

Dear fellow pilgrims,

Last week we wrapped up the chapter entitled "The Practical Conclusion," which is the final chapter of Book 2 ("What Christians Believe") in *Mere Christianity*. In that chapter, Lewis beautifully illustrates the point that the Christian life is not just about what you believe or about trying to be and do Good, but that it is truly a transformation whereby what he calls "the Christ-life" takes hold of and dwells in us. He develops the points that Jesus taught about Belief, Baptism, and Holy Communion as markers and means of the Christ-life becoming rooted in our lives: *"The Christian... thinks any good he does comes from the Christ-life inside him. He does not think God will love us because we are good, but that God will make us good because He loves us; just as the roof of a greenhouse does not attract the sun because it is bright, but becomes bright because the sun shines on it."*

This week we will launch into Book 3, entitled *Christian Behavior*, in a chapter that is eerily applicable to our situation today. Here is a selection to whet your appetite:

*"Almost all people at all times have agreed (in theory) that human beings ought to be honest and kind and helpful to one another. But though it is natural to begin with all that, if our thinking about morality stops there, we might just as well not have thought at all. Unless we go on to the second thing—the tidying up inside each human being—we are only deceiving ourselves... What is the good of drawing up, on paper, rules for social behaviour, if we know that, in fact, our greed, cowardice, ill temper, and self-conceit are going to prevent us from keeping them? I do not mean for a moment that we ought not to think, and think hard, about improvements in our social and economic system. What I do mean is that all that thinking will be mere moonshine unless we realise that nothing but the courage and unselfishness of individuals is ever going to make any system work properly. It is easy enough to remove the particular kinds of graft or bullying that go on under the present system: but as long as men are twisters or bullies they will find some new way of carrying on the old game under the new system. You cannot make men good by law: and without good men you cannot have a good society."*

The main points we covered last week are as follows:

#### **Book 2, Chapter 5: The Practical Conclusion**

--**Christ's perfect work** Now the Christian belief is that if we somehow share the humility and suffering of Christ we shall also share in His conquest for death and find a new life after we have died and in it become perfect, and perfectly happy, creatures. This means much more than our trying to follow His teaching.

--**The New Life** In Christ a new kind of man appeared: and the new kind of life which began in Him is to be put into us. There are three things that spread the Christ life to us: baptism, belief, and Holy Communion. [Jesus] taught His followers that the new life was communicated in this way. ...I believe it on His authority.

--**NOT Just Trying to Be Good** The Christian is in a different position from other people who are trying to be good. They hope, by being good, to please God if there is one; or—if they think there is not—at least they hope to deserve approval from good men. But the Christian thinks any good he does comes from the Christ-life inside him. He does not think God will love us because we are good, but that God will make us good because He loves us; just as the roof of a greenhouse does not attract the sun because it is bright, but becomes bright because the sun shines on it.

--**A Caution** Do not think I am setting up baptism and belief and the Holy Communion as things that will do instead of your own attempts to copy Christ. 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. --**The Christ-life** When Christians say the Christ-life is in them, they do not mean simply something mental or moral. When they speak of being "in Christ" or of Christ being "in them," this is not simply a way of saying that they are thinking about Christ or copying Him. They mean that Christ is actually operating through them; that the whole mass of Christians are the physical organism through which Christ acts—that we are His fingers and muscles, the cells of His body. And perhaps that explains one or two things. It explains why this new life is spread not only by purely mental acts like belief, but by bodily acts like baptism and Holy Communion. There is no good trying to be more spiritual than God. God never meant man to be a purely spiritual creature. That is why He uses material things like bread and wine to put the new life into us. We may think this rather crude and unspiritual. God does not: He invented eating. He likes matter. He invented it.

--**God's Methods** Why is God landing in this enemy-occupied world in disguise and starting a sort of secret society to undermine the devil? Why is He not landing in force, invading it? Is it that He is not strong enough? Well, Christians think He is going to land in force; we do not know when. But we can guess why He is delaying. He wants to give us the chance of joining His side freely. When the author walks on to the stage the play is over. 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? Now, today, this moment, is our chance to choose the right side. God is holding back to give us that chance. It will not last forever.

#### **IMPLICATIONS OF CHAPTER 5**

The great truth and paradox of the Christian life: *Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.* (Philippians 2:5-6)

Here is the link for class tomorrow, Wednesday, February 24, at 7:15 p.m. ET--please feel free to share the link with any friends who may be interested:

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/99307536525>

I look forward to "seeing" you tomorrow in class on Zoom!

Further up and further in,  
Brian+

Music link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HlHkI3LGj4w>

"If With All Your Heart You Truly Seek Me" begins at 5:30 on the recording

(You may want to watch the entire video, as it is from the 15th century chapel at Magdalen College, where Lewis worshiped on a daily basis for decades)

Video link to last week's class:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zMdO5FIHeEI>

Podcast link:

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/episode-14-book-2-chapter-5-the-practical-conclusion/id1537579476?i=1000509707406>

Audio on church website link:

<https://www.stphilipchurchsc.org/mere-christianity-/episode/2021-02-17/episode-14-book-2-chapter-5:-the-practical-conclusion>