

Screwtape Letters: Session #3 (Letters 13-18)

❖ Letter 13 – Pain and Pleasure

Summary

Screwtape admonishes Wormwood for letting his patient “slip through [his] fingers”. The patient has had a spiritual reawakening and detachment ‘from self’ as he experiences the REAL and simple pleasures of reading an enjoyable novel on a comforting, country walk. Screwtape encourages Wormwood to interfere with his patient’s “second conversion” of repentance and renewal of grace by preventing him from acting upon his newfound feelings. He recommends employing the use of “Romantic” or “Worldly” methods of temptations to prevent the formation of virtue. The Romantic method would lead the patient to personal discontent as he envisions the ideals of another life. The Worldly method would convince the patient that happiness and pleasure can be found in things of this World, not God.

1. In the 2nd paragraph, Screwtape describes and “asphyxiating cloud”, which prevented Wormwood's attack on the patient. What do you think this “cloud” was and how did it protect the patient? Read 2 Tim 1:14 & Romans 8: 5-6 and 26-27, and Galatians 5: 16-26 for guidance.

2. What does Screwtape imply are the dangers of real pain and pleasure?

3. Both God and Satan encourage ‘detachment from self’. How do their aims differ?

4. Screwtape says, “Let him do anything but act. No amount of piety in his imagination and affections will harm us, if we can keep it out of his will.” Read James 1-22-27. As Catholics, what does the bible say about action?

❖ Letter 14 – Humility

Summary

“When pride comes, disgrace comes; but with the humble is wisdom.” *Proverbs 11:2*

“Do to others whatever you would have them do to you. This is the law and the prophets.” *Matthew 7:12*

Wormwood’s patient no longer is making grandiose resolutions of change and promises of lifelong virtue. Instead, he exhibits a humble reliance on God as he seeks the graces to endure “the daily and hourly temptation”. Screwtape summons Wormwood to encourage his patient to be proud of his newfound humility, thereby creating a sense of vanity and false modesty. As true humility declines, the patient will become more susceptible to temptation and sin.

5. Humility is one of the more complicated and difficult to recognize of the virtues. Describe what true humility looks like and why it is dangerous to devils.

6. Screwtape describes ways humility can be twisted so it no longer resembles true virtue. How does he propose this should be done and what does this look like?

❖ Letter 15 – Time (Past, Present, and Future) and Eternity

Summary

Wormwood's patient is experiencing lower levels of anxiety due to a "lull in the European War". Screwtape counsels Wormwood to direct his patient's focus to be on the Past (already has happened) or the Future (does not yet exist), but never on the Present Moment, where "all duty, all grace, all knowledge, and all pleasures dwell". Freedom and choice exist in the Present where a reliance on God, not self, brings destruction to the plans of Satan.

**7. According to Screwtape, what are the two things God wants us to be concerned with? (§2)
Read 1 Peter 5: 6-10 for reflection.**

8. Screwtape advises Wormwood to turn the patients mind toward the past as well as encourage both worry and excessive hope in the future. What ends does he hope to achieve here? Read Phil 4:6-7, 1 Peter 5: 6-8 & Matthew 6:33-34 to see what the bible says about worrying about the future.

❖ Letter 16 – Church-hopping

Summary

Wormwood's patient is content with attending the Church that he started attending after his 'Conversion' to Christianity. Screwtape berates Wormwood for not getting his patient to 'Church Hop' as a means to accommodate personal preferences rather than fostering unity and spiritual growth in his Christian faith. As Catholics, we must be mindful that the real presence of Christ is reflected in the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist, and not become preoccupied with the dynamic priest or gifted homilist.

9. Screwtape says, "Surely you know that if a man can't be cured of churchgoing, the next best thing is to send him all over the neighborhood looking for the church that 'suits' him until he becomes a taster or connoisseur of churches." What attitude is Screwtape trying to foster here?

10. Screwtape describes one church where the Vicar has a watered-down faith and another where the vicar has a streak of dishonesty in him. What action should this letter spur us to in regards to our priests and seminarians?

❖ Letter 17 – Gluttony

Summary

It has been said that true happiness is wanting what you get, not getting what you want. In this letter Screwtape reveals that the sin of Gluttony is a complex animal that consists of not just the sin of excess, but also an insatiable demand for the exact found in the Gluttony of Delicacy. He informs Wormwood that quantities don't matter as long as they "can use a human belly and palate to produce querulousness, impatience, uncharitableness and self-concern." We're shown how the patient's mother's desire for exactness becomes a sort of selfishness, and disregard for the trouble of others. It is hinted that finickiness is as deadly a sin as excessive consumption when that finickiness becomes excessive, selfish and starts to control our lives. In this letter we call to mind the Catholic practice of fasting as a means of us Catholics strengthening the soul. By denying the desires of the body, our appetites lose the power to overpower our will.

11. Screwtape describes a unique form of gluttony called the 'Gluttony of Delicacy.' List ways this kind of gluttony manifests itself in the mother's life. Can you recognize instances of this in your own life?

12. Think of ways you are guilty of both 'Gluttony of Delicacy' and 'Gluttony of Excess' in your own life. What methods might you employ to be more aware of these sins so you can better avoid their negative influence on your faith?

❖ Letter 18 – Love and Marriage

Summary

Screwtape outlines for Wormwood God's design for heterosexual relationships and sexual activity: "either complete abstinence or unmitigated [absolute] monogamy" – purity in all things. He then describes the opposing views that both God and Satan have on love and sexual union. God's intention is focused on the *permanent* unitive and procreative nature between husband and wife, in which love is sacrificial and spiritual, based on action and not feeling, and disposed to the raising of Family. Satan's philosophy is to foster competition amongst people and the "sucking of will and freedom out of a weaker self into a stronger" which leads to perversion in a husband/wife relationship and the acceptance of infidelity and divorce when a couple find themselves "falling out of love".

13. What does God demand from us in terms of chastity? Read St. Paul's advice in 1 Corinthians 7:1-2 for his instruction.

14. Screwtape gives a very dim view of marriage, love and human relationships. Based on Screwtape's diabolical advice that would see relationships as competitive and self-serving, what should a holy relationship should look like? List the characteristics Screwtape describes along with their holy opposite.