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### Personal Problems of Christian Living: I Feel Inferior

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# "I FEEL INFERIOR"

By C. E. Wittschiede, *Professor of Pastoral Care*  
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*"I just don't amount to anything. I feel so inferior. And I can't do anything in the church."*

**T**HIS person is suffering from what is known in popular language as an inferiority complex. While this is a common problem, and troubles church members and nonchurch members alike, let us here note the effect it has on the former.

To begin with, let us explore briefly the problem of feeling inferior. The condition itself, the ways in which it is expressed, and the attitudes in which it becomes evident, do not need any extended description. Not being worth much, not being able to keep up with others, not having any talents at all, not belonging to the right social class, not being very attractive—all are types of these feelings that can be present. In addition, there may be a more or less continuing condition of mild anxiety, arising partly out of, and accompanied by, frustration. The individual seldom feels that he has what it takes to meet most of the situations in life, and has a nagging sense of coming short too often.

Feelings of inferiority may revolve around physical defects—from poor complexion to being crippled. They may center in the individual's lower level of mental ability or of education, or they may focus on the lack of acceptance by the better (as the individual sees them) social classes, with the consequent burden of living in less desirable neighborhoods and belonging, if at all, to clubs and organizations of relatively little social prestige. They may take the form of low opinions of oneself in terms of morality and goodness, in a greater-than-average degree of feeling "bad" and "unfit."

The areas of difficulty may be real or imagined. Often, of course, there is a real basis for the unhappy feelings. But even if there is not, the effect can be the same. We must keep in mind, then, that we are dealing not only with the person as he is but with the

person as he seems to himself to be.

This brings us to the point that, in the main, feelings of inferiority are learned through childhood and youth. Obvious physical and mental defects are naturally quite likely to produce them with very little "conditioning" being involved. Yet even here a child's attitude toward a defect will largely reflect the opinions about this defect of those who are important in his life. Homeliness does not have to be too distressing unless the family and his social group overemphasize physical beauty.

Lack of physical strength and athletic ability do not have to make one feel inferior, unless these capabilities rate too highly in his world. Lower levels of mental ability are not necessarily breeders of inferiority feelings unless the child and youth is made the butt of jokes and other unpleasant forms of belittling.

In any case, the individual finds himself coming short of the image he has of his "ideal" self. This image he has derived from the words and actions of the significant people around him, and as he gets older, from the concepts forming in his own mind of what he ought to be.

## The Heart of the Problem

Within the limits of an article of this size, this is probably all that should be said about the feeling of inferiority itself. Let us turn now to the heart of this problem, so far as the religious life is concerned: "I can't do anything in the church."

To begin with, church membership in itself is *doing* something. When a man enlists in the Army and is classified as a private he is at once rendering military service. A general can do no more. Rank gives authority, responsibility, and some privileges, but does not imply more *service*. (Can you recall any battle on land or sea or in the air that was won by officers alone?) The army of the Lord is built on the principle that a soldier is pleasing his Commander completely when he serves from pure motives and with undivided loyalty.



The parable of the talents emphasizes the fact that it is not the number of talents originally possessed that wins approval, but the use made of those in hand. In this connection, we should remember that the talents include mental faculties, speech, influence, time, health, strength, money, and kindly impulses and affections.

On the basis of this list, I doubt that there would be many Seventh-day Adventists who would be below the level of five-talent men. Even in poverty, or sickness, or prison, most of these talents remain to some degree. The parable of the workers picked up in the market place at different hours of the day adds another important point: God is not concerned, in determining rewards, with the length of time one of His children has served. Otherwise what consolation could we offer to Stephen, to the thief on the cross, to John the Baptist, and to the many thousands of Christians through the ages who have paid for their loyalty with their lives within a short time of declaring their allegiance? "It is not the length of time we labor but our willingness and fidelity in the work that makes it acceptable to God."—*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 402.

Perhaps the sense of inferiority is deepened by our aspiring to tasks that require such particular talents as musical ability, speaking ability, or leadership qualities. But the great mass of the work of the church is not of this kind. For example, "Practical work will have far more effect than mere sermonizing. We are to give food to the hungry, clothing to the naked, and shelter to the homeless. . . . God calls not only for our gifts for the needy, but for our cheerful countenance, our hopeful words, our kindly  
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veals the whole plan of salvation. "Thy way, O God, is in the sanctuary" (Ps. 77:13).

The typical services that were carried on in the earthly sanctuary revealed the one grand truth that sin could be atoned for by the death of our blessed, sinless Christ. The study of the earthly tabernacle discloses our Saviour as the innocent Lamb who shed His blood for our redemption, His position as our high priest in the heavenly sanctuary, His intercessory work for the sinner, His office as judge as well as advocate.

