



August 2011 - *The Unraveling of the Soul*

From time immemorial, the three great enemies of the soul have been “the world, the flesh and the devil” and they work in concert. The devil is a master at using our fleshly desires to entice us into a love for the world and thus separate us from God (1 John 2:15-17). In *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis uses an imaginary dialog between an old, experienced demon and a young tempter to shed helpful light on some of the devil’s schemes. Read slowly and ponder below, and see if you can identify any that are at work in your life:

The long, dull monotonous years of middle-aged prosperity or middle-aged adversity are excellent campaigning weather. You see, it is so hard for these creatures to persevere. The routine of adversity, the gradual decay of youthful loves and youthful hopes, the quiet despair (hardly felt as pain) of ever overcoming the chronic temptations with which we have again and again defeated them, the drabness which we create in their lives and the inarticulate resentment with which we teach them to respond to it—all this provides admirable opportunities of wearing out a soul by attrition. If, on the other hand, the middle years prove prosperous, our position is even stronger. Prosperity knits a man to the World. He feels that he is “finding his place in it,” while really it is finding its place in him. His increasing reputation, his widening circle of acquaintances, his sense of importance, the growing pressure of absorbing and agreeable work, build up in him a sense of being really at home in earth which is just what we want. You will notice that the young are generally less unwilling to die than the middle-aged and the old.

The truth is that the Enemy, having oddly destined these mere animals to life in His own eternal world, has guarded them pretty effectively from the danger of feeling at home anywhere else. That is why we must often wish long life to our patients; seventy years is not a day too much for the difficult task of unraveling their souls from Heaven and building up a firm attachment to the earth. While they are young we find them always shooting off at a tangent. Even if we contrive to keep them ignorant of explicit religion, the incalculable winds of fantasy and music and poetry—the mere face of a girl, the song of a bird, or the sight of a horizon—are always blowing our whole structure away. They will not apply themselves steadily to worldly advancement, prudent connections, and the policy of safety first. So inveterate is their appetite for Heaven that our best method at this stage, of attaching them to earth is to make them believe that earth can be turned into Heaven at some future date by politics or eugenics or “science” or psychology, or what not. Real worldliness is a work of time—assisted of course by pride—for we teach them to describe the creeping death as good sense or Maturity or Experience.¹

As one of the old Puritans said, “The devil is a master fisherman: he baits the hook according to the appetite of the fish.” If none of the above are at work in you, what else might there be that is unraveling your soul from God and knitting it to something (or someone) of the world? Ask the Holy Spirit to show you.

Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God lives forever.

1 JOHN 2:15-17 (NIV)

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (New York: Macmillan, 1976), pp 130-131.