

1

The Screwtape Letters (II)

by C. S. Lewis (~1941)



Letter 31
The Other Side

March 29, 2026

Key words

Patient = **Man**

Enemy = **God**

Wormwood = **Young Devil in training
(Nephew)**

Screwtape = **Older / Experienced Devil
(Uncle)**



Introduction (Chap. 31)

MY DEAR, MY VERY DEAR, WORMWOOD, MY POPPET, MY PIGSNIE,

How mistakenly now that all is lost you come whimpering to ask me whether the terms of affection in which I address you meant nothing from the beginning. Far from it! Rest assured, my love for you and your love for me are as like as two peas. I have always desired you, as you (pitiful fool) desired me. The difference is that I am the stronger. I think they will give you to me now; or a bit of you. Love you? Why, yes. As dainty a morsel as ever I grew fat on.

You have let a soul slip through your fingers. The howl of sharpened famine for that loss re-echoes at this moment through all the levels of the Kingdom of Noise down to the very Throne itself.

Introduction

MY DEAR, MY VERY DEAR, WORMWOOD, MY POPPET, MY PIGSNIE,

How mistakenly now that all is lost you come whimpering to ask me whether the terms of affection in which I address you meant nothing from the beginning. Far from it! Rest assured, my love for you and your love for me are as like as two peas. I have always desired you, as you (pitiful fool) desired me. The difference is that I am the stronger. I think they will give you to me now; or a bit of you. Love you? Why, yes. As dainty a morsel as ever I grew fat on.

You have let a soul slip through your fingers. The howl of sharpened famine for that loss re-echoes at this moment through all the levels of the Kingdom of Noise down to the very Throne itself.

- **Screwtape responds to Wormwood's plea for help**
- **Relationship of mentorship is "competitive", with the stronger "eating up" the weaker**
- **There is a price to be paid for "failure"**

What is Wormwood blamed for?

It makes me mad to think of it. How well I know what happened at the instant when they snatched him from you! There was a sudden clearing of his eyes (was there not?) as he saw you for the first time, and recognized the part you had in him and knew that you had it no longer. Just think (and let it be the beginning of your agony) what he felt at that moment; as if a scab had fallen from an old sore, as if he were emerging from a hideous, shell-like tetter [skin disease], as if he shuffled off for good and all a defiled, wet, clinging garment. By Hell, it is misery enough to see them in their mortal days taking off dirtied and uncomfortable clothes and splashing in hot water and giving little grunts of pleasure — stretching their eased limbs. What, then, of this final stripping, this complete cleansing? The more one thinks about it, the worse it becomes.

What is Wormwood blamed for?

It makes me mad to think of it. How well I know what happened at the instant when they snatched him from you! There was a sudden clearing of his eyes (was there not?) as he saw you for the first time, and recognized the part you had in him and knew that you had it no longer. Just think (and let it be the beginning of your agony) what he felt at that moment; as if a scab had fallen from an old sore, as if he were emerging from a hideous, shell-like tetter [skin disease], as if he shuffled off for good and all a defiled, wet, clinging garment. By Hell, it is misery enough to see them in their mortal days taking off dirtied and uncomfortable clothes and splashing in hot water and giving little grunts of pleasure — stretching their eased limbs. What, then, of this final stripping, this complete cleansing? The more one thinks about it, the worse it becomes.

When the patient is “snatched away”, his eyes cleared and see

- **Wormwood for what he is**
- **He is freed of Wormwood, and feels “completely clean”**

What the Patient experienced

7

He got through so easily! No gradual misgivings, no doctor's sentence, no nursing home, no operating theatre, no false hopes of life; sheer, instantaneous liberation. One moment it seemed to be all our world; the scream of bombs, the fall of houses, the stink and taste of high explosive on the lips and in the lungs, the feet burning with weariness, the heart cold with horrors, the brain reeling, the legs aching; next moment all this was gone, gone like a bad dream, never again to be of any account. Defeated, out-maneuvered fool! Did you mark how naturally — as if he'd been born for it — the earthborn vermin entered the new life? How all his doubts became, in the twinkling of an eye, ridiculous? I know what the creature was saying to itself! “Yes. Of course. It always was like this. All horrors have followed the same course, getting worse and worse and forcing you into a kind of bottle-neck till, at the very moment when you thought you must be crushed, behold! you were out of the narrows and all was suddenly well. The extraction hurt more and more and then the tooth was out. The dream became a nightmare and then you woke. You die and die and then you are beyond death. How could I ever have doubted it?”

