



The Great Divorce Study by C.S. Lewis

Rev. Dr. Chris Ascher
Summer 2020

Session 1: Introduction

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THE GREAT DIVORCE



Discussion:

What is the most desirable place you can think of to take a vacation? (SHARE)

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Discussion:

What if at the end of the vacation you were invited to stay forever? But if you stay, you had to leave everything else behind? There's no going back. If you stay, you have to leave immediately and never return.

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Introduction:

This is the plot for “The Great Divorce” by CS Lewis. Damned spirits are given a “vacation” from Hell to visit Heaven, where they are invited to stay forever. There, they are persuaded by people they formally knew, relatives and friends, to come with them up the mountain and enjoy the bliss of Heaven. But they can only do so by leaving what is keeping them in Hell and accepting the love of God.

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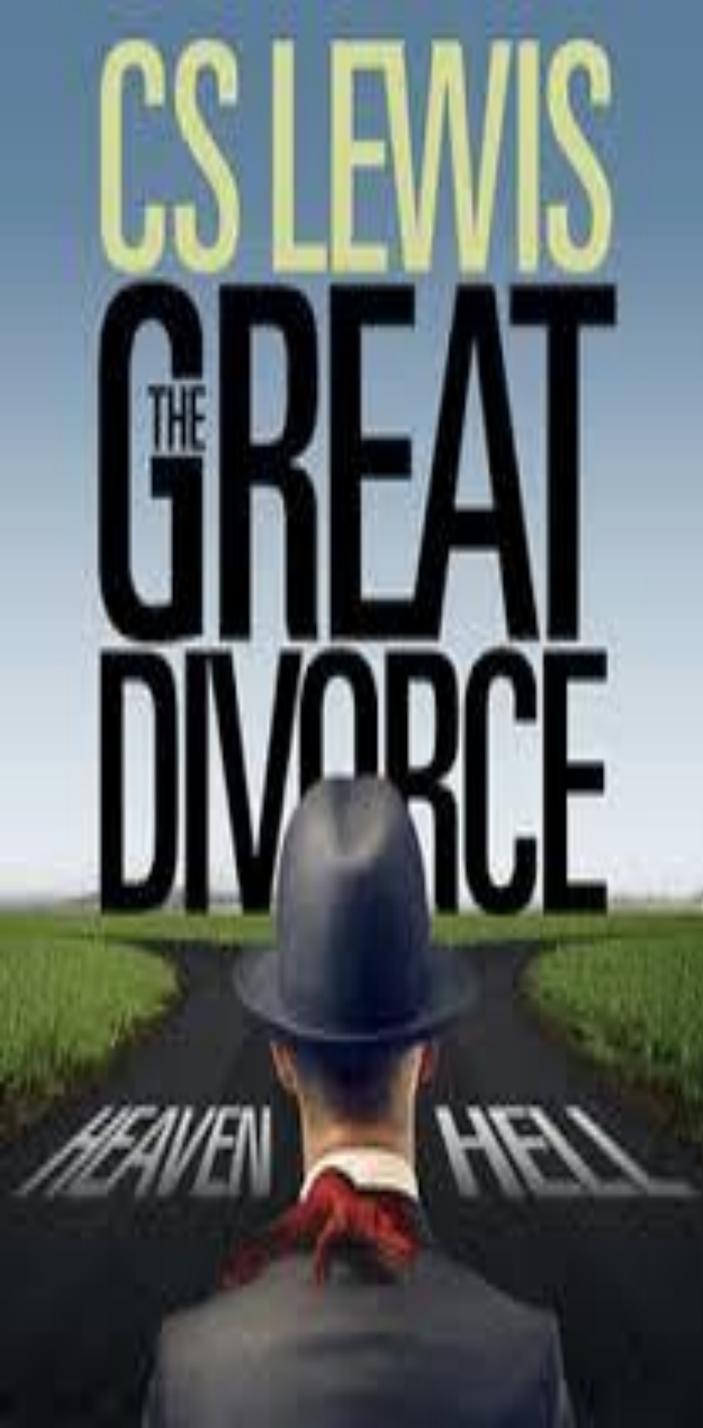
THE GREAT DIVORCE



Introduction:

The answer seems obvious right?

Yet, we'll find that it's not the choice to sin that binds people to Hell but rather the choice to NOT repent. We must let go, step out into the light, and embrace the better life that God has planned for us. That's the most confining part about sin – to admit you're in the wrong.



Introduction:

Lewis tells us not to take the story literally, not does he suppose that eternity really is the way he presents it in the book. The fact is, Hell is final. Scripture records no opportunities after death to enter Heaven. Lewis includes a quote from author George MacDonald: “No, there is no escape. There is no heaven with a little of hell in it – no plan to retain this or that of the devil in our hearts or our pockets. Out Satan must go, every hair and feather.”

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Introduction:

In the story, Lewis vividly illustrates for us that we are all soul searching and our efforts either move us toward or away from God. It's a progression away from our own idea of what we think is best for us toward the humility required to embrace God's best for our lives. It can be painful to leave our old life behind, but with each step, it gets a little easier, and any pain will be nothing compared to the joy we will experience in Heaven.

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Class Notes/Format

Each week you will read select chapters from the book. Each chapter is fairly short and easily digested except for a few.

You may purchase a copy in either a physical or ebook from your favorite source. Or you may go to the following site for a free

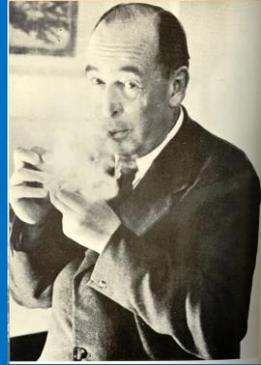
copy: <https://barnardsvilleumc.files.wordpress.com/2013/07/ebook-lewis-c-s-the-great-divorce.pdf>

I would encourage you to have a copy you can take notes, underline, etc. sections that interest you. Also make notes of any questions you may have.

