

The Screwtape Letters by C. S. Lewis

temptation: how we cheat ourselves out of joy

You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore. - Psalm 16:11

Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!

- Psalm 32:11 + over 30 other similar verses in the Psalms

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. – Philippians 4:4, St. Paul from Prison

“There is not one blade of grass, there is no color in this world that is not intended to make us rejoice.”

- John Calvin

Surprised by Joy by C. S. Lewis (an autobiographical account of his conversion & early years as a Christian)

Currency → Counterfeit
Host → Parasite

Truth → Lie
Righteousness → Sin
Life → Death
Good → Evil

James 1:13-17

God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is **lured** and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to **sin**, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth **death**. Do not be **deceived**, my beloved brothers. Every **good** gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

“Readers are advised to remember that the devil is a liar.” – In Preface to the Original Edition (p. 25)

Excerpts from Screwtape:

Never forget that when we are dealing with any pleasure in its healthy and normal and satisfying form, we are, in a sense, on the Enemy's ground. I know we have won many a soul through pleasure. All the same, it is His invention, not ours. He made the pleasures: all our research so far has not enabled us to produce one. All we can do is to encourage the humans to take the pleasures which our Enemy has produced, at times, or in ways, or in degrees, which He has forbidden. Hence we always try to work away from the natural condition of any pleasure to that in which it is least natural, least redolent of its Maker, and least pleasurable. An ever increasing craving for an ever diminishing pleasure is the formula. It is more certain; and it's better style. To get the man's soul and give him nothing in return—that is what really gladdens our Father's heart. (Letter 9, p. 53)

You speak of their being great laughers. I trust this does not mean that you are under the impression that laughter as such is always in our favour. The point is worth some attention. I divide the causes of human laughter into Joy, Fun, the Joke Proper, and Flippancy. You will see the first among friends and lovers reunited on the eve of a holiday. Among adults some pretext in the way of Jokes is usually provided, but the facility with which the smallest witticisms produce laughter at such a time shows that they are not the real cause. What that real cause is we do not know. Something like it is expressed in much of that detestable art which the humans call Music, and something like it occurs in Heaven—a meaningless acceleration in the rhythm of celestial experience, quite opaque to us. Laughter of this kind does us no good and should always be discouraged. Besides, the phenomenon is of itself disgusting and a direct insult to the realism, dignity, and austerity of Hell. Fun is closely related to Joy—a sort of emotional froth arising from the play instinct. It is very little use to us. (Letter 11, p. 58)

One of my own patients said on his arrival down here, “I now see that I spent most of my life in doing neither what I ought nor what I liked.” The Christians describe the Enemy as one “without whom Nothing is strong.”
(Letter 12, p. 62)

And now for your blunders. On your own showing you first of all allowed the patient to read a book he really enjoyed, because he enjoyed it and not in order to make clever remarks about it to his new friends. In the second place, you allowed him to walk down to the old mill and have tea there—a walk through country he really likes, and taken alone. In other words you allowed him two real positive Pleasures. Were you so ignorant as not to see the danger of this? The characteristic of Pains and Pleasures is that they are unmistakably real, and therefore, as far as they go, give the man who feels them a touchstone of reality.
(Letter 13, p. 64)

“God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” – C. S. Lewis in *The Problem of Pain*, chapter 6

hedonist – one who believes the pursuit of pleasure is the principle good
bourgeois (pronounced boorzhwa) – materialistic, boringly middle class and conventional

He’s a hedonist at heart. All those fasts and vigils and stakes and crosses are only a façade. Or only like foam on the sea shore. Out at sea, out in His sea, there is pleasure, and more pleasure. He makes no secret of it; at His right hand are “pleasures for evermore.” Ugh! I don’t think He has the least inkling of that high and austere mystery to which we rise in the Miserific Vision. He’s vulgar, Wormwood. He has a bourgeois mind. He has filled His world full of pleasures. There are things for humans to do all day long without His minding in the least—sleeping, washing, eating, drinking, making love, playing, praying, working. Everything has to be twisted before it’s any use to us. We fight under cruel disadvantages. Nothing is naturally on our side. (Letter 22, p. 92)

The Enemy (being a hedonist at heart) has made change pleasurable to them, just as He has made eating pleasurable. But since He does not wish them to make change, any more than eating, an end in itself, He has balanced the love of change in them by a love of permanence. He has contrived to gratify both tastes together in the very world He has made, by that union of change and permanence which we call Rhythm. He gives them the seasons, each season different yet every year the same, so that spring is always felt as a novelty yet always as the recurrence of an immemorial theme. (Letter 25, p. 100)

All the delights of sense, or heart, or intellect, with which you could once have tempted him, even the delights of virtue itself, now seem to him in comparison but as the half nauseous attractions of a raddled harlot would seem to a man who hears that his true beloved whom he has loved all his life and whom he had believed to be dead is alive and even now at his door. He is caught up into that world where pain and pleasure take on transfinite values and all our arithmetic is dismayed. Once more, the inexplicable meets us. (Letter 31, p. 121)

Questions

1. Is anything bad in itself? See Romans 14:14, Titus 1:15, 1 Timothy 4:4
2. What does James 1:13-17 teach us about temptation and the world we live in?
3. What are some examples of how caving to temptation leads to less pleasure? (Letter 9, p. 53)
4. Why is the “unmistakably real” nature of pleasure and pain such a concern to Screwtape? (Letter 13, p. 64)
5. Why does Screwtape call God a “hedonist at heart”? (Letters 22 & 25, pp. 92 & 100)
6. Why does Screwtape say, “We fight under cruel disadvantages. Nothing is naturally on our side.”? (Letter 22)
7. “All our arithmetic is dismayed. Once more, the inexplicable meets us.” (Letter 31) What do you make of this?