

**STUDY GUIDE**  
**THE GREAT DIVORCE** By C.S. Lewis

**Introduction:** *The Great Divorce* arose out of Lewis' interest in the nature of spiritual choices. The idea for allowing damned spirits a "holiday" in Heaven was suggested to him by his reading of the seventeenth century Anglican divine Jeremy Taylor, who introduced him to the ancient Catholic notion of *Refrigerium* – that the damned are given occasional repose from the torments of Hell by being granted "days off" in other places. The title of the book was a play on William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* – Lewis implying that no such marriage is possible. On the title page there is a telling quote from George MacDonald:

No, there is no escape. There is no heaven with a little of hell in it – no plan to retain this or that of the devil in our hearts or our pockets. Out Satan must go, every hair and feather.

**Instructions:** All the conversations in *The Great Divorce* are aimed at unearthing the deceptions with which damned humanity defends its refusal of God. As you read, pick out a few cases where the ghosts are apparently deceived. Note how the ghosts justify their choices. Working through their examples, contrast what they say with what, as Lewis suggests, are the unspoken crises of the will behind their choices (fear of humbling themselves, wanting to remain in control, possessiveness over others, etc).

**Assignment:**

1. After reading *The Great Divorce*, choose two cases as mentioned above with which to **write one total 5 - 7 paragraph essay**. Contrast what the ghosts say with what Lewis suggests are the unspoken crises of the will behind their choices then relate these examples to your life today. Be sure to cite textual evidence properly. Use MLA format.
  
2. Choose **one** of the following questions with which to respond with a **one paragraph** response using MLA.
  - A. What do you think Lewis is saying in this book about the relationship between good and evil?
  
  - B. Writing in a letter to his brother in 1940, Lewis said: "I begin to suspect that the world is divided not only into the happy and unhappy, but into those who like happiness and those who, odd as it seems, really don't." Do you think this is a good insight into the spiritual choice we make for or against God? Is it really that simple?
  
  - C. "Better to reign in Hell than serve in Heaven." Why, in Lewis' view, do people reject God?
  
  - D. "Because the Middle Ages erred in one direction, does it follow that there is no error in the opposite direction?" Discuss Lewis' portrait of liberalized Christianity.
  
  - E. Lewis has one of his characters describe God as the Eternal Fact. Do you think that's a good description?

Staple the assignments together . Turn in the first day of class for a quiz grade.

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