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Who is CS Lewis?



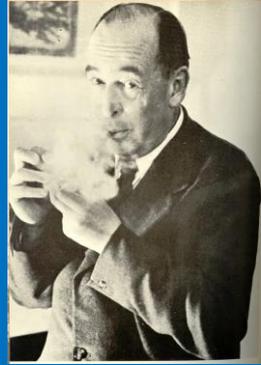
C.S. Lewis was an author, essayist and Christian apologist. He is best known for his children's classic series – The Chronicles of Narnia.

He was born on Nov. 29, 1898 and lived until Nov. 22, 1963. In 1917, he volunteered to join the British army in WWI until he was injured and sent home. He returned to Oxford where he completed his degree and taught from 1925-1954 at Magdalene College

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Who is CS Lewis?

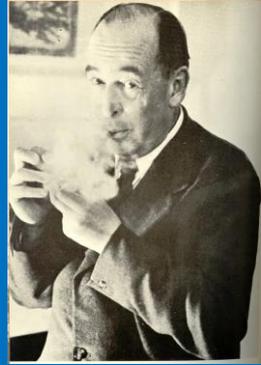


He was a prolific author and formed a close relationship with JRR Tolkien, Charles Williams, Owen Barfield and Dorothy Sayers. They formed an informal group known as the 'Inklings' to read each others novels and provide feedback.

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Who is CS Lewis?



Lewis lost his faith as a teenager due to boring services and the problem of evil in the world. It was his relationship with Tolkien that brought him to a belief in God (1929) and Christianity (1931). His journey to faith was based on “evidence” that he was given and he became an influential apologist for Christianity through his works like: the “Screwtape Letters”.

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Schedule:

Date:	Reading Due
6/3	Introduction / Preface
6/10	Chapters 1 and 2
6/17	Chapters 3 and 4
6/24	Chapters 5 and 6
7/1	4 th of July Break – (No Class)
7/8	Chapters 7 and 8
7/15	Chapter 9
7/22	Chapters 10 and 11
7/29	Chapters 12, 13, 14
8/5	(Makeup 1)
8/12	(Makeup 2)



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Session 1: Preface



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Preface

In the opening Preface of the book, Lewis elaborates on what we should all know – That you cannot have both Heaven and Hell at the same time. It's either one or the other. This sounds obvious, right? But often we live our lives contrary to that belief by clinging to those worldly vices and values that have no place in the Christian life, much less Heaven. According to Lewis, “Evil can be undone, but it cannot develop into good.” The fact is we must reject evil for Heaven to be embraced.

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Preface

“If we insist on keeping Hell (or even Earth) we shall not see Heaven; if we accept Heaven we shall not be able to retain even the smallest and most intimate souvenirs of Hell.”



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Discussion Questions:

William Blake wrote *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* between 1790 and 1793. In this book, he tells us that good and evil aren't really what we think they are. They're just different kinds of energies, and both are needed to keep the world going. The Bible and other religious texts, he says, have been responsible for a lot of the misinformation we've been given.



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Discussion Questions:

He claims that two types of people exist: the “energetic creators” or devils from Hell, and the “rational organizers,” or angels from heaven, of which he claims both are necessary for life.

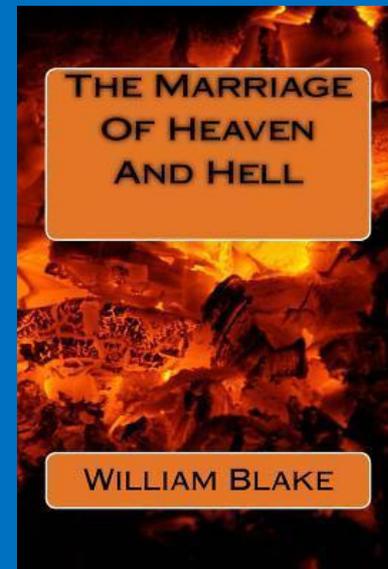
1. Why do you think that humanity is constantly searching for opportunities to blur the lines between good and evil? Why is this dangerous ground to tread?

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Discussion Questions:

2. What attempts do you see in today's culture of trying to "marry" Heaven and Hell, and how do you think this dysfunctional "marriage" has changed culture today?



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Discussion Questions:

3. Read Isaiah 5:20. What did Isaiah say to warn the nation of Israel that they were in rebellion against God? What specifically were they doing? Do you think God's standards have changed since the time of Isaiah, why or why not?

WOE TO THOSE WHO CALL
EVIL GOOD AND GOOD EVIL,
WHO PUT DARKNESS FOR LIGHT
AND LIGHT FOR DARKNESS,
WHO PUT BITTER FOR SWEET
AND SWEET FOR BITTER!

ISAIAH 5:20



Discussion Questions:

4. Lewis disagreed with Blake. In his view, all good comes from God, nothing good comes from Hell, and there can be no legitimate marriage of the two. Read Matthew 5:29-30. On the journey to Heaven, which “luggage” cannot be carried along and why might we have to leave our “right hand” and “right eye” behind?

Matthew 5:29-30

If your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.

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Discussion Questions:

5. Explain what Lewis meant by “Evil can be undone, but it cannot ‘develop’ into good.” According to Romans 12:21, how is evil overcome?



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Discussion Questions:

6. What does Lewis say will happen if we insist on keeping Hell? If we accept Heaven, what will we not be able to keep? If we accept Heaven, what will we find?



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Discussion Questions:

7. Why does Lewis put in his “disclaimer” at the conclusion of the Preface?

