

PARISHES OF
ST PIUS X, ALDERLEY EDGE, ST BENEDICT'S, HANDFORTH
AND
SACRED HEART & ST TERESA'S WILMSLOW
WEEKLY REFLECTION

Sunday 28th September 2025: 26th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Mere Christianity: Christian Behaviour
(4) Forgiveness

C.S. Lewis devotes a whole chapter of "Mere Christianity" to forgiveness. The requirement in Christian morality to love our neighbour as ourself requires loving our enemy and so we have to face, and obey, this enormous duty.

Many believe that forgiveness is a good idea until they have to face the reality of forgiving someone who has horribly wronged them and, even worse, who expresses no remorse or request for forgiveness. As Lewis says, a response in his time was "*I wonder how you'd feel about forgiving the Gestapo if you were a Pole or a Jew?*" He says he wonders very much about how he would feel in that case, but he does know that Christianity requires it. If we do not forgive, we shall not be forgiven.

How to approach this problem? Lewis proposes starting with easier examples. When we start mathematics, we do not begin with calculus but with simple addition. So let us first ensure we forgive in the easier situations before tackling the Gestapo type of example. If we unconditionally forgive a colleague at work who has been nasty to us, we are at least on the right road in the foothills of this mountainous difficulty.

Next, we might try to understand what loving your neighbour means. I have to love them as myself. So how do I love myself? It is unlikely that we feel fondly or affectionately about ourselves. So, loving our neighbours does not require that we feel that way towards them. It is also likely that, at times, we look at some of the things we have done with horror and loathing. So, we are allowed to regard as horrific and loathsome things which others do. This is no more than the old, but true adage, that we must hate the sin but not the sinner. To many this may seem an unnatural distinction. Yet there is one person towards whom we may well do this repeatedly: that person is me. However much we may hate our own cowardice or nastiness, we have little trouble in continuing to love ourselves. In fact, the reason I hated the sinful things was because I loved myself. It was because I loved myself that I was sorry to find that I was the sort of person who did those things. Thus if someone does something evil towards us, Christianity requires that we respond as

we do when we ourselves do something sinful. We should hate the sin but feel sorry for the person who has done it and hope and pray that he can be cured of it.

Loving those who wrong us does not mean that the wrongdoer should not be punished. Loving myself does not entail expecting that we should not suffer just punishment; nor does loving someone else who has done wrong. Then, if we should condemn and punish the acts of a wrongdoer what is the difference between Christian and non-Christian morality? As far as the wrongdoer is concerned the outcome may feel the same¹. What really matters is the effect on our own soul. It is not damaged by imposing just and necessary punishment. It is damaged by feelings of resentment, revenge or taking pleasure in the punishment.

This all necessitates loving people whom we feel have nothing loveable about them. But then, do we ourselves have anything loveable about us? We look after and tend to and love ourselves because it is our own being, warts and all. God intends us to love all other selves in the same way and for the same reason. He loves us not for any nice attractive qualities we think we have, but just because we are us.

An example of a positive outcome to condemnation of wrongdoing was in the Times 8th April 2025. It concerned the German golfer, Bernard Langer who, aged 27, had just won his first major tournament, the US Masters, in 1985. The article recorded:

“TV host Jim Nantz asked if he had looked at the scoreboards. “I was trying not to but saw one on the 9th and thought, ‘Jesus Christ, I’m playing well and I’m four shots behind!’”that remark caused a backlash. “I got a lot of letters,” he says. “I got home a couple of weeks later and thought it was fan mail, but they were mostly letters saying: who was I to swear on national television and use God’s name in vain? By the time I got home I was already thinking about God, I went to my first Bible study and my eyes got opened.”

*For Langer, his perspective on what is important was founded on his faith.
“Where golf kind of used to be my god, my all and everything, that changed when I became a Christian. It’s not a matter of life and death if you make a six-foot putt. Hopefully, it made me change as a person where I treat other human beings better.””*

Stephen S.

¹ But see below