

C.S. LEWIS – The most beloved heretic

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C.S. Lewis. That name rolls off the tongue with buttery smoothness and emanates a vivaciously ethereal theological preponderance. It makes billions of people well up with emotion and delight. It is a name more beloved than any other name in Christian history that is not found in the Bible itself. The book *Mere Christianity* is listed as the 3rd most influential book for Evangelicals (1) It is listed in just about every list of top Christian books of “all time.” (2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10) C.S. Lewis is beloved by everyone from Roman Catholics to scores of Baptists and Pentecostals. He remains one of the most quoted Christian authors of all time and considered one of the 50 most influential Christians of history (11).

I have personally witnessed the most diverse range of people gleefully quote C.S. Lewis. This includes people who adhere to all manner of theological and ecclesiological positions, including fundamentalism, cessationist, continuationism, calvinism, arminianism, molinism, open theism, the third wave prophetic movement, the traditional Pentecostal movement, heck every single movement! (I am sometimes surprised at the diverse group of friends I have).

Are you getting the point? C.S. Lewis is one of the most influential, beloved, esteemed, revered, and honored Christian authors of all time. He is claimed by Calvinists like John Piper and the Open Theists like Greg Boyd. Essentially everyone thinks two things (1) C.S. Lewis is amazing, and (2) C.S. Lewis is on their team.

Turns out that while the majority of the Christian world absolutely adores C.S. Lewis “the author” very few people know C.S. Lewis “the heretic.” I personally don’t think C.S. Lewis is a heretic, but, and here is the great irony, if I were to claim his beliefs, 95% of evangelical churches would kick me out as a heretic, and yet most of these people avidly and excessively quote Lewis upon numerous occasions.

THE “HERESIES” OF C.S. LEWIS

Heresy refers to belief or teaching that is contrary to orthodox beliefs (those accepted as vital and true). There are indeed official heresies, as defined by the Church, however, most Christians use the term loosely to refer to any beliefs that are considered nontraditional Christian beliefs.

1. Evolution is a valid scientific explanation for life

C.S. Lewis openly accepted that evolution was a valid scientific theory of origins. In fact, his most famous Christian book, “*Mere Christianity*” includes the concept of scientific evolution as an example of spiritual growth in the book’s grand finale. This was never updated, revised, or changed, throughout Lewis’ life.

- **“Thousands of centuries ago huge, very heavily armoured creatures were evolved. If anyone had at that time been watching the course of Evolution he would probably have expected that it was going to go on to heavier and heavier armour. But he would have been wrong. The future had a card up its sleeve which nothing at that time would have led him to expect. It was going to spring on him little, naked, unarmoured animals which had better brains: and with those brains they were going to master the whole planet.** They were not merely going to have more power than the prehistoric monsters, they were going to have a new kind of power. The next step was not only going to be different, but different with a new kind of difference. **The stream of Evolution** was not going to flow on in the direction in which he saw it flowing: it was in fact going to take a

sharp bend.... Now, if you care to talk in these terms, the Christian view is precisely that the Next Step has already appeared. And it is really new. It is not a change from brainy men to brainier men: it is a change that goes off in a totally different direction—a change from being creatures of God to being sons of God.” (Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, “The Next Man,” 12)

- **“For long centuries God perfected the animal form which was to become the vehicle of humanity and the image of Himself.** He gave it hands whose thumb could be applied to each of the fingers, and jaws and teeth and throat capable of articulation, and a brain sufficiently complex to execute all the material motions whereby rational thought is incarnated. **The creature may have existed for ages in this state before it became man: it may even have been clever enough to make things which a modern archaeologist would accept as proof of its humanity.** But it was only an animal because all its physical and psychological processes were directed to purely material and natural ends. **Then, in the fullness of time, God caused to descend upon this organism, both on its psychology and physiology, a new kind of consciousness which could say ‘I’ and ‘me,’ which could look upon itself as an object, which knew God, which could make judgments of truth, beauty, and goodness, and which was so far above time that it could perceive time flowing past.”** (Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* 13)

