

## ***The Screwtape Letters. Lesson 2.***

### **Letter 2: On Using the Patient's Pride and the Flaws in the Visible Church to Undermine Him**

In this letter, Screwtape begins by noting, “with grave displeasure, that your patient has become a Christian.” Henceforth, the letters focus on how Wormwood might undermine the patient's new conviction. Sure, he's converted, but that doesn't mean the devil's done with him!

#### **Read the first paragraph.**

“There's no need to despair,” Screwtape writes. “Hundreds of these adult converts have been reclaimed after a brief sojourn in the Enemy's camp and are now with us.” In what sense is this true? Why? What's Screwtape's point in mentioning that “all the habits of the patient, both mental and bodily, are still in our favor”? How can this be so? Is it so even for new believers who, nevertheless, will persevere, or only for some? Why should it be that the cultivation of habits consistent with our faith is so vitally important?

#### **Read the second paragraph.**

“One of our great allies at present,” Screwtape writes, “is the church itself.” How can this be so? How does he distinguish the visible from the invisible church, and how does he describe the latter?

Consistent with the theme of the first letter, Screwtape advises that Wormwood keep the patient's view fixed firmly on the visible church. Why? In what way is the patient thus “a fool” even as he disdainfully views his fellow congregants as “ridiculous”? Why is it so important to let God help shape how we view (a) ourselves and (b) real righteousness?

What does Screwtape mean by writing of the patient that, “he has an idea of ‘Christians’ in his mind, which he supposes to be spiritual but which is, in fact, largely pictorial”? Why must Wormwood “keep everything hazy”? And what is “the peculiar kind of clarity which Hell affords”?

#### **Read the third paragraph.**

“Work hard, then, on the disappointment or anticlimax which is certainly coming to the patient during his first few weeks as a churchman,” writes Screwtape. Is it true that “the Enemy allows this disappointment to occur on the threshold of every human endeavor”? Why? What might God's purpose be in allowing us to experience these things? What is his goal and end for us?

Is it true that those who are less dependent on emotion as the bellwether of their spiritual lives are harder to tempt?

#### **Read the fourth paragraph.**

Here Screwtape gets to what is perhaps Wormwood's greatest weapon in his arsenal. “He [the patient] has not been anything like long enough with the Enemy to have any real humility yet.” Why is this so important? What is the importance of humility in the Christian life?

### **Letter 3: On Ensuring and Maximizing Disharmony in Relationships**

In this letter, Screwtape turns to the faith- and life-disrupting power of pride, folly, and human relationships.

#### **Read the first paragraph.**

“The Enemy will be working from the center outwards, gradually bringing more and more of the patient’s conduct under the new standard, and may reach his behavior to the old lady [his mother] at any moment.” Think about this pattern of God’s working in us. How is the approach of the devil (and the world, and the flesh) different?

Screwtape now provides four principles for ensuring maximum disruption in relational harmony between the patient and his mother, which in their aggregate would harm his faith even as he was convinced that no such thing was happening to his faith.

#### **Read the second paragraph.**

“Keep his mind on the inner life... chiefly turned at present to the states of his own mind.” Why is this such a problem for a healthy life of faith? What does Screwtape mean when he writes that Wormwood must “aggravate that most useful human characteristic, the horror and neglect of the obvious”? In what way do we fall prey at times to this same pattern of “horror and neglect of the obvious”?

#### **Read the third paragraph.**

Here, Screwtape gives Wormwood advice for rendering the patient’s prayers innocuous. How? What are the two advantages he sees in this strategy of keeping the his prayers excessively “spiritual” and inadequately practical? How does the focus on the sins of others actually have the effect of “rubbing the wounds of the day a little sorer, even while he’s on his knees”? What is the importance (for Screwtape, that is) of making sure that the patient is praying for “an imaginary person”? What does this mean?

#### **Read the fourth paragraph.**

Wormwood is to cultivate “irritation” between mother and patient. How does this work powerfully to undermine harmony in relationships?

#### **Read the fifth paragraph.**

What is the “double standard” that Screwtape advises Wormwood to cultivate in his patient? How does the “double standard” aggravate problems in relationships? What might account for our propensity to embrace, even unwittingly, double standards?

#### **Letter 4: On Undermining the Prayer-life of a Believer**

In this letter, Screwtape gives Wormwood a number of pointers for how to undermine the patient's prayer life, emptying it of all power, even as he might continue going through the motions of prayer. He provides a number of principles for effecting this end.

##### **Read the first two paragraphs.**

What is "the best thing" that Wormwood can hope to achieve on the matter of prayer? Why is this so?

Next, Screwtape advises Wormwood to encourage the patient "to remember, or to think he remembers, the parrotlike nature of his prayers in childhood." Why?

Next, Screwtape presses to the next thing, noting that, "in reaction against [the parrotlike prayers of childhood], he may be persuaded to aim at something entirely spontaneous, inward, informal, and unregularized." Why is the patient's focus on the generation of "mood" in his prayer so harmful to his prayer life? To our own?

What does Screwtape mean by saying that such prayer "bears a superficial resemblance to the prayer of silence as practiced by those who are very far advanced in the Enemy's service"?

What does Screwtape say about body position in prayer? What do you think about this?

"It is funny how mortals always picture us as putting things into their minds; in reality our best work is done by keeping things out." What does he mean by this? Do you think this is so?

##### **Read the third paragraph.**

Next, Screwtape has Wormwood "fall back on a subtler misdirection of his intention." How will keeping the patient's mind fixed on his feelings during prayer undermine the power and effectiveness of his prayer? Of ours?

##### **Read the fourth paragraph.**

What is the "danger" that Screwtape acknowledges in prayer? As a still subtler strategy, he advises keeping the patient's mind fixed on some sort of "composite object"? What does he mean here, and why might this tendency be dangerous in our own prayer life?

The final factor to which Screwtape points is powerful indeed. He notes how a person who finds him or herself in the presence of the Living God, and confronted by thereby "this real nakedness of the soul in prayer" – may not in fact desire the experience as much as they suppose. What does he mean here? Does this have any resonance with your life?