



C·S· LEWIS INSTITUTE

Reflections

March 2017 – *LEAD US NOT INTO TEMPTATION*

In his book *Reflections on the Psalms*, in a chapter titled “Connivance,” C.S. Lewis considers how we should behave in the presence of “very bad people who are powerful, prosperous and impenitent”:

Many people have a very strong desire to meet celebrated or “important” people, including those whom they disapprove, from curiosity or vanity. It gives them something to talk or even (anyone may produce a book of reminiscences) to write about. It is felt to confer distinction if the great, though odious, man recognises you in the street... But I am inclined to think a Christian would be wise to avoid, where he decently can, any meeting with people who are bullies, lascivious, cruel, dishonest, spiteful and so forth.

Not because we are “too good” for them. In a sense because we are not good enough. We are not good enough to cope with all the temptations, nor clever enough to cope with all the problems, which an evening spent in such society produces. The temptation is to condone, to connive at; by our words, looks and laughter, to “consent”...

We shall hear vile stories told as funny; not merely licentious stories but (to me far more serious and less noticed) stories which the teller could not be telling unless he was betraying someone’s confidence. We shall hear infamous detraction of the absent, often disguised as pity or humour. Things we hold sacred will be mocked...

What makes this contact with wicked people so difficult is that to handle the situation successfully requires not merely good intentions, even with humility and courage thrown in; it may call for social and even intellectual talents which God has not given us. It is therefore not self-righteousness but mere prudence to avoid it when we can. The Psalmists were not quite wrong when they described the good man as avoiding “the seat of the scornful” and fearing to consort with the ungodly lest he should “eat of” (shall we say, laugh at, admire, approve, justify?) “such things as please them”. As usual in their attitude, with all its dangers, there is a core of very good sense. “Lead us not into temptation” often means, among other things, “Deny me those gratifying invitations, those highly interesting contacts, that participation in the brilliant movements of our age, which I so often, at such risk, desire.”¹



If we find ourselves in a social situation like Lewis describes, we need to carefully consider what to do, since, as Lewis notes, “there is a degree of unprotesting participation in such talk which is very bad.” How much better it is to avoid such situations in the first place.

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.”

PSALM 1:1-3 (ESV)

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1958), pp. 68, 71-72, 74.