2. Adam and Eve were not literal people

- The prominent pastor Tim Keller, who is an avid student of C.S. Lewis (14) writes “*One of my favorite Christian writers (that’s putting it mildly), C. S. Lewis, did not believe in a literal Adam and Eve, and I do not think the lack of such belief means he cannot be saved.*” (15)
- Lewis himself writes the following (which was never revised, updated, or changed in new editions of his books): “*Then, in the fullness of time, God caused to descend upon this organism, both on its psychology and physiology, a new kind of consciousness which could say “I” and “me,” which could look upon itself as an object, which knew God, which could make judgments of truth, beauty and goodness, and which was so far above time that it could perceive time flowing past... “We do not know how many of these creatures God made, nor how long they continued in the Paradisal state. But sooner or later they fell. Someone or something whispered that they could become as gods.... They wanted some corner in this universe of which they could say to God”* (C.S. Lewis, *Problem of Pain* 16)

3. The Old Testament is partly legendary and mythical

C.S. Lewis did not believe that the earliest portions of Genesis were literal historical narrative, but rather that they were mythical ways of grasping for truth.

- ***The earliest stratum of the Old Testament contains many truths in a form which I take to be legendary, or even mythical—hanging in the clouds,*** but gradually the truth condenses, becomes more and more historical. **From things like Noah’s Ark or the sun standing still upon Ajalon, you come down to the court memoirs of King David. Finally you reach the New Testament and history reigns supreme, and the Truth is incarnate.** And “incarnate” here is more than a metaphor. It is not an accidental resemblance that what, from the point of view of being, is stated in the form “God became Man,” should involve, from the point of view of human knowledge, the statement “Myth became Fact.” (Lewis, “Is Theology Poetry?,” in *The Weight of Glory and Other Essays*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2001), 129)
- ***I have therefore no difficulty in accepting, say, the view of those scholars who tell us that the account of Creation in Genesis is derived from earlier Semitic stories which were Pagan and mythical.*** We must of course be quite clear what “derived from” means. Stories do not reproduce their species like mice. They are told by men. each re-teller either repeats exactly what his predecessor had told him or else changes it. He may change it

unknowingly or deliberately. If he changes it deliberately, his invention, his sense of form, his ethics, his ideas of what is fit, or edifying, or merely interesting, all come in. If unknowingly, then his unconscious (which is so largely responsible for our forgettings) has been at work. Thus at every step in what is called—a little misleadingly—the “evolution” of a story, a man, all he is and all his attitudes, are involved. And no good work is done anywhere without aid from the Father of Lights. When a series of such re-tellings turns a creation story which at first had almost no religious or metaphysical significance into a story which achieves the idea of true Creation and of a transcendent Creator (as Genesis does), then nothing will make me believe that some of the re-tellers, or some one of them, has not been guided by God. (Lewis, 17)

- **“whether a particular passage is rightly translated or is myth (but of course myth specially chosen by God from among countless myths to carry a spiritual truth) or history....** But we must not use the Bible (our fathers too often did) as a sort of Encyclopedia out of which texts...can be taken for use as weapons.”(C. S. Lewis, *Letters of C. S. Lewis*, (New York, Harper and Row, 2001), p. 428.)
- The point is that *the whole Book of Jonah has to me the air of being a moral romance*, a quite different kind of thing from, say, the account of King David or the New Testament narratives, not pegged, like them, into any historical situation. **In what sense does the Bible “present” the Jonah story “as historical”? Of course it doesn’t say, “This is fiction,” but then neither does our Lord say that the Unjust Judge, Good Samaritan, or Prodigal Son are fiction (I would put Esther in the same category as Jonah for the same reason).** How does a denial, a doubt, of their historicity lead logically to a similar denial of New Testament miracles? Supposing (as I think is the case), that sound critical reading revealed different kinds of narrative in the Bible, surely it would be illogical to suppose that these different kinds should all be read in the same way? (Lewis, Letter from C. S. Lewis to Corbin 18)

4. Substitutionary Atonement is not the Gospel

Most protestants state that what took place on the cross can be explained with Penal Substitutionary Atonement, the idea that God punished Jesus as a substitute instead of sinners for their sins. Many modern evangelicals indeed call substitutionary atonement “The Gospel,” however, C.S. Lewis did not accept this:

