

WEEK ONE DISCUSSION GUIDE

MERE CHRISTIANITY | C.S. LEWIS

THIS WEEK

Book One, Chapters 1 and 2

In these first few chapters, C.S. Lewis explores the concept of morality, questioning the growing modern perception that Moral Truth is relative to culture and personal preferences. By arguing for absolute truth, he lays the foundation for his case that there is a God and he owns it.

ASSESSING THE TEXT

“Now this Law or Rule about Right and Wrong used to be called the Law of Nature. Nowadays, when we talk of the ‘laws of nature’ we usually mean things like gravitation, or heredity, or the laws of chemistry. But when the older thinkers called the Law of Right and Wrong ‘the Law of Nature’, they really meant the Law of Human Nature. (pg. 4)”

Why have we stopped equating moral law with natural law in our society today?

“If we do not believe in decent behaviour, why should we be so anxious to make excuses for not having behaved decently? The truth is, we believe in decency so much – we feel the Rule of Law pressing on us so – that we cannot bear to face the fact that we are breaking it, and consequently we try to shift the responsibility. For you notice that it is only for our bad behaviour that we find all these explanations. It is only our bad temper that we put down to being tired or worried or hungry; we put our good temper down to ourselves. (pg. 8)”

What explanations have you heard others give to avoid this concept?

Have you ever noticed this avoidance tendency in your life? How do you typically explain away a sense of conviction in your life to avoid feelings of guilt?

“These, then, are the two points I want to make. First, that human beings, all over the earth, have this curious idea that they ought to behave in a certain way, and cannot really get rid of it. Secondly, that they do not in fact behave in that way. They know the Law of Nature; they break it. These two facts are the foundation of all clear thinking about ourselves and the universe that we live in. (pg. 8)”

How is this concept of a moral standard and our failure to keep it foundational to our understanding of the Gospel?

“Think once again of a piano. It has not got two kinds of notes on it, the ‘right’ notes and the ‘wrong’ ones. Every single note is right at one time and wrong at another. The Moral Law is not any one instinct or set of instincts: it is something which makes a kind of tune (the tune we call goodness or right conduct) by directing the instincts. (pg. 11)”

Do you agree with Lewis here? Why or why not?

What does this teach us about ethics?

Can you give an example of when the “right” thing at one moment is not necessarily the “right” thing in another situation?

“The most dangerous thing you can do is to take any one impulse of your own nature and set it up as the thing you ought to follow at all costs. (pg. 11)”

What impulses does modern society say we should follow at all costs?

“In the same way, if a man asks what is the point of behaving decently, it is no good replying, “in order to benefit society”, for trying to benefit society, in other words being unselfish (for ‘society’ after all only means ‘other people’), is one of the things decent behaviour consists in; all you are really saying is that decent behaviour is decent behaviour. You would have said just as much if you had stopped at the statement, ‘Men ought to be unselfish.’ (pg. 19)”

Why is unselfishness as a moral code overly simplistic or not strong enough?

BRINGING IT HOME

How does this section of the book better help you defend the principles of Christianity?

Where have you recently found yourself out of line with the Natural Law God has set before us?

How can others in the group pray for you?

Who in your life can the group pray for that might need to hear this message?