

Mere Christianity

Session 5.3 What Christians Believe

1. Rival Conceptions of God (Book 2, Chapter 1)

- a. Other than pure atheism, Christians do not have to believe that all other theistic faiths are entirely incorrect.
- b. Wherever there is consistency, both views may well be correct.
- c. It is only in the inconsistencies where we see the difference between Christianity and the other theistic beliefs.
- d. By definition, being a Christian means believing that our views on God are correct and any opposing view is wrong. This would also be true of any other religious system.
- e. As a theistic religion, Christianity is in the majority of historical beliefs that reject atheism and materialism including ancient Greeks, Romans, Stoics, Platonists, Hindus, Muslims and many others.
- f. Major views:
 - i. Pantheism – god is beyond good and evil. Everything is part of god and he/it is part of everything.
 - ii. Monotheism – there is one God who exists separate from His creation.
 1. Judaism
 2. Islam
 3. Christianity
- g. Christianity opposes pantheism because it observes that many things in the universe have gone very wrong. Good and bad are real and meaningful distinctives of the known world.
- h. The question that must be answered by theists is, “If God is good and He made the world, why has it gone so very wrong?”
- i. As an atheist, Lewis objected to God because the universe seemed to be cruel and unjust.
 - i. Where did the idea of just and unjust come from.
 - ii. We can identify a line is crooked only by understanding what a straight line should be.
 - iii. If everything was bad (chaotic, disorganized as a result of a cosmic explosion), how would anyone ever have a sense that it was either good or bad in some way?
 - iv. Man feels wet in water, a fish would not feel wet.
 - v. In his very act of trying to prove God did not exist because of cruelty, wickedness and the corruption he witnessed, he was forced to assume that his idea of justice or good must have come from a source outside of the corrupted universe.
 - vi. If the whole universe had no meaning, it would have been impossible to discover that it had no meaning just as if light did not exist, then no one could properly understand darkness. Darkness would be a word without meaning.
 - vii. Therefore, atheism is just too simple of a philosophical viewpoint and must be rejected since we as humans do see a world out of order and also have a sense of what order it should be in.

2. The Invasion (Book 2, Chapter 2).

- a. Christianity is not simple. A watered down version that attempts to take the good and leave out the challenging aspects of the Christian faith simply will not work.

- b. Real things are not simple. Fantasies might be simple, but very little we find in real life is actually “simple” when we understand all that goes into something real.
 - i. A wood table may look simple, but at the atomic level it manifests a complexity that challenges the most scientific and intellectual thinkers among us.
 - ii. Even the ability to see the table with a human eye is incredible complex.
 - iii. A child’s prayer may appear simple, but analyzing the prayer and its intended meaning of praying to an infinite and all-powerful God is certainly not simple.
 - iv. We may demand simplicity in our religion, but that will not lead us to any meaningful understanding of truth.
- c. Skeptics often complain that Christianity is just too complicated and even asset that if God were to make a religion, He would have made it simple according to their liking.
- d. Christians should be on guard against these attacks of wanting a simple religion because God has given us the unalterable facts about Himself and our relationship to Him. If this does not meet a definition of “simple” then so be it. Christianity is not simple because God is not simple.
- e. Reality is often odd in addition to being complex. In many things we observe, we find oddities that go against what we might have expected as a inquiring child.
 - i. Planets in the solar system are very different from one another, not what anyone would have predicted or expected.
 - ii. The act of sexual reproduction does not normally meet with a child’s inquisitive expectation of “where do babies come from?”.
- f. What we observe is that reality is often not what we would have expected. Christianity is not what anyone would have guessed or made up. It has the kind of twists and unexpected doctrines that real things have that are not made up.
- g. Simplicities are “boys’ philosophies” that must be left behind to discover real truth.
- h. The reality is that we observe a universe that is obviously bad perhaps without meaning, but within the universe we have creatures that know that it is bad by not fully conforming to our inner sense of goodness.
- i. Christianity and Dualism are the only remaining theistic views that address the reality of what we observe.
 - i. Dualism asserts that there are two equal and independent powers engaged in an eternal battle.
 - ii. One of these powers prefers good and the other bad.
 - iii. Both powers are speculated to be eternal and neither made the other.
 - iv. The bad likes hatred and cruelty while the other likes love and mercy.
 - v. If these powers existed, would it just be a preference that most men prefer love and mercy over hatred and cruelty like some prefer beer to cider?
 - vi. If it is merely preference, then we must give up using the terms “good” or “evil.”
 - vii. Since “good” and “evil” are not merely preferences, we must claim that one of the two powers is actually right and the other is actually wrong.
 - viii. But this puts a third concept in play that is over and above both of these two powers and the one conforms more closely to this objective standard than the other power.
 - ix. Whoever made this standard would be the real God or power, not the good and evil powers in their struggle for dominance.
- j. Can badness or evil exist independently of goodness or proper actions?
 - i. The bad power of dualism must like badness for its own sake.
 - ii. We have no real experience with such a motivation.

