

Briefing Document: Social Morality — A Synthesis of C.S. Lewis and John MacArthur

October 15, 2025

Executive Summary

This document synthesizes the comparative analysis of **C.S. Lewis** and **John MacArthur** on *social morality*, as presented in a lecture on October 15, 2025.

The central argument asserts that true Christian social transformation begins with **individual spiritual renewal**, not political reform. Both thinkers affirm that the foundation of social morality rests upon the timeless *Golden Rule*—to love one’s neighbor as oneself—representing not a new moral system, but a reaffirmation of principles humanity has always known to be right.

Both theologians distinguish between the **Church** and the **state**.

- **Lewis** insists Christianity provides *directional principles*, not political programs, and that lay believers, not clergy, are responsible for applying those principles in public life.
- **MacArthur** echoes this, emphasizing separation between the *spiritual* and *political* kingdoms and warning against *mission drift*—where political activism overshadows the Great Commission.

The lecture also examines:

- The nature of a Christian society
 - Economic ethics and charitable giving
 - The perils of selective Christianity
 - The inward nature of true social reform
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1. Foundational Principle: The Golden Rule

Christian social morality is not new but a return to universal truths revealed in Scripture.

C.S. Lewis’s View

“Christ did not come to preach any brand-new morality.”

True moral teachers, Lewis explains, simply bring us back “to the old simple principles which we are all so anxious not to see.”

The essence of this is the *Golden Rule*: “*Do as you would be done by*,” which summarizes what every person inherently knows to be right.

Biblical Foundation

The principle is affirmed repeatedly throughout Scripture:

- **Romans 13:9 (NKJV):**
“For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery,’ ‘You shall not murder,’ ‘You shall not steal,’ ‘You shall not bear false witness,’ ‘You shall not covet,’ and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”
- **Galatians 5:14 (NKJV):**
“For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”
- **Leviticus 19:18 (NKJV):**
“You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.”
- **Leviticus 19:34 (NKJV):**
“The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God.”

MacArthur fully affirms this foundational principle.

2. The Role of the Church in Politics and Society

C.S. Lewis on Political Programs

- **Christianity as a “Director”:** Lewis teaches that Christianity “does not profess to have a detailed political program.” Rather, it provides moral direction that energizes righteous action.
- **Role of the Laity:** When people demand “leadership” from clergy in social reform, Lewis argues they confuse the Church’s spiritual mission with political duty. The application of Christian truth in education, labor, and governance belongs to *Christian laypeople*, not the pulpit.

John MacArthur on Political Engagement

MacArthur parallels Lewis but expands with biblical detail:

Principle	MacArthur’s Teaching
Two Distinct Kingdoms	The Church’s kingdom “is not of this world.” Spiritual progress cannot be measured by political victories.

Principle	MacArthur's Teaching
Separate Authorities	The state governs justice and order; the Church governs doctrine and worship.
Rejection of Christian Nationalism	Attempts to merge faith with politics misinterpret Scripture. MacArthur's premillennial view anticipates worsening conditions until Christ returns.
Political Engagement	Christians should vote for the most righteous candidate available, pray for leaders, and speak biblical truth.
Legal and Civic Remedies	Using lawful means to preserve justice or religious liberty is appropriate for believers.
Warning Against Mission Drift	When politics overshadows the Gospel, the Church loses focus. The mission is reconciliation to God , not legislative victory.

3. The Nature of a Christian Society

C.S. Lewis's Vision

A truly Christian society would combine progressiveness and tradition:

- **Work and Production:** No idleness; each person contributes something good and useful.
- **Economic and Social Structure:** Economically "socialistic," yet morally conservative and respectful.
- **Manners and Mood:** Cheerful, obedient, and orderly—marked by singing, gratitude, and contentment.
- **Rejection of Busybody Behavior:**
 - *2 Thessalonians 3:11 (NKJV)*: "For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies."
 - *Proverbs 26:17 (NKJV)*: "He who passes by and meddles in a quarrel not his own is like one who takes a dog by the ears."

MacArthur's Emphasis on Unity and Fellowship

- **Unity:** "*Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!*" (Psalm 133:1, NKJV)
- **Fellowship:** "*So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart.*" (Acts 2:46, NKJV)

MacArthur underscores that spiritual unity and joyful community are the marks of a faithful society.

4. The Danger of Selective Christianity

Both thinkers warn against accepting only the agreeable parts of faith.

Lewis's Warning

People “want bits of Christianity” to support their own views. But Christianity offers us not an ally, but a *Master and Judge*.

MacArthur's Perspective

- **Non-Negotiable Truth:** Doctrine matters—belief determines behavior.
 - **Cost and Commitment:** True discipleship involves repentance and sacrifice.
 - **False Assurance:** Selective obedience can create self-deception about salvation.
 - **Theological Drift:** Cultural pressure tempts believers to ignore “hard truths” about sin, judgment, and hell.
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5. Christian Perspectives on Economics and Debt

C.S. Lewis on Usury

Lewis observed that ancient Greeks, Old Testament Jews, and medieval Christians all forbade **usury** (lending money at interest). He recognized it as foundational to modern economics but urged Christians to reflect on its moral implications.

John MacArthur on Interest and Debt

- **Context Matters:** Interest is not inherently sinful; its morality depends on intent and context.
 - **Permissible Interest:** Acceptable in business or investment settings (*cf.* Matthew 25:27).
 - **Forbidden Interest:** Prohibited when exploiting the poor (*Leviticus 25:37; Deuteronomy 23:19–20*).
 - **Condemnation of Exploitation:** Christians must reject predatory lending and excessive interest.
 - **Avoidance of Debt:** Believers should live free of unnecessary debt to prevent bondage.
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6. The Mandate of Charitable Giving

C.S. Lewis on Charity

- Charity is *essential* to Christian morality.
- Christians must *give more than they can spare*.
- Fear of insecurity, not greed, often prevents generosity.

John MacArthur on Giving

- **Act of Worship:** Giving expresses gratitude and faith (*2 Corinthians 9:7*).
 - **Not a Legal Tithe:** Christians are called to *voluntary, joyful, and sacrificial* giving.
 - **Spiritual Rewards:** God blesses generous hearts with joy and eternal treasure, not guaranteed material prosperity (*Matthew 6:21*).
 - **Purposeful and Planned:** Giving should sustain the local church and gospel work (*1 Corinthians 16:2*).
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7. Conclusion: The Inward Path to Social Change

C.S. Lewis concludes:

“A Christian society is not going to arrive until most of us really want it, and we shall not want it until we become fully Christian. I may repeat, ‘Do as you would be done by,’ till I am blue in the face, but I cannot really carry it out until I love my neighbor as myself, and I cannot learn to love God except by learning to obey Him.”

True social transformation begins in the **heart**, not in systems.

Obedience to God births love for neighbor—and that inward renewal alone produces enduring moral change.

Greek Words

None used in this briefing.