

Screwtape Letters: Session #2 (Letters 7 – 12)

❖ Letter 7 – Complacency, Factionalism & Extremism

Summary

Screwtape advises Wormwood to keep humans ignorant of the existence of demons. The “perfect work” of the devil is the creation of the “Materialistic Magician”- the man who lacks true understanding of the spiritual realm and his place within it and chooses instead to worship the different ‘forces’ affecting his life. In response to whether Wormwood should guide his patient toward extreme Pacifism or extreme Patriotism, Screwtape acknowledges that neither position is right or wrong so long as Screwtape encourages his patient toward all worldly extremes and his thoughts away from God and neighbor.

1. Screwtape warns Wormwood not to reveal himself. What advantage does the devil see in concealment? How might seeing the devils around you influence your faith?

2. In paragraph 2, Screwtape explains that, “Some ages are lukewarm and complacent and then it is our business to soothe them yet faster asleep. Other ages...are unbalanced and prone to faction, and it is our business to inflame them.” How are these two extreme positions present in our lives today and how might we as Christians guard against the dangers they pose?

3. In paragraph 4, Screwtape says “Once you have made the World an end, and faith a means, you have almost won your man, and it makes very little difference what kind of worldly end he is pursuing” What are the pitfalls of political activism and how do we keep our faith the end, not the means? Screwtape gives a clue to rightly ordered priorities in his final sentence.

❖ Letter 8 – Spiritual Dryness (Mountains and Valleys)

Summary

“Do not be deceived Wormwood. Our cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do our Enemy's will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys.”

Screwtape explains God’s desire for Man to transition from servants to Sons. This process requires periods of spiritual dryness as Man must freely choose and trust God while retaining his own individuality. This is contrasted to Satan’s plan to consume Man’s Will into his own through tactics of enticement of vice and worldly values.

4. Define Undulation. In Paragraph 3, Screwtape says of God, “In His efforts to get permanent possession of a soul, He relies on the troughs even more than on the peaks.” From the reading why are these periods of spiritual dryness necessary to the faith?

5. Think of the differences between how the devil “seduces” and God “woos”. How can we take comfort in a God that wants relationship, versus a devil who simply wants to consume us?

❖ Letter 9 – Pleasure and Perversion

Summary

“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.”

Screwtape advises Wormwood to continue to “exploit” his patient’s spiritual dryness through sensual temptations and direct attacks on his faith. Screwtape also discusses how to corrupt the natural, beautiful form of pleasure (given us by God) by encouraging pleasure in all extremes and in ways that God has forbidden. That is SIN!

6. Screwtape advises Wormwood to use pleasure during the troughs to tempt the patient. What reasons does he give for this? What dangers do devils face when encouraging pleasure during peak periods?

7. Consider and list ways in which the devil has taken good pleasures created by God, and twisted them to his own ends. (Consider the art-world, human relationships/sexuality, concept of family, consumption of food and drink, Life and death).

❖ Letter 10 – Tempting Acquaintances

Summary

Screwtape approves of Wormwood’s efforts to lead his patient into a friendship with a middle-aged couple that is “rich, smart, superficially intellectual, and brightly skeptical about everything in the world” – a potentially harmful relationship for his Christian identity. This relationship can be exploited further by guiding the patient to lead a double life (inside church and out) where he thinks he is a “complete, balanced, complex man” within his co-existing environments and able to neglect his everyday tasks and familial relationships.

8. There are times when vanity leads us into relationships that are at odds with our faith. There are other times when our desire to be accepted, liked or included, keeps us from speaking out against what we know is wrong. Think of times when your faith has conflicted with the beliefs of those around you. What vanities do you need to be aware of to prevent Satan from gaining a foothold in this area?

9. Referring to the second half of Letter 10, What are the dangers of fostering unwise relationships? What does the bible say regarding this issue? Read Matthew 6:24 & 2 Corinthians 6:14-18.

❖ Letter 11 – Laughter

Summary

In the context of the patient’s newly formed friendships, Screwtape explores the forms of laughter and which ones are effective tools of the devils.

Joy	Joy is not based on jokes but rather on innocent pleasure and reflects love of friends, family, and others. The source of true Joy is God and cannot be forced or faked. Joy is not dependent on circumstances.
Fun	Fun is...an innocent pleasure that arises from the play instinct. It can “promote charity, courage, [and] contentment”. It may be a diversion from acknowledging God but it is largely ineffective in damaging a person’s heart or soul.
Joke Proper	“Humor is the...all-excusing grace of life.” It is a way to play off traits, habits, or characteristics that are actually shameful or cruel as comical or funny. In today’s culture, people often will excuse their sin by making jokes that help free them from guilt.
Flippancy	Flippancy is being sarcastic – showing a lack of respect or seriousness especially when it comes to sacred matters. This can eventually build up a callous heart that is insulated from the penetration of God.

10. Screwtape divides humor into “Joy, Fun, The Joke Proper and Flippancy.” What does he say are the benefits to the Devil in fostering Fun, Joke and Flippancy?

11. Screwtape cautions against Joy. Everything that is truly good is from God. This is true of Joy. What virtues does he say that Joy fosters? (reference: Galations 5:16-26)

❖ Letter 12 – Small Sins and Spiritual Sloth

Summary

At the end of Letter 12, Screwtape explains, “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. Murder is no better than cards if cards can do the trick. Indeed the safest road to Hell is the gradual one – the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.”

For fear of spiritually reawakening his patient through a rushed process of pulling him away from God, Screwtape advises Wormwood to guide his patient to Hell through a series of small sins and omissions.

12. Screwtape explains that trivial and small sins are almost more valuable than full abandonment of faith. He explains, “It increases the patient's reluctance to think about the Enemy.” Why? Think of ways in your own life, where the “little sins” have led you off course and caused you to avoid God?

13. Read Luke 13: 24-27 How does Matthew describe the gate to Heaven and what claim do those who are locked outside make? Read Catechism 1458 and 1468. What does the church say about confessing “little sins?” What are the benefits of taking advantage of the sacrament of Confession and Penance?