

Andrews University

Digital Commons @ Andrews University

Faculty Publications

10-5-1961

Personal Problems of Christian Living: Did I Do the Right Thing?

Charles E. Wittschiebe
Andrews University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs>



Part of the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Wittschiebe, Charles E., "Personal Problems of Christian Living: Did I Do the Right Thing?" (1961). *Faculty Publications*. 3726.

<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs/3726>

This Popular Press is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact repository@andrews.edu.

Did I Do the Right Thing?

By C. E. Wittschiebe, Professor of Pastoral Care
Andrews University

"I am tormented all the time with the fear that I have not done the right thing."

THIS problem is somewhat related to the problem discussed in an earlier article—the difficulty of feeling forgiven. Here, however, the individual feels himself more prone to do the wrong thing than the average Christian. He is often a perfectionist, and usually falls short of his perfectionist standards. He is often a legalist who finds that he falls short of "laws" he has either acquired or created for himself.

Let me illustrate. Such a person may, for instance, stress the "eat to live" principle to the point that actual pleasure in eating comes to be regarded as sin. Diet becomes almost a form of penance. With herbs, teas, and substitutes of all kinds, he guards so carefully against gluttony and intemperance as to transform the work of preparing food into a meticulous laboratory process. Someone else may regard all forms of humor as sinful, as a form of "idle words."

Such persons are likely, also, to measure modesty largely in terms of inches from the floor or the armpit. For them, the matter of dress becomes a sort of hair-shirt way of bringing the body into subjection. They are likely to feel that symmetry in line, or form, or color is of itself evil. For them modesty is not a matter of judicious good taste, but the denial of anything in dress or appearance that might give a feeling of delight or satisfaction. The concept of dress as pure discipline has led many to wrong conclusions about the Seventh-day Adventist view of right living.

Illustrations might be multiplied, in the areas of recreation, of music, of social relations, and so on. We are not here dealing with legalism and perfectionism, but with a kind of unreasoning overscrupulousness.

Anxiety, Obsessions, Compulsions

As technical terms, *anxiety*, *obsessions*, and *compulsions* probably need defining for those not accustomed to their use in a clinical sense. In its simplest form *anxiety* may be defined as "a feeling of threat, especially a fearsome threat, without the

person's being able to say what he thinks threatens." Anxiety in the form of "preoccupation with unwanted ideas" becomes an obsession, and when it is expressed in "persistent impulses to repeat certain acts over and over" it becomes a compulsion.

Why does a person become overscrupulous? We have no clear-cut answer. Some writers feel that this may be due to factors at work in the physical constitution of the individual—that is, physical causes bringing about changes in the emotional centers that lead to this type of feeling and acting.

Others—and they seem to be in the great majority—feel that the causes, which are basically psychological, are to be found among the conditions under which the person developed through childhood and adolescence. As in the case of the person who feels that he has not been forgiven, there has been, in the background, a lack of



EWING GALLOWAY

Some sincere Christians are in constant torment because of fear that they have fallen, or will fall, fatally short of God's goal for them. They need someone to help them understand the full power and meaning of the love of their heavenly Father.

nourishing, supporting love. Parents may have been too demanding, beyond the child's capacity to achieve. This can lead to the setting up of rigid standards of conduct as a sort of protection against failure and as an assurance of attaining perfection. The demands of reaching such a high standard quickly makes it practically impossible to express negative feelings. Such feelings must be suppressed at whatever cost to the personality. Sometimes the motivating power is a constant and accentuated appeal to fear. The individual is so afraid to do wrong that he spends all his time straining out gnats and counting anise and cummin seeds, but he is still worried as to whether he has not unintentionally defrauded the Lord of a proper tithe!

A Problem of Maturity

To express the problem in another way, we might say that the conscience of the overscrupulous person has not matured. He is so preoccupied with the do's and don'ts, down to the lowest minutiae, that he fails to see the principle behind these details. He is unable to regulate his life on the basis of broad and reasonable principles, but has to have a list of rules and regulations, a sort of canon law of his own by which to live. He has the intellectual power to arrive at a mature philosophy, but the fear and insecurity that have left his emotional life poorly developed also inhibit his mental powers and leave his conscience on an infantile level.

What can be done to help such a person? Unfortunately, there is no short cure, no emotional miracle drug that can bring about a radical change.

To ridicule such a person is not only cruel and unfeeling but useless. To offer reassurance does not accomplish much, and what may be accomplished is at best superficial and temporary. To try to change the pattern of thinking by logic and reason does little good. The emotional climate in which this person grew to adulthood was not sufficiently nourishing to develop a healthy conscience. Long training in obedience and duty, not centered in a love that is warm and forgiving and accepting, gradually leads, in many cases, to an increasing sense of unworthiness and a corresponding need to attain perfection if one is to be worthy and loved and accepted.