- Now before I became a Christian I was under the impression that the first thing Christians had to believe was one particular theory as to what the point of this dying was. According to that theory God wanted to punish men for having deserted and joined the Great Rebel, but Christ volunteered to be punished instead, and so God let us off. Now I admit that even this theory does not seem quite so immoral and silly as it used to; but that is not the point I want to make. **What I came to see later on was that neither this theory nor another is Christianity.** The central belief is that Christ’s death has somehow put us right with God and given us a fresh start. Theories as to how it did this are another matter: A good many different theories have been held as to how it works; what all Christians are agreed on is that it does work. (Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, 19)

5. People from other religions can be saved

- **“There are people in other religions who are being led by God’s secret influence to concentrate on those parts of their religion which are in agreement with Christianity, and who thus belong to Christ without knowing it.** For example a Buddhist of good will may be led to concentrate more and more on the Buddhist teaching about mercy and to leave in the background (though he might still say he believed) the Buddhist teaching on certain points. Many of the good Pagans long before Christ’s birth may have been in this position.” (Lewis, *Mere Christianity* p.176, 177, 19).

- “I think that every prayer which is sincerely made *even to a false god* or to a very imperfectly conceived true God, is accepted by the true God and that *Christ saves many who do not think they know Him*. (C. S. Lewis, Letters of C. S. Lewis, (New York, Harper and Row, 2001), p. 428.)

6. There is a Purgatory after death

- “**Of course I pray for the dead.** The action is so spontaneous, so all but inevitable, that only the most compulsive theological case against it would deter me. And I hardly know how the rest of my prayers would survive if those for the dead were forbidden. At our age, the majority of those we love best are dead. What sort of intercourse with God could I have if what I love best were unmentionable to him? *I believe in Purgatory. I assume that the process of purification will normally involve suffering. Partly from tradition; partly because most real good that has been done me in this life has involved it.* But I don’t think the suffering is the purpose of the purgation. I can well believe that people neither much worse nor much better than I will suffer less than I or more. . . . The treatment given will be the one required, whether it hurts little or much. My favourite image on this matter comes from the dentist’s chair. I hope that when the tooth of life is drawn and I am ‘coming round’, a voice will say, ‘Rinse your mouth out with this.’ *This will be Purgatory. The rinsing may take longer than I can now imagine. The taste of this may be more fiery and astringent than my present sensibility could endure. But . . . it will [not] be disgusting and unhallowed.*” (C.S. Lewis, Letters To Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer, chapter 20, paragraphs 7-10, pages 108-109 20)

7. People are not thrown into a fiery, eternal hell

Firstly, Lewis was a student of the Universalist pastor and author George MacDonald (21, 22), however Lewis did not fully accept his mentors universalism. Rather, he became known for proposing a radically different idea about hell. Lewis did not take the hell passages literally, including their depictions of God as a judge throwing people into a fiery lake, but rather as symbolically for a hell what was self-imposed.

- “*The doors of Hell are locked on the inside.* I do not mean that the ghosts may not wish to come out of Hell, in the vague fashion wherein an envious man ‘wishes’ to be happy: but they certainly do not will even the first preliminary stages of that self-abandonment through which alone the soul can reach any good. *They enjoy forever the horrible freedom they have demanded, and are therefore self-enslaved:* just as the blessed, forever submitting to obedience, become through all eternity more and more free.” (Lewis, The Problem of Pain, 23)
- Even regarding this self-imposed exile, Lewis was unsure about its eternality, saying the passages on the topic “*usually emphasizes the idea not of duration but of finality, whether this eternal fixity implied endless duration—or duration at all—we cannot say*” (Lewis, The Problem of Pain, 24)
- He even postulated that hell might simply be solitary existence, essentially, being alone in one’s brain: *Whether [hell] means being left to a purely mental existence, left with nothing at all but one’s own envy, prurience, resentment, loneliness & self conceit, or whether there is still some sort of environment, something you call a world or a reality, I never pretend to know.* But I wouldn’t put the question in the form “do I believe in an actual Hell.” One’s own mind is actual enough. If it doesn’t seem fully actual now that is because you can always escape from it a bit into the physical world – look out of the window, smoke a cigarette, go to sleep. But when there is nothing for you but your own mind (no body to go to sleep, no books or landscape, nor sounds, no drugs) it will be as actual as – as – well, as a coffin is actual to a man buried alive. (Letters of C. S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves (13 May 1946) 25)

