

Pastor Paul Wilcox  
February 20, 2008

***The Screwtape Letters*** is a work of Christian fiction by C.S. Lewis first published in book form in 1942. The story takes the form of a series of letters from a senior demon, Screwtape, to his nephew, a junior tempter named Wormwood, so as to advise him on methods of securing the damnation of an earthly man, known only as "the Patient." In the body of the thirty-one letters which make up the book, Screwtape gives Wormwood detailed advice on various methods of undermining faith and promoting sin in his Patient. Lewis provides a series of lessons in the importance of taking a deliberate role in living out Christian faith by portraying a typical human life, with all its temptations and failings, as seen from the demon/devil's viewpoint. Wormwood and Screwtape live in a peculiarly morally reversed world, where individual benefit and greed are seen as the greatest good, and neither demon is capable of comprehending or acknowledging true human virtue when he sees it. The Letters from Screwtape constitute an "antisermon" useful to Christians in the glimpse it gives to the plans of the enemy that seeks to destroy them.

## A Letter From Screwtape

Dear Sludge breath,

Your concern about the coming season of Lent is well founded, I'm afraid. For anytime that these humans are encouraged to practice confession and humility – and other similarly revolting virtues, there is a great potential for danger to our evil and glorious cause. You see, it is a mysterious and discouraging fact that while we may spend years corrupting and turning these humans to the ways of our Father below, one moment, one split instant of honest confession and prayer can destroy all our hours of labor. The very sins that had once stood like a yawning canyon between our victims and the enemy become with confession like a bridge between them. We do our best to break their relationship, but this nauseating "forgiveness" that the enemy disperses so freely, heals the breaks and restores the relationship to an even stronger footing. It's patently unfair and totally unsporting, but then that's the kind of tactics we expect from the enemy.

Be assured, he will stop at nothing to win these worthless creatures to his side! And so my dear tempter, the season of Lent is only one of many "gimmicks" that the enemy uses to rob us of our hard fought victims. The dangers of Lent, however, can be avoided and even turned to our advantage by a few, well - placed temptations.

It was here that your inquiries in your letter quite surprised me Sludge Breath. For while you show great promise as a junior Devil, you seem to know very little about temptation. I find it hard to believe that you could possibly have studied under so fine and devious a professor as Dr. Wretch blister and still display such ignorance!

Surely Cokytus University hasn't dropped the basics from its curriculum! And yet it's clear by your letter that you know nothing about the cornerstone of all successful seduction. "The fearsome foursome" of temptation as we called it back in my college days. I think it best then that I briefly relate to you the four basic ingredients of any sound and useful temptation as demonstrated by our master some 2000 years ago. Surely, you remember from black Sabbath school the story of our lord Satan's encounter with the enemy's son in the wilderness of Galilee. Our master's temptation of the Nazarene carpenter was so perfectly executed, so fiendishly subtle and effective that it has served as the model for all the ghouls of hell ever since – including myself with my rather impressive record of success.

In any case, the 4 basics of temptation begin with timing. Timing is all important, my dear Devil! Notice for example, that our master chose to tempt the enemy's son immediately following his baptism. Now, this baptism was a very high spiritual experience for the carpenter and left him filled with faith and confidence about his ministry. Sickening isn't it? You would think it would be the worst time to tempt him, but actually it was the best time. You see, humans are always more open to temptation after a particularly close encounter with the enemy. For that moment, they walk with their heads in the clouds, it seems, basking in the awful heavenly light, thinking for some reason that this is the way it's going to be the rest of their lives! And so, they are totally unprepared for the moment when those lights fade and their spirits sink and they find themselves back to normal again. That is our moment Sludge breath! The moment they think they no longer have to worry about us! It is in the transition between the mountain top experience and the desert wilderness that we catch most of our victims.