Accordingly, the person troubled with overscrupulousity can only reconstitute his conscience by finding relationships in which he feels more and more loved and accepted as he is. He will still seek perfection, but will realize that it is the product of a life-long experience with his Master and

not a condition to be met before his Master will condescend to love him. On the level of human experience, he needs to be loved by his brothers and sisters in the church, and particularly by the pastor and the more mature Christians. This will permit him to discard the defenses he has built against his own sense of unworthiness. He will be able to relax in God's love instead of forever straining to earn it. He needs less admonition in the form of "cry aloud and spare not," and needs to hear more often,

"comfort ye, comfort ye, my people." Helping people thus troubled requires a large investment of ourselves. It requires understanding and patient love. The legalist and the Pharisee cannot help. The worldly ultraliberal cannot help. The "average" Christian can help but little. The prime need of the church today is a larger number of true sons and daughters of God who can convey to such needy and hurt persons the full power and meaning of God's Father-love.

thereafter a missionary stopped on this island and when he began to preach this family recognized the same truth that they had read in the tract.

They introduced themselves to the missionary and told him all about the bottle with the blessing in it. Bible studies were given. The family was converted to God and the prayers of the Missionary Volunteers in Manáos were answered.

But that is not the whole story. One of the daughters in this family attended one of our schools in Brazil and became a teacher. She now is a Bible instructor employed by the Voice of Prophecy in the city of Belém, a large city situated at the mouth of the Amazon River.

I want to thank Missionary Eugene Walker, of Brazil, for permitting me to tell this story to you. And, by the way, I have a suggestion for you. If you live in a coastal city like Charleston, or St. Petersburg, Seattle, San Diego, or perhaps by the side of a mighty river or a great lake, and you are interested in a missionary project, why don't you start a club in which you can lay plans to save souls as the young people in Manáos did?

You might even call your project Operation Bob or Bottles of Blessing. Collect your bottles, fill them with tracts, and send them forth with a prayer. As the bottles of blessing bob up and down the waters of the lake or the sea or the river, you can pray that God will guide some lonely traveler to the light of His saving truth.

Bottles of Blessing

A Message for Juniors

By D. A. Delafield

THE bottle is a curse when it is filled with alcohol. But this story is about a bottle that was filled with a blessing.

The young people in the church of Manáos in north Brazil were restless. They wanted to do something for Jesus. What kind of missionary work would be best? After talking it over and praying about it they decided that they would collect empty bottles, clean them out, stuff them with our truth-filled tracts, cork and seal them, and send them forth on their mission for God.

The young people started to work. They gathered hundreds of bottles—big ones and little ones, all sizes and all shapes—and filled them with the blessed truth of the living God. Then after corking and sealing the bottles they took them in a big box down to the banks of the Amazon River and prayerfully threw them into the water. Talk about casting your bread upon the waters, well, they literally cast the bread of life upon the waters of the mighty Amazon.

Then the bobbing little glass boats, freighted with God's message of love, bobbed up and down on the mighty stream and drifted toward the great Atlantic. The young people prayed that someone would find the truth.

Sure enough! One day along one of the smaller tributaries of the Amazon, a fisherman noticed the bottle with the blessing in it bobbing up and down on the water. That precious little glass boat filled with God's last message of mercy was to be a great blessing to that man.

He reached over and pulled the bottle out of the water, drew out the cork, and there inside he found the little tract. He read the tract and it had a great influence on his life. Later

he stopped at a little island and presented the tract to a family. The parents were interested at once as they read the message of truth. Shortly



An Enlarged Field for the *Review*

"I have a brother [or sister, or aunt, or father] who used to be a Seventh-day Adventist. I think he still believes the teachings of the church. What can I do to win him back?"

Why not send him the **REVIEW AND HERALD**? Perhaps as he reads of the progress of God's work in all the world his faith will revive and he will cast his lot again with the remnant church. Others have had this experience. A woman who used to be an Adventist wrote us: "Some time ago a friend gave me some copies of the **REVIEW AND HERALD** and the *Sabbath School Quarterly*. I read them; my heart was filled again with love for God and His church and all that the church stands for. . . . I am homesick for the church and I long to be a child of God."

We believe that there are many dear people who once attended our Sabbath schools and churches—perhaps our church schools when they were children—who might be brought back into the Advent Movement by receiving a weekly visit from the **REVIEW**. Christian friends, also, who have heard the truth in evangelistic meetings, and perhaps attend our weekly services regularly, may be won through this means. They have not yet taken their stand to join the church, but they will take this step when they obtain a clearer picture of the church, see its worldwide scope, and get the "feel" of the Advent Movement. The **REVIEW** can supply that picture and furnish the "feel."

Here is an enlarged field of service for our church paper—reaching those who once walked with us but who have strayed into the world, and those who are attending church but are not members. Why not explore this field? When you order your own subscription, at \$3.95, invest another \$3.95 on behalf of a relative, a friend, or a soul now on the threshold of the church. For so little you may accomplish so much!

THE EDITORS