

Screwtape Letter #21 – Questions

Screwtape's going to change directions now.



My dear Wormwood,
Yes. A period of sexual temptation is an excellent time for working in a subordinate attack on the patient's peevishness. ... The more claims on life, therefore, that your patient can be induced to make, the more often he will feel injured and, as a result, ill-tempered. ... They anger him because he regards his time as his own and feels that it is being stolen. ... But what he must never be permitted to doubt is that the total from which these deductions have been made was, in some mysterious sense, his own personal birthright.

21.1) Who does our time belong to? What does this tell us about these unplanned intrusions on our time and the consequences of not handling them well?



You have here a delicate task. ... When I speak of preserving this assumption in his mind, therefore, the last thing I mean you to do is to furnish him with arguments in its defence. There aren't any. ... Wrap a darkness about it, and in the centre of that darkness let his sense of ownership-in-Time lie silent, uninspected, and operative.

21.2) Screwtape's now going to say that what seemed so easy, is now not so easy. It seems like we never have enough time. I certainly feel that way. And yet – is this right?

Ps 31:14 But I trust in you, O LORD;
I say, "You are my God."

Ps 31:15 My times are in your hands;
deliver me from my enemies
and from those who pursue me.

Ps 31:16 Let your face shine on your servant;
save me in your unfailing love.

Ps 31:17 Let me not be put to shame, O LORD,
for I have cried out to you;
but let the wicked be put to shame
and lie silent in the grave.

Ps 31:18 Let their lying lips be silenced,
for with pride and contempt
they speak arrogantly against the righteous.

If we believe what David wrote – how should we really feel about this lack of time and the intrusions on what we perceive as too little time in the first place?

The sense of ownership in general is always to be encouraged. The humans are always putting up claims to ownership which sound equally funny in Heaven and in Hell and we must keep them doing so. ... Even in the nursery a child can be taught to mean by 'my teddy bear' not the old imagined recipient of affection to whom it stands in a special relation (for that is what the Enemy will teach them to mean if we are not careful) but 'the bear I can pull to pieces if I like'. And at the other end of the scale, we have taught men to say 'my God' in a sense not really very different from 'my boots', meaning 'the God on whom I have a claim for my distinguished services and whom I exploit from the pulpit—the God I have done a corner in'.

21.3a) Screwtape now moves from time to the ownership of physical things.

How does Screwtape manage to get from ownership of a shoe to ownership of a teddy bear to essentially ownership of God?

21.3b) Is this sense of ownership equally funny in both Heaven and Hell? Or do you think God looks at it differently?



And all the time the joke is that the word 'Mine' in its fully possessive sense cannot be uttered by a human being about anything. ... Our Father hopes in the end to say 'Mine' of all things on the more realistic and dynamic ground of conquest,

Your affectionate uncle

SCREWTAPE

21.4) We get to the heart of the matter here: will everything go to The Enemy or to Screwtape's Father Below? Will ownership be determined by Who made everything – or by conquest?

Some interesting concepts are in here too:

- Screwtape says his Father Below “hopes” to claim victory in the end. How does this differ from our hope.

- Screwtape's Father Below also looks at his expected conquests as more realistic than The Enemy's claims as Creator. Ultimately, who will decide what happens to (a) everything except people and (b) each individual person?

Screwtape Letter #22 – Questions

Things must not be going so well for little Wormwood.
Maybe they were a little rough for Screwtape too?

My dear Wormwood,

So! Your man is in love—... You may be interested to learn that the little misunderstanding with the Secret Police which you tried to raise about some unguarded expressions in one of my letters has been tidied over. ... Meanwhile I enclose a little booklet, just issued, on the new House of Correction for Incompetent Tempters. It is profusely illustrated and you will not find a dull page in it.



22.1) So Wormwood tried to get his “affectionate Uncle Screwtape” in trouble.

Contrast this scenario with our relationship with Jesus in terms of

(a) The chances that taking Jesus’ advice would even lead to the need to call the “Secret Police”

(b) When we do something to Jesus – His reaction to us as compared to Screwtape’s reaction to what Wormwood did.