The second fundamental of good temptations is endurance. Remember that the Lord Satan worked on the Nazarene for 40 days and 40 nights. That should have been enough to break down anyone's endurance. But notice, even our Master was forced to give up for the time being. He left looking all the while for a more "opportune time". So we never give up, Sludge breath. Make your victims think that their temptations will never end. There's nothing more demoralizing to the humans than that. They may resist you once or twice or even a hundred times, but if you can turn their minds to the future and make them think of the thousands of battles to come, they will give up without a fight. You see, the enemy, cursed be his name, gives the humans the strength to resist our temptations *day by day*. But if we can shift their view away from the present and on to the future, then the whole burden of our future temptations will be brought to bear in a single moment- an instant-and they will fall most assuredly, because they have not the strength to handle a whole lifetime of temptation in one moment.

And so, it is a matter of endurance, my junior tempter, of pacing one-self for the long run. The moment you can convince the human he must resist all your temptations at once that

is the moment you'll succeed. If however, your victim is permitted to take each day as it comes - "Taking one day at a time" as they say – your cause is lost!

Thirdly, you must exercise your powers of suggestion. Humans forget the enemy so quickly-it is really quite marvelous! They may be absolutely certain of their belief in the enemy today, but then make them uncomfortable, give them a turn of bad luck take a loved one from them and tomorrow they will plunge into the depths of darkness and doubt. They will want a sign from heaven to cure their doubt, but, of course, the enemy is not in the sign-giving business. It seems he wants believers and not slaves the way we do. Little good these fickle believers will do him! See how the Master casts the carpenter into doubt with one little phrase: "if you are the son of god", he says, "change the stones into bread!" "If you are the son of god", he says, "throw yourself down from the temple". If you can lead your victim into the fruitless search for divine signs – then you've got him. Plant thoughts like these in his mind: If god really cares about me, he will.....find me a new job, talk to me next time I pray, solve my problems with my wife, appear to me in a burning bush, etc. (That last is an especially good one- it is so deceptively biblical!)

Finally, the last fundamental of basic temptation is lying. The humans don't call our Master the "Father of lies" for nothing. For us, dishonesty is always the best policy. But don't tell little lies, make your lies bold and brash. For some reason the bigger the lies are, the more likely the humans will swallow them. Take our Master's very effective temptation of the woman Eve in the Garden of Eden. The enemy had just told her that she must not eat of the tree of knowledge, lest she die. But notice, our master's response: He lies, he tells her: "You will not die, For god knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like god". And Eve believes him! A total, complete, bold faced lie and she swallowed it. Notice too what he says to the Carpenter: "I will give you all the kingdoms of the world and their authority and splendor, for it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. So if you worship me, it will all be yours". A total and masterful lie! And even today, there are still humans who believe the world belongs to us. And, of course, someday it will belong to us, when the victory is ours. But for now, in reality, we have absolutely nothing to offer these humans – only lies and illusions! And if we did have something to offer them besides pain- do you really think we'd give it to them? So practice the bold lie, Sludge breath. For that is a tempter's chief weapon.

So there you have it, my demon, the fearsome foursome of temptations. Timing, endurance, sign seeking and the bold lie. I hope that will help answer your questions and round out what appears to be hopelessly insufficient education. As to your final question about our Master's success with the enemies' son. It is true that the Carpenter did hold out against even his most clever temptations. So our Father below was forced to take a more indirect approach to destroy him. Acting through the humans surrounding the Nazarene—indeed, even infiltrating his small group of disciples—our Master saw to it that the Carpenter was executed in a most vile and dishonorable fashion. His death would have spelled the end for those wretched humans had the enemy not stepped in with his usual unsportsmanlike high— handed tricks, he broke the rules and brought his son

back to life. And our situation stood very much as it stands today—a battle, a lengthy war for the hearts and minds of the human creatures. A war which our Father below tells us we will eventually win. (Although he is such a liar, it's hard to know how things will turn out). I cannot explain why the enemy fights for these infernal humans. He actually seems to love them—and of course this will be his downfall—just as it was the downfall of his son! On that cheery note, let me wish you all the worst, my dear Sludge Breath for your sake. Our Master does not long tolerate failure.

Your Mentor & Fellow Ghoul,  
Screwtape  
Undersecretary of Temptation