

Discussion Questions on *The Screwtape Letters*

Preface

A touch of humor.

What is the scriptural reference for the teaching that the devil is a liar?

Part One: Preventing Christianity from taking root
WORLD (God plants, establishes; PURGATIVE)

Letter 1

1. What is the main subject (your title) of this letter?
2. Is argument the way for Satan to keep spiritual matters out of a person's head? Why or why not?
3. What is?
4. What does Lewis think of "the weekly press"?
5. What does Lewis say about "real" and "real life"?
6. Do rational arguments convince?

Letter 2

1. What is the main subject (your title) of this letter?
2. What does Lewis mean by saying, "All the *habits* of the patient, both mental and bodily, are still in our favor"?
3. What does Lewis apparently feel about much of the church's worship?
4. What is Wormwood supposed to convince his patient about other Christians?
5. What expectation do new Christians often have about the church that are unrealistic?
6. Comment: "The Enemy takes this risk because He has a curious fantasy of making all these disgusting little human vermin into what He calls His "free" lovers and servants—"sons" is the word He uses...."
7. What virtue has the new Christian not yet developed?

Letter 3

1. What is the main subject (your title) of this letter?
2. What are the four suggested methods of temptation?
3. Why does Screwtape want Wormwood to keep his patient's mind on the inner life?
4. How can prayers be rendered innocuous?
5. What happens when two humans live together for years?
6. What sort of a double standard is Wormwood to encourage? Can someone really say something with the express purpose of offending and yet "having a grievance when offence is taken"?
7. What is the biblical reference to the elder brother?

Letter 4

1. What is the main subject (your title) of this letter?
2. Why does Screwtape argue for making prayer a matter of mood?
3. What does Lewis think about the position of the body in prayer?
4. Where should Wormwood direct the attention of his patient in prayer? Where should he not? So what?
5. What is Screwtape's "subtler weapon"?
6. What is the biblical reference behind the phrase "never knowable by him as he is known by it"?
7. Comment: "There's such a thing as getting more than they bargained for!"

8. How does one's health and freshness, or lack thereof, affect our prayer life?

Letter 5

1. What is the main subject (your title) of this letter?
2. Will the war aid Wormwood or the Enemy most?
3. What does Screwtape think most likely to happen during this war?
4. How is death undesirable in war?
5. Why is this true: "And how disastrous for us is the continual remembrance of death which war enforces."
6. What does Screwtape want to see happen to the patient's reason?

Letter 6

1. What is the main subject (your title) of this letter?
2. Please explain: "He wants men to be concerned with what they do; our business is to keep them thinking about what will happen to them."
3. Does Satan want us to be anxious about things that may never happen?
4. Is the only thing we have to fear nothing but fear itself?
5. Why does Screwtape encourage Wormwood to keep the patient's mind off the Enemy?
6. How do you make malice real and benevolence imaginary?
7. Explain the concentric circles of the human being.
8. What should Wormwood do with that knowledge?
9. What does Lewis see as a synonym for the will?

Letter 7

1. What is the main subject (your title) of this letter?
2. What are the characteristics of a just war?
3. How and why does Screwtape encourage extremes?
4. How should Wormwood make the World an end and faith a means?
5. How can Patriotism or Pacifism be guided in stages for evil?

Letter 8

1. What is the main subject (your title) of this letter?
2. What is the Law of Undulation?
3. What biblical support can you find for the idea, "He relies on the troughs even more than on the peaks"?
4. What is the biblical source for this quotation: ". . . but because their wills freely conform to His. We want cattle who can finally become food; He wants servants who can finally become sons"?
5. What biblical support can you find for the idea, "Merely to over-ride a human . . . would be for Him useless. He cannot ravish. He can only woo"?

Letter 9

1. What is the main subject (your title) of this letter?
2. Why does Lewis call "being in love" "the milk and water phenomenon"?
3. Where is the biblical source of the idea, "I know we have won many a soul through pleasure. All the same, it is His invention, not ours"?
4. What is evil?
5. Why is "the first step . . . to keep knowledge out of his mind"?
6. Where is the biblical source of the idea, ". . . and then to set him to work on the desperate design of recovering his old feelings by sheer will-power"?

