the letters. In other words, these three lectures look at the big themes Lewis develops in the letters. Because the themes also appear in many of his other books they will be illustrated, at times, from some of Lewis’s other books.]

Lecture Three—*The Screwtape Letters* and Pride

Introduction

There are thirty-one letters that comprise C. S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters*. Of these, each letter contains approximately one to three themes. Some of these themes—such as: pride, rationalization of evil, and temptations of the flesh—occur with frequency throughout the letters. It is due to the frequency of these themes that I will devote the next three sessions to these topics as Lewis presents them in the *Letters*.

The first of these topics is Pride.

Pride, is man trying to play God of his own life. Every definition of sin in the Bible has this as the dominate concept embedded in what it means to sin. Romans 3:23 says “All have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God”. *Hamartia*, the Greek word for sin, comes from the vocabulary for archery. A *hamartia* was to miss the mark or target. Sin was to miss the mark and fall short of what it means to be God. Sin means that we've assumed a position we were unqualified for. Sins are a resulting consequent of our mismanagement of our own lives once we have abandoned God's right to rule and reign over them. In I John 3:4 it says that “Sin is lawlessness”. Sin is not antinomian: against the law. Sin is *anomos*: without the law. It is anarchistic deriving its own standards from itself. It plays God and spins its own morality out from itself like a spider spinning its web. In Genesis, as Satan tempts Eve, he appeals to her by telling her, eating the fruit will allow her to be like God (Genesis 3:5). Similarly pride as Lewis defined it in *Mere Christianity*, is “Self-Conceit” and is the opposite of Humility. It is “the essential vice” leading to every other vice; “it is the complete anti-God state of mind”. *Mere Christianity* (London: Geoffrey Bless, 1953. P. 96). Lewis concludes his chapter on Pride with these words, “If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step. The first step is to realize that one is proud. And a biggish step too. At least, nothing whatever can be done before it. If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed”. *Ibid.* P. 101. This hints at Screwtape's strategy to keep a person proud and not to allow the slightest hint of real humility to begin to emerge. Let us look through the letters listed above and see the various nuances and subtleties of Pride Lewis discusses.

Pride is to deny reality and put self in God's place. After that everything is projection; or, deployment of the *Transforming* imagination.

In Letter XIV Lewis develops the idea of a pseudo-humility which amounts to pretense.

“Your patient has become humble; have you drawn his attention to the fact? All virtues are less formidable to us once the man is aware he has them, but this is especially true of humility”. P. 71.

1. Pride is self-centered and self-exalting and as such estranges us from the real world where God and others can be met. It engages in projection of self and self interest onto the world around us and thereby becomes utilitarian.

2. Pride results in attempts to actually alter reality this is seen in Screwtape’s nefarious advice relative to humility:
 - a. Abuse: “Conceal from the patient the true end of humility”. P. 72 (Honest relation to God, honest to others, honest relationship to one’s environment, honesty with oneself as well as the assumption of responsibility to God, Others, environment, self).
 - b. Abuse: “Let him think of it not as self-forgetfulness but as a certain kind of opinion (namely, a low opinion) of his own talents and character. P. 72. In other words, false humility is dishonest.
 - c. “Make him value an opinion for some quality other than truth, thus introducing an element of dishonesty and make-believe into the heart of what otherwise threatens to become virtue”. P. 72-73.
 - d. “And since what they are trying to believe may, in some cases, be manifest nonsense, they cannot succeed in believing it and we have a chance of keeping their minds endlessly revolving on themselves in an effort to achieve the impossible”. P. 73. [Note *The Weight of Glory*: Today, if you asked a person what was the highest virtue they would likely say it was unselfishness. Lewis says 100 years ago he would have been more likely to say love. What has happened?]
 - e. “The enemy wants him, in the end, to be so free from any bias in his own favor that he can rejoice in his own talents as frankly and gratefully as in his neighbor’s talents—or in a surprise, or in an elephant, or a waterfall. He wants each man, in the long run, to be able to recognize all creatures (even himself) as glorious excellent things”. P. 73. [True humility cultivates eyes that see God’s purposes unfold in his creation: how each is made; how each has uniqueness in order to serve God and others. Cf. editorial comments]

Each of us is intolerant of pride when we see it in others but false humility is manifest in our blindness to pride in our own lives every time it raises its ugly head in our own lives.

1. Muhammad Ali—“Superman don’t need no seat belt....”
2. T. E. Lawrence—Taking tea with the Mayoress of Dorchester at Mrs. Thomas Hardy’s home.
3. The Milgram Experiment—Yale University July 1961.

Consequence: projection (the *Transforming* imagination).

Screwtape advises: “Keep your man in the condition of false spirituality.” Letter XVII. P. 89. In this regard pride becomes a religious condition; albeit a very unsavory one.

