

WEEK FOUR LEADER'S GUIDE

MERE CHRISTIANITY | C.S. LEWIS

THIS WEEK

Book Two, Chapters 4-5

Lewis concludes his arguments from book two in the final two chapters, this time dealing with Jesus' second coming, the human condition, and how we can know him more fully.

B2, CHAPTER FOUR: THE PERFECT PENITENT

God has landed on this enemy-occupied world in human form (pg. 53).

The central Christian belief is that Christ's death has somehow put us right with God and given us a fresh start. Theories as to how it did this are another matter (pg. 54).

We believe that the death of Christ is just that point in history at which something absolutely unimaginable from outside shows through in to our own world. And if we cannot picture even the atoms of which our own world is built, of course we are not going to be able to picture this (pg. 55).

A man can accept what Christ has done without knowing how it works: indeed, he certainly would not know how it works until he has accepted it (pg. 55).

We are told that Christ was killed for us, that His death has washed out our sins, and that by dying He disabled death itself. That is the formula. That is Christianity. That is what has to be believed (pg. 55).

Now what was the sort of 'hole' man had gotten himself into? He had tried to set up on his own, to behave as if he belonged to himself. In other words, fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement: he is a rebel who must lay down his arms. Laying down your arms, surrendering, saying you are sorry, realizing that you have been on the wrong track and getting ready to start life over again from the ground floor – that is the only way out of our 'hole.' This process of surrender – this movement full speed ahead – is what Christians call repentance (pg. 56).

It means unlearning all the self-conceit and self-will that we have been training ourselves into for thousands of years. It means killing part of yourself, undergoing a kind of death (pg. 57).

But the same badness which makes us need it, makes us unable to do it. Can we do it if God helps us? Yes, but what do we mean when we talk of God helping us? We mean God putting into us a bit of Himself, so to speak. He lends us a little of His reasoning powers that is how we think: He puts a little of His love into us and that is how we love one another (pg. 57).

He could surrender His will, and suffer and die, because He was man; and He could do it perfectly because He was God. You and I can go through this process only if God does it in us; but God can do it only if He becomes

man. Our attempts at this dying will succeed only if we men share in God's dying, just as our thinking can succeed only because it is a drop out of the ocean of His intelligence: but we cannot share God's dying unless God dies; and He cannot die except by being man (pg. 58).

B2, CHAPTER FIVE: THE PRACTICAL CONCLUSION

In Christ a new kind of man appeared: and the new kind of life which began in Him is to be put into us (pg. 60).

In the same way a Christian can lose the Christ-life which has been put into him, and he has to make efforts to keep it. But even the best Christian that ever lived is not acting on his own steam – he is only nourishing or protecting a life he could never have acquired by his own efforts (pg. 62-63).

In the same way a Christian is not a man who never goes wrong, but a man who is enabled to repent and pick himself up and begin over again after each stumble – because the Christ-life is inside him, repairing him all the time, enabling him to repent (in some degree) the kind of voluntary death which Christ Himself carried out (pg. 63).

Christians are Christ's body, the organism through which He works. Every addition to that body enables Him to do more. If you want to help those outside you must add your own little cell to the body of Christ who alone can help them. Cutting off a man's fingers would be an odd way of getting him to do more work (pg. 64).

God is going to invade, all right: but what is the good of saying you are on His side then, when you see the whole natural universe melting away like a dream and something else – something it never entered your head to conceive – comes crashing in; something so beautiful to some of us and so terrible to others that none of us will have any choice left? For this time it will be God without disguise; something so overwhelming that it will strike either irresistible love or irresistible horror into every creature (pg. 65).