7. Moderation is a good thing. Why does Screwtape say, “Talk to him about ‘moderation in all things’?”
8. What biblical support can you think of for the idea, “Keep his mind off the plain antithesis between True and False?”

Letter 10

1. What is the main subject (your title) of this letter?
2. What does Lewis mean by vanity and worldly vanities?
3. What is Lewis’s point about the word “Puritan”?
4. What things does Screwtape want the man to neglect in the process of relating to the new friends and the grocer?

Letter 11

1. What is the main subject (your title) of this letter?
2. What sort of friends has the patient made?
3. What are the four causes of laughter? What do you think of Lewis’s distinction(s)?
4. What does Screwtape think of music?
5. Comment: “It is a thousand miles away from joy; it deadens, instead of sharpening, the intellect; and it excites no affection between those who practice it.” (56)

Part Two: Removing rooted Christianity FLESH (God nurtures; ILLUMINATIVE)

Letter 12

1. What is the main subject (your title) of this letter?
2. What is the danger of Christian habits?
3. What sort of repentance does Screwtape encourage?
4. What will this do to the patient’s thoughts about the Enemy?
5. What will happen to his religious duties?
6. What does habit do to various pleasures of vanity and excitement?
7. Comment on what one person arriving in hell said to Screwtape: “I now see that I spent most of my life in doing *neither* what I ought *nor* what I liked.” (60)
8. Comment: “It does not matter how small the sins are, provided that their cumulative effect is to edge the man away from the Light and out into the Nothing.” (60)

Letter 13

1. What is the main subject (your title) of this letter?
2. What is “the asphyxiating cloud” Screwtape mentions?
3. What is Lewis’s point about reading a book because someone enjoys it?
4. Why should Wormwood avoid having his patient experience pain and pleasure, such as a walk in nature or reading a good book?
5. What is the point Lewis is trying to make about losing yourself?
6. Who is the source of our deepest likings? What might they be compared to?
7. Why does Screwtape want Wormwood to avoid “country cricket or collecting stamps or drinking cocoa”? Do you agree?
8. Why does Screwtape want to avoid something “for its own sake”?
9. Where is the center of the human being?
10. What is Screwtape’s last bit of advice?

Letter 14

1. What is the main subject (your title) of this letter?
2. What's wrong with confident resolutions?
3. What is the biblical support for the idea, "... only a hope for the daily and hourly pittance to meet the daily and hourly temptation!"
4. What is the danger of focus on self?
5. What three things does Screwtape want humility to lead to?
6. Comment: "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." (70)
7. What is the biblical support for the idea, "... that he can rejoice in his own talents as frankly and gratefully as in his neighbour's talents"?
8. Comment: "...when they have really learned to love their neighbors as themselves, they will be allowed to love themselves as their neighbors." (71f.)
9. What two extremes does Screwtape want instilled?
10. Comment: "...a man is not usually called upon to have an opinion of his own talents at all." (72)
11. What common human problem does this quotation suggest? "Even of his sins the Enemy does not want him to think too much."

Letter 15

1. What is the main subject (your title) of this letter?
2. Why do you think it's naïve to call it "The War"?
3. Do you agree that God wants us to focus on the Present or on Eternity? If so, why? If not, why not?
4. What are the problems with focusing on the past? What is the value of focusing on the past?
5. Why is it a better strategy for Wormwood to have his patient focus on the future? It inflames hope and fear. It's least like eternity (76).
6. Do you agree with this quotation? "Hence nearly all vices are rooted in the Future. Gratitude looks to the Past and love to the Present; fear, avarice, lust, and ambition look ahead." (76) Try to give an example that supports this position and one that contradicts it. Try to find a Scripture passage that supports either side.

Letter 16

1. What is the main subject (your title) of this letter?
2. What does Screwtape say that God wants in a church member?
3. What is the first type of church that Screwtape recommends?
4. The second?
5. How are the two churches similar?
6. Should "the human without scruples should always give in to the human with scruples"?
7. To what extent does any member of any church live up to Lewis's answer to Question 2?

Letter 17

1. What is the main subject (your title) of this letter?
2. What is the essence of gluttony?
3. What is the "All-I-want" state of mind?
4. In this day of tension over gender issues, do you agree with what Lewis says about males and gluttony?
5. How can "delicacy" be "a kind of artillery preparation for attacks on chastity"?