What did the Patient see

8

He got through so easily! No gradual misgivings, no doctor's sentence, no nursing home, no operating theatre, no false hopes of life; sheer, instantaneous liberation. One moment it seemed to be all our world; the scream of bombs, the fall of houses, the stink and taste of high explosive on the lips and in the lungs, the feet burning with weariness, the heart cold with horrors, the brain reeling, the legs aching; next moment all this was gone, gone like a bad dream, never again to be of any account. Defeated, out-maneuvered fool! Did you mark how naturally — as if he'd been born for it — the earthborn vermin entered the new life? How all his doubts became, in the twinkling of an eye, ridiculous? I know what the creature was saying to itself! “Yes. Of course. It always was like this. All horrors have followed the same course, getting worse and worse and forcing you into a kind of bottle-neck till, at the very moment when you thought you must be crushed, behold! you were out of the narrows and all was suddenly well. The extraction hurt more and more and then the tooth was out. The dream became a nightmare and then you woke. You die and die and then you are beyond death. How could I ever have doubted it?”

What happened to the Patient?

- While a horrible death, yet it was quick.
- What happened in the twinkling of an eye?

What did the Patient see

9

As he saw you, he also saw Them. I know how it was. You reeled back dizzy and blinded, more hurt by them than he had ever been by bombs. The degradation of it! — that this thing of earth and slime could stand upright and converse with spirits before whom you, a spirit, could only cower. Perhaps you had hoped that the awe and strangeness of it would dash his joy. But that is the cursed thing; the gods are strange to mortal eyes, and yet they are not strange. He had no faintest conception till that very hour of how they would look, and even doubted their existence. But when he saw them he knew that he had always known them and realised what part each one of them had played at many an hour in his life when he had supposed himself alone, so that now he could say to them, one by one, not “Who are you?” but “So it was you all the time”. All that they were and said at this meeting woke memories. The dim consciousness of friends about him which had haunted his solitudes from infancy was now at last explained; that central music in every pure experience which had always just evaded memory was now at last recovered. Recognition made him free of their company almost before the limbs of his corpse became quiet. Only you were left outside.

What did the Patient see

10

As he saw you, he also saw Them. I know how it was. You reeled back dizzy and blinded, more hurt by them than he had ever been by bombs. The degradation of it! — that this thing of earth and slime could stand upright and converse with spirits before whom you, a spirit, could only cower. Perhaps you had hoped that the awe and strangeness of it would dash his joy. But that is the cursed thing; the gods are strange to mortal eyes, and yet they are not strange. He had no faintest conception till that very hour of how they would look, and even doubted their existence. But when he saw them he knew that he had always known them and realised what part each one of them had played at many an hour in his life when he had supposed himself alone, so that now he could say to them, one by one, not “Who are you?” but “So it was you all the time”. All that they were and said at this meeting woke memories. The dim consciousness of friends about him which had haunted his solitudes from infancy was now at last explained; that central music in every pure experience which had always just evaded memory was now at last recovered. Recognition made him free of their company almost before the limbs of his corpse became quiet. Only you were left outside.

What did the Patient see/experience and do/decide?

Who is “Them”?

What does “So it was you all the time” mean?

Who got in and who was left outside?

Footprint in the Sand

- *He will carry us through our life's highs and lows.*



The Lord replied, "My precious, precious child, I love you and I would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you saw only one set of footprints, ... it was then that I carried you."

Who else did the Patient see?

He saw not only Them; he saw Him. This animal, this thing begotten in a bed, could look on Him. What is blinding, suffocating fire to you, is now cool light to him, is clarity itself, and wears the form of a Man. You would like, if you could, to interpret the patient's prostration in the Presence, his self-aborrence and utter knowledge of his sins (yes, Wormwood, a clearer knowledge even than yours) on the analogy of your own choking and paralysing sensations when you encounter the deadly air that breathes from the heart of Heaven. But it's all nonsense. Pains he may still have to encounter, but they embrace those pains. They would not barter them for any earthly pleasure. All the delights of sense, or heart, or intellect, with which you could once have tempted him, even the delights of virtue itself, now seem to him in comparison but as the half nauseous attractions of a raddled harlot would seem to a man who hears that his true beloved whom he has loved all his life and whom he had believed to be dead is alive and even now at his door. He is caught up into that world where pain and pleasure take on transfinite values and all our arithmetic is dismayed.

Who else did the Patient see?

He saw not only Them; he saw Him. This animal, this thing begotten in a bed, could look on Him. What is blinding, suffocating fire to you, is now cool light to him, is clarity itself, and wears the form of a Man. You would like, if you could, to interpret the patient's prostration in the Presence, his self-aborrence and utter knowledge of his sins (yes, Wormwood, a clearer knowledge even than yours) on the analogy of your own choking and paralysing sensations when you encounter the deadly air that breathes from the heart of Heaven. But it's all nonsense. Pains he may still have to encounter, but they embrace those pains. They would not barter them for any earthly pleasure. All the delights of sense, or heart, or intellect, with which you could once have tempted him, even the delights of virtue itself, now seem to him in comparison but as the half nauseous attractions of a raddled harlot would seem to a man who hears that his true beloved whom he has loved all his life and whom he had believed to be dead is alive and even now at his door. He is caught up into that world where pain and pleasure take on transfinite values and all our arithmetic is dismayed.