Letter IV Pride transforms prayer into idolatry. Letter IV

It appears from this letter that Wormwood’s “patient” has begun the practice of prayer. Screwtape warns Wormwood that he must not allow prayer to God but rather to the “patient’s” *image* of God made up from a composite of a host of contributing factors. Whatever the case may be, the image is wrong and projective. In essence Screwtape advises Wormwood to have his “patient” pray to the god of his own making. This, of course makes the “patient” a god of his own god and thus a worshipper of a god of his own making. Here pride is cultivated even in the midst of what first appears to be a spiritual discipline when in fact the discipline only reinforces the bad activity. As Dr. Richard Chase used to say, “Practice doesn’t make perfect, it makes permanent”. In essence, Screwtape is advising Wormwood to tempt his patient to idolatry, to embrace a deity destined to calcify, become brittle and break. This runs against the grain of Lewis who wrote, “I want God, not my idea of God”. [Hooper, Walter. *C. S. Lewis: A Companion Guide*. London: Harper Collins, also see C. S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*]. One could easily play this out further by imagining that the subtle act of creating one’s own god can also provide ample reasons for being disappointed at that god and then projecting the disappointment on the Christian God. The advice as Screwtape gives it:

1. “The best thing, where it is possible, is to keep the patient from the serious intention of praying altogether”. P. 24.

“It is funny how the mortals always picture us as putting things into their minds: in reality our best work is done by keeping things out”. P. 25
2. Next is: “Misdirection of his attention”. P. 25
 - a. The simplest is to turn their gaze away from Him towards themselves”. P. 75.
 - b. Screwtape warns Wormwood that it is a risky business, nonetheless, for God responds to prayers even when the motives of men and women are not perfect.

[Have you ever had a perfectly pure motive for anything you have ever done? Nobody is very life-skilled; and, to one degree or another, we are all awkward].
3. Finally, Screwtape advises Wormwood to have his “patient” pray to images in his mind as if these were God. P. 27. It is an old idea in Lewis. Note:

“All prayers always, taken at their word, blaspheme,
Invoking with frail imageries a folk-lore dream;
And all men are idolaters, crying unheard

To senseless idols, if thou take them at their word,
And all men in their praying, self-deceived, address
One that is not (so saith that old rebuke) unless
Thou, of mere grace, appropriate, and to thee divert
Man's arrows, all at hazard aimed, beyond desert.”
The Pilgrim's Regress. Book Eight. Chapter Four.

Letter XVI Pride transforms Church into worship of self.

Screwtape: “Surely you know that if a man can't be cured of church-going the next best thing is to send him all over the neighbourhood looking for a church that 'suits' him until he becomes a taster or connoisseur of churches”. P. 81.

1. “The search for a 'suitable' church makes the man a critic where the enemy wants him to be a pupil”. Pp. 81-82.
 - a. Screwtape advises that the patient must not become critical against falsehoods in the church. P. 82.
 - b. From this one can surmise that Lewis, the scholar, wants people to bring to worship both a sound mind and a soft and tender heart.
2. Two kinds of churches Screwtape endorses:
 - a. The vicar who waters down Scripture and its doctrines. Pp. 82-83. This type of Church is amorphic and leaves the attendee free to make his religion into anything he wants it to be.
 - b. The vicar who uses Scripture through which to breathe his own opinions. Pp. 83-84. This type of Church makes the word of its pastors and parishioners equal to the word of God. Note: Lewis's warning in *Reflections on the Psalms* that of all bad men the worst bad men are religious bad men.
3. Screwtape advises to keep the patient in a 'party church' where he can join a party that rejects others without reason, simply dismissing others because they are not affiliated with the right 'party'. [Letter XVII “Keep your man in a condition of false spirituality”. P. 89].

Letter VIII Pride that transforms expectations and maintains (falsely) that the spiritual life is always even keeled.

1. *The Law of Undulation*. We live our lives with the emotional roller coaster of peaks and troughs.

- a. Pride directs a man or woman to interpret reality from the perspective of the current peak or the descending trough. Such a perspective makes man the center of his world.
 - b. “He cannot tempt to virtue as we do to vice”. P. 47. More on virtue in lecture six.
2. Such a false projection is destined to disappoint. [Cf. Lewis’s “Talking about Bicycles” in *Present Concerns*. Four phases of enchantment].
 3. “Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending to do our enemy’s will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys”. P. 47.

Letter X Pride transformed into corporate, systemic evil.

1. The Inner Ring—when the pride of the individual becomes the pride of the collective. It exists as an end in itself. Furthermore, it practices the cultivated art of exclusion.
2. Lewis seldom bludgeons an opponent and he never uses an *ad hominem* nevertheless, the worst criticism he gives is to call Rudyard Kipling “a poet of the inner ring”.

Letter XXI Pride transformed into judging the motives of others.

1. Offended by “stolen” time, “My time is my own”. P. 107 (similar to the “gluttony of delicacy...the ‘All I want’ state of mind”. P.86-88. “All she wants is a cup of tea properly made, or an egg properly boiled, or a slice of bread properly toasted. But she never finds any servant or any friend who can do these things ‘properly’—because her ‘properly’ conceals an insatiable demand for the exact, and almost impossible, palatal pleasures for which she imagines she remembers from the past..... The daily disappointment produces daily ill temper”. P. 88.
2. “The sense of ownership in general is always to be encouraged. The humans are always putting up claims to ownership”. P. 108.
3. Screwtape: “We produce this sense of ownership not only by pride but by confusion. We teach them not to notice the different senses of the possessive pronoun—the finely graded differences that run from ‘my boots’ through ‘my dog’, ‘my servant’, ‘my wife’, ‘my father’, ‘my master’ and ‘my country’, to ‘my God’. They can be taught to reduce all these senses to that of ‘my boots’, the ‘my’ of ownership”. P. 109.
4. These ideas reverberate in Lewis:

