

Letter 4 – Sincere Prayer

After counseling Wormwood to try to keep the patient from praying at all, he moves on in the letter to strategies to use to make human prayer ineffective. On this topic, here are some questions to consider.

1. ¶ 2 (p.15-16) – What do you think Screwtape is after when he encourages Wormwood to get his “patient” to contrast the “parrot-like” nature of his childhood prayers with “something entirely spontaneous, inward, informal, and unregularised,” emphasizing “mood” over “will and intelligence”?
2. ¶ 2 (p.16) – What do you think Screwtape refers to as “the prayer of silence as practised by those who are very far advanced in the Enemy’s service”?
3. ¶ 2 (p.16) – Screwtape says that we “can be persuaded that the bodily position makes no difference to [our] prayers.” What is he saying about prayer, and do you agree?
4. ¶ 3 (p.16-17) – Why does Screwtape advise Wormwood “to turn [the Christians’] gaze away from Him [God] towards themselves”?
5. ¶ 3 (p.17) – Regarding prayer, what do you understand to be the difference between being forgiven and feeling forgiven? Why would Screwtape want to emphasize the latter?
6. ¶ 4 (p.18) – Screwtape asserts, “If ever [the patient] comes to make the distinction, if ever he consciously directs his prayers ‘Not to what I think thou art but to what thou knowest thyself to be’, our situation is desperate. What does he mean?
7. ¶ 4 (p.19) – Why does Screwtape assert that we do not desire “this real nakedness of the soul in prayer . . . as much as [we] suppose”?

Letter 5 – War

Wormwood is rejoicing. War has descended upon Europe, and he sees this as a great opportunity, but Uncle Screwtape is not in complete agreement. While it does create certain advantages (from the demonic viewpoint), it also creates (from that same viewpoint) certain hazards.

1. ¶ 1 (p.21) – Why is Wormwood excited by the start of the war, and why does Screwtape throw cold water on that excitement?
2. ¶ 1 (p.22) – “[W]e can consider whether you are likely to do more good by making him an extreme patriot or an ardent pacifist.” What does this suggest about the nature of temptation?
3. ¶ 2 (p.23) – What are some of the “tendencies inherent in [the war] which are, in themselves, by no means in [the demons’] favor?”
4. ¶ 2 (p.23-24) – Why does Screwtape favor humans dying “in costly nursing homes amid doctors who lie, nurses who lie, as we have trained them.” What lie(s) do you think he is referring to?
5. ¶ 3 (p.24) – “The Enemy’s human partisans have all been plainly told by Him that suffering is an essential part of what He calls Redemption.” Is suffering in fact essential in the life of the Christian? If so, what is its purpose? (See Romans 5:3-5; 1 Peter 5:10; James 1:2-4.)

Letter 6 – Focus

In this letter, Screwtape discusses with Wormwood various strategies for keeping the patient's focus on himself rather than on God and on how to live out the life of faith.

1. ¶ 1 (p.25) – “[The Enemy] wants men to be concerned with what they do; our business is to keep them thinking about what will happen to them.” What point is Screwtape making?
2. ¶ 2 (p.25-26) – Why does Screwtape instruct Wormwood “to see that the patient never thinks of the present fear as his appointed cross, but only of the things he is afraid of”?
3. ¶ 3 (p.26) – Consider FDR’s famous words from his first inaugural address, “We have nothing to fear but fear itself.” Whereas concerning prayer, Screwtape advised getting the patient not to think about the Enemy himself, but rather to his own state of mind about the Enemy, in the matter of fear, he advises the opposite: To focus on the fear itself, rather than on the thing feared. Why is this the tempter’s strategy?
4. ¶ 3 (p.26) – Screwtape states as a general rule: “[I]n all activities of mind which favour our cause, encourage the patient to be unself-conscious and to concentrate on the object, but in all activities favourable to the Enemy bend his mind back on itself.” What is his point?
5. ¶ 5 (p.28) – In a discussion on the attitudes of “malice” (hatred) and “benevolence” (charity) that the war would inevitably produce, Wormwood is to work on the patient “to direct malice to his immediate neighbours whom he meets every day and to thrust his benevolence out to the remote circumference, to people he does not know.” Why?
6. ¶ 5 (p.28) – Viewing the human as three concentric circles with the heart or will being innermost, the intellect next, and the outer ring being fantasy, Screwtape counsels Wormwood to push all the virtues outward into the area of fantasy, but all the “desirable qualities” [i.e., vices] into the region of the Will. How does this describe our struggle with temptation?