- iii. People are cruel either because they have a perversion that gives them perverted pleasure, or they desire to gain from their act of cruelty (money, power, safety).
- iv. But pleasure, power, safety, and money are all good things. The badness comes in the form of pursuing good things in a wrong or corrupted way.
- v. People can be good for the mere sake of goodness. People cannot be bad for the mere sake of badness.
- vi. No one ever did an act of cruelty just because cruelty is wrong. The act was done because cruelty was pleasurable or useful.
- vii. Badness cannot succeed on its own. It requires a corruption of a good thing in order to be to be pursued in an act of badness.
- viii. Goodness is goodness without qualification. Badness is spoiled goodness.
- ix. There must be something originally good in order for it to become spoiled.
- x. In order to classify sadism as a sexual perversion, we must know what proper sexual behavior is.
- xi. We can explain the perverted by looking at the good. We cannot explain the good by observing the perverted.
- k. In order for the bad power of dualism to be bad, it must have started out as good and then became corrupted to pursuing evil in order to gain a good result in a bad way.
- l. Therefore, the bad power must have received his goodness from the good power and therefore could not exist independently.
- m. In order to exist, the bad power must have been granted existence, intelligence and a will. But existence, intelligence, and a free will are all good things that did not originate with him.
- n. This explanation of the bad power of dualism naturally parallels the biblical description of Satan as a fallen angel. That is, he was once good but his goodness was corrupted by pursuing something good in a corrupted way.
- o. Therefore, dualism does not work as it is proposed.
- p. Christianity agrees that the universe is at war, but not among equal powers. It is a civil war and a rebellion.
- q. Christians, and all of humanity, are currently living in the enemy-occupied territory.
- r. Christianity is the account of how the rightful King landed in enemy-occupied territory in disguise and is calling all His followers to engage in a campaign of sabotage against the ruler of this world.
- s. The Bible and church attendance gives us orders from the King on how to defeat the enemy.
- t. That is why Satan desires to keep people from both. His weapons against us are playing on our conceit, laziness, and intellectual snobbery.

3. The Shocking Alternative (Book 2, Chapter 3).

- a. Is the evil power that has made himself prince of this world in God's will or not?
- b. God created beings that have free will and it means that creatures can either do right or wrong.
- c. Could there ever be a real choice in life if wrong was not an option available?
- d. If something is free to be good, then it must also be free to be bad.
- e. It is the granting of free will that makes evil possible.
- f. A world with creatures that functioned like pre-programmed machines would hardly be worth creating in the first place.
- g. The expressing of love demands freedom. Love is simply not possible without a free will.
- h. Of course God knew that His creatures could choose to do evil, but apparently He thought it was worth it in order to offer His love to them and to receive love in response from them.

- i. Perhaps someone may desire to argue with God about free will and love, but arguing with God is always a losing proposition. He can never be wrong, but we often are.
- j. God even gives us the freedom and ability to argue with Him, even if that is not His will for us.
- k. If God thinks this state of war between good and evil in order to offer free will to creature is worth the cost then we should accept that it is a good and proper condition for us to live in.
- l. The greater the capacity of a creature to do good also represents a greater capacity to do evil.
 - i. A cow cannot be exceedingly good of bad.
 - ii. A dog has more capacity for good and bad than that of a cow.
 - iii. A child has more capacity than a dog.
 - iv. A man of genius even more.
 - v. An angelic being even more than any man.
- m. The moment a creature has self will is the moment it is in danger of putting itself first and therefore be out of order with God's will and purposes.
- n. Satan's sin emerged out of his enormous capacity to do either good or evil by his free will.
- o. Satan corrupts human thinking by convincing us that we can be our own gods.
 - i. Giving credit to ourselves for our very existence.
 - ii. Declaring ourselves to be our own masters.
 - iii. Inventing a form of happiness apart from the God who created us.
 - iv. It is from this corruption that all forms of wickedness have come into the world: poverty, ambition, war, prostitution, socioeconomic classes/castes, slavery.
 - v. Man fails to find something to make himself happy apart from God.
- p. True happiness apart from God is impossible because He made us to be in relationship with Him. No substitute will ever fulfill human lives the way God is able to satisfy us.
- q. God cannot give us happiness apart from Himself. There is no such thing.
- r. All human institutions eventually fail. Some fatal flaw always creeps in, usually based on pride and selfish people in charge.