6. How is it a deception that “physical exercise in excess and consequent fatigue are specially favorable to” the virtue of chastity?

Letter 18

1. What is the main subject (your title) of this letter?
2. What do you think of Lewis’s choice of names throughout this book, i.e. Screwtape, Wormwood, and Slubgob?
3. What is “being in love”?
4. What does the whole philosophy of Hell rest upon?
5. How is the many made into one a reflection of God’s nature?
6. What is the Enemy’s philosophy?
7. What does Lewis think of competition and cooperation? What about athletic competition?
8. Why is “one flesh” a joke for Screwtape?
9. Is it possible to “marry[ing] with any other motive” than love?

Letter 19

1. What is the main subject (your title) of this letter?
2. Do you think that all selves are in competition?
3. What does this quotation suggest? “All His talk about Love must be a disguise for something else—He must have some *real* motive for creating them and taking so much trouble about them. The reason one comes to talk as if He really had this impossible Love is our utter failure to find out that real motive.”
4. Compare this quotation, “Nothing matters at all except the tendency of a given state of mind, in given circumstances, to move a particular patient at a particular moment nearer to the Enemy or nearer to us.” with this statement from *Mere Christianity*: “Good and evil both increase at compound interest. That is why the little decisions you and I make every day are of such infinite importance. The smallest good act today is the capture of a strategic point from which, a few months later, you may be able to go on to victories you never dreamed of. An apparently trivial indulgence in lust or anger today is the loss of a ridge or railway line or bridgehead from which the enemy may launch an attack otherwise impossible. (*Mere Christianity*, page 132, Book III, Chapter 12, “Charity”)
5. What is wrong with the idea that “‘Love’ is both irresistible and somehow intrinsically meritorious”?

Letter 20

1. What is the main subject (your title) of this letter?
2. What type of woman does Screwtape want the patient to fall in love with?
3. Are we still “making the role of the eye in sexuality more and more important”?
4. What are the “two imaginary women” and what does Lewis mean by them?

Letter 21

1. What is the main subject (your title) of this letter?
2. How is this patient most easily angered? What about you? (This is only a rhetorical question.)
3. Was this point somewhat autobiographical for Lewis?
4. What sorts of things does the patient think he owns?
5. How much does he really own?
6. Why is this so hard for us to accept?
7. What does Lewis suggest will happen when we think about it?
8. What is the joke?
9. How does God’s and Satan’s claim of ownership differ?

Letter 22

1. What is the main subject (your title) of this letter?
2. Why is Screwtape so upset about the girl?
3. Who is the “He” at the start of the paragraph, “He’s a hedonist at heart.”
4. What point does Lewis make again about pleasure?
5. Comment: “Then, of course, he gets to know this woman’s family and whole circle.”
6. Why do you think that Screwtape hates both music and silence? Can you think of any biblical passages that support the idea with one or the other?
7. Why do you think that Lewis makes silence a characteristic of heaven and noise a characteristic of hell?
8. What is the reference to Milton?
9. Who is meant by the reference to “Pshaw”?

Part Three: Corrupting well-rooted Christianity DEVIL (God harvests; UNITIVE)

Letter 23

1. What is the main subject (your title) of this letter?
2. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Albert Schweitzer wrote a book entitled *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*. What are other ways that people have attempted to resize and reshape Jesus?
3. What is the irony of “the historical Jesus”?
4. What are the four aims of Screwtape?
5. How does the picture of the Gospel get changes?
6. How does this destroy the devotional life?
7. How does study of the biography of Jesus divert people’s attention from the real issue?
8. What is the end result of treating Christianity as a means?

Letter 24

1. What is the main subject (your title) of this letter?
2. What is the chink?
3. What is the mistaken typical stereotype today in many circles?
4. What does Screwtape want Wormwood to do with her fault?
5. How might Wormwood do that?
6. What would Screwtape advise Wormwood today, if you were his patient? (This is somewhat rhetorical; no one need bring their answer to class and share it).
7. Is the patient marrying up or down?
8. Is the best strategy direct or indirect?
9. Which is worse, spiritual pride or social vanity? Why?

