

# Screwtape Letters Session #4 (Letters 19-25)

## ❖ Letter 19 – Agape Love

### *Summary*

*Agape love* is used to describe the love that is of and from God, whose very nature is love itself: “God is love” (1 John 4:8). In Letter 19, Screwtape tries to rationalize away earlier statements he has made to Wormwood referencing God’s love for humans. Because the nature of ‘love’ is considered heresy in the world of demons, a true understanding of God loving humans, desiring their ultimate existence with Him in Eternity through freedom of will, is believed to be impossible. The demons believe that God is driven by an ulterior motive since the very notion of love doesn’t make sense to them, especially love with no strings attached (*agape love*). Yet, the notion of “falling in love” can be bent away from God’s purpose of marriage, by steering man into strict asceticism (*rigorous self-denial or extreme abstinence*) or unchaste, immoral relationships that end in murders, suicides, or intensely difficult marriages. As in all key areas of life, man’s spiritual inclinations and practices can lead him closer to God or closer to Satan...love is the fundamental difference between heaven and hell.

**1. Describe the nature of agape love vs. romantic (sexual) love and filial (brotherly love) – ref: Hebrews 13:1-4. Why is it hard for some people to believe that God loves humans purely and with “no strings attached”?**

**2. Read Genesis 1:27 and John 3:16. How does God show His love for humanity?**

## ❖ Letter 20 – Sexual Taste

### *Summary*

By Letter 20, Wormwood’s patient continues being chaste as he learns the “dangerous truth” (according to the devil) that sexual temptation does not last forever and will fade even faster when resisted. So Screwtape advises Wormwood to guide his patient along another path - “misdirection” of “sexual taste”. Wormwood can accomplish this by directing his patient toward the cultural norms of the ‘ideal woman’ as manifested by the media together with man’s physical appetite for sexual desire without the obligation of the marriage commitment (in relation with the “infernal Venus”).

**3. Temptations lose their power when God intervenes. Read 1 Corinthians 10:13 regarding temptation. Why do you think God allows temptations in our lives?**

**4. In what ways does today's culture twist our sexual desire for the "ideal man" or "ideal woman"?**

**5. What are the results of sexual sin and how does sexual sin differ from other sins?**

**Read 1 Corinthians 6:15-20 for insight.**

### **❖ Letter 21 – Entitlement with Time and Personal Ownership**

#### ***Summary***

In this letter, Screwtape advises Wormwood to exploit his patient's sense of 'ownership' of his time, money, body, and even God. By encouraging his patient to believe that his 'Time is his Own', Wormwood wants the patient to feel justified for reactions of anger, frustration, and impatience when unplanned events or people intrude on his previously planned schedules. Screwtape directs Wormwood to "darken his [patient's] intellect" by never letting him realize that "man can neither make, nor retain, one moment of time; it all comes to him by pure gift;...[that] he is also committed to a total service of the Enemy [God]". In essence, God gifts us with our souls, bodies, and time – how we 'use' those gifts will determine our eternal destiny (to whom our time, money, bodies, and souls actually belong)!

**6. How do we react at unexpected "intrusions" on our time? How does Jesus react (read Mark 5:21-34) with "interruptions" during his preaching ministry?**

**7. It is very common in today's culture to exploit the notion of 'I own my [body, ...], I can do with it as I please'. From a Christian perspective, why is the sense of personal ownership detrimental to living as part of the 'Body of Christ'?**

## ❖ Letter 22 – Silence, Music and Noise

### *Summary*

Letter 22 gives us a glimpse of the back biting, antagonistic nature of devils. It's obvious from the first paragraph that Wormwood has sought to get Screwtape in trouble. Screwtape retorts with disdain for what he considers a weak attempt, then turns the tables by criticizing Wormwood for not revealing the true nature of the patient's girlfriend. It's clear from the start, that the girlfriend's state of Christianity is completely vile to Screwtape and sends him into apoplexy. The fit changes him into a large centipede. And the letter is ultimately transcribed and signed by his secretary Toadpipe where he gives Screwtape the title Abysmal Sublimity Under Secretary. The meat of the letter reveals what devils find truly repulsive: loving, Christian families. He describes the girlfriend's house as a place that "reeks" of the odor of Christ. He goes so far as to equate it to Heaven and says that it's so contagious that even the gardener, after only five weeks, is being swayed to God's side. In the course of his diatribe about what he despises about the girl, he reveals the diabolical plan to replace the "melodies and silence" of heaven with Noise: "which alone defends us from silly qualms, despairing scruples and impossible desires."

