**The Screwtape Letters**

**Week Two: The Power of the Real (Desire and Objectivism)**

**Introduction:**

From letter XIII

“…you allowed the patient to read a book he really enjoyed, because he enjoyed it and not in order to make clever remarks about it to his new friends.”

“…you allowed him two real positive Pleasures.”

“The characteristic of Pains and Pleasures is that they are unmistakably real, and therefore, as far as they go, give the man who feels them a touchstone of reality.”

“How can you have failed to see that a *real* pleasure was the last thing you ought to have let him meet?”

“The deepest likings and impulses of any man are the raw material, the starting point, with which the Enemy has furnished him. To get him away from those is therefore always a point gained…”

“The man who truly and disinterestedly enjoys any one thing in the world, for its own sake, and without caring twopence what other people say about it, is by that very fact forearmed against some of our subtlest modes of attack.”

**Joy and the Dialectic of Desire**

“The Christian says, ‘Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If not of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing. If that is so, I must take care, on the one hand, never to despise, or to be unthankful for, these earthly blessings, and on the other, never to mistake them for something else of which they are only a kind of copy, or echo, or mirage. I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country and to help others to do the same.’” (*Mere Christianity,* Book III.10, “Hope, point 3”)

Longing, first experienced in childhood—*sehnsucht*;

“It appeared to me therefore that if a man diligently followed this desire, pursuing the false objects until their falsity appeared and then resolutely abandoning them, he must come out at last into the clear knowledge that the human soul was made to enjoy some object that is never fully given—nay, cannot even be imagined as given—in our present mode of subjective and spatio-temporal experience. This Desire was, in the soul, as the Siege Perilous in Arthur’s castle—the chair in which only one could sit. And if nature makes nothing in vain, the One who can sit in this chair must exist. I knew only too well how easily the longing accepts false objects and through what dark ways the pursuit of them leads us: but I also say that the Desire itself contains the corrective of all these errors. The only fatal error was to pretend that you had passed from desire to fruition, when, in reality, you had found either nothing, or desire itself, or the satisfaction of some different desire. The dialectic of Desire, faithfully followed, would retrieve all mistakes, head you off from all false paths, and force you not to propound, but to live through, a sort of ontological proof. This lived dialectic, and the merely argued dialectic of my philosophical progress, seemed to have converged on one goal; accordingly I tried to put them both into my allegory which thus became a defense of Romanticism (in my particular sense) as well as of Reason and Christianity. (*The Pilgrim’s Regress*, Preface, 10)

Let me turn this into a series of statements:

1) God made the world and all that is in it.

2) God made human creatures with desire—creatures who would long for things.

3) When human creatures try to fill their desires with the things of the world, the desires is frustrated.

4) When human creatures accept that God is the true fulfillment of their desire, then they are able to enjoy the pleasures of the world as God intended.

**The Doctrine of Objective Value**

“In coming to understand anything we are rejecting the facts as they are for us in favour of the facts as they are” (Lewis, *An Experiment in Criticism*, 138).

High level summary: **all judgments depend upon reality. A statement is true if it corresponds to reality, and untrue if it does not correspond to reality.**

“It is the doctrine of objective value, the belief that certain attitudes are really true, and others really false, to the kind of thing the universe is and the kinds of things we are.” (*The Abolition of Man*, 31)

“On the contrary, except on the supposition of a changeless standard, progress is impossible. If good is a fixed point, it is at least possible that we should get nearer and nearer to it; but if the terminus is as mobile as the train, how can the train progress towards it? Our ideas of the good may change, but they cannot change either for the better or the worse if there is no absolute and immutable good to which they can approximate or from which they can recede. We can go on getting a sum more and more nearly right only if the one perfectly right answer is ‘stagnant’.” (*Christian Reflections*, “The Poison of Subjectivism,” 76.)

“Can you be righteous,” asks Traherne, “unless you be just in rendering to things their due esteem? All things were made to be yours and you were made to prize them according to their value.” St. Augustine defines virtue as *ordo amoris*, the ordinate condition of the affections in which every object is accorded that kind and degree of love which is appropriate to it. Aristotle says that the aim of education is to make the pupil like and dislike what he ought… The little human animal will not at first have the right responses. It must be trained to feel pleasure, liking, disgust, and hatred at those things which really are pleasant, likeable, disgusting, and hateful. (*Abolition*, 28-29)

**Screwtape and Distractions from Joy/the Real:**

Screwtape’s distractions regularly try to take us away from the real, and to substitute subordinate pleasures for real ones.

Letter I, “By the very act of arguing, you awake the patient’s reason; and once it is awake, who can foresee the result?”

VII, “All extremes except extreme devotion to the Enemy are to be encouraged.”

VII, “The attitude which you want to guard against is that in which temporal affairs are treated primarily as material for obedience.”

VIII, “Hence the prayers offered in the state of dryness are those which please Him best.”

IX, “Never forget that when we are dealing with any pleasure in its healthy and normal and satisfying form, we are, in a sense, on the Enemy’s ground. 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.”

IX, “You see the idea? Keep his mind off the plain antithesis between True and False. Nice shadowy expressions… [instead].”

XI – discussion of laughter—the laughter that is connected with Joy expresses something *real*; i.e., can’t be defeated

XII – “My only fear is les tin attempting to hurry the patient you awaken him to a sense of his real position.”

XII – “He will *want* his prayers to be unreal, for he will dread nothing so much as effective contact with the Enemy.”

XII – “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.”

Group Discussion Question:

1) Can you identify places where there is temptation to choose lesser goods over greater ones?

2) How can real things protect us in the Christian walk?