

LETTER 26

UNSELFISHNESS

In this letter, Screwtape talks about the difference between unselfishness and charity. He suggests Wormwood sow seeds of unselfishness during the patient's courtship in hopes of causing marital discord later in life. Since the two are enchanted in the early days of natural attraction, they are putting their best foot forward in order to hide any weakness. However, after the honeymoon phase ends and the *real* marriage begins, each will start expecting the other to maintain their unselfishness which neither of them will be able to do.

...teach a man to surrender benefits not that others may be happy in having them but that he may be unselfish in forgoing them. – Screwtape

Discussion Questions

1. Screwtape says, "courtship is the time for sowing those seeds which will grow up ten years later into domestic hatred." What are some things that couples might do for each other during courtship that they fail to do in marriage? ¶ 1
2. The definition of enchantment is the state of being under a spell or a feeling of great pleasure or delight—in the case of the patient an enchantment of love. Why would Screwtape want these enchanted lovebirds to be deceived into thinking that any problem they will encounter is solved simply because they are in love? ¶ 1
3. God created us to experience and enjoy both eros and agape love. Read Song of Solomon 1:1-4 where eros is used for love and Romans 5:8 where agape is used for love. What is the difference between the two forms of love? Why are each important to the marriage relationship?

4. What is the difference between "unselfishness" and "charity"? Why would Screwtape want to substitute one for the other? ¶ 2

a. Unselfishness –

b. Charity –

5. How does Screwtape say the word "Unselfishness" differs for men and women? Do you agree with his assessment? ¶ 2

a. Women –

b. Men –

6. Screwtape says that we often compete with others to see who can be the most "unselfish". Why would we do this? ¶ 2

7. What does Screwtape mean when he says the couple will be, "mistaking sexual excitement for charity and of thinking that the excitement will last"? ¶ 3

8. Describe the game that Screwtape likes to play called the "Generous Conflict Illusion"? ¶ 4

LETTER 27

ANSWERS

Wormwood has failed. As the patient's love for the girl continues to grow stronger and war efforts loom, his prayers have shifted from normal "daily bread" prayers to attentive appeals directly to God for guidance. Since Satan is a master at distraction, Screwtape instructs Wormwood to attack the legitimacy of prayer. If he cannot create in the man a pious prayer life, then the next best thing is to convince him that the answers to his prayers are what is going to happen or not happen anyway. If successful, Wormwood might be able to convince the man to stop praying altogether.

Don't forget to use the "heads I win, tails you lose" argument. If the thing he prays for doesn't happen, then that is one more proof that petitionary prayers don't work; if it does happen, he will, of course, be able to see some of the physical causes which led up to it, and "therefore it would have happened anyway..." - Screwtape

Discussion Questions

1. According to Screwtape, what can happen when distractions or sins surface during prayer? What specifically should Wormwood do when distractions or sins surface during the patient's prayers? ¶ 1

2. Read Matthew 6:5-6. What does Jesus say about the "false spirituality" of the Pharisees prayers? Why would the devil want to encourage a sense of "false spirituality" rather than letting you petition God with sincere prayers and questions? ¶ 2

3. Read the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13. In your own words, how does Jesus instruct us to pray? How hard is it for you to model this prayer in your daily life?

4. Due to the man's spiritual obedience, Wormwood's efforts to encourage this "false spirituality" will probably not work. What other tactics does Screwtape recommend to steer the patient away from prayer? ¶ 3

5. Describe Screwtape's "heads I win, tails you lose" argument? How can being too focused on the results of prayer actually hinder our prayer life? ¶ 3

6. Read Revelations 22:13. What is the human perspective of time? According to this verse, what is the perspective of time for God? How does this impact your prayer life? ¶ 4

7. Read John 14:13; 15:16; and 16:23. How do we reconcile these verses with statements like, "If God is going to do what He wants, why pray?" or "Why doesn't God seem to answer my prayers?" or "How do I know that what I prayed for wouldn't have happened anyway?" ¶ 4

LETTER 28

PERSEVERANCE

Wormwood's failures keep mounting. The demon was unable to entangle the patient with worldly friends. The patient has fallen in love with a dedicated Christian woman, and none of the attacks on his spiritual life are working at the present. To top it off, Wormwood is showing too much enthusiasm over the potential for human fatalities due to war. Since the patient is a Christian, his death is the last thing that Screwtape wants. In fact, Screwtape says that they must guard the patient's life in order to let real worldliness take root and grow into his middle-age years.

They, of course, do tend to regard death as the prime evil and survival as the greatest good. But that is because we have taught them to do so. – Screwtape

Discussion Questions

1. It seems strange that demons would actually want to keep us safe! Why does Screwtape want to avoid the patient's death at this point in his life? ¶ 1
2. Wormwood assumed the war would have a negative effect on the patient's spiritual life, but it has actually proven to be the opposite. How so? ¶ 1

3. Screwtape said, "Do not let us be infected by our own propaganda." What is the propaganda that he is referring to? How does Philippians 1:21 counter that argument? ¶ 1

4. Screwtape discloses that only if the man is kept alive, will Wormwood have the opportunity to attack him in the middle-age years. What advantage does Screwtape foresee for this period of the man's life?

5. Screwtape suggests attacking the man through either adversity or prosperity in his middle-age years. How are each different? Which of these temptations would be fertile ground for you?

Adversity –

Prosperity –

6. Read 2 Timothy 4:7 and Philippians 3:12-16. What does the Bible say about finishing well? ¶ 1

7. Screwtape says that while we are young, it is hard to keep humans ignorant of religion because of the fascination with music, poetry, love, songbirds, or a sunset. In contrast, as we grow older, what does Screwtape say that we steadily apply ourselves toward? Do you agree? ¶ 2

LETTER 29

COWARDICE

In this letter, Screwtape revisits an old topic—fear. This time the context of the war and recent bombings is in the patient's hometown. Screwtape recommends defeating the patient's courage and making him a coward. Since human beings normally feel shame and guilt over cowardice, Screwtape believes that his fear will undermine his courage and drive him away from God.

This, indeed, is probably one of the Enemy's motives for creating a dangerous world—a world in which moral issues really come to the point. – Screwtape

Discussion Questions

1. What is the one thing that Hell's Research Department has not been able to produce? Why are they incapable of doing so? How does knowing that tempters have limitation impact your spiritual life? ¶ 2
2. Screwtape says, "Hatred is best combined with Fear" and "Hatred has its pleasures." How does Screwtape link hatred to fear? Why is hatred and "anodyne for shame"? ¶ 4
3. Read Psalm 27:1, 1 John 4:18; 2 Timothy 1:7. What do these Scripture passages say about fear?

4. Screwtape claims that they have been able to make men proud of their weakness, but not of cowardice. Why? What is the danger in inducing patients with cowardice? ¶ 5

5. What does Screwtape say is the formation point of all virtues? Explain what Screwtape means by this. As an example, how was Pilate merciful until it became risky (John 18: 13-17)? ¶ 6

6. Screwtape's other option is to heap shame on a coward until they break and give in to utter despair. What does despair cause one to do? How did Pilate demonstrate his own despair and cowardice in Matthew 27:24? ¶ 7

7. Read Matthew 16:25. What does Jesus say about the courage necessary to follow him?

8. What does Screwtape mean by, "the emotion of fear is, in itself, no sin and, though we enjoy it, does us no good"? ¶ 8