



July 2009—*Faultfinding*

How easy it is to see the faults of others, how hard to see our own. This destructive habit produces a steady stream of damage in relationships with our family, friends, and coworkers. But it need not be so, says C.S. Lewis:

When we see how all our plans shipwreck on the character of the people we have to deal with we are “in *one* way” seeing what it must be like for God. But only in one way. There are two respects in which God’s view must be very different from ours. In the first place, He sees (like you) how all the people in your home or your job are in various degrees awkward or difficult; but when He looks into that home or factory or office He sees one more person of the same kind—the one you never do see. I mean, of course, yourself. That is the next great step in wisdom—to realize that you also are just that sort of person. You also have a fatal flaw in your character. All the hopes and plans of others have again and again shipwrecked on your character just as your hopes and plans have shipwrecked on theirs.

It is no good passing this over with some vague, general admission such as “Of course, I know I have my faults.” It is important to realize that there is some really fatal flaw in you: something which gives the others just that same feeling of *despair* which their flaws give you. And it is almost certainly something you don’t know about—like what the advertisements call “halitosis,” which everyone notices except the person who has it. But why, you ask, don’t the others tell me? Believe me, they have tried to tell you over and over again, and you just couldn’t “take it.” Perhaps a good deal of what you call their “nagging” or “bad temper” or “queerness” are just their attempts to make you see the truth. And even the faults you do know you don’t know fully. You say, “I admit I lost my temper last night”; but the others know that you’re always doing it, that you are a bad-tempered person. You say, “I admit I drank too much last Saturday”; but everyone else knows that you are a habitual drunkard...

We don’t like rationing which is imposed upon us, but I suggest one form of rationing which we ought to impose on ourselves. Abstain from all thinking about other people’s faults, unless your duties as a teacher or parent make it necessary to think about them. Whenever the thoughts come unnecessarily into one’s mind, why not simply shove them away? And think of one’s own faults instead? For there, with God’s help, one *can* do something. Of all the awkward people in your house or job there is only one whom you can improve very much. That is the practical end at which to begin. And really, we’d better. The job has to be tackled some day: and every day we put it off will make it harder to begin.

Just think how different your inner life and your relationships could be if you were to take Lewis’s advice.

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C.S. Lewis, *God in the Dock* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1972), pp. 153-154.