Mere Christianity - C. S. Lewis

Reading Guide

*I use “moral standard” to refer to Lewis’ “Law of Human Nature” since that makes more sense to me.

*I added Bible references where I thought of them- Lewis does not quote the Bible in this book since his main audience was non-Christians.

Book 1: Right and Wrong as a clue to the meaning of the Universe

B1-Ch1: The Law of Human Nature

- We all live as if there is a Moral Law or Standard
- Only humans have a moral standard & we're free to disobey it
- All cultures have a similar standard
- Arguing about fairness or providing excuses for our behavior just proves it exists
- We all fail to follow the moral standard (Rom 3:10)

Discussion Questions

- Do you agree that a moral standard exists?
- Can you think of a time when you or someone else assumed a moral standard? -A time you have been wronged or a time you wronged someone else? In the interaction of children?

B1-Ch2: Some Objections

- Is the Moral Standard just herd instinct?
  - No this is what judges between instincts, usually directing toward the weaker, less advantageous thing.
  - None of our instincts are always good or bad.
  - **Interesting Quote**: “The most dangerous thing you can do is to take any one impulse of your own nature and set it up as the thing you ought to follow at all costs. There is not one of them which will not make us into devils if we set it up as an absolute guide.“
- Is the Moral Standard a social convention, taught to us?
  - No, all cultures have the same basic standard & where there are differences we see one as better.
  - There are social conventions that we are taught, often mixed in with the moral standard, but they vary from culture to culture.

Discussion Questions

- When are we most likely to view the moral standard as herd instinct or social convention? (When is this really hard?)
- When is it hardest to know if something is the moral standard or a social convention?

B1-Ch3: The Reality of the Law

- We have a Moral standard, but can't keep it. This has consequences.
- It's not like scientific laws, which nature has to obey- they describe what always happens, not what ought to happen (descriptive versus prescriptive).
- Attempts to explain the moral standard away (more objections):
  - "Wrong" just means inconvenient? No- good is often inconvenient.
  - "Good" is just what's best for society? No- that doesn't explain why I should care about society. Why shouldn't I be selfish (as macro-evolution suggests)?
- Conclusion: This moral standard/law is something none of us made, but presses on us. (So, it must come from outside of us).

Discussion questions

- Have you ever heard someone say that what is moral/ethical can be determined by whatever is for the 'greater good?' How would you answer them?

B1-Ch4: What Lies Behind the Law

- Man asks, "What is the universe and how did it come to be?" There are 2 main views:
  - Materialistic view: no mind behind the universe. It just always was, for no reason
  - Religious view: something like a mind is behind the universe
  - Lewis says both views have always existed
- Science (observation of the physical) cannot help here. We can't observe this. We must look beyond science.
- We are experts on ourselves and we see that something outside ourselves tells us we ought to behave a certain way. The only way to study this outside force is to look inward to study ourselves.
- **Interesting quote:** "If there was a controlling power outside the universe, it could not show itself to us as one of the facts inside the universe – no more than an architect of a house could actually be a wall or staircase or fireplace in that house. The only way in which we could expect it to show itself would be inside ourselves as an influence or a command, trying to get us to behave a certain way. And that is just what we do find inside ourselves. Surely this ought to arouse our suspicions?"
- Conclusion: The law (moral standard) shows us that must be a law-giver. A law-giver must be something like a mind.

Discussion Questions

- When you look inward, what forces from beyond the world do you seem to be experiencing?
- Can you think of examples of times that people have tried to use science to explain something beyond science (the observation of the physical)?

B1-Ch5: We Have Cause to be Uneasy

- Feeling tricked or annoyed?
  - "God" seems like an old idea. You want "progress" but older ideas may be true, in which case you should return to them.
  - We aren't claiming all Christianity is true, just that there's a creator of a moral standard, who must be a 'person' who is 'good.'
    - If God is good & we are not, we must depend on mercy- that can be terrifying!
  - Christianity ("repent for forgiveness") only makes sense if you realize there's a law you broke, from a law-giver.
- **Interesting Quote:** "All I am doing is to ask people to face the facts—to understand the questions which Christianity claims to answer. And they are very terrifying facts. I wish it was possible to say something more agreeable. But I must say what I think true. Of course, I quite agree that the Christian religion is, in the long run, a thing of unspeakable comfort. But it does not begin in comfort; it begins in the dismay I have been describing, and it is no use at all trying to go on to that comfort without first going through that dismay. In religion, as in war and everything else, comfort is the one thing you cannot get by looking for it. If you look for truth, you may find comfort in the end: if you look for comfort you will not get either comfort or truth-only soft soap and wishful thinking to begin with and, in the end, despair."

Discussion questions

- Have you ever tried to explain Christianity to someone who did not believe they were breaking a universal moral standard? Did they struggle to make sense of it?
- Are there any other ideas someone must understand before they believe in God?