

February 2008—*Rats in the Cellar of My Life*

One of the important lessons we learn from those who have developed a deeper relationship with God is that we must discover and deal with the depths of our sin if we wish to grow closer to him. This sounds deceptively simple and elementary until we realize that sin is not simply a matter of the individual sins we commit. Sin has both fruits (individual acts and attitudes) and roots (the “flesh,” or our old fallen nature). Failure to recognize and deal with the root causes of our sins hinders us from gaining freedom from them and thereby becoming more Christ-like and enjoying deeper intimacy with God.

C.S. Lewis is a good example of someone who came to see this problem in his own life.

We begin to notice, besides our particular sinful acts, our sinfulness; begin to be alarmed not only about what we do, but about what we are. This may sound rather difficult, so I will try to make it clear from my own case. When I come to my evening prayers and try to reckon up the sins of the day, nine times out of ten the most obvious one is some sin against charity; I have sulked or snapped or sneered or snubbed or stormed. And the excuse that immediately springs to my mind is that the provocation was so sudden and unexpected; I was caught off my guard, I had not time to collect myself. Now that may be an extenuating circumstance as regards those particular acts: they would obviously be worse if they had been deliberate and premeditated. On the other hand, surely what a man does when he is taken off his guard is the best evidence for what sort of a man he is? Surely what pops out before the man has time to put on a disguise is the truth? If there are rats in a cellar you are most likely to see them if you go in very suddenly. But the suddenness does not create the rats: it only prevents them from hiding. In the same way the suddenness of the provocation does not make me an ill-tempered man; it only shows me what an ill-tempered man I am. The rats are always there in the cellar, but if you go in shouting and noisily they will have taken cover before you switch on the light.¹

Once Lewis came to see that his acts of sulking, snapping, and sneering were the fruit of sin, a deeper problem—a lack of love in his heart—became evident, and he was in a position to deal with the root cause. He could then see his great need for God’s help in developing a deeper love for his neighbor. As he earnestly sought God’s help, he became a much more loving person, and the instances of unkindness dramatically decreased. What was true for Lewis is true for us. As we begin to pay closer attention to the rats in the cellar of our lives and ask the Holy Spirit for insight, conviction, and help in dealing with the root causes, we will increasingly die to self, sin less, grow more like Jesus, and enjoy deeper intimacy with the Father.

*Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!
And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!*

PSALM 139:23-24 (ESV)

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, McMillan Publishing, 1952), pp. 164-165.