

College Christian Study -- Sunday, Jan. 23rd, 2005 -- Mere Christianity – by C.S. Lewis
Introduction and Book Overview

Preface (by C.S. Lewis):

In this book, C.S. Lewis is not trying to convert anyone to his own position. Ever since he became a Christian he had thought that the best, perhaps the only service he could do for his unbelieving neighbors was to explain and defend the belief that has been common to nearly all Christians at all times.

He wrote not to expound something he could call “my religion”, but to expound ‘mere’ Christianity, which is what it is and what it was long before he was born and whether he liked it or not.

One of the things Christians are disagreed about is the importance of their disagreements. When two Christians of different denominations start arguing, it is usually not long before one asks whether such-and-such a point ‘really matters’ and the other replies: ‘Matter? Why, it’s absolutely essential.’”

All this is said simply in order to make clear what kind of book C.S. Lewis was trying to write; not in the least to conceal or evade responsibility for his own beliefs.

Far deeper objections may be felt – and have been expressed – against his use of the word *Christian* to mean one who accepts the common doctrines of Christianity. Now if we allow people to start spiritualizing and refining, or as they might say ‘deepening’, the sense of the word *Christian* it will speedily become a useless word. It is not for us to say who, in the deepest sense, is or is not close to the spirit of Christ. We do not see into men’s hearts. Therefore we cannot judge, and are indeed forbidden to judge.

When you have reached your place with God, be kind to those who have chosen different doors and to those who are still wandering in the halls. If they are wrong they need your prayers all the more; and if they are your enemies, then you are under orders to pray for them. That is one of the rules of common to the whole house (i.e. “community”) of God.

Foreword (by Kathleen Norris):

C.S. Lewis, who was once described by a friend as a man in love with the imagination, betrays a deep faith in the power of the human imagination to reveal the truth about our condition and bring us to hope.

The “mere” Christianity of C.S. Lewis is not a philosophy or even a theology that may be considered, argued, and put away in a book on a shelf. It is a way of life, one that challenges us always to remember that “there are no ordinary people”. Once we tune ourselves to this reality, Lewis believes, we open ourselves to imaginatively transform our lives in such a way that evil diminishes and good prevails. **It is what Christ asked of us in taking on our humanity, sanctifying our flesh, and asking us in turn to reveal God to one another.**

The Christianity Lewis embraces is humane, but not easy: it asks us to recognize that the great religious struggle is not fought on a spectacular battleground, but within the ordinary human heart, when every morning we awake and feel the pressures of the day crowding in on us, and we must decide what sort of immortals we wish to be.