- a. He cites Dante's *De Monarchia* "The essence exists for the sake of function".
The Arthurian Torso.
- b. Explain the concept and illustrate:
 - 1) William's King Arthur asks, "Does the King exist for the Kingdom or the Kingdom for the King"?
 - 2) Queen Jadis of Charn and the "Deplorable Word".
- c. The irony, Screwtape observes: "In the long run either Our Father or the Enemy will say 'Mine' of each thing that exists, and specially of each man". Pp. 109-10. Screwtape continues: "At present the Enemy says 'mine' of everything on the pedantic, legalistic ground that He made it...". P. 110.
5. Screwtape: "Men are not angered by mere misfortune but by misfortune conceived as injury". P. 106.

Conclusion: In pride, things matter if, and only if, they matter to me.

Questions:

1. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity* that Pride is the great sin. How do you think he meant this, and do you believe it is true? Is it possible there may be some kind of sin prior to pride and thus foundational to pride? Or, do you believe pride is prior to all other sin and foundational to sin? If so, explain how you think it so.
2. How does the tempter tempt one to pride? It is clear if one is tempted to greed or avarice or lust there is something, even though the benefits are short lived and yielding to temptation is short sighted; nevertheless, there is something in it for the one who falls. What is it that the tempter has to offer by tempting one to pride? How come pride has such a holding power?
3. How can a person familiar with the well worn groves of pride and pretense get himself out of the rut?

Lecture Four: *The Screwtape Letters* and *Akrasia*, or “The Lust of Deceit”

Introduction

Akrasia defined: “Without mastery” The idea contained in the concept of *akrasia* is the tendency to make excuses, rationalize, or justify our bad acts. It is the bad alternative to *repentance*. Screwtape is a master at seeking to supply rationalizations for bad choices to keep Wormwood’s “patient” in moral blindness.

Akrasia is an Aristotelian concept found in the *Ethics*.

Examples:

1. Aristotle: “Vice is unconscious of itself”
2. Lewis: “Continued disobedience to conscience makes conscience blind.” *A Preface to Paradise Lost*. P. 10.
3. St. Paul: “We suppress the truth in our unrighteousness”. Romans 1:18.

Screwtape is engaged in using a corrupted form of Rhetoric to keep the “patient” blind.

The Rhetoric of Rationalized Behavior: The Unknowing Falsification of Reality

Letter I—Rationalized behavior Part 1

- a. “Jargon, not argument, is your best ally in keeping him from the Church.” P. 11.
- b. “By the very act of arguing, you awake the patient’s reason; and once it is awake, who can foresee the result?” P. 12. [To reason, Screwtape argues, is to put the “patient” on Enemy [God’s] ground.
- c. Screwtape wants to keep those he seeks to destroy in a state of blindness: “...give to him a grand general idea that he knows it all and that everything he happens to have picked up in causal talk and reading is ‘the results of modern investigation.’” P. 14 [Themes: we’re all mere ‘pea-brains’. We are not very life-skilled and we are awkward when it comes to negotiating our way through life.]

Letter II—Rationalized behavior Part 2

1. “All the *habits* of the patient, both mental and bodily are still in our favor.” P. 15.
2. “Keep everything hazy in his mind now, and you will have all eternity wherein to amuse yourself by producing in him the peculiar kind of clarity which Hell affords.” P. 17.

3. Screwtape advises Wormwood to have his “patient” notice the hypocrisy of others and take offense to it while being ignorant and dismissive of his inconsistencies.
4. Notes on hypocrisy as a diabolical tool:
 - a. The judgment: “I don’t want anything to do with Christianity because there are too many hypocrites in the church.”
 - b. Plato: “An abuse does not nullify a proper use.” *Laws*.
 - c. If we judged any segment of society by its worst examples nobody could stand
 - d. It would appear that Letters I and II deal with the topics of moral blindness, caused by rationalized behavior, in the hopes to confuse and control the “patient” making it easier for the tempter to cloud his head and drive him to behaviors normal scruples would prevent him from embracing.

Letter III—Rationalized behavior Part 3—Blame

- a. Screwtape advises Wormwood to redirect his patients thinking towards unrealities. “You must bring him to a condition in which he can practice self-examination for an hour without discovering any of those facts about himself which are perfectly clear to anyone who has ever lived in the same house with him or worked in the same office.” Pp. 20-21.
- b. Screwtape advises Wormwood to keep his patient constantly irritated by things his mother does without thought of how irritating his own actions might be to others. At the end of the day, the patient has two visions of reality: the false image of his mother (who is not as bad as the one he projects on her) and the false image of himself (which is not as good as the one he projects on himself). Wormwood is instructed “to make that imaginary person daily less and less like the real mother.” P. 21 [“I want my neighbor not my idea of my neighbor.”—C. S. Lewis].
- c. “When two people have lived together for many years it usually happens that each has tones of voice and expressions of face which are almost unendurably irritating to the other. Work on that. Bring fully into the consciousness of your patient that particular lift of his mother’s eyebrows which he learned to dislike in the nursery, and let him think how much he dislikes it. Let him assume that she knows how annoying it is and does it to annoy—if you know your job he will not notice the immense improbability of the assumption. And, of course, never let him suspect that he has tones and looks which similarly annoy her. As he cannot see or hear himself this is easily managed.” P. 22.