I have looked up this girl’s dossier and am horrified at what I find. ... The sort of creature who’d find ME funny! ... Why doesn’t the Enemy blast her for it, if He’s so moonstruck by virginity—instead of looking on there, grinning?

22.2) Seeing – but not seeing?

How is it possible to see so clearly what’s going on – and not see it at all?

looks as if she’d faint at the sight of blood and then dies with a smile

The sort of creature who’d find ME funny!

Maybe if Screwtape could actually / thoughtfully answer his own question at the end of this paragraph he would get at least a clue as to what’s going on. But, he can’t – or won’t.

What are some possible reasons why not?

He's a hedonist at heart. All those fasts and vigils and stakes and crosses are only a façade. ... We fight under cruel disadvantages. Nothing is naturally on our side. (Not that that excuses you. I'll settle with you presently. You have always hated me and been insolent when you dared.

22.3) Screwtape seems to be feeling a little self pity. Still seeing – but not seeing. First, Screwtape says that God doesn't understand – Ugh! I don't think He has the least inkling of that high and austere mystery to which we rise in the Miserific Vision.

And then he goes on to say – **Everything has to be twisted before it's any use to us. We fight under cruel disadvantages. Nothing is naturally on our side.**

Following on with the previous question – is there something preventing Screwtape (and us) from seeing the problem here? Given the second statement, should one maybe reconsider which side they're on when everything is “naturally” against them?



Then, of course, he gets to know this woman's family and whole circle. Could you not see that the very house she lives in is one that he ought never to have entered? The whole place reeks of that deadly odour. ... It bears a sickening resemblance to the description one human writer made of Heaven: 'the regions where there is only life and therefore all that is not music is silence'.

Music and silence—how I detest them both! ... The melodies and silences of Heaven will be shouted down in the end. But I admit we are not yet loud enough, or anything like it.

Research is in progress.

22.4) The more Screwtape sees – the less he sees.

Given the responses to questions 2 & 3, talk about how this “Noise” can make those things harder to overcome.

Along with that, consider that once it is overcome, what is the “impenetrable mystery” and how can it help to defend against being tricked by Satan again?

Meanwhile you, disgusting little—

[Here the MS breaks off and is resumed in a different hand.]

In the heat of composition I find that I have inadvertently allowed myself to assume the form of a large centipede. I am accordingly dictating the rest to my secretary. ... In my present form I feel even more anxious to see you, to unite you to myself in an indissoluble embrace,

(Signed) TOADPIPE

For his Abysmal Sublimity Under Secretary Screwtape, TE, BS, etc

22.5) Uh Oh!

What just happened here?

What does it have to do with us? Can this happen to you or I?

Screwtape Letter #23 – Questions

Time for Wormwood to take practice to reality.

My dear Wormwood,

Through this girl and her disgusting family the patient is now getting to know more Christians every day, and very intelligent Christians too. ... A spoiled saint, a Pharisee, an inquisitor, or a magician, makes better sport in Hell than a mere common tyrant or debauchee.



23.1) Although we don't know if it's even possible to lose salvation, Screwtape says one who has lost it "makes better sport". Why would this be the case – especially considering that he tells Wormwood to pretend to be an angel of light?



Looking round your patient's new friends I find that the best point of attack would be the borderline between theology and politics. Several of his new friends are very much alive to the social implications of their religion. ... The advantages of these constructions, which we intend to change every thirty years or so, are manifold.

Screwtape now gets into two topics we often say it's best to avoid – politics and religion.

In the first place they all tend to direct men's devotion to something which does not exist, for each 'historical Jesus' is unhistorical. ... but which is enough to produce a crop of new Napoleons, new Shakespeares, and new Swifts, in every publisher's autumn list.

23.2a) Including Napoleon in the list is an interesting choice. Even while Jesus was alive (as a human) – His followers wanted Him to be a Napoleon of sorts. What's wrong with this view?

In the second place, all such constructions place the importance of their historical Jesus in some peculiar theory He is supposed to have promulgated. ... We make the Sophists: He raises up a Socrates to answer them.