8. Belief in Satan not necessary for Christian faith

- *No reference to the Devil or devils is included in any Christian Creeds, and it is quite possible to be a Christian without believing in them. I do believe such beings exist, but that is my own affair.* Supposing there to be such beings, the degree to which humans were conscious of their presence would presumably vary very much. Third-Reich-3 I mean, the more a man was in the Devil's power, the less he would be aware of it, on the principle that a man is still fairly sober as long as he knows he's drunk. It is the people who are fully awake and trying hard to be good who would be most aware of the Devil. It is when you start arming against Hitler that you first realize your country is full of Nazi agents. Of course, they don't want you to believe in the Devil. If devils exist, their first aim is to give you an anaesthetic — to put you off your guard. Only if that fails, do you become aware of them. (Lewis, "Answers to Questions on Christianity," *God in the Dock* (Eerdmans: 1970) 56-57. (26)

9. Used reason to dismiss biblical passages with atrocities

- "On my view one must apply something of the same sort of explanation to, say, **the atrocities (and treacheries) of Joshua. I see the grave danger we run by doing so; but the dangers of believing in a God whom we cannot but regard as evil, and then, in mere terrified flattery calling Him 'good' and worshipping Him, is still greater danger. The ultimate question is whether the doctrine of the goodness of God or that of the inerrancy of Scriptures is to prevail when they conflict. I think the doctrine of the goodness of God is the more certain of the two.** Indeed, only that doctrine renders this worship of Him obligatory or even permissible. To this some will reply 'ah, but we are fallen and don't recognize good when we see it.' But God Himself does not say that we are as fallen at all that" (Lewis, Letter to Beversluis, 27)

10. The Bible is partly human and has errors

- "The main difficulty seems to me not the question whether the Bible is 'inspired', but what exactly we mean by this. **Our ancestors, I take it, believed that the Holy Spirit either just replaced the minds of the authors (like the supposed 'control' in automatic writing or at least dictated to them as to secretaries. Scripture itself refutes these ideas.** ... I myself think of it as analogous to the Incarnation — that, as in Christ a human soul-and-body are taken up and made the vehicle of Deity, so in Scripture, a mass of human legend, history, moral teaching, et cetera, are taken up and made the vehicle of God's Word. **Errors of minor fact are permitted to remain.** (Was Our Lord Himself incapable, [as] Man, of such errors? Would it be a real human incarnation if He was?) One must remember of course that our modern and western attention to dates, numbers, et cetera, simply did not exist in the ancient world. No one was looking for that sort of truth." (Lewis, To Lee, 28)
- Regarding the gospels, he did not believe that they were divine word, or inerrant, but rather human reporting: "*I have been reading poems, romances, vision-literature, legends, myths all my life. I know what they are like. I know that not one of them is like this. Of this text there are only two possible views. **Either this is reportage — though it may no doubt contain errors** — pretty close up to the facts; nearly as close as Boswell. Or else, some unknown writer in the 2nd century, without known predecessors, or successors, suddenly anticipated the whole technique of modern, novelistic, realistic narrative. If it is untrue, it must be narrative of that kind. The reader who doesn't see this has simply not learned to read.* (C.S. Lewis 29)
- "We may observe that the teaching of **Our Lord Himself**, in which there is no imperfection, is not given us in that cut-and-dried, fool-proof, systematic fashion we might have expected or desired. **He wrote no books. We have only reported sayings, most of them uttered in answer to questions, shaped in some degree by their context.** And when we have collected them all we cannot reduce them to a system....He will not be, in the way we want, "pinned down." (Lewis, 30)