- d. “You...must see to it that each of these two fools has a sort of double standard. Your patient must demand that all his own utterances are to be taken at their face value and judged simply on their on the actual words, while at the same time judging all his mother’s utterances with the fullest and most over-sensitive interpretation of the tone and the context and the suspected intention. She must be encouraged to do the same to him. Hence from ever quarrel they can both go away convinced, or very nearly convinced, that they are quite innocent.” Pp. 22-23.

The Rhetoric of Rationalized Behavior: Intentional Dishonesty

Letter VI—Knowing Dishonesty

“Do what you will there is going to be some benevolence, as well as some malice, in your patient’s soul. The great thing is to direct the malice to his immediate neighbours whom he meets every day and to thrust his benevolence out to the remote circumference, to people he does not know. The malice thus becomes wholly real and the benevolence largely imaginary.” P. 37.

Richard Weaver’s *The Ethics of Rhetoric*—Kinds of Ethical Arguments:

1. The Argument from Definition
2. The Argument from Similitude
3. The Argument from Consequence

“We want a whole race perpetually in pursuit of the rainbow’s end, never honest, nor kind, nor happy now, but always using as mere fuel wherewith to heap the altar of the future every real gift which is offered them in the Present.” Letter XV. P. 79.

4. The Argument from Authority

Letter XII—The Gradual Road to Hell

“But do remember, the only thing that matters is the extent to which you separate the man from the Enemy. It does not matter how small the sins are provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one—the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.” Pp. 64-65.

[“Tonight Shanghai is Burning”]

The Rhetoric of Rationalized Behavior: Devoid of Principle or Legitimate Ends

Letter XXIII—Creating an Illusion of Truth

The quest for the Historical Jesus is a distraction from Reality. Screwtape notes:

“**First**...each ‘historical Jesus’ is unhistorical.” P. 117.

“**Second**...all such construction place the importance of their Historical Jesus in some peculiar theory He is supposed to have promulgated. ... We thus distract men’s minds from Who He is, and what He did. Pp. 117-18.

“Our **third** aim is, by these constructions, to destroy the devotional life. ... Instead of the Creator adored by its creature, you soon have merely a leader acclaimed by a partisan, and finally a distinguished character approved by a judicious historian.” P. 118.

Fourth “Religion of this kind is false to history in another sense. No nation, and few individuals, are really brought into the Enemy’s camp by the historical study of the biography of Jesus, simply as biography. ... The earliest converts were converted by a single historical fact (the Resurrection) and a single theological doctrine (the Redemption) operating on a sense of sin which they already had....” Pp. 118-19.

“About the general connection between Christianity and politics, our position is more delicate. Certainly we do not want men to allow their Christianity to flow over into their political life, for the establishment of anything like a really just society would be a major disaster. On the other hand **we do want and want very much, to make men treat Christianity as a means**; preferably, of course, as a means to their own advancement, but, failing that, as a means to anything—even to social justice. The thing to do is to get a man at first to value social justice as a thing which the Enemy demands, and then work him on to the stage at which he values Christianity because it may produce social justice.” Pp. 119-20.

What does Lewis mean here?

1. He is not saying “social justice” is inappropriate.
2. He is saying that even “social justice” can become a distraction if it leads away from centering on Jesus.
 - a. Lewis, *The Arthurian Torso*, quotes Charles Williams, “When the means become autonomous they become dangerous.”
 - b. Furthermore, Lewis notes in *The Four Loves*, even love can become dangerous when it replaces God as the chief end of life: “When love becomes a god it becomes a demon.” Unselfishness substituted for love (compare with Lewis’s sermon “*The Weight of Glory*”).

- c. “Believe this, not because it is true, but for some other reason.” P. 120. Letter XXVI.

The Rhetoric of Rationalized Behavior: Self-referentialism.

- a. While, Lewis, rightly acknowledged that all judgments imply a standard, judgments are destined to go wrong when the standard is self-referential.
- b. In “Screwtape Proposes a Toast” Screwtape, no less than five times, seeks to inculcate an “I am as good as you” (P. 174, 179, 180, 181, 184) approach to good judgment. It is the beginning of the destruction of a society.
- c. Note the Harvard speech by Judith Martin aka Miss Manners. *Common Courtesy: Miss Manners Solves the Problem that Baffled Mr. Jefferson*. (Explain the basic premise of the speech).

Conclusion

Questions:

1. Why is it that having stumbled in some way our first response is so often to make excuses, and rationalize the behavior, or blame others? Why do you think it is so hard to simply admit wrong and change our behavior?
 - 1.
2. How is it that the rhetoric of self-deception keeps us so blind? Why is it that behaviors we find unacceptable in others we are so willing to ignore in ourselves? How can we get better?
3. Can you think of other forms of self-justification that Lewis neglected to write about in The Screwtape Letters that you think should have been included? What are these? How do they affect us and how can they be overcome?

Lecture Five: *The Screwtape Letters* and the Sins of the Flesh

Introduction

Key Concept: Screwtape writes, “Separate his sexuality from all that might humanize it”. Letter XIX, P. 99. [To humanize desire is not to deny the desire but to allow love and justice to guide and direct it.]

