

May 2008 – *The Natural Life and the Spiritual Life*

We all know people who are nice, respectable, well-adjusted, moral human beings—yet do not have faith in Christ or see a need for it. They are usually easy people to like, and it can seem strange, even “judgmental” to think that such people will not go to heaven. With the growth of pluralism and the cult of tolerance, this kind of thinking has become increasingly common.

C.S. Lewis has some helpful insights on the subject.

Natural gifts carry with them a...danger. If you have sound nerves and intelligence and health and popularity and a good upbringing, you are likely to be quite satisfied with your character as it is. “Why drag God into it?” you may ask...Often people who have all these natural kinds of goodness cannot be brought to recognize their need for Christ at all until, one day, the natural goodness lets them down and their self-satisfaction is shattered. In other words, it is hard for those who are “rich” in this sense to enter the Kingdom.

It is very different for the nasty people—the little, low, timid, warped, thin-blooded, lonely people, or the passionate, sensual, unbalanced people. If they make any attempt at goodness at all, they learn, in double quick time, that they need help. It is Christ or nothing for them....

There is either a warning or an encouragement here for every one of us. If you are a nice person—if virtue comes easily to you—beware! Much is expected from those to whom much is given. If you mistake for your own merits what are really God’s gifts to you through nature, and if you are contented with simply being nice, you are still a rebel: and all those gifts will only make your fall more terrible...The Devil was an archangel once; his natural gifts were as far above yours as yours are above those of a chimpanzee.

But if you are a poor creature—poisoned by a wretched up-bringing in some house full of vulgar jealousies and senseless quarrels—saddled, by no choice of your own, with some loathsome sexual perversion—nagged day in and day out by an inferiority complex that makes you snap at your best friends—do not despair. He knows all about it. You are one of the poor whom He blessed. He knows what a wretched machine you are trying to drive. Keep on. Do what you can. One day (perhaps in another world, but perhaps far sooner than that) He will fling it on the scrapheap and give you a new one.

“Niceness”—a wholesome, integrated personality—is an excellent thing. We must try by every medical, educational, economic, and political means in our power to produce a world where as many people as possible grow up “nice...” But we must not think that even if we succeeded in making everyone nice, we should have saved their souls...for mere improvement is no redemption, though redemption always improves people even here and now, and will in the end, improve them to a degree we cannot yet imagine.¹

Even though society increasingly considers the idea “too narrow,” the need for spiritual rebirth and transformation is just as necessary today as it was when Jesus and the Apostles taught it.

1. C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1952), pp. 180-182.