

WEEK EIGHT DISCUSSION GUIDE

MERE CHRISTIANITY | C.S. LEWIS

THIS WEEK

Book Three, Chapters 10-12

In the last part of book three, C.S. Lewis deals with the virtues of faith and hope.

ASSESSING THE TEXT

“Hope is one of the Theological virtues. This means that a continual looking forward to the eternal world is not (as some modern people think) a form of escapism or wishful thinking, but one of the things a Christian is meant to do. It does not mean that we are to leave the present world as it is. If you do read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next (pg. 134).”

Do you think many Christians today use their hope for Heaven as an escape from the world’s present realities? Why or why not?

Why does belief in Heaven necessitate a desire to improve the world today?

“The longings which arise in us when we first fall in love, or first think of some foreign country, or first take up some subject that excites us, are longings which no marriage, no travel, no learning, can really satisfy... There was something we grasped at, in that first moment of longing, which just fades away in that reality. I think everyone knows what I mean. The wife may be a good wife, and the hotels and scenery may have been excellent, and chemistry may be a very interesting job: but something has evaded us (pg. 135).”

Have you ever experienced this disappointment in life from something that was supposed to be more fulfilling than it really was? If so, when?

What is our most natural reaction to disappointments in life?

“A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthy pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing (pg.136-137).”

Why are we not generally drawn to a greater appreciation for Heaven by unmet desires? Why do we, instead, turn to bitterness or anger?

"I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country and to help others do the same (pg. 137)."

Why is it difficult to keep this love for Heaven alive in the world today?

Is it easier to appreciate Heaven in the difficult times or the easy ones?

"That is why Faith is such a necessary virtue: unless you teach your moods 'where they get off', you can never be either a sound Christian or even a sound atheist, but just a creature dithering to and fro, with its beliefs really dependent on the weather and the state of its digestion. Consequently one must train the habit of Faith (pg. 141)."

What makes the practice of faith as a virtue so difficult to maintain?

"I think every one who has some vague belief in God, until he becomes a Christian, has the idea of an exam, or of a bargain in his mind. The first result of real Christianity is to blow that idea into bits. When they find it blown into bits, some people think this means that Christianity is a failure and give up. They seem to imagine that God is very simple-minded. In fact, of course, He knows all about this. One of the very things Christianity was designed to do was to blow this idea to bits. God has been waiting for the moment at which you discover that there is no question of earning a pass mark in this exam. Or putting Him in your debt (pg. 142-143)."

Why do so many people have this attitude about God and Christianity?

How can we curtail this perception of what it means to be a Christian?

"If you devoted every moment of your whole life exclusively to His service you could not give Him anything that was not in a sense His own already. So that when we talk of a man doing anything for God or giving anything to God, I will tell you what is really like. It is like a small child going its father and saying, 'Daddy, give you sixpence to buy you a birthday present... When a man has made these two discoveries God can really get to work. It is after this that real life begins. The man is awake now. We can now go on to talk of Faith in the second sense (pg. 143)."

How does this reality produce greater humility in us?

Why is it so important to understand?

"There are certain things in Christianity that can be understood from the outside, before you have become a Christian. But there are a great many things that cannot be understood until after you have gone a certain distance along the Christian road (pg. 144)."

Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?

What would you put under the category of things you can't understand before receiving Christ?

“And as long as a man is thinking of God as an examiner who has set him a sort of paper to do, or as the opposite party in a sort of bargain – as long as he is thinking of claims and counter-claims between himself and God – he is not yet in the right relation to Him. He is misunderstanding what he is and what God is. And he cannot get into the right relation until he has discovered the fact of our bankruptcy (pg. 145).”

Does this idea come from a high or low view of God?

Why can't we have a right relationship with God prior to this realization?

“To trust Him means, of course, trying to do all that He says. There would be no sense in saying you trusted a person if you would not take his advice. Thus if you have really handed yourself over to Him, it must follow that you are trying to obey him. But trying in a new way, a less worried way. Not doing these things in order to be saved, but because He has begun to save you already. Not hoping to get to Heaven as a reward for your actions, but inevitably wanting to act in a certain way because a first faint gleam of Heaven is already inside you (pg. 147-148).”

What makes following God in the Christian sense something that produces less worry?

“I think all Christians would agree with me if I said that though Christianity seems at the first to be all morality, all about duties and rules and guilt and virtue, yet it leads you on, out of all that, into something beyond (pg. 149).”

What is that something beyond? What are we to pursue chiefly above all else, including morality?

BRINGING IT HOME

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

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?