

The Screwtape Letters

Letter 13 – Personal Pleasure

Summary

In this letter, Screwtape is not pleased with Wormwood. He has allowed his patient to awaken from his spiritual drift and into reality by experiencing real, simple pleasures. Screwtape understands that this repentance and renewal can have a more profound effect on the patient than his original conversion. However, all in not lost, says Screwtape, as long as Wormwood can keep the patient from acting on his new feelings.

The more often he feels without acting, the less he will be able ever to act, and, in the long run, the less he will be able to feel. - Screwtape

Discussion Questions

1. Screwtape refers to the man's spiritual change as a "second conversion". In some circles this might be referred to as a "rededication of one's life". How would you describe this phase, and have you ever had a similar experience? (¶1)
2. What is the "asphyxiating cloud" that Screwtape is referring to? Read 2 Timothy 1:14 and 1 John 5:18. How do these verses support Wormwood's inability to attack his patient? How do we get to that point where we are surrounded by God's "asphyxiating cloud"? (¶2)
3. What does Screwtape say about the dangers of "real" Pain and Pleasure? (¶3)
4. Screwtape says that Wormwood has failed to employ either Romantic or Worldly methods of temptation. Describe each of these methods. (¶3)
5. In Romans 12:2, what instruction does Paul provide for protecting ourselves against a culture that is trying to sell us "vanity, bustle, irony, and expensive tedium as pleasures"? (¶3)
6. What is the difference in the ways in which God and Satan want to detach people from themselves? (¶4)
7. Why would Screwtape want to eradicate simple pleasures like "enjoying country crickets or collecting stamps or drinking cocoa" from our life? What are some examples of innocent pleasures that if you stopped enjoying, might weaken your will? (¶4)
8. Now that Wormwood's patient has experienced these simple pleasures, what does Screwtape say is the thing to do next? (¶5)
9. What does Screwtape mean by "The more often he feels without acting, the less he will be able to act, and, in the long run, the less he will be able to feel"? (¶5)

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Letter 14 - Humility

Summary

In this letter, Screwtape is concerned because Wormwood's patient has discovered real humility. Screwtape tells Wormwood to draw the patient's attention to himself and to just how humble he is being. As the patient becomes proud of his newfound humility and false modesty, the actual virtue of humility becomes worthless and he becomes susceptible to temptation.

The Enemy wants to bring the man to a state of mind in which he could design the best cathedral in the world, and know it to be the best, and rejoice in the fact, without being any more (or less) or otherwise glad at having done it than he would be if it had been done by another. - Screwtape

Discussion Questions

1. Screwtape says that he likes it when people make "confident resolutions" at their conversion experience. What confident resolutions might we make when we first accept Christ? How might this change as we mature as Christians? (¶1)
2. What does Screwtape mean by, "All virtues are less formidable to us once the man is aware that he has them..."? What is the danger in making the man aware of his virtue? (¶2)
3. Why does Screwtape instruct Wormwood to confuse humility with low opinion? (¶4)
4. Why is it bad for a woman who really is pretty or a man who really is intelligent to believe they are not? (¶4)
5. How does Romans 12:15 support the idea "...that he [the patient] can rejoice in his own talents as frankly and gratefully as in his neighbor's talents"? (¶4)
6. How hard would it be for you to rejoice in your neighbor's talents and accomplishments in the following situations: (¶4)
 - Your neighbor's son scored the winning basket in the game while your son sat the bench.
 - Your coworker achieved his sales goal and won a trip to Hawaii; you got a gift card to Starbucks.
 - Your sister is pregnant with their third child; you have not been able to conceive.
 - Your best friend just got a great new job; you are unemployed.
 - Everyone gushed over your sister's dessert at Thanksgiving; no one touched yours.
7. According to Ephesians 4:2, what is the type of humility that God wants from us? From Mark 12:30-31, where does humility begin? (¶4)
8. How does God counteract Satan's strategy of trying to instill vainglory or false modesty into the patient? (¶5)

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Letter 15 – Past, Present, Future, and Eternity

Summary

Currently, the patient’s anxiety level is low due to a lull in the war. Screwtape instructs Wormwood to direct the patient’s attention to either the past (which is gone) or to the future (which does not exist) but never to his present state. Either strategy will work, but focusing on the future works best.

But we want a man hag-ridden by the Future – haunted by visions of an imminent heaven or hell upon earth – ready to break the Enemy’s commands in the present if by so doing we make him think he can attain the one or avert the other – dependent for his faith on the success or failure of schemes whose end he will not live to see. - Screwtape

Discussion Questions

1. What fears of the future distract you the most in your daily life? What is your line of defense when Satan starts attacking you with those fears”?
2. According to Screwtape, what are the two things that God wants us to attend to and why? (¶12)
3. Screwtape says, “For the present is the point at which time touches eternity”. Why is living in the present – in contrast to past experiences or future expectations – most like eternity? (¶12)
4. Why does Screwtape say that it is far better to make humans live in the future than in the past? (¶13)
5. What do Jesus’ words in Matthew 6:25-34 tell us about our preoccupation with the future?
6. God wants man to think about the Future too, “just so much as is necessary for *now* planning the acts of justice or charity which will probably be their duty tomorrow.” What does Satan want man to think about the Future? (¶14)
7. There are two ways that we can live in the moment – a right way and a wrong way. Describe those below: (¶15)

The Right Way (or God’s Way)	
The Wrong Way (or Satan’s Way)	

8. Read Luke 12:16-21. What is Jesus’ advice for those who are living in the moment but in the wrong way?