

Inductive Approach to Apologetics: Shown in *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis

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C.S. Lewis (1898-1963) was one of the most influential Christian thinkers of the 20th century. He decided he was an atheist at the age of 13. After fighting in World War I, he became a great scholar and writer at Oxford University. He was a good friend of JRR Tolkien, the Christian author who wrote *Lord of the Rings*. Through the influence of scholarly Christians, he professed his faith in Jesus at the age of 33. He wrote both fiction and nonfiction, including many works on apologetics.

During the Second World War, England was under constant attack by Nazi Germany. During that difficult time, he was asked by the BBC to deliver a series of radio lectures on the basic Christian faith. These lectures were compiled and published in 1952 under the title *Mere Christianity*.

Mere Christianity is directed to a non-Christian audience. The purpose of this book is to show that the basic teachings of the Christian faith. To make his case, Lewis does not rely on the authority of Scripture, because many people who do not believe have little regard for the Bible. Instead, he uses an inductive approach. He relies on simple observations about people and common human experience, and from that, builds a case that the Bible is true.

Mere Christianity is divided into four books:

1. Right and wrong as a clue to the meaning of the universe
2. What Christians believe
3. Christian behavior
4. Beyond personality (First steps in the doctrine of the Trinity)

Each of these books consists of 5-12 chapters. We obviously don't have time tonight to go over every chapter. So we will just cover a few highlights from each of the four parts.

Book 1: Right and wrong

Some people claim that right and wrong is a human invention. In Book 1, Lewis makes the case that all people everywhere have a strong sense of right and wrong. You can hear it in the way that kids argue. "You're not playing fair!" People demand to be treated fairly. (Give some funny examples.) This shows that people everywhere know in their hearts that there is a standard of right and wrong, and the standard is universal.

But some people will object: "How can you say that the standard is *universal*? Societies are different!" They point to the fact that, in some cultures, a man can have only one wife, but in other cultures they practice polygamy. Yes, cultures are different. But if you really do an objective study, you have to conclude that the differences are only in the details, and the major points are always the same. There is no culture that has a totally different

moral standard from any other place. There is no place where cowardice is praised, where betrayal of family and friends is considered good, where selfishness is promoted. Some people disagree over how many wives you may have, but no one really believes that it's ok for a man to have any woman he wants at any time.

Still, despite all this evidence, some people will stubbornly insist that there is no universal standard. If you meet such a person, you can try an experiment. Treat him unfairly or cheat him out of something. Then see how long it takes for him to say, "Hey, you cheated. That's not fair!"

Just as everyone knows there is a universal standard, they also know that they don't live up to it. People are always apologizing for what they did wrong. They make excuses for the bad behavior, not the good. They feel guilty and ashamed and want to hide their weaknesses. (Give examples.) This is a powerful illustration of Romans 3:23: "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..."

Book 2: What Christians believe

One of the big objections to Christianity is that it's too exclusive. People say that if you are a Christian, you have to say that all other religions are wrong. But, in fact, that isn't true. C.S. Lewis says that if you are a Christian, you are free to recognize that there is a lot of truth in other religions. Most religions in fact hold some truth. It's only where they differ with Christianity that you have to draw the line. If you are an atheist, on the other hand, you have to believe that every religion at its core is fundamentally wrong. It's much harder to be an atheist. Atheists are the most rigid people of all.

Very few people in the world are actually atheists. The vast majority have always believed in some kind of divine being. But the conceptions of God differ. Some religions are based on pantheism. Pantheism is the view that God is in the universe, and the universe is God. God is in us and we are God. Hindus believe this. But most people recognize that God and creation are distinct. Many difficult and important questions arise about the nature of good and evil. Some eastern religions are based on dualism. Dualism sees good and evil as two separate and equal forces, like a north and south pole. Neither one is inherently stronger than the other. Neither one is inherently better than the other. Each side thinks of itself as good and the other side as bad. It's like Star Wars, with a light side and dark side of The Force. But it's hard to reconcile dualism with human nature, because people always want to line up on one side. We distinguish good from bad and want to align ourselves with the good. We side with Luke Skywalker, not Darth Vader.

