

## 232 Screwtape rides again

(Warning: This article is not unconnected with my recent topic, but it broadens the theme. It uses strong irony – C.S. Lewis did it first – so please don't take it as personal criticism.)

Behind all of my searching and writing is the heart-cry of 'How come the early church was so dynamic, powerful, life-changing, world-changing and yet look at us now?!' My recent studies in Revelation have reminded me that there are forces trying to screw up our witness.

I don't have 'the answer', but I think I can point to a few ploys that Screwtape's ultimate boss must have used. Here's a strong current one: Convince the enemy that what is most important is personal salvation – get away from this 'evil' world, and escape to a comfy future in heaven.

I doubt that the early church would have recognised what we now refer to as 'the gospel', and would have had questions to ask us about why we're so little involved in fighting against the corrupt and unjust systems in the world.

Obviously, Screwtape has an eye on church doctrine, trying to seed ideas that are *close* to God's ways but will, if encouraged by a bit of self-interest and power-hunger, lead off into all sorts of fruitful variations. With a bit of luck he can encourage humans to feel so strongly that **they are right** that they will begin to hate and kill (literally or metaphorically) each another.

My history knowledge is weak, but I'm sure you can think of examples through the centuries.

Then, when the Christians have challenged the political systems and are in the ascendancy, there's the technique of getting them to use that political power in all sorts of 'interesting' and 'creative' ways. Again history provides many examples. Nice one, Screwtape!

So what should Screwtape do now that Christians are fighting a rear-guard action? Fear is certainly a good emotion to feed; we won't upset anyone if we say it's just about having a personal relationship with God rather than proclaiming, 'Christ is Lord'.

Another really useful technique is to pick an ethical, personal behaviour-based issue – especially one with strong emotional overtones – and convince Christians that it's a fundamental fight for the truth of the Bible against the way of the world.

Maybe Screwtape has encouraged leading US ethicist, David Gushee, to lead us off into error, or maybe Screwtape is working on Christians' obsession (tell me I'm wrong) with sexual sin to blind us to a valid interpretation of Scripture.

Over all, Screwtape has a lot to gain from our turning this into a matter of biblical principle, rather than personal ethics. He has a sure-fire way of destroying families – especially Christian families – by creating fear, misunderstanding and prejudice. One bonus is that it can alienate Christians from a church that says they are 'welcome' and yet stops them serving. Another bonus is that it shows the church, yet again, as judgemental and out of touch with reality.

Paul Bev. 31.12.22