Letter 25

1. What is the main subject (your title) of this letter?
2. Are we easily dissatisfied by the same old thing? Give an example of this in your Christian life. What is the difference between tradition and traditionalism?
3. What is the advantage of the seasons?
4. Can Satan take advantage of both permanence and change?
5. Lewis once is reputed to have said, “I love routine.” Does this fit?
6. What are the problems with novelty?
7. What does Lewis think about the Arts and novelty? Is he right? Is this true of other areas?

8. What is the value of Fashion for Screwtape?
9. Do you agree that simple questions such as “Is it righteous? Is it prudent? Is it possible?” cut to the issue better than more complex questions?

Letter 26

1. What is the main subject (your title) of this letter?
2. What is the problem with making “Unselfishness” a problem?
3. Do you agree with Lewis in his statement of how men and women view unselfishness, i.e. that women view it as doing for others while men view it as not making trouble for others?
4. What is the ambiguity about the word “Love” that Lewis alludes to?
5. What happens when excitement dies away and we don’t have the spiritual resources to be unselfish?
6. What is Generous Conflict Illusion?
7. What does Lewis mean by writing, “‘love’ is not enough, that charity is needed”?

Letter 27

1. What is the main subject (your title) of this letter?
2. How can a distraction actually bring you closer to God?
3. How does Screwtape recommend that Wormwood get his patient away from praying?
4. How can dwelling upon the results of prayer work against us?
5. What does Lewis mean by writing that “prayers today are one of the innumerable coordinates with which the Enemy [God] harmonizes the weather of tomorrow”?
6. How does Lewis explain time from God’s perspective?
7. What does Lewis think of old books?
8. What is “the Historical Point of View”?
9. What does this say about Lewis?

Letter 28

1. What is the main subject (your title) of this letter?
2. What does Screwtape want to avoid?
3. Why? What is the usual spiritual effect of war in people’s minds?
4. What problem does Screwtape mention early in the letter?
5. What should Wormwood aim for chiefly at this moment?
6. What are some helps along the way for Wormwood?
7. What does prosperity do?
8. Do you agree that “increasing reputation, his widening circle of acquaintances, his sense of importance, the growing pressure of absorbing and agreeable work” work against us spiritually?
9. How is real worldliness achieved?
10. Why does Lewis write that “the incalculable winds of fantasy and music and poetry—the mere face of a girl, the song of a bird, or the sight of a horizon—are always blowing our whole structure away,” i.e. working against the powers of evil?
11. Who is that great philosopher who said “Experience is the mother of Illusion”? What do you think of the quotation?
12. How does Lewis think of time as on God’s side?

Letter 29

1. What is the main subject (your title) of this letter?
2. Why can’t Hell’s Research Department produce any virtue?
3. So in what direction does Screwtape advise?

4. What does this mean: "Hatred . . . is therefore often the *compensation* by which a frightened man reimburses himself for the miseries of Fear."
5. An anodyne is something that comforts or relieves pain. How is hatred an anodyne for shame?
6. What does cowardice, and hence war, sometimes produce?
7. Comment: "...courage is not simply *one* of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point, which means, at the point of highest reality."
8. What does despair cause one to do?
9. What is Screwtape's final strategy?

Letter 30

1. What is the main subject (your title) of this letter?
2. What do unexpected demands, when coupled with fatigue, produce? Does that work in your life? (rhetorical question)
3. Does a sense of disappointment turn into a sense of injury?
4. Do we ever yield just when relief is in sight? What consolation or encouragement does that give us?
5. Does "fatigue makes women talk more and men talk less"? What is your experience?
6. What is Lewis saying by mention of an attack on the emotions?
7. What two meanings does the word "real" carry? So what?

Letter 31 (Note: A tetter is a skin disease.)

1. What is the main subject (your title) of this letter?
2. What does Lewis suggest about problems we must face as we go through life?
3. How did the patient apparently die?
4. What other insight into the next life does Lewis offer?
5. Comment: "What is blinding, suffocating fire to you is now cool light to him, is clarity itself, and wears the form of a Man."
6. What does Lewis mean by "Pains he may still have to encounter, but they *embrace* those pains."
7. What is the implication of this quotation: "Next to the curse of useless tempters like yourself, the greatest curse upon us is the failure of our Intelligence Department. If we could only find out what He is really up to!"