Who is "Him"?

Who experienced blinding, suffocating fire; who experienced cool light?

Can Wormwood tempt the Patient anymore?

What Wormwood missed

Once more, the inexplicable meets us. Next to the curse of useless tempters like yourself the greatest curse upon us is the failure of our Intelligence Department. If only we could find out what He is really up to! Alas, alas, that knowledge, in itself so hateful and mawkish a thing, should yet be necessary for Power! Sometimes I am almost in despair. All that sustains me is the conviction that our Realism, our rejection (in the face of all temptations) of all silly nonsense and claptrap, must win in the end. Meanwhile, I have you to settle with. Most truly do I sign myself

Your increasingly and ravenously affectionate uncle

SCREWTAPE

What Wormwood missed

Once more, the inexplicable meets us. Next to the curse of useless tempters like yourself the greatest curse upon us is the failure of our Intelligence Department. If only we could find out what He is really up to! Alas, alas, that knowledge, in itself so hateful and mawkish a thing, should yet be necessary for Power! Sometimes I am almost in despair. All that sustains me is the conviction that our Realism, our rejection (in the face of all temptations) of all silly nonsense and claptrap, must win in the end. Meanwhile, I have you to settle with. Most truly do I sign myself

Your increasingly and ravenously affectionate uncle

SCREWTAPE

What is “inexplicable”, “what He is really up to”?
Why blame “our Intelligence Department”?
Is Screwtape’s long term conviction reasonable?

Job 19:25-27

- 25 I know that my redeemer^[a] lives,
and that in the end he will stand on the earth.^[b]
- 26 And after my skin has been destroyed,
yet^[c] in^[d] my flesh I will see God;
- 27 **I myself will see him
with my own eyes**—I, and not another.
How my heart yearns within me!

Philippians 1:21

“To live is Christ, to die is gain”

1 Corinthians 15:50-57

- **⁵⁰ What I am saying, dear brothers and sisters, is that our physical bodies cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. These dying bodies cannot inherit what will last forever.**
- **⁵¹ But let me reveal to you a wonderful secret. We will not all die, but we will all be transformed! ⁵² It will happen in a moment, in the blink of an eye, when the last trumpet is blown. For when the trumpet sounds, those who have died will be raised to live forever. And we who are living will also be transformed. ⁵³ For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies.**
- ⁵⁴ Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, [\[a\]](#) this Scripture will be fulfilled:
- “Death is swallowed up in victory. [\[b\]](#)
⁵⁵ O death, where is your victory?
O death, where is your sting? [\[c\]](#)”
- ⁵⁶ For sin is the sting that results in death, and the law gives sin its power. ⁵⁷ But thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ.



Discussion Questions

1. What, ultimately, happens to the patient? ¶s 2 and 3
2. How would you describe the patient's "sudden clearing of the eyes" as he saw Wormwood for the first time on the other side of death? Have you ever experienced "a sudden clearing of the eyes" in some way? What did you gain as a result of that experience? ¶ 2
3. The man died a horrific death, but Screwtape seems to suggest that the man got off relatively easy. How so? ¶ 3
4. What sort of sensory descriptions or insights did the man experience in the aftermath of dying? ¶ 5
5. Read the following verses Job 19:25-27 and 1 Corinthians 15:50-57. What do these verses say about our experience with death?
6. Screwtape says to Wormwood, "As he saw you, he also saw Them." Who is the "Them" and how did the patient respond to them? ¶ 4
7. Who else did the man see upon death? How was being in the presence of God different for both the man and Wormwood? ¶ 5
8. Since the beginning of the book, Screwtape has signed each of his



Letter 31 Theme: Deliverance Diabolical Strategies

Exposed: 1. No diabolical strategy available in heaven Divine Strategies Revealed: 1. Life beyond death Key Quotes to Look For: “By Hell, it is misery enough to see them in their mortal days taking off dirtied and uncomfortable clothes and splashing in hot water and giving little grunts of pleasure—stretching their eased limbs. What, then, of this final stripping, this complete cleansing?” – Screwtape

Questions: 1. Wormwood’s patient completely escaped demonic harassment by dying. What is the first thing the patient sees on the other side of death ¶2? 2. How does evaluating what Screwtape says help us to grasp what death really means and why death is even beneficial ¶3? 3. According to Screwtape, what sort of insights do people have as they experience the process of dying ¶3? 4. What do you think Screwtape means when he laments that the patient will see “Them” and “Him” ¶¶4–5? 5. How does the sight of Christ on the other side of death affect Wormwood’s patient ¶5

