

Those who shaped us: C.S. Lewis and George Herbert

Love, (III) by George Herbert

Love bade me welcome, yet my soul drew back,
 Guilty of dust and sin.
But quick-eyed love, observing me grow slack,
 From my first entrance in,
Drew nearer to me, sweetly questioning,
 If I lack'd anything.

A guest, I answer'd, worthy to be here:
 Love said: You shall be he.
I the unkind, ungrateful? Ah my dear,
 I cannot look on thee.
Love took my hand, and smiling did reply,
 Who made the eyes but I?

Truth Lord, but I have marr'd them: let my shame
 Go where it doth deserve.
And know you not, says Love, who bore the blame?
 My dear, then I will serve.
You must sit down, says Love, and taste my meat:
 So I did sit and eat.

Praise III (and Hymn

King of Glorie, King of Peace, I will love thee:
And that love may never cease, I will move thee.

Thou hast granted my request, Thou hast heard me:
Thou didst note my working breast, Thou hast spar'd me.

Wherefore with my utmost art I will sing thee,
And the cream of all my heart I will bring thee.

Though my sinnes against me cried, Thou didst cleare me;
And alone, when they replied, Thou didst heare me.

Sev'n whole dayes, not one in seven, I will praise thee.
In my heart, though not in heaven, I can raise thee.

*Thou grew'st soft and moist with tears, Thou relentedst:
And when Justice call'd for fears, Thou disentedst.*

Small it is, in this poore sort To enroll thee:
Ev'n eternitie is to short To extoll thee.

C.S. Lewis

- Narnia – as a child at home, camp Mikell, Aslan ‘the deep magic’ forgiveness, restoration
- Screwtape Letters
- The Great Divorce
- Mere Christianity
- Daily Devotionals, like the one below

“Are you not thirsty?” said the Lion.

"I am dying of thirst," said Jill.

"Then drink," said the Lion.

"May I — could I — would you mind going away while I do?" said Jill.

The Lion answered this only by a look and a very low growl. And as Jill gazed at its motionless bulk, she realized that she might as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside for her convenience.

The delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic.

"Will you promise not to — do anything to me, if I do come?" said Jill.

"I make no promise," said the Lion.

Jill was so thirsty now that, without noticing it, she had come a step nearer.

"Do you eat girls?" she said.

"I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms," said the Lion. It didn't say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it.

"I daren't come and drink," said Jill.

"Then you will die of thirst," said the Lion.

"Oh dear!" said Jill, coming another step nearer. "I suppose I must go and look for another stream then."

"There is no other stream," said the Lion."

— C.S. Lewis, *The Silver Chair*

C.S. Lewis

WHY WE NEED A MAP

IN A way I quite understand why some people are put off by Theology. I remember once when I had been giving a talk to the R.A.F., an old, hard-bitten officer got up and said, "I've no use for all that stuff. But, mind you, I'm a religious man too. I *know* there's a God. I've *felt* Him: out alone in the desert at night: the tremendous mystery. And that's just why I don't believe all your neat little dogmas and formulas about Him. To anyone who's met the real thing they all seem so petty and pedantic and unreal!"

Now in a sense I quite agreed with that man. I think he had probably had a real experience of God in the desert. And when he turned from that experience to the Christian creeds, I think he really was turning from something real to something less real. In the same way, if a man has once looked at the Atlantic from the beach, and then goes and looks at a map of the Atlantic, he also will be turning from something real to something less real: turning from real waves to a bit of colored paper. But here comes the point. The map is admittedly only colored paper, but there are two things you have to remember about it. In the first place, it is based on what hundreds and thousands of people have found out by sailing the real Atlantic. In that way it has behind it masses of experience just as real as the one you could have from the beach; only, while yours would be a single isolated glimpse, the map fits all those different experiences together. In the second place, if you want to go anywhere, the map is absolutely necessary. As long as you are content with walks on the beach, your own glimpses are far more fun than looking at a map. But the map is going to be more use than walks on the beach if you want to get to America.

Readings for Meditation and Reflection

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C.S. Lewis

FORGIVING AND EXCUSING

FORGIVING does not mean excusing. Many people seem to think it does. They think that if you ask them to forgive someone who has cheated or bullied them you are trying to make out that there was really no cheating or no bullying. But if that were so, there would be nothing to forgive. They keep on replying, "But I tell you the man broke a most solemn promise." Exactly: that is precisely what you have to forgive. (This doesn't mean you must necessarily believe his next promise. It does mean that you must make every effort to kill every trace of resentment in your own heart—every wish to humiliate or hurt him or to pay him out.) The difference between this situation and the one in which you are asking God's forgiveness is this. In our own case we accept excuses too easily, in other people's we do not accept them easily enough. As regards my own sins it is a safe bet (though not a certainty) that the excuses are not really so good as I think: as regards other men's sins against me it is a safe bet (though not a certainty) that the excuses are better than I think. One must therefore begin by attending carefully to everything which may show that the other man was not so much to blame as we thought. But even if he is absolutely fully to blame we still have to forgive him; and even if 99 per cent of his apparent guilt can be explained away by really good excuses, the problem of forgiveness begins with the 1 per cent of guilt which is left over. To excuse what can really produce good excuses is not Christian charity; it is only fairness. To be a Christian means to forgive the inexcusable, because God has forgiven the inexcusable in you.

This is hard. It is perhaps not so hard to forgive a single great injury. But to forgive the incessant provocations of

Readings for Meditation and Reflection

daily life—to keep on forgiving the bossy mother-in-law, the bullying husband, the nagging wife, the selfish daughter, the deceitful son—how can we do it? Only, I think, by remembering where we stand, by meaning our words when we say in our prayers each night, "Forgive our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us." We are offered forgiveness on no other terms. To refuse it is to refuse God's mercy for ourselves. There is no hint of exceptions and God means what He says.

"On Forgiveness"

in Fern-seed and Elephants