

Dear fellow pilgrims,

Last week, we began our journey into the third book of *Mere Christianity*, entitled *Christian Behavior*, which is based on broadcast talks that C.S. Lewis gave in 1942 at the BBC as the German bombing of England continued. The first chapter in Book 3, "The Three Parts of Morality," is a marvelous explication of moral theology, complete with some of Lewis's best analogies, and helps explain much of the confusion about morality that we see in our culture today.

Here is a summary of the key points we discussed last week:

Chapter 1: The Three Parts Of Morality

--**The Nature of Morality** There is a story about a schoolboy who was asked what he thought God was like. He replied that, as far as he could make out, God was "The sort of person who is always snooping round to see if anyone is enjoying himself and then trying to stop it." And I am afraid that is the sort of idea that the word Morality raises in a good many people's minds: something that interferes, something that stops you having a good time. In reality, moral rules are directions for running the human machine. Every moral rule is there to prevent a breakdown, or a strain, or a friction, in the running of that machine. That is why these rules at first seem to be constantly interfering with our natural inclinations. When you are being taught how to use any machine, the instructor keeps on saying, "No, don't do it like that," because there are all sorts of things that look right and seem to you the natural way of treating the machine, but do not really work.

--**Three ways of going wrong** There are two ways in which the human machine goes wrong. One is when human individuals drift apart from one another, or else collide with one another and do one another damage, by cheating or bullying. The other is when things go wrong inside the individual—when the different parts of him (his different faculties and desires and so on) either drift apart or interfere with one another.

Analogy—Ships Think of us as a fleet of ships sailing in formation. The voyage will be a success only, in the first place, if the ships do not collide and get in one another's way; and, secondly, if each ship is seaworthy and has her engines in good order. As a matter of fact, you cannot have either of these two things without the other. If the ships keep on having collisions they will not remain seaworthy very long. On the other hand, if their steering gears are out of order they will not be able to avoid collisions. We have not asked where the fleet is trying to get to, And however well the fleet sailed, its voyage would be a failure if it were meant to reach New York and actually arrived at Calcutta.

Three Parts of Morality Morality, then, seems to be concerned with three things:

--fair play and harmony between individuals

--tidying up or harmonising the things inside each individual

--the general purpose of human life as a whole: what man was made for:

When people say in the newspapers that we are striving for Christian moral standards, they usually mean that we are striving for kindness and fair play between nations, and classes, and individuals; that is, they are thinking only of the first thing. When a man says about something he wants to do, "It can't be wrong because it doesn't do anyone else any harm," he is thinking only of the first thing... --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 telling the ships how to steer so as to avoid collisions if, in fact, they are such crazy old tubs that they cannot be steered at all? 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? ...All that thinking [about societal improvement] 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.

Individual Morality and Beliefs about the Universe Different beliefs about the universe lead to different behaviour...Religion involves a series of statements about facts, which must be either true or false. If they are true, one set of conclusions will follow about the right sailing of the human fleet: if they are false, quite a different set. For example, let us go back to the man who says that a thing cannot be wrong unless it hurts some other human being. He quite understands that he must not damage the other ships in the convoy, but he honestly thinks that what he does to his own ship is simply his own business.

Whose Are You? But does it not make a great difference whether his ship is his own property or not? ...If individuals live only seventy years, then a state, or a nation, or a civilisation, which may last for a thousand years, is more important than an individual. But if Christianity is true, then the individual is not only more important but incomparably more important, for he is everlasting and the life of a state or a civilisation, compared with his, is only a moment.

Conclusion It seems, then, that if we are to think about morality, we must think of all three departments: between persons, within each person, and between the person and God.

IMPLICATIONS

1. We as Christians need to re-engage with the Truth and Beauty of God's Law as expressed in Psalm 19:

*The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.
Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they reveal knowledge.
They have no speech, they use no words; no sound is heard from them.
Yet their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.
In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.
It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, like a champion rejoicing to run his course.
It rises at one end of the heavens and makes its circuit to the other; nothing is deprived of its warmth.
The law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul.
The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple.
The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart.
The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes.
The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever.
The decrees of the Lord are firm, and all of them are righteous.
They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the honeycomb.
By them your servant is warned; in keeping them there is great reward.
But who can discern their own errors? Forgive my hidden faults.
Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me.
Then I will be blameless, innocent of great transgression.
May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.*

2. Building Bridges 2 Corinthians 5:18-21

All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

We live in a culture where there can still be some dialog among those with differing viewpoints about the morality of different behaviors that affect others. However, the second level about morality of the Self is increasingly viewed as off-limits for the same reason as the third level about who made the Self; the most strident voices in our culture today proclaim loudly that identity and personal morality are constructs that are solely the purview of the individual—you are your own creator and are responsible to no one except yourself; your highest good is to create and speak “your” truth. How does one get around this?

You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. Matt. 5:43-45

Here is the link for class tomorrow, Wednesday, March 3, 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: (Psalm 19, chanted by the Choir of Exeter Cathedral):

www.youtube.com/watch?v=QpqZL4L9qKI

Video link to last week's class:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B_E0Q0TM4UA

Podcast link:

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/mere-christianity-episode-15-book-3-chapter-1-three/id1537579476?i=1000510631590>

Audio on church website link:

<https://www.stphilipschurchsc.org/mere-christianity-/episode/2021-02-24/mere-christianity-episode-15-book-3-chapter-1:-the-three-parts-of-morality>