When the antitypical fulfillment of the types and shadows is clearly understood by the Roman Catholic, he will accept Christ as his sin-pardoning Saviour. He will recoil at the sacrifice of the Mass, which he has been taught to regard as the reiteration of Calvary. He will see Christ as priest in the heavenly sanctuary, not a human one on the Catholic altars. He will see the altar of incense, which typifies the prayers of the humble suppliant offered in the name of Jesus. He now sees his prayers ascending directly to the throne of God without a deceased human intermediary. It is Christ, and not the Virgin Mary, or any of the many beatified saints, that he sees as his Mediator.

He will see that it is repentance, and not penance and works of supererogation, that is required by the High Priest of the heavenly sanctuary. He will understand that it is God alone who can absolve from sin, accompanying the absolution with the power to keep from sinning. He will see the complete work of the atonement carried on in the Most Holy Place by his Saviour and Judge. These truths and many others will be revealed by the study of the sanctuary.

The two studies that chronologically would follow are "The 2300 Days" and "The Investigative Judgment." When these studies are completed the student is prepared for the doctrinal subjects and the prophecies that deal with the papacy. However, discretion is required in presenting the scriptures that characterize the man of sin.

3. *Should the studies be given from the Douay Version rather than the Authorized Version?*

I would not advise using the Douay Version unless the student refuses to study from the Authorized. However, the messages of truth can be given from the Douay. Should questions arise relating to the Apocrypha, a brief explanation can be made to show that these books are not inspired and consequently are not part of the Sacred Canon. The New Testament does not record any statement from the Apocryphal writings, thus suggest-

ing that our Lord and His apostles did not regard the deuterocanonical books of the Old Testament as an integral part of God's holy revelation.

However, whichever version is used, rest assured that God will witness to His inspired word. The Apocryphal books can be bypassed as we give the message. But should the Catholic student insist on bringing passages from these books to support the doctrines of his church, then a study should be given to show that these books are not inspired and should find no place in the Holy Bible.

As we work earnestly for our Catholic friends, with a sincere love for their souls, God will bless our efforts and enable us to win many of them for His kingdom.

(Last in a Series of Four Articles)

### "The Dear Old Review"

The other day we received a letter from Grand Prairie, Texas, from an 84-year-old REVIEW reader who taught school for 52 years. We would like to share a part of her letter.

"I was a child in Oakland, California, when the *Pitcairn* was being built. My parents gave me 5 cents to invest in a project to help build the ship. Mother first had me buy a dish towel and wipe dishes for her. When I had accumulated a little money, we bought scraps from a millinery shop and mother taught me how to make pin cushions, which we filled with sawdust. With the Lord's help, I sold \$25 worth of these on Castro Street in Oakland, California.

"Mother wrote a poem which she read at the dedication of the *Pitcairn*, and was invited, with father (who was blind), to board the ship as it sailed through the Golden Gate on its maiden voyage, and then return to port with the pilot on the tug. They let me go with them!

"The dear old REVIEW has been in my home ever since I first married in 1900, and before that it had come to my parents' home for as long as I could remember. During her lifetime, my mother, Mary Jane Cottrell, wrote poetry and prose for seven of our denominational papers. I renewed my subscription last week, at the new low price. I already had it and seven other of our magazines paid for to February, 1962. Now my REVIEW will keep coming until 1963. I still read all of these papers, and then send them on to dear friends.

"(Signed) Grace Wilcox"

Have you renewed your subscription?

THE EDITORS

## I Feel Inferior

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handclasp."—*Ibid.*, pp. 417, 418. Are there very many members who cannot engage in this type of service for the Lord? How, then, can any of us say that "we can't do anything in the church"?

What has just been written leads naturally into the following thought: "There are many who have given themselves to Christ, yet who see no opportunity of doing a large work or making great sacrifices in His service. These may find comfort in the thought that it is not necessarily the martyr's self-surrender which is most acceptable to God; it may not be the missionary who has daily faced danger and death that stands highest in heaven's records. The Christian who is such in his private life, in the daily surrender of self, in sincerity of purpose and purity of thought, in meekness under provocation, in faith and piety, in fidelity in that which is least, the one who in the home life represents the character of Christ—such a one may in the sight of God be more precious than even the world-renowned missionary or martyr."—*Ibid.*, p. 403.

### The Best Cure

Finally, the best cure for feelings of inferiority is an awareness of our real status in the church. We are in it because we have chosen to be adopted by the Lord as His sons and daughters. The measure of our value is the price that was paid for us—the death of the Son of God. Our past sins have been forgiven, we receive help for the present, and we have hope for the future.

Our adoption includes a share in the estate—we are joint-heirs with Christ of the measureless riches of the wonderful creation of God. We are linked to the throne in a way that even unfallen beings can never share. When the president of the General Conference and the "newest" member of the church are both sons of God, the difference in type of service is minor. With such a high rank for all, the differences are seen for what they are—largely artificial, and arising out of the necessity for organization at the human level.

Properly understood, then, church membership does not aggravate feelings of inferiority. It provides a family, a brotherhood, in which each man becomes a new creature, and in which he realizes a new sense of the worth that transcends anything he dared dream of before. "See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are" (1 John 3:1, R.S.V.).