Letter VII

“Once you have made the World an end, and faith a means, you have almost won your man, and it makes very little difference what kind of worldly end he is pursuing.” P. 42.

Screwtape seeks to hold the “patient” in a state of confusion over real pleasure and artificiality, or the corruption of pleasure.

Letter IX

“The Devil cannot produce pleasures: “All we can do is to encourage the humans to take pleasures which our Enemy has produced at times, or in ways, or in degrees He has forbidden. Hence we always try to work away from the natural condition of any pleasure to that which is least natural, least redolent of its maker, and least pleasurable. An ever increasing craving for an ever diminishing pleasure is the formula.” P. 49.

1. Exploiting the Trough. P. 50.
 - a. “Keep knowledge out of his mind.” P. 50.
 - b. Misconception. P. 50.
2. “Set him to work on the desperate design of recovering his old feelings by sheer will-power, and the game is ours.” P. 50.
 - a. Note John in *The Pilgrim’s Regress*, just before his encounter with the Brown Girl. “I will enjoy the wood, I will enjoy it...at least I will enjoy something.”
 - b. Also Dyer and the girl in his dreams at the magician’s house.
 - 1) The Magician is very evil, a subjectivist, he majors in unrealities.
 - 2) He gives Dyer dreams, and Dyer encounters a woman in his dreams.
 - 3) Dyer’s realization (similar to Lewis’s in *A Grief Observed*):

There I was nearly wrecked, but mark the rest:
She went too fast. Soft to my arms she came.

The robe slipped from her shoulder. The smooth breast
Was against my own. She shown like flame
Before me in the dusk, all love, all shame—
Faugh!—And it was myself. But all was well,
For, at the least, that moment snapped the spell.”
(Canto VII, Verse 25)

- 4) The Magician shoots Dymmer (VII, 32-33).
3. The antidote to lust:
 - a. Reality—people not projections. Again: “Separate his sexuality from all that might humanize it.” P. 99. [Note story of the student struggling with lust and what happened].
 - b. Virtue as the means to pleasure. This will be developed in lecture six.

Letter XIII

Screwtape warns Wormwood not to allow his patient to experience real pleasure, “The characteristic of pains and pleasures is that they are unmistakably real, and therefore as far as they go, give the man who feels them a touchstone of reality.” P. 67.

- “How can you have failed to see that a *real* pleasure was the last thing you ought to have him meet?” P. 67.
- Note, again: Wordsworth’s “Transforming Imagination”.

Letter XVII

Gluttony of Delicacy: “Her belly now dominates her whole life. The woman is in what may be called the ‘All-I-want’ state of mind. All she wants is a cup of tea properly made, or an egg properly boiled, or a slice of bread properly toasted. But she never finds any servant or any friend who can do these things ‘properly’—because her ‘properly’ conceals an insatiable demand for the exact, and almost impossible...The daily disappointment produces daily ill temper...She doesn’t mind what she eats herself but ‘does like to have things nice for her boy’. In fact, of course, her greed has been one of the chief sources of his domestic discomfort for many years.” P. 88. This woman shows up, often, in the corpus of Lewis’s work, she is:

1. Mrs. Fidget in *The Four Loves*.
2. The controlling Mother Ghost in *The Great Divorce*.
3. Swollen Peggy in “The Shoddy Lands” in *God in the Dock*

4. The Vicar in “The Sermon and the Lunch” in *God in the Dock*.
5. In Screwtape, Letter # XXVI, we read “She’s the sort of woman who lives for others—you can always tell the others by their hunted expression”. P. 135.
6. Key to understanding this mind-set:
 - a. It denies the reality of the other.
 - b. It inflates the sense of self.
7. Screwtape says to Wormwood: “Keep your man in a condition of false spirituality.” P. 89.

Letter XX

Goal: “To produce in every age a general misdirection of what may be called sexual ‘taste’. This they do by working through the small circle of popular artists, dressmakers, actresses and advertisers who determine the fashionable type” (P. 102). “As a result we are more and more directing the desires of men to something which does not exist—making the role of the eye in sexuality more and more important and at the same time making its demands more and more impossible.” (P. 103).

The Law of Undulation the seedbed for temptation.

Letter VIII—On Undulation

Pleasures in this life produce diminishing returns. Life tends to go up and down in a perpetual state of “undulation”. When things are low, Screwtape advises Wormwood that his “patient” is more susceptible to temptations at such times.

Screwtape advises Wormwood to exploit “trough” times. P. 50

Letter XXV—The horror of “the same old thing” & the lust for novelty

God who is immutable, created the mutability of time (He even entered it Himself). He gives to His creatures a love of permanence as well as a love of change (variety). God seeks to gratify both of these loves via the rhythms of life. To over indulge one side of the permanence-variety struggle is to neglect the other: to play to eternity while failing at temporal responsibilities is Gnostic; so, too, to play to time while failing at eternal responsibilities is damnable. The antidote to the excesses of change is permanence; the antidote to the excesses of permanence is to discover delight in the particular. Screwtape seeks to exaggerate the pleasures of either (to make an end of it). He seeks to destroy balance and the struggle that brings about balance. This results in:

- 1) Diminished pleasure and increased desire.

