



The Screwtape Letters: Letters from a Senior to a Junior Devil

Lewis CS
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The *Screwtape Letters* (1942) was written by atheist-turned-Christian CS Lewis. It takes a refreshing look at Christianity, broken down into its simplest concepts. This work of fiction, a scary reflection of reality, both identifies Christian struggles and provides practical solutions to battles every Christian must face. Although this article will attempt to pay homage to this book, no praise can do justice to how it can revolutionise one's perspective on Christianity, God, and the Devil.

The narrative takes an epistolary form, detailing imagined instructions from an experienced 'senior' demon, Screwtape, to his nephew, Wormwood. Discussion centres around Wormwood's 'patient', a newly converted Christian, and the various trials and temptations he faces. The universality of these human experiences make this book resonate with Christians and non-Christians alike.

Lewis in his brilliance captures the timeless nature of humanity. He satirises human folly in pursuing things we feel we 'ought' to rather than pursuits which will bring genuine happiness. He highlights the cognitive dissonance rampant today; Screwtape writes, 'we will make the whole universe a noise in the end'. Lewis deciphers human fickleness in our 'desire for novelty' and 'Fashions or Vogues... [which] distract the attention of men from their real dangers'. He even calls the reader out on their propensity for ultimate selfishness: 'certainly, we do not want men to allow their Christianity to flow over into their political life...we do want...to make men treat Christianity as a means...to their own advancement, but, failing that, as a means to anything – even to social justice'.

As a reader I found myself scrutinising my own heart and motives.

Although the book tackles a multitude of moral subjects – adultery, sloth, cynicism, charity, humility, war – particularly gripping was discussion surrounding pursuit of achievement and the notion of 'earning' the future. Many of us live not day-to-day but rather for an imagined future, one we do not yet possess. Lewis writes on this brilliantly: 'It is far better to make [humans] live in the Future...nearly all vices are rooted in the future...we want a whole race perpetually in pursuit of the rainbow's end, never honest, nor kind, nor happy now'. This passage is pertinent in today's consumerist world, where one is never satisfied; alas, it is our mental health and happiness that so often suffers.

Another poignant commentary is on human endurance in running the Christian race. Screwtape writes, 'the thing to avoid is the total commitment...let [the man's]...inner resolution be not to bear whatever comes to him, but to bear it "for a reasonable period"...the fun is to make the man yield just when (had he but known it) relief was almost in sight'. This resonated with me, as someone who dislikes uncertainty. Lewis here reminds us that God is in ultimate control and that we mustn't lose sight of his imminent deliverance of us.

This book provides penetrating insights into the human heart and mind through its original and radical narrative technique. It caused me both to laugh and to be deeply contemplative; it is a challenging read in that it provokes sincere self-examination. I cannot recommend it highly enough. It simply must be read. ■