The most satisfying explanation of good and evil is given by Christianity. We believe that God is the Creator and separate from his creation. We believe that God is good. He loves love and he hates hatred. But if God is good and created the world, then why is there so much bad? We believe that this is a good world that has gone bad. This story began with Lucifer, God's angel who turned into the devil. Evil is not a separate power from good; it is a parasite. God only creates good. God made us and said that we were good. But he also gave us free will, so that we would not be robots. Free will makes evil

possible. But it is also the only way that real love, joy and goodness are possible. Mankind chose evil. After the fall of man, God left us a conscience and spent years revealing himself to his creation, so that we could know who he is and what he wants. He revealed himself to the Jews. And then he sent Jesus, who forgives our sins and makes us right with God. This is what Christians believe. This is the only reason why we need religion at all. We need to be saved to be right with our Creator and to have fellowship with him. That is why we were created.

Book 3: Christian behavior

The word “morality” brings different images to people’s minds. A little boy often thinks that God doesn’t want him to have any fun. Many adults also think of morality as something that interferes with pleasure and fun. Lewis disagrees. He says, “Morality is the directions for running the human machine.” Morality prevents serious problems and breakdowns.

There are two ways that humans go wrong. We do damage to others. And we do damage to ourselves. But morality is concerned with three things: harmony among people, harmony within the individual, and the general purpose of human life.

Everyone agrees that we need harmony among people. We want a fair society. We say that what a person does is okay as long as it doesn’t interfere with the wellbeing of others. But how can a moral and upright society be attained if the people have no morals? It’s no use making rules of social behavior when we know that greed, bad temper and selfishness will prevent us from keeping them. Law cannot make a bad person good. So we need a morality that is also inside the individual. So morality concerns harmony among people and within people. But the third part is where Christian morality differs from other systems. Christianity says that people will live forever. If we are greedy and jealous people, then eternity would be hell. We must also care about the relationship between ourselves and the power that made us. And the power that made us wants us to be the best that we were made to be. God doesn’t want people who know how to follow rules. He wants people of character. Real morality is not in the rules that we follow. We are obedient but it is for the sake of our own character. God wants to give us a happiness that no external rules can give. He wants us to act like outstanding people. But he also wants us to be outstanding people that can share in heaven with him.

This is the overarching principle that C.S. Lewis applies to Christian behavior. He also goes into detail on certain aspects of morality, including sex, marriage, forgiveness, charity, hope and faith.

Book 4: The Trinity

The fourth book is about theology. Theology is essentially the science of God. When giving these talks on the radio, C.S. Lewis says that many people discouraged him from talking about theology. They thought that average people want “plain, practical, religion”.

Lewis states in response that he thinks highly of people and that they need something more than child's religion.

Theology is no substitute for the real experience of God. But it helps us to fit the pieces together. It comes from the learning of faithful Christians. And it strengthens our faith. In this day and age, some theology is necessary. People are well educated. We are exposed to million of ideas every day. A simple understanding of Christianity is not enough to help us make sense of everything that we see and hear.

The most important doctrine in theology is the Trinity. The Trinity consists of God the father, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Jesus is God but he is also God's son. Without this doctrine, it would be easy to say that Jesus was simply a great teacher, and that we could just follow his teachings and make the world a better place. But this statement is problematic. First, what makes us think that we can actually follow his teachings? His teachings are very hard. And Jesus cannot just be a great moral teacher, because he claimed to be the Son of God. If he is not the Son of God, then he must be a pathological liar or a madman. And if he was a liar or madman, then we definitely shouldn't trust in him or follow his teachings. This idea that Jesus is a moral teacher is not Christianity. Christianity says that Jesus is the son of God, and those who follow him can also become children of God.

The idea that we can be children of God is another key point of Christian theology. We are not children of God automatically. We have to become them. Jesus was begotten by God, we were made by him. To beget is to make something of the same kind as yourself. God can beget and create. God begets God but makes man. This is how Jesus is God but we are his creation. We were made by god, but in his image. Christianity is all about the fact that we were made to be like god and we really come alive only when we become his children. This is what we exist for. If we want, joy, power peace, eternal life we must go to the one who has them. If we share God's life, then we are his sons and daughters. Jesus is the perfect example of a son of God. He came to this fallen world to show us how to become God's children. He came to give us a whole new life that is not only natural but spiritual. If our goal is to become children of God, then we need to be like Jesus. But we are not like him yet. So we pretend and imitate. When we try to be like Jesus, he is at our side, showing us his life and thoughts. Jesus is alive and with us as a man and as God. He is changing us from what we are into the kind of person that he is. This is the whole essence of Christianity. Christ doesn't want us to follow a set of morals. He wants us to be transformed. He wants to change us into new people. The best of our talents and personality are realized in him, because he gave them to us. When we come to Jesus and remain in him we experience new life and new personality.