11. The Bible includes contradictions

- *“The human qualities of the raw materials show through. Naivety, error, contradiction, even (as in the cursing Psalms) wickedness are not removed. The total result is not “the Word of God” in the sense that every passage, in itself, gives impeccable science or history. It carries the Word of God; and we (under grace, with attention to tradition and to interpreters wiser than ourselves, and with the use of such intelligence and learning as we may have) receive that word from it not by using it as an encyclopedia or an encyclical but by steeping ourselves in its tone or temper and so learning its overall message.” (Lewis, Reflections on the Psalms, 27)*
- *“Whatever view we hold of the divine authority of Scripture must make room for the following facts:*
 1. The distinction which St. Paul makes in 1 Cor vii between *ouk ego all’ ho kurios* [not myself but the Lord] (v. 10) and *ego lego oux ho kurios* [I myself say, not the Lord] (v. 12).
 2. **The apparent inconsistencies between the genealogies in Matt. i and Luke ii; with the accounts of the death of Judas in Matt. xxvii 5 and Acts i 18-19.**
 3. St. Luke’s own account of how he obtained his matter (i 1-4).
 4. **The universally admitted unhistoricity (I do not say, of course, falsity) of at least some of the narratives in Scripture (the parables), which may well also extend to Jonah and Job.**
 5. If every good and perfect gift comes from the Father of lights, then all true and edifying writings, whether in Scripture or not, must be in some sense inspired.
 6. John xi 49-52 Inspiration may operate in a wicked man without him knowing it, and he can then utter the untruth he intends (propriety of making an innocent man a political scapegoat) as well as the truth he does not intend (the divine sacrifice).

It seems to me that 2 and 4 rule out the view that every statement in Scripture must be historical truth. And 1, 3, 5, and 6 rule out the view that inspiration is a single thing in the sense that, if present at all, it is always present in the same mode and the same degree. **Therefore, I think, rule out the view that any one passage taken in isolation can be assumed to be inerrant in exactly the same sense as any other: e.g., that the numbers of O.T. armies (which in view of the size of the country, if true, involve continuous miracle) are statistically correct because the story of the Resurrection is historically correct.** That the over-all operation of Scripture is to convey God’s Word to the reader (he also needs his inspiration) who reads it in the right spirit, I fully believe. That it also gives true answers to all the questions (often religiously irrelevant) which he might ask, I don’t. The very kind of truth we are often demanding was, in my opinion, not even envisaged by the ancients. (Lewis Quoted in Michael J. Christensen, C. S. Lewis on Scripture, Abingdon, 1979, Appendix A, 29)

12. Other books, in addition to the Bible can be inspired

- Not only did Lewis widen his view of inspiration to include Old Testament myths, but he also allowed for the “inspiration” of later extra-biblical material. He wrote (in a May 7, 1959 letter) to Clyde Kilby: **“If every good and perfect gift comes from the Father of lights, then all true and edifying writings, whether in Scripture or not, must be in some sense inspired.” (33)**

13. Jesus incarnate was a man, capable of error

- “Say what you like,” we shall be told, “the apocalyptic beliefs of the first Christians have been proved to be false. **It is clear from the New Testament that they all expected the Second Coming in their own lifetime. And worse still, they had a reason, and one which**

you will find very embarrassing. *Their Master had told them so.* He shared, and indeed created, their delusion. He said in so many words, ‘this generation shall not pass till all these things be done.’ **And he was wrong. He clearly knew no more about the end of the world than anyone else.”** *It is certainly the most embarrassing verse in the Bible.* Yet how teasing, also, that within fourteen words of it should come the statement “But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father.” (Lewis, *The World’s Last Night*, 34)

- **The one exhibition of error and the one confession of ignorance** [Mark 13:32] grow side by side. That they stood thus in the mouth of Jesus himself, and were not merely placed thus by the reporter, we surely need not doubt.... The facts, then, are these: **that Jesus professed himself (in some sense) ignorant, and within a moment showed that he really was so.**” (Lewis, *The World’s Last Night*, 35)

Lees ook:

- Rubriek “C. S. Lewis”: http://www.verhoevenmarc.be/valse_leraars.htm#cslewis1

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C. S. Lewis de Beroemde Ketter accepteerde volgende geloofspunten:

- Christus alleen bracht geen behoudenis
- Katholieke sacramenten zijn noodzakelijk
- De Bijbel is niet geïnspireerd of inerrant
- De Bijbel is niet letterlijk te nemen
- Heidense religies bezitten waarheid
- Evolutie is waar
- De Hel is fictie
- Het Vagevuur is een echte plaats
- Gods schepping was verdorven
- God wordt gevonden binnenin de mens
- De natuurlijke mens is niet veroordeeld
- Mysticisme overstijgt de Bijbel
- Wij zouden moeten bidden tot de doden
- God is niet het enige object van aanbidding
- Witte magie is goed