Divine strategies to practice. 1. Pray and meditate upon Scripture: "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known." 1

Corinthians 13:12 Ask God to help you live fully in the present, yet long expectantly for heaven where we will see Jesus face to face. 2. Live fully in the present yet look forward expectantly to heaven by developing God's perspective on your future: In the world we are told that people can be too heavenly minded to be any earthly good. Yet in fact, that is false. As C.S. Lewis stated in his book *Mere Christianity*, "If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did the most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next... Aim at heaven and you get earth 'thrown in'; aim at earth and you get neither." Make it a habit daily to ask God to help you have the perspective of Paul who wrote, "To live is Christ, to die is gain" Philippians 1:21 Knowing that people have the opportunity to make a choice for heaven or hell during their earthly life, ask the Lord to give you the chance to share the gospel with one nonbeliever this year so that they too can experience the joy of knowing that heaven awaits them. This is definitely a prayer that fits within God's will as Jesus expressed in Matthew 28:18-20

Detailed Summary

- Wormwood has failed.

- Now that all is lost, he has come whimpering back to Screwtape to ask if his terms of affection in his letters meant anything.
 - Screwtape responds that the only “affection” he feels for Wormwood is his burning desire to consume him.
- Upon his death, the patient’s soul was freed from Wormwood and he was able to perceive him as a part of himself that was now separated.

- As the patient was able to see Wormwood after his death, he was also able to see and speak with “Them.”

- Not only them, but “Him.”
- By “Them,” Screwtape means the trinity, whose blinding presence spelled more suffering for Wormwood than any of the bombs that had killed the patient.
- By “Him” Screwtape of course means The Enemy.
 - Screwtape is disgusted that this human creature birthed in a bed could look upon the Enemy when the devils can only cower.



•Screwtape laments once again that he wishes they could find out what the Enemy is “up to.”


- However, he stands firm in his belief that the realism of hell will triumph over good in the end.
 - In the meantime, he has Wormwood to settle with.

Summary

Analysis


Screwtape begins his final letter with a different greeting: “My dear, my very dear, Wormwood, my poppet, my pignie.” He begins in this way to “assure” Wormwood that his professed affection for Wormwood is far from artificial. On the contrary, Screwtape insists, he loves Wormwood every bit as much as Wormwood loves him. Screwtape gloats that he is stronger than Wormwood—and as a result, when Wormwood is punished for letting a soul “slip through his fingers,” he will probably be fed to Screwtape.

The final letter of the book begins differently, with Screwtape exaggerating his displays of affection for Wormwood. In a sense, we already knew that Screwtape was lying when he called Wormwood his “Dear,” but here it becomes clear that Screwtape has no love for his nephew whatsoever—in other words, he and Wormwood love each other equally: not at all. This shows that Hell is, as Screwtape has already suggested, a “zero-sum game”—the strong eat the




The patient has died in an air raid. In the moments leading up to his death, the patient became fully conscious for the first time of the influence that Wormwood had on his mind. As he became conscious of this, he also came to realize that Wormwood no longer had any influence on his behavior. The patient died quickly—he won't have to stay in a nursing home or a hospital. This is a disaster for the devils.

It reinforces Lewis's argument that the patient becomes "fully conscious" in the same instance that he fully embraces Christianity and sets aside corruption altogether—this again implies that Christianity is the religion of consciousness and rationality. It's interesting that what might seem the cruelest fate for the patient—a sudden death early in life—is actually a great blessing.



In the final seconds before he died, the patient saw God. Wormwood, Screwtape guesses, saw God too, and cowered before him. Perhaps Wormwood was amazed that a mere human being could see God with love and affection while a devil couldn't find the strength even to look at him. In this instant, the patient realized that at every sad or lonely moment in his life, God was standing by his side. It was also in this instant that the patient became completely aware of his sins—even more aware of them than Wormwood had been.

Screwtape's efforts to describe the patient's contact with God are three times removed from the patient's actual experience. Wormwood witnessed the patient, Screwtape heard about the patient's death from Wormwood, and we are hearing about the patient from Screwtape/Lewis. This points to the devil's inability to understand God's wisdom, or his love. In a moment like this, we are meant to see how laughably pitiful the devils are in their "war" against God.



Screwtape reminds Wormwood that the patient is now in a place where Wormwood can no longer tempt him—indeed, any temptation he offers the patient will seem as disgusting as the temptations of a prostitute to a man who has just learned that his dead love is still alive.

Lewis shows that God will inevitably defeat Satan. God is the author of all true pleasure and joy, while Satan can only corrupt those pleasures.