

Grade Eleven: Theology

Course: Christian Ethics

Text: *The Great Divorce*

Author: C.S. Lewis

***The Great Divorce* Study Guide**

Note: Lewis wrote this book in 1945, so when he refers to “the war” he is writing about World War II, particularly from his own English perspective.

1. In his Preface, Lewis explains that he titled this book *The Great Divorce* in response to the poet William Blake’s book *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. What is Lewis’s point here? What does he want his reader to understand about Heaven and Hell?
2. Lewis writes, “I think earth, if chosen instead of Heaven, will turn out to have been, all along, only a region of Hell; and earth, if put second to heaven, to have been from the beginning a part of Heaven itself.” How does he illustrate this point throughout the story?
3. Lewis begins the story in his imaginative version of Hell. How does he describe it? What makes this place “Hell” and what is the character of the people there?
4. Do the ghosts know they are in Hell? And why would any of them choose to return there after being brought out of it? What are some examples of those who return to the gloomy city? What is their reason for doing this?
5. Who are the people who meet the ghosts? How does Lewis describe them? Where are they from and what is their purpose? How do they interact with the ghosts? How can the ghosts become like the “solid” and “bright” people?
6. One solid person (who we learn was a murderer in his earthly life) says to a ghost, “Ask for Bleeding Charity. Everything is here for the asking and nothing can be bought.” What is he trying to teach his friend, the ghost, about Heaven? What lessons should we, the reader, take from their conversation?
7. The narrating Ghost describes his encounter with the writer George MacDonald (an actual Scottish writer of fantasy and theology who had a profound influence on C.S. Lewis.) He says, “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’ How does this line explain the entire story of this book?

8. In the story, the narrating Ghost witnesses a conversation between an angel and another ghost with a lizard on his shoulder. What is this conversation about? What do you think it symbolizes?
9. Near the end of the story, George MacDonald uses a blade of grass to teach the Ghost something about Hell and the souls in Hell. What is revealed in this scene?
10. MacDonald explains to the Ghost shortly thereafter: "For a damned soul is nearly nothing; it is shrunk, shut up in itself." How do the many ghosts in the story illustrates MacDonald's point?
11. "Only the Greatest of all can make Himself small enough to enter Hell. For the higher a thing is, the lower it can descend—a man can sympathize with a horse but a horse cannot sympathize with a rat. Only One has descended into Hell." What is MacDonald explaining in this quote?