

Andrews University

Digital Commons @ Andrews University

Faculty Publications

1-4-1962

Personal Problems of Christian Living: Impure Thoughts

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: Impure Thoughts" (1962). *Faculty Publications*. 3729.

<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs/3729>

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.

us a \$20,000 home for one tenth of its value? Would we attempt to beat him down on the price? Paul, after he had been beaten, shipwrecked, imprisoned, and spurned by his countrymen declared: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17).

We cannot escape the consequences of transgression. David sinned and repented, but he paid dearly for his folly, and his heartbroken cry for pardon echoes across the centuries of time: "Have mercy upon me, O God, according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me."

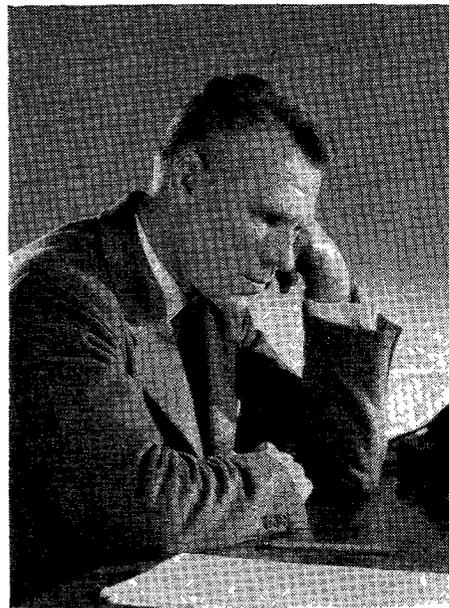
Anything worth doing at all is worth doing *now*, for "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." If we sow hard work we will be rewarded for our labor, if we sow idle-

ness we will reap poverty, if we neglect the care of our bodies we will reap ill health, if we deal dishonestly with others they will return full measure, with interest.

We cannot build poorly and live luxuriously. Now is the accepted time. There was an ancient Greek statue named Opportunity. The only hair on the statue's head was a lock that hung loosely over its brow. Any one who would lay hold of Opportunity, presumably, must do so as it approaches, for once it turns away, there is nothing on which to lay hold.

We are our ship's own pilot, and if on the sea of life we steer that ship onto the rocks, we have no one but ourselves to blame. If after we have crossed the sea of life we find that we have taken the wrong course, we cannot turn back. But at any time during the voyage we can change our course.

Yes, there *is* a Land of Beginning Again, but its glories are available only to those who have not too long postponed meeting the requisites for an inheritance within its borders.



A. DEVANEY

It is not a sin to be tempted. Don't confuse temptation with sin.

capable of wanting to bite. But it is "sin" when he takes the bait. It was not because no evil presented itself to Jesus' mind that He triumphed over the devil in the wilderness. Jesus was hungry; He could feel the attraction of riches and power and pleasure, the "pull" of a way of life that left out Gethsemane and Calvary. Jesus perceived these things, but He did not entertain them in His mind beyond the point of perception. He rejected them immediately and decisively, and expelled them from His mind. Let us not subtly persuade ourselves that extended consideration of a temptation is still only "being tempted." We need to be completely honest with ourselves in this respect, and restrict the "zone of temptation" to the bare recognition of the proposition.

No, we need not charge ourselves with sin when we have only been tempted. The possibility of being tempted exists until death, and the frequency and intensity of temptations are not a reflection on one's state of sanctification. In fact, it is certain that a vigorous Christian life will draw attacks from within and without. Temptation is the devil's prime weapon. Why should he not use it powerfully, and often, against his inveterate enemies—consecrated Christians? The hunter does not go on chasing and shooting at dead birds. It is the bird trying to get away that draws his attention and fire.

A Lifelong Battle

Next let us ask, Does the new birth make us into creatures who cannot experience temptation and who cannot sin? Do we lose all past evil tendencies immediately? Any knowledge of post-conversion of human nature proves this to be false. The Christian has an unending battle against the sinfulness of his human nature, even after conversion and the new birth:

Personal Problems of Christian Living—

IMPURE THOUGHTS

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

Even though I have been a church member for many, many years, I sometimes find myself tormented with impure thoughts.

HERE is one of the most difficult problems in the whole field of Christian experience. Put in its simplest terms, it might be worded this way: How can a Christian, a new creature, one who has buried the old man of sin in baptism, ever feel lustful drives and be troubled with impure thoughts?

Some may argue that the occurrence of such evils proves that a man is not a Christian. This, you may say, would greatly simplify the problem. But probably it would