23.2b) What is the problem with considering Jesus to be nothing more than a great moral teacher?



Our third aim is, by these constructions, to destroy the devotional life. ... Instead of the Creator adored by its creature, you soon have merely a leader acclaimed by a partisan, and finally a distinguished character approved by a judicious historian.

23.2c) How can this be done – and how can it be prevented?



And fourthly, besides being unhistorical in the Jesus it depicts, religion of this kind is false to history in another sense. ... The 'Gospels' come later and were written not to make Christians but to edify Christians already made.

23.2d) That last sentence is very powerful –

The 'Gospels' come later and were written not to make Christians but to edify Christians already made.

Maybe this is why some people read the Bible and think it's a "nice story" – others think it's foolish – and others think it's a Book of Truth.

Talk about what it really means about our ability to "save ourselves".

Screwtape Letter #24 – Questions

Uh Oh!

– is pride rearing its head?

My dear Wormwood,

I have been in correspondence with Slumtrimpet who is in charge of your patient's young woman, and begin to see the chink in her armour. ... Now the element of ignorance and naïvety in all this is so large, and the element of spiritual pride so small, that it gives us little hope of the girl herself. But have you thought of how it can be made to influence your own patient.



24.1) What might the Apostle Paul have to say about this situation and how to deal with it?

1Co 4:6 Now, brothers, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, “Do not go beyond what is written.” Then you will not take pride in one man over against another.”



It is always the novice who exaggerates. ... Can you get him to imitate this defect in his mistress and to exaggerate it until what was venial in her becomes in him the strongest and most beautiful of the vices—Spiritual Pride?

The conditions seem ideally favourable. The new circle in which he finds himself is one of which he is tempted to be proud for many reasons other than its Christianity. ... He is like a dog which should imagine it understood fire-arms because its hunting instinct and love for its master enable it to enjoy a day's shooting.

24.2) Screwtape's logic now begins to reveal much about us

We talked about pride in the previous question. Screwtape wants Wormwood to take advantage of a “minor” flaw in the girl and turn it into a major case of Spiritual Pride in his patient. At the end of the paragraph, Screwtape makes an analogy between the patient and a hunting dog.

He is like a dog which should imagine it understood fire-arms because its hunting instinct and love for its master enable it to enjoy a day's shooting.

Being someone who likes dogs, I actually do believe that a dog would enjoy a day's shooting with his master – not because the dog likes (or knows how to) shoot, but because he enjoys being with his master.

First – compare my point of view to Screwtape's as far as the analogy between the two.

Then – take it further to show how it's not at all a forgone conclusion that the patient will pick up Spiritual Pride at all.



Here is your chance. ... he must mean not 'The people who, in their charity and humility, have accepted me', but 'The people with whom I associate by right'.
Success here depends on confusing him. ... It is no affair of yours whether those theories are true or false; the great thing is to make Christianity a mystery religion in which he feels himself one of the initiates.

24.3) Now that he's talking about us again, Screwtape is back on solid ground and beginning to get on a roll.

There are 3 thoughts in here – confusion – not putting thoughts into words – and making Christianity into some kind of mystery religion. How do these three work together – and what would a good Christian community do to them?

Pray do not fill your letters with rubbish about this European War. Its final issue is, no doubt, important, but that is a matter for the High Command. I am not in the least interested in knowing how many people in England have been killed by bombs. In what state of mind they died, I can learn from the office at this end. That they were going to die sometime, I knew already. Please keep your mind on your work,

Your affectionate uncle

SCREWTAPE

24.4) Screwtape all of a sudden ends that line of thought and goes back to chastising Wormwood.

Back in Letter #5, Screwtape also talked about war – as in this excerpt –

I know that Scabtree and others have seen in wars a great opportunity for attacks on faith, but I think that view was exaggerated. The Enemy's human partisans have all been plainly told by Him that suffering is an essential part of what He calls Redemption; so that a faith which is destroyed by a war or a pestilence cannot really have been worth the trouble of destroying.

Earlier in this letter, Screwtape said the patient was a novice. He seems to be saying here that maybe the patient is beyond just the novice stage. What do you think?