- 2) The pleasure of novelty is subject to the “law of diminishing returns”.
- 3) Continued lust for novelty costs money, thus leading to greed and avarice as well as unhappiness.
- 4) Innocent pleasures are abandoned for dishonest ones.
- 5) This leads to the susceptibility to fashion or vogues (each generation vilifies the vice farthest from it & values as virtue the vice it embraces).
- 6) Screwtape’s goal is to produce “that nonsense in the intellect [which reinforces] corruption in the will”.

Screwtape tells Wormwood: “We want cattle who can finally become food; He wants servants who can finally become sons. We want to suck in, He wants to give out.” P. 46.

1. Screwtape will make man in his image.
2. Or, God will make man in His Image.
3. All Choices move us one way or another: towards the miserrific vision or the beatific vision. Cf. *The Great Divorce/The Weight of Glory* we live in a world of possible gods and goddesses or a world of horrors.

Questions:

1. Do you believe sexual desire and lust are the same thing? If you see them to be different, how do you explain the difference between them? If you think they are the same do you believe then that all sexual interest is sin? Explain your position.
2. Did the discussion on the *Gluttony of Delicacy* make sense to you? What do you think it meant and how can you prevent it from happening to you? How would you deal with it if you saw it in the life of a loved one or friend?
3. Why is it that Screwtape warns Wormwood against letting his “patient” experience any real pleasure? Is pleasure a tool of the tempter or a tool of God? Explain your answer and why you think it might be so.

Lecture Six: *The Screwtape Letters*: Escaping the Wiles of the Devil the Antidote to Screwtape's Snares.

Introduction

Screwtape's overtures must be detected and overcome. How can this be done? Any study of C. S. Lewis's *The Screwtape Letters* must end with a word of hope and some positive advice as to how we can become less and less susceptible to the wiles of the evil one.

Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity* that he thought pride was the great sin. Augustine wrote something similar in his commentary on Psalm 19. I disagree with them, so I am probably wrong. But let me see if I can make a case. I am not talking about the Pride of a job well done; I am talking about that form of pride that is a synonym for pretense, it seeks to make itself appear better than it actually is.

Think more deeply with me about this matter.

- If Lewis and Augustine mean by “greatest sin” that it is the fountain head from which all other sin springs, i.e., it is the primary and first sin, once again, I disagree.
- But, if Lewis and Augustine are suggesting that it is the superlative sin, in being the “greatest sin” like the apex of a pyramid is the greatest point of the pyramid, I will concede the point.
- But that which is at the apex of a pyramid is always preceded by something more substantive. What precedes this kind of pride and pretense?
 - 1) Could it not be fear and insecurity?
 - 2) If you knew me like I really am you might reject me, so I put up the mask. Or, if I feel insecure in your presence—knowing, somehow that I don't measure up in some way—I might try to pass myself off as better than I am. Or, I may be delusional in my arrogance passing myself off as knowing more than in fact I do, again, driven by my own insecurities and fears.
 - 3) This kind of insecurity can be reinforced by communities where strugglers are marginalized with words like “backslidden”, “out of fellowship”, and so forth. Though nobody says it explicitly, what is implied is that one must be perfect in this environment if he or she is to be accepted. Nobody is perfect so this environment breeds fear and pretense. We never let anyone know how we are truly doing for fear we might be rejected. This kind of an environment can develop in any sub-culture and when it does, Screwtape has gotten a foothold.

- 4) What is prior to and more substantive than insecurity and fear?
- 5) In I John 4:18 the Bible says that “Perfect love casts out fear”.
 - If this is so one might consider a corollary of this to be: imperfect love breeds anxiety.
 - We have never been loved perfectly by others and have been saddled by a burden of anxiety. It gets worse before it gets better. We have never loved anyone perfectly either. There are those in our world we care for and yet they have been saddled with a burden of anxiety because, well meaning as we are, we have not loved them perfectly.
 - Only God, who knows us utterly, loves us completely.

Therefore, it would appear that the greatest sin is the unwillingness to accept the love of God in our lives. The love of God is the first and foremost antidote to Screwtape’s nefarious advice. Furthermore, security in the love of Christ is a preventative making us less susceptible to Screwtape’s temptations and offerings (what C. S. Lewis called “false infinities” in *Perelandra*) that make such poor substitutes for the Infinite and eternally satisfying.

Note: Ecclesiastes 1:1&2; 3:11; 2:25.

How does the Love of God make such a difference? Lewis wrote in *The Four Loves*,

“Man approaches God most nearly when he is in one sense least like God. For what can be most unlike than fullness and need, sovereignty and humility, righteousness and penitence, limitless power and cry for help”. (*Introduction*, paragraph 8).

- I John 4:17b asserts the same thing when it says, “As He is so also are we in this world”.
- Jerry Sittser, *The Adventure*. “We are most like God in the world when we are most unlike God in relationship with him”.
 - a) Explain the concept
 - b) Idiot lights
 - c) Go into the world like him in self-offering and serving becoming so fulfilled in God that we can be independent of the world functioning as givers rather than takers. This does not remove all

possibility of falling but it is a substantive antidote. Let me develop the concept further.

Further Thoughts on God's Love as a Safeguard Against Screwtape & Company

We define ourselves based on how we perceive others see us. Screwtape supplies false notions of the self, and the world. When we define ourselves by these falsehoods we become susceptible to the things he suggests will fulfill us.

