

College Christian Study -- Sunday, Feb.27th, 2005 -- **Mere Christianity – by C.S. Lewis**  
Book II: What Christians Believe (\*chapters 3-5\*)

-Chapter 3 is about the problem of evil, free will, and the shocking alternative solution to both...God sends us His Son, our Redeemer.

-Chapter 4 treats the doctrines of repentance and the atonement and that only Christ can be “The Perfect Penitent.”

-Chapter 5 is a discussion of the practical conclusion: how the new life is spread, the responsibility of a Christian here, and why God has delayed landing in force.

### **Chapter 3: The Shocking Alternative**

Here Lewis affirmed that an evil power has become the “Prince of this World.” Problems are raised: Is this situation God’s will or not? Either way you answer seems to have difficulties: If this is God’s will, there is something quite strange in this. If it isn’t the will of God, how do you account for all this given the fact that God is an absolute power? The implications of free will and where the dark power went wrong are discussed. Then the “real shock” is revealed: God sends the Redeemer.

God created us with free will. We can do either right or wrong. Lewis could not imagine a really free creature who had no possibility of doing wrong. Why did God give us free will? Even though evil is made possible in free will, it is also the only way love, goodness, or real joys are possible.

How would you respond to someone saying, “I envision a better world than God created.”? When we really understand the implications of being created in God’s image, of having free will, then we will see to argue we could have done better seems ridiculous. God has chosen a particular people and has spent centuries revealing the “sort of God He was” to them.

Now comes the real shock...God sends, in essence, Himself! What this man claimed was the “most shocking thing...ever...uttered” by the lips of man. Next Lewis treated what he called the “really foolish thing” some people say about Jesus: ‘I accept Him as a great moral teacher but not His claim to be God’. If He said these kinds of things and was not God, then He was certainly not a great moral teacher. Lewis made his famous statement: “He would either be a lunatic...or else He would be the Devil of Hell. Son of God, madman, or worse! Jesus did not leave it open to us to “come with any patronizing nonsense about Him being a great human teacher.” Either He is infinitely more or infinitely less. You must choose. (pg. 56)

### **Chapter 4: The Perfect Penitent**

The central Christian belief is that Jesus in dying put us right with God and gave us a new start. But how is this possible? Only Jesus, the Christ, God incarnate, can be the perfect penitent.

Before he accepted Christ, Lewis was under the impression that the first point of Christian belief was that God wanted to punish us for having deserted Him and joining Satan. But Jesus “volunteered” for the punishment, and God “let us off.” But Lewis maintained this theory is not Christianity. At the center of all Christian doctrine is that Jesus’ death “put us right” and gives us a “fresh start” with the Father. Lewis said that there are many theories about how this works but all Christians agree that it does work.

Now, the hitch: We need to be good to repent. The bad man needs repentance, but only a good one can repent perfectly. The more evil a man is, the more he needs repentance, yet the less he is able to repent. It turns out the only person who could do so faultlessly would be a perfect person. And, of course, such a person would not need to repent!

This repentance is really a description of what going to God is like. It is not so much what God demands as it is what we must do to get back to Him and our true, intended self. But because we have become bad and need repentance, this badness disables us, keeps us from what we should do. God must help us.

SO: What if God became a man? What if human nature, which knows suffering and death, could be combined with divine nature in one person? Such an individual could help us, could surrender His will, suffer, and die, because He was man. He could also do it absolutely because He was God. Only if God did this for us could we go through this, and God could only do so as a man.

### **Chapter 5: The Practical Conclusion**

This chapter reminds us of why Christ's could be the perfect surrender and humiliation. But what spreads this new life?...baptism, belief, and Communion. Christians have the Christ-life in them and thus can repent when they stumble. But with this, they have the responsibility to spread this life to the outside world. God delayed His landing in force to give us a chance to accept Him before it was too late.

In Jesus' example of perfection, we believe that we must share in the humility and suffering, and if we do, we will share in His victory over death and have a new life in Him. More than just trying to follow His teachings, how do we share in this new life? Also, how should we share (the possibly fearful to others) teaching of Christ's authority?

A "possible objection" from non-believers: "Why didn't God land in force, instead of in enemy-occupied territory in "disguise" as it were? Why not act in force instead of starting a "secret authority" to defeat Satan?" .... He acted thus, Christians think, to give us a chance to freely join His side. But one day He will come in force. The people who raise this objection do not realize their own questions. It will do no good, after God has landed in force, to say we are on His side. It will be too late to choose sides then.

So, back to repentance...The old bumper stickers: "Christians are not perfect. They are just forgiven." – that seems to sum it up just right.