

WEEK NINE DISCUSSION GUIDE

MERE CHRISTIANITY | C.S. LEWIS

THIS WEEK

Book Four, Chapters 1-3

In the final book, Lewis turns his attention to the intricacies of Christian theology, constantly discussing the practical application of it in our daily lives.

ASSESSING THE TEXT

"They all say 'the ordinary reader does not want Theology; give him plain practical religion'. I have rejected their advice. I do not think the ordinary reader is such a fool. Theology means 'the science of God', and I think any man who wants to think about God at all would like to have the clearest and most accurate ideas about Him which are available. You are not children: why should you be treated like children? (pg. 153)."

Why do people tend to reject the relevance of deeper theological studies?

How has the study of theology impacted your own spiritual growth?

"Doctrines are not God: they are only a kind of map. But that map is based on the experience of hundreds of people who really were in touch with God – experiences compared with which any thrills or pious feelings you and I are likely to get on our own are very elementary and very confused. And secondly, if you want to get any further, you must use the map. You see, what happened to that man in the desert may have been real, and was certainly exciting, but nothing comes of it. It leads nowhere. There is nothing to do about it. In fact, that is just why a vague religion – all about feeling God in nature, and so on – is so attractive. It is all thrills and no work: like watching the waves from the beach (pg. 154-155)."

Do you think Christians today are more attracted to the feelings surrounding following Christ, rather than the reality of who he really is? What evidence of that do you see today?

"If Christianity only means one more bit of good advice, then Christianity is of no importance. There has been no lack of good advice for the last four thousand years. A bit more makes no difference (pg. 156)."

What makes Christianity stand out as more than just good advice?

"When you beget something, you beget something of the same kind as yourself. A man begets human babies, a beaver begets little beavers and a bird begets eggs which turn into little birds. But when you make, you make something of a different kind from yourself. A bird makes a nest, a beaver builds a dam, a man makes a wireless set – or he may make something more like himself than a wireless set: say, a statue (pg. 157)."

The early church leaders went far out of their way to make the distinction that Jesus was 'begotten,' not 'made.' Why is this so important to make?

"That is why men are not Sons of God in the sense that Christ is. They may be like God in certain ways, but they are not things of the same kind. They are more like statues or pictures of God (pg. 158). "

Given Lewis' definitions of 'begetting' and 'making,' do you think it is appropriate for Christians to refer to Jesus as our brother as some do? Why or why not?

"And that is how Theology started. People already knew about God in a vague way. Then came a man who claimed to be God; and yet He was not the sort of man you could dismiss as a lunatic. He made them believe Him. They met Him again after they had seen Him killed. And then, after they had been formed into a little society or community, they found God somehow inside them as well: directing them, making them able to do things they could not do before. And when they worked it all out they found they had arrived at the Christian definition of the three-personal God (pg. 163). "

The doctrine of the Trinity is embedded in Scripture but never explicitly laid out, yet it's considered one of the most foundational Christian beliefs. Why is it so important to emphasize and understand?

"Consequently, the only really adequate instrument for learning about God is the whole Christian community, waiting for Him together. Christian brotherhood is, so to speak, the technical equipment for this science – the laboratory outfit. That is why all these people who turn up every few years with some patent simplified religion of their own as a substitute for the Christian tradition are really wasting time (pg. 165). "

Do you agree or disagree with Lewis that the church is the only adequate instrument for learning about God? Why or why not?

"Almost certainly God is not in Time. His life does not consist of moments following one another. If a million people are praying to Him at ten-thirty tonight, He need not listen to them all in that one little snippet which we call ten-thirty.. He has all eternity in which to listen to the split second of prayer put up by a pilot as his plane crashes in flames (pg. 167). "

In your opinion, how can we conclude that God stands outside of time?

"This idea has helped me a good deal. If it does not help you, leave it alone. It is a 'Christian idea' in the sense that great and wise Christians have held it and there is nothing in it contrary to Christianity. But it is not in the Bible or any of the creeds. You can be a perfectly good Christian without accepting it, or indeed without thinking of the matter at all (pg. 171)."

Despite the importance of this doctrine in his own life, Lewis takes a rather humble approach to it. What can his humility teach us about the study of theology in general?

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?