

SEPTEMBER 2007—*The Subtle Attraction of the Inner Ring*

Have you ever found yourself wanting to be part of the “inner circle” of some group or organization? Probably most of us have felt this pull at some point in life. Or perhaps we do even now. In some cases, as C.S. Lewis warns us, the subtle attraction of being part of the Inner Ring can lead us into moral compromise and even ruin.

To nine out of ten of you the choice which could lead to scoundrelism will come, when it does come, in no very dramatic colours. Obviously bad men, obviously threatening or bribing, will almost certainly not appear. Over a drink or a cup of coffee, disguised as a triviality and sandwiched between two jokes, from the lips of a man, or woman, whom you have recently been getting to know rather better and whom you hope to know better still—just at the moment when you are most anxious not to appear crude, or naïf or a prig—the hint will come. It will be the hint of something which is not quite in accordance with the technical rules of fair play; something which the public, the ignorant, romantic public, would never understand; something which even the outsiders in your own profession are apt to make a fuss about, but something, says your new friend, which “we”—and at the word “we” you try not to blush for mere pleasure—something “we always do.” And you will be drawn in, if you are drawn in, not by desire for gain or ease, but simply because at that moment, when the cup was so near your lips, you cannot bear to be thrust back again into the cold outer world. It would be so terrible to see the other man’s face—that genial, confidential, delightfully sophisticated face—turn suddenly cold and contemptuous, to know that you had been tried for the Inner Ring and rejected. And then, if you are drawn in, next week it will be something a little further from the rules, and next year something further still, but all in the jolliest, friendliest spirit. It may end in a crash, a scandal, and penal servitude; it may end in millions, a peerage, and giving the prizes at your old school. But you will be a scoundrel.

.... Of all passions the passion for the Inner Ring is most skillful in making a man who is not yet a very bad man do very bad things.¹

The worlds of business and politics have given us many examples of the seductive power of the Inner Ring and its destructive effects. But they don’t exhaust the possibilities. Churches, ministries, civic organizations, family, and social circles (to name only a few) can also have an Inner Ring to which we can be attracted. And while the form of the temptations and consequences may be different, the injury to our souls and relationships can be every bit as real. Are you part of an Inner Ring? Do you secretly aspire to be?

Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life.

PROVERBS 4:23 (NLT)

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (New York: Simon & Schuster Touchstone, 1980), pp. 115-116.