

WEEK SEVEN LEADER'S GUIDE

MERE CHRISTIANITY | C.S. LEWIS

THIS WEEK

Book Three, Chapters 7-9

In the third part of book three, C.S. Lewis deals with forgiveness, pride, and the nature of true Christian love.

B3, CHAPTER SEVEN: FORGIVENESS

There is no slightest suggestion that we are offered forgiveness on any other terms. It is made perfectly clear that if we do not forgive we shall not be forgiven. There are no two ways about it (pg. 116).

We kill if necessary, but we must not hate and enjoy hating. We may punish if necessary, but we must not enjoy it. In other words, something inside us, the feeling of resentment, the feeling that wants to get one's own back, must be simply killed. (pg. 120).

B3, CHAPTER EIGHT: THE GREAT SIN

You may remember, when I was talking about sexual morality, I warned you that the centre of Christian morals did not lie there. Well, now, we have come to the centre. According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind (pg. 121-122).

In fact, if you want to find out how proud you are the easiest way is to ask yourself, 'How much do I dislike it when other people snub me, or refuse to take any notice of me, or shove their oar in, or patronise me, or show off (pg. 122)?'

Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man (pg. 122).

In God you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself. Unless you know God as that – and, therefore, know yourself as nothing in comparison – you do know God at all. As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people: and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you (pg. 124).

That raises a terrible question. How is it that people who are quite obviously eaten up with Pride can say they believe in God and appear to themselves very religious? I am afraid it means they are worshipping an imaginary God. They theoretically admit themselves to be nothing in the presence of this phantom God, but are really all the time imagining how He approves of them and thinks them far better than ordinary people: that is, they pay a pennyworth of imaginary humility to Him and get out of it a pound's worth of Pride towards their fellow-men (pg. 124).

Whenever we find that our religious life is making us feel that we are good – above all, that we are better than someone else – I think we may be sure that we are being acted on, not by God, but by the devil. The real test of being in the presence of God is, that you either forget about yourself altogether or see yourself as a small, dirty object. It is better to forget about yourself altogether (pg. 124-125).

Pleasure in being praised is not Pride (pg. 125).

The trouble begins when you pass from thinking, 'I have pleased him; all is well,' to thinking, 'What a fine person I must be to have done it.' The more you delight in yourself and the less you delight in the praise, the worse you are becoming (pg. 126).

The real black, diabolical Pride, comes when you look down on others so much that you do not care what they think of you (pg. 126).

We must not think Pride is something God forbids because He is offended at it, or that Humility is something He demands as due to His own dignity – as if God Himself was proud. He is not the least worried about His dignity. The point is, He wants you to know Him: wants you give you Himself. And He and you are two things of such a kind that if you really get into any kind of touch with Him you will, in fact, be humble – delightedly humble, feeling the infinite relief of having for once got rid of all the silly nonsense about your own dignity which has made you restless and unhappy all your life (pg. 127).

B3, CHAPTER NINE: CHARITY

Charity means "Love, in the Christian sense". But love, in the Christian sense, does not mean an emotion. It is a state not of the feelings but of the will; that state of the will which we have naturally about ourselves, and must learn to have about other people (pg. 129).

The rule for all of us is perfectly simple. Do not waste time bothering whether you 'love' your neighbor; act as if you did. As soon as we do this we find one of the great secrets (pg. 131).

Good and evil both increase at compound interest. That is why the little decisions you and I make every day are of such infinite importance. The smallest good act today is the capture of a strategic point from which, a few months later, you may be able to go on to victories you never dreamed of (pg. 132).

They are told they ought to love God. They cannot find any such feeling in themselves. What are they to do? Their answer is the same as before. Act as if you did. Do not sit trying to manufacture feelings. Ask yourself, 'If I were sure that I loved God, what would I do?' When you have found the answer, go and do it (pg. 132).

Christian Love, either towards God or towards man, is an affair of the will (pg. 132).