4. God's response to Satan's corruption and man's complicit rebellion against His will.

- a. He gave us a conscience to tell us right from wrong.
- b. He selected the Jews to know first-hand what kind of God He is.
 - i. One God.
 - ii. Intensely interested in proper conduct.
- c. He then sent Jesus who did and said things that are utterly shocking to come from the mouth of a Man.
 - i. He claims to be God.
 - ii. He claims to forgive sins.
 - iii. He claims to have always existed.
 - iv. He claims He will return to judge the sins of the world.
- d. As a Jew, Jesus was not claiming pantheism, but rather that the One true God had come as a Man and this is the most shocking thing ever to be uttered by human lips.
- e. The claim to forgive sins would be preposterous if Jesus was not God.
 - i. A man can forgive offenses against himself, but not others.
 - ii. What would we say of an ordinary man who forgives someone for stepping on someone else's toes or stealing their money? Asinine fortuity is how Lewis describes such behavior.
 - iii. Yet, this is what Jesus did. He forgave sins as if He were the person chiefly offended by all such sinful actions.
 - iv. This make sense only if He actually was God whose laws of good and bad were broken and if He was injured by man's sins.

- f. Yet even Jesus' enemies do not get the impression that Jesus was silly or conceited by making these statements.
- g. Christ says He is humble and meek and we believe Him not noticing that these are not accurate descriptions if He was not God.
- h. This line of reasoning should prevent anyone from making the foolish statement that Jesus was just a good, moral teacher.
- i. Jesus left us only three possible conclusions concerning His words and conduct:
 - i. Lunatic – like someone claiming to be a poached egg.
 - ii. Liar
 - iii. Lord – the very God He claimed and demonstrated Himself to be.
- j. You can call Him a fool; you can spit at Him and mock Him, or you can fall down at His feet and call Him Lord and God.
- k. However, you cannot patronizingly call Him a great human teacher. He did not leave that option open to us and He did not intent to.

5. The Perfect Penitent (Book 2, Chapter 4).

- a. With Lunatic and Liar invalid options, we must conclude that Jesus was in fact God, or the Son of God, who came into this enemy-occupied territory in human likeness.
- b. For what purpose did He come? Death and resurrection to life (teaching is secondary).
- c. We understand that Christ's death paid for our sins and defeated death itself.
- d. This is the basic doctrine of Christianity, though there are many theories about how His death actually accomplished this for humanity.
- e. Our sins put us under an unpayable debt to a righteous God; Christ's payment of our debt in His own blood is an essential teaching of the Christian faith.
- f. Turning to Christ from our sins is called repentance, and it is no fun at all.
- g. Repentance means unlearning all the self-conceit and self-will that we have been training ourselves to obey for years.
- h. It means killing a part of yourself and undergoing a kind of death.
- i. But there's a catch. Only a bad person needs to repent, but only a good person can repent perfectly.
- j. The worse you are the more you need to repent, but the less able you are to do so.
- k. Only a perfect person could repent perfectly, but a perfect person would have no need to repent.
- l. This is where God has stepped in to help with our need and inability to perfectly repent.
- m. We need God's help to do something that God Himself never does at all since He is perfect.
- n. Nothing in God's nature corresponds to repenting from sin.
- o. This is where Jesus' role as God-Man steps in.
 - i. He is perfect, so He can repent perfectly whereas sinful man cannot.
 - ii. As a man, He can experience death whereas God in His divine character cannot.
 - iii. He can surrender and submit to God's will perfectly, for He is God.
 - iv. Our attempts at repentance and death to self can only be accomplished if the God-Man helps us He has done it perfectly.

6. The Practical Conclusion (Book 2, Chapter 5).

- a. The Christian belief is that somehow we share in the humility and suffering of Christ and this allows us to share in His conquest of death and are offered eternal life instead.
- b. This is far more than just trying to follow His teachings.

- c. In Christ, all believers are a new creation of God.
 - d. Our life in the flesh was the result of mother and father (we had nothing to do with it).
 - e. Likewise, our new life in Christ is the result of His work; we had nothing to do with it.
 - f. There are three things that spread the Christ life to us:
 - i. Believe/faith
 - ii. Baptism
 - iii. Communion.
 - g. We believe in these doctrines because Christ gave them to us to accept by faith.
 - h. Nearly everything we accept is based on faith, not direct evidence.
 - i. Places we have never been, like New York or Tokyo
 - ii. Solar System and celestial bodies
 - iii. Atoms
 - iv. Historical facts
 - i. We believe because reliable and trustworthy people who witnessed these things wrote them down to tell us about them.
- 7. Why did God come “in disguise” to undermine the schemes of the devil rather than coming in force to overthrow his rule?**
- a. He desires to have humanity join Him willingly of their free wills.
 - b. When God/Christ comes in force, it will all be over. There will be no additional opportunity to choose sides.
 - c. On that day, it will be beautiful and glorious to those who have chosen Him; conversely it will be terrible, dreadful and inescapable to those who rejected Him.