

January 2012 - *Communicating "Mere Christianity"*

"Mere Christianity" was a term adapted by C. S. Lewis from the writings of the 17th century pastor, Richard Baxter, who defined the expression as "mere Scripture Christianity," and "the ancient, simple Christianity," held by "all true Christians on earth."¹ It is not a mere idea or an attempt to narrow down Christianity to the least common denominator for the sake of unity at all costs. Rather it is the essential truths of biblical, orthodox Christianity as communicated to the church by the apostles without getting caught up in secondary doctrinal divisions.

Lewis writes in his preface to his book, *Mere Christianity*:

Ever since I became a Christian I have thought that the best, perhaps the only, service I could do for my unbelieving neighbors was to explain and defend the belief that has been common to nearly all Christians at all times. I had more than one reason for thinking this. In the first place, the questions which divide Christians from one another often involve points of high Theology or even of ecclesiastical history, which ought never to be treated except by real experts. I should have been out of my depth in such waters: more in need of help myself than able to help others. And secondly, I think we must admit that the discussion of these disputed points has no tendency at all to bring an outsider into the Christian fold. So long as we write and talk about them we are much more likely to deter him entering any Christian communion than to draw him into our own. Our divisions should never be discussed except in the presence of those who have already come to believe that there is one God and that Jesus Christ is His only Son. Finally, I got the impression that far more, and more talented, authors were already engaged in such controversial matters than in the defense of what Baxter calls 'mere' Christianity. That part of the line where I thought I could serve best was also the part that seemed to be thinnest. And to it I naturally went...For I am not writing to expound something I could call 'my religion,' but to expound 'mere' Christianity, which is what it is and what it was long before I was born and whether I like it or not...So far as I can judge from reviews and from the numerous letters written to me, the book, however faulty in other respects, did at least succeed in presenting an agreed, or common, or central, or 'mere' Christianity... Far deeper objections may be felt—and have been expressed—against my use of the word *Christian* to mean one who accepts the common doctrines of Christianity...The name *Christians* was first given at Antioch (Acts 11:26) to 'the disciples,' to those who accepted the teaching of the apostles."²

As we begin a new year let us, like C. S. Lewis, prayerfully consider how we might best present "Mere Christianity" to our unbelieving neighbors by living as Christians in thought, word, and deed.

Then Agrippa said to Paul, "Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?" Paul replied, "Short time or long—I pray to God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains."

ACTS 26:28-29 (NIV)

¹ Baxter, Richard. *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter*. London: Paternoster Row, 1838, pp. 83, 577, 1026.

² Lewis, C. S. *Mere Christianity*. New York: Simon & Schuster – A Touchstone Book, 1996, pp. 6-11.