**8. Screwtape describes the girl's family as being infectious. Describe your own experiences of being around someone who is so transformed by Christ that their presence makes you feel different.**

**9. Why do you think Screwtape hates both music and silence? Read Psalm 46:10. What does this passage say about the importance of silence? ¶5**

## ❖ Letter 23 – Historical Jesus

### *Summary*<sup>3</sup>

In letter 23, we see Screwtape using the 'historical Jesus' as a means of attack. He suggests that by reducing Jesus to a mere set of historical actions, they can reduce his influence on the patient: make him a teacher, not a savior, a leader, not the Creator himself. We see this in modern times in the WWJD brand of theology. Screwtape reveals a simple truth when he confesses that the earliest converts "were converted by a single historical fact (the Resurrection) and a single theological doctrine (the Redemption)." Screwtape says that another aim is to destroy the devotional life. He suggests that they replace experience of the real presence with a "remote, shadowy, and uncouth figure who spoke a strange language and died long ago." If they can separate the Man from God, they can separate the patient from relationship with God. The end of the letter brings up the topic of Christianity and politics. Again, Screwtape suggests ways to make Christianity a *means instead of end*, using political issues as the catalyst. Instead of allowing Christianity to inform politics to create a truly just society, his aim is to convince the patient to like Christianity because it produces political outcomes he favors, such as social justice.

**10. One devilish agenda is to destroy the devotional life. How do they do that? ¶3**

**12. The “historical Jesus” Screwtape refers to is an attempt by each generation to reinvent Jesus according to the ideas or theories of that generation. As a result it changes every 30 years or so. In the prior generation it was promoted along “liberal and humanitarian lines”. In the patient's generation (WWII era), it was being promoted on “Marxian, catastrophic and revolutionary lines.” What is the fashionable teaching about Jesus in our culture today?” ¶ 3**

## **❖ Letter 24 – Spiritual Pride and Social Vanity**

### ***Summary***

At its heart, this letter again speaks to humility as a major Christian virtue, and spiritual pride and social vanity as methods of gaining entrance to the patient's soul. Screwtape explains that he has found only a small fault in the patient's girlfriend. Because her faith is one since childhood, it still bares the marks of childlike acceptance. She believes that any belief different from hers is absurd and unworthy of belief. But this belief is one of innocent, unquestioning acceptance, not one born of spiritual pride. This makes her a “hopeless” cause for devils. The friends that have formed the patient's social circle, through his association with the girl, are advanced in their faith. By means of Christian charity they have accepted him as their own. Screwtape hopes to exploit this acceptance as one of the patient's own achievements, not charity, thereby inspiring pride, not humility. He also suggests a secondary tactic would be to appeal to his social vanity. Wormwood should encourage him to feel really Christian, not by his actions, but by his associations.

**13. Screwtape acknowledges that girl's faith, which has been hers since birth, makes her a difficult target. Read Proverbs 22:6, Matthew 18:3 and Luke 18:17. What is the value in teaching our children and grandchildren the faith and spiritual discipline from an early age? How might we recapture this childlike acceptance and apply it to our daily lives?**

**14. What is *spiritual pride* and how do you see it manifested in your life? Read Luke 18:9-14. How did Jesus confront such pride in this parable?**

## ❖ Letter 25 – Love of Change vs Novelty

### *Summary*

In this letter, Screwtape reveals that God has made change pleasurable for humans, but also the love of permanence. The cyclical nature of things, especially the seasons and the Christian calendar, appeal to this love of change, while simultaneously bringing comfort with their predictability. Screwtape starts this letter with concerns about the patient being “merely Christian.” He advises Wormwood to add novelty to this, so that the patient would find himself the subject to some fashion with Christian coloring, thereby diluting his Christianity and leading to heresy. Along with this, Wormwood is advised to inspire the 'horror of the Same Old Thing.' The goal is to make Christianity seem old fashioned and boring and appeal to the human desire for change. If devils can lead humans to ask if something is progressive or reactionary instead of righteous, prudent or possible, they can corrupt the conscience. “The greatest triumph of all is to elevate this horror of the Same Old Thing into a philosophy so that nonsense in the intellect may reinforce corruption in the will.”

**15. How do Novelty and Fashion, devilish smoke and mirrors, affect us? How do they affect your faith, what you believe, where you live and what you buy? Read 1 Timothy 6:6-11 and Philippians 4:11-13. What does Paul tell us about contentment?**

**16. The greatest triumph of the “horror of the Same Old Thing” is in the realm of ideas. What's wrong with asking if an idea is relevant rather than asking if it is prudent or true?**