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Reflections

July 2013 - *Conquering Fear & Finding True Friendship*

In our June 2013 “Reflections,” C. S. Lewis spoke of how giving in to the desire to be part of the “inner ring,” an exclusive, snobbish group, will eventually turn you into a scoundrel. In this edition he describes the freedom that comes from conquering the fear of being an outsider and finding true friendship through honest work and respect:

As long as you are governed by that desire [to be part of the inner ring] you will never get what you want. You are trying to peel an onion: if you succeed there will be nothing left. Until you conquer the fear of being an outsider, an outsider you will remain...

The quest of the Inner Ring will break your hearts unless you break it. But if you break it, a surprising result will follow. If in your working hours you make the work your end, you will presently find yourself all unawares inside the only circle in your profession that really matters. You will be one of the sound craftsmen, and other sound craftsmen will know it. This group of craftsmen will by no means coincide with the Inner Ring or the Important People or the People in the Know. It will not shape that professional policy or work up that professional influence which fights for the profession as a whole against the public: nor will it lead to those periodic scandals and crises which the Inner Ring produces. But it will do those things which that profession exists to do and will in the long run be responsible for all the respect which that profession in fact enjoys and which the speeches and advertisements cannot maintain.



And if in your spare time you consort simply with the people you like, you will again find that you have come unawares to a real inside: that you are indeed snug and safe at the centre of something which, seen from without, would look exactly like an Inner Ring. But the difference is that its secrecy is accidental, and its exclusiveness a by-product, and no one was led thither by the lure of the esoteric: for it is only four or five people who like one another meeting to do things that they like. This is friendship. Aristotle placed it among the virtues. It causes perhaps half of all the happiness in the world, and no Inner Ring can ever have it.

We are told in Scriptures that those who ask get. That is true, in senses I can't now explore. But in another sense there is much truth in the schoolboy's principle “them as asks shan't have.” To a young person, just entering on adult life, the world seems full of “insides,” full of delightful intimacies and confidentialities, and he desires to enter them. But if he follows that desire he will reach no “inside” that is worth reaching. The true road lies in quite another direction. It is like the house in *Alice Through the Looking Glass*.

True friendship comes out of mutual respect and admiration for others, rather than attitudes of exclusivity or superiority. Those who experience the joy of true friendship will experience much happiness. As opposed to the insecurity and anxiety produced by “the inner ring,” authentic friendship brings lasting freedom and security.

“The righteous choose their friends carefully, but the way of the wicked leads them astray.”

Proverbs 12:26 (NIV)

¹ C. S. Lewis. *The Weight of Glory*, “The Inner Ring” (Eerdmans: Grand Rapids, 1965), pp. 64-66.