Note: Illustration from Donald Miller's *Searching for God Knows What*.

We need to define ourselves based on how God sees us and, he loves us.

Illustration: *The Notebook*. Lewis says we ought to receive and surrender to a given story before we think critically about it (*An Experiment in Criticism*). Good readers receive a book; bad readers merely use a book. The same can be said about music, painting, sculpture and film. When you see a movie, after it is over revisit the story later, in your memory. Why did you laugh? Why were you so moved? Why were you so offended?

This particular story has something in it analogous to the love of God and how it can define us.

***The Notebook* a story of Cognoscente Love**

Not all that long ago I was on an airplane and happened to see the film: *The Notebook*. Often when I watch a movie I like to let the story wash over me; that is, I like to watch passively in order to enter fully and uncritically into the world developed by the film. Rather than thinking critically at first—there will be time for that later—I want to give the story-teller his due (again, taking Lewis's advice seriously). I want to give the film maker the opportunity to do his best artistically in order to create a coherent world that invites me in. It is after the film I like to revisit the story and ask the critical questions about it. One topic I like to explore centers around asking the question: Was there any moment in the film where I felt particularly moved emotionally; if so, what might have been going on in the film to stimulate this. There was a particular scene in *The Notebook* that moved me deeply and tears came to my eyes as I saw it. Why did that happen?

I must put the scene in context. *The Notebook* begins when an older man (played by James Garner) enters the room of a nursing home occupied by an elderly woman (played by Gena Rowlands). She seems confused and a little standoffish. A nurse reassures by saying, "It's OK, he comes every day to read to you." In this moment one surmises that this woman has dementia of some sort and this kind man volunteers at the hospital by reading to the patients.

The film progresses by going back and forth between this elderly man reading to this elderly woman and flashbacks that take the viewer into the story being read. The story is about a young man and a young woman who, against all odds seeming to work against

them, fall in love. The young woman is from an upper class family; the young man is relatively poor. The woman comes from sophistication and refinement; the man is rough hewn and raw. The woman is educated; the man lacks the benefits of a rigorous education but he is very intelligent nonetheless. The woman has a controlling mother and father; the man's mother has died and his father is present but somewhat distant. The young woman lives far away and only comes into proximity with the man when she happens to be summering in the town where the young man lives. There is so much distance between these two: socially, economically, geographically, and educationally; and, to compound matters the young woman's mother does everything to prevent further connection between the two. She intercepts all of the young man's letters before the young woman even knows they were sent. World War II breaks out and adds another degree of separation as the young man goes off to war and the young woman working as a nurse begins to fall for a patient more of her class and sophistication. With all the odds working against them, this man and this woman still fall in love and eventually marry.

About two-thirds of the way through the film the viewer puts it together that this old man reading the story is in fact the young man of the story. And, this old woman is the very same young woman he fell in love with so many years before. Near the end of the film as the day is drawing nigh and the story is nearly told; the older man and the older woman are eating a nice dinner by candle light. A single rose in a vase adorns the table and a phonograph is playing the music that has contributed to so many of this couple's memories together. The entire atmosphere is shouting out to the woman trapped in the deep recesses of her dementia. As the story ends, the woman says, "That is the most beautiful story I have ever heard; and it sounds so very familiar." In that moment cognition washes across her face and her expression moves from the vacuousness that once characterized it to an expression flush with perception. She looks at her husband and says, "It's our story isn't it?"

He says, "Yes."

She asks, "How much time do we have?"

He answers, "Last time it was about five minutes."

She asks what any mother would ask, "How are the children?"

He says, "There fine. They were here to see you today."

She requests, "Tell them I love them," and he assures her that he will.

Then, as the music is still playing, she asks, "Can we dance?" He stands and takes her in his arms and they begin to move slowly to the music. Then just as surely as cognition came to her so her oblivion returns. She finds herself in the arms of a stranger and screams. The orderlies rush into the room and find it necessary to sedate the old woman in order for her to calm down. James Garner's character is standing, watching it all, biting his knuckle, and weeping. It was that scene that moved me so deeply. In fact it moves me

now as I type this. Why? What was it that was so touching about that scene? Of course it has all the sentimentalism of a great love story between a man and woman; magnified by the triumph of their love to reach across the many things that sought to separate them even at the end of their lives. But, as I thought about it I realized there was much more in the story to move me so.

I believe the story is a kind of metaphor or analogy that explains, figuratively, something of the quality of every human story. For certainly, all of our lives consist in God telling each of us, perpetually, his love story with us. He tells us of His wooing and loving us. He has placed us in an environment that, one way or another, cries out to us His great love for us. Most of our lives we live without cognition. Then moments occur when we cognition of His love and grace towards us occurs and we respond. Then something happens and as easily as we fell into cognition we fall out. In James Garners' tears and the biting of the knuckles, I think I was moved because I saw something analogous to the love of God for us. He cannot love us any more than He does. Infinite love has no capacity to increase. The question is will we be cognizant of that love or not?

To the degree we are aware of the love of God ("Perfect love that casts out fear") we can escape many of the schemes of the evil one. To the degree we are given to those very fears that create in us doubt as to God's capacity to meet us at the deepest levels of our lives, we are vulnerable to those fears that fill in the vacuum when His love is unknown or neglected. Fear is the threshold where Screwtape finds his entry.

Neglect of God's love is the beginning of a drift away from Him and the Drift towards those artificialities that we use as substitutes for God. Once Screwtape can move us towards these idols he will have his way with us.

We withdrawing into ourselves and becoming self-referential we also look on others in a utilitarian way which compounds are sense of isolation.

We reap what we sow; if we sow wheat, we reap wheat; if we sow barley, we reap barley; if we sow self, we reap solitude and isolation; nobody wants to be around us.

We also increase our own sensitivities becoming more easily "hurt" by the actions of others around us while becoming less sensitive toward the hurt others around us may be enduring.

Illustration: Mark's mural and Ruby's footwashing.

Yet, at some level we are remain desperate for the love of God even as we seek it in the substitutes Screwtape offers to keep us distracted. These substitutes raise false expectations that are destined to crash into bitter disappointments. All of life-experience counts against the delusion of this self-sufficiency and agonizing isolation. Often, God is blamed in the process and the *akrasia* sets in. Who, in their right mind, would deny the need for God's grace? Furthermore, without this grace we hurt others and we hurt ourselves.

Transition: We need rescue [Screwtape would keep us in a state of artificial self-dependence]. God gives grace in Christ and He nurtures us to grow in Christlikeness.

The Gospel is the means to reconnect with the love of God. Furthermore, out of the Gospel comes the awareness of God's nurturing love to restore in us the life of Christ. This maturation in the love of God leads to virtue.

Virtue in contrast to Screwtape's Vice

Screwtape: "He cannot tempt to virtue as we do to vice." Letter VIII. P. 47.

Regarding virtue, Lewis wrote, "Innocence is not goodness. Even Divine nature, even in her prime cannot make of virtue a gift". Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*. P.60.

Virtue is the means to a Good Life.

Characteristics of Virtue: 1) It is an integrated and interdependent whole made up of four facets: Courage, Temperance, Justice, Wisdom. 2) It must be worked into the habits of a person's life. One act of vice and you can be known for that vice. One act of virtue does not qualify as character.

Definitions for the four characteristics of virtue:

1. **Courage:** The habitual ability to suffer pain and hardship; it is endurance fortitude and staying power. (*hupomone*: endurance, fortitude, staying power).

Clarifying comment: Courage is the ability to say "Yes" to right action even in the teeth of pain.

Illustrations: Dr. Stephen Barabbas as an example: Oldest son in a Hungarian immigrant family had to quite HS and assume responsibility for providing for all of his younger siblings when his dad died. He went back to HS and finished at age 28. Then went to Princeton University for his BA, his M.Div, and his Ph.D. He did his doctorate on the Keswick Movement. He amassed the most complete library on the literature of that movement. He was pasturing a small Presbyterian Church and living in the Manse. The night before he was to turn in the final draft of his typed dissertation, the Manse caught fire and his manuscript and his library were destroyed in the fire. He picked up and started over until he finished the job. His life was one of courage. Life is not a sprint, it's an endurance race.

2. **Temperance:** The habitual ability resist the enticement of immediate pleasure in order to gain the greater though more remote good.

(Self control; **Plato's *Charmides* subtitled: Temperance.** Entrance into the

temple of Delphi “Know yourself” and the greeting given as you entered was, “Be temperate!” And later: “Temperance is self-knowledge.”)

Clarifying comment: If Courage is the ability to say “Yes” to right action even in the teeth of pain; then Temperance is the ability to say “No” to wrong action even in the jaws of pleasure.

Illustrations: Giving my kids the choice between a piece of penny candy right now or, a \$10.00 toy the next day. Their inability to make the better of the two choices revealed not only a lack of temperance but also a lack of maturity; for an intemperate person is immature.

3. **Justice:** The habit of being law abiding and concerned for the common good and general welfare of one’s society. Justice seeks to:
 - a. Secure and protect natural rights.
 - b. Be fair.
 - c. Render to others their due.

Clarifying comment: Justice testifies to the fact that character development is connected to one’s responsibilities to others. One’s moral development is linked with practicing fairness and showing genuine concern for the welfare of others.

Illustrations: The ring of Gyges (from Herodotus and Plato’s *Republic*)

4. **Wisdom:** The habit of being careful about the decisions one makes; it seeks counsel and advice. (*Ginosis* experiential knowledge, not Sophia but a near cousin to that word)

Illustrations: Hampton Court Maze. Wisdom is the perspective of the Scaffold.

Conclusion

The Love of God and the life of virtue built upon that love are two of the most significant antidotes to the wiles of Screwtape.

Questions:

1. Besides the examples discussed above how else might the love of God give us the means to guard ourselves against the nefarious schemes of Screwtape and his like?

2. If we risk becoming utilitarian in our relationships when we are neglectful of the love of God, how might the love of God restore us to being more loving and empathetic towards others?
3. How are each of the features of virtue (courage, temperance, justice and wisdom) strengthened in the love of God? How is each exercised in avoiding utilitarian approaches towards others and exhibited in love for others?

The edition of *The Screwtape Letters* used for these lectures:

Lewis, C. S. *The Screwtape Letters and Screwtape Proposes a Toast*. The Macmillian Company: New York. Fifth Printing 1971.