

# A STUDY OF MERE CHRISTIANITY

Preface | Chapter 1.1 | Chapter 1.2



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## C.S. LEWIS (1898-1963)

- Born in Belfast, Ireland.
- Enrolled in Oxford University in 1916.
- Volunteered for the British Army in 1917.
- Graduated in 1925 and took a job on the faculty of Oxford.
- Member of the “Inklings,” a renowned group of intellectuals and writers at Oxford.

“While Lewis grew up in a Christian family, he lost his faith as a teen. He was turned off by dreary church services as well as the problem of sin in the world. But after going back to Oxford after WWI, he became confused by the existence of Christianity and God. After a number of evening discussions with friends like Tolkien, Hugo Dyson, and other members of The Inklings, Lewis ultimately converted to Christianity in 1929. Later he wrote that he was reluctant and unwilling to convert to Christianity.”

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## HOW DID “MERE CHRISTIANITY” COME TO BE?

- During the height of WW2, the BBC sought to uplift the spirits of the British people through the radio.
- Part of this endeavor involved speaking on religion and faith.
- It was decided to enlist a “non-church” spokesman so as not to appear too formal or dogmatic.
- First radio broadcast was on August 6, 1941. The series was called “Right and Wrong: A Clue to the Meaning of the Universe.”
- The talks were wildly popular and eventually compiled into a book in 1952.

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## THE PREFACE

### Outline:

- The Purpose of the Book
- On the word “Christian”
- The Hallway Illustration

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## THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

For I am not writing to expound something I could call ‘my religion’, but to expound ‘mere’ Christianity, which is what it is and what it was long before I was born and whether I like it or not.

1. Questions that divide Christians often involve “points of high Theology or even ecclesiastical history.
2. Discussion of disputed topics does not help bring outsiders into Christianity.
3. Others have written extensively on these areas already.

**“One of the things Christians are disagreed about is the importance of their disagreements.” Preface, p.VIII**

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## ON THE WORD “CHRISTIAN”

**“Who are you, to lay down who is, and who is not a Christian?” Preface, p.XI**

When you called someone ‘a gentleman’ you were not paying him a compliment, but merely stating a fact. If you said he was not ‘a gentleman’ you were not insulting him, but giving information.

When a word ceases to be a term of description and becomes merely a term of praise, it no longer tells you facts about the object: it only tells you about the speaker’s attitude to that object.

**“We simply cannot, without disaster, use language as these objectors want us to use it.”**

**Preface, p.XI**

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## THE HALLWAY ILLUSTRATION

I hope no reader will suppose that ‘mere’ Christianity is here put forward as an alternative to the creeds of the existing communions—as if a man could adopt it in preference to Congregationalism or Greek Orthodoxy or anything else. It is more like a hall out of which doors open into several rooms.

- The hallway is for waiting – to truly live you must enter a room.
- Keep asking which door is the true one, not which one pleases you the most.
- Try to obey the rules that are common to the whole house.



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## BOOK ONE: RIGHT AND WRONG AS A CLUE TO THE MEANING OF THE UNIVERSE

### CHAPTER ONE: THE LAW OF HUMAN NATURE

#### Outline:

- There is a “Law of Human Nature”
- Humans aren’t good at keeping it

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## THERE IS A “LAW OF HUMAN NATURE”

Quarrelling means trying to show that the other man is in the wrong. And there would be no sense in trying to do that unless you and he had some sort of agreement as to what Right and Wrong are; just as there would be no sense in saying that a footballer had committed a foul unless there was some agreement about the rules of football.

1. This “law” applies to all people.
2. In order for us communicate with other people, there must be a shared basis of knowledge.
3. This is the one natural law that mankind is free to disobey.

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## THERE IS A “LAW OF HUMAN NATURE”

The “Law of Human Nature” contradicts \_\_\_\_\_.

“The doctrine that no ideas or beliefs are universally true.”

Can you think of any absolute truth claims in the Bible?

But the most remarkable thing is this. Whenever you find a man who says he does not believe in a real Right and Wrong, you will find the same man going back on this a moment later.

“Relativism is the belief that what can be known, especially in relation to moral issues, is dependent upon one’s own personal views or the collective beliefs of one’s culture. It is a theory that is in direct opposition to the concept of absolute truth claims. An absolute truth is something that is true for all people at all times and is not subject to change.”

*The Popular Encyclopedia of Apologetics*, p.418

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## HUMANS AREN'T GOOD AT KEEPING IT

I hope you will not misunderstand what I am going to say. I am not preaching, and Heaven knows I do not pretend to be better than anyone else. I am only trying to call attention to a fact; the fact that this year, or this month, or, more likely, this very day, we have failed to practise ourselves the kind of behaviour we expect from other people.

### Chapter 1.1 Summary

1. Human beings ought to act a certain way (and they all believe this).
2. Human beings do not act this way.

So far, Lewis is speaking about Christianity but hasn't quoted from the Bible. Can you think of any Bible passages that confirm what he is saying in this chapter?

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## BOOK ONE: RIGHT AND WRONG AS A CLUE TO THE MEANING OF THE UNIVERSE

### CHAPTER TWO: SOME OBJECTIONS

#### Outline:

#### Three Objections About...

- Instinct vs. Law
- The Origin of the Law
- An Important Difference

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## INSTINCT VS. LAW

“Isn’t what you call the Moral Law simply our herd instinct and hasn’t it been developed just like all our other instincts?” (p.9)

1. Feeling a *desire* to do something is different from feeling you *should* do something.
2. When two or more instincts contradict, we often feel that we should choose the weaker instinct.
3. There is no single instinct that is always, or never, suppressed by the Moral Law.



How does Lewis’ example of the piano help us understand the difference between instinct and Moral Law?

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## THE ORIGIN OF LAW

“Isn’t what you call the Moral Law just a social convention, something that is put into us by education?” (p.12)

1. The Moral Law is consistent across cultures and eras, even though individual conventions differ greatly.
2. The fact that there are better, or worse, cultural practices is proof that there is a higher morality by which we judge them.

The moment you say that one set of moral ideas can be better than another, you are, in fact, measuring them both by a standard, saying that one of them conforms to that standard more nearly than the other. But the standard that measures two things is something different from either.

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## UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCE

“Three hundred years ago people in England were putting witches to death. Was that what you call the Rule of Human Nature or Right Conduct?” (p.14)

1. You must distinguish between a difference of moral principle and a difference of belief about facts.

How is the distinction above very helpful when considering how we defend/talk about our Christian faith?

### Chapter 1.2 Summary

1. Lewis responds to several objections about the Law of Human nature which try to make it more subjective than it is.

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## CLASS ONE CHAPTER SUMMARIES

### Preface

This book attempts to show the rational value inherent to Christianity, not to say everything about Christianity.

### 1.1

There is Law of Human Nature and people are not good at keeping it.

### 1.2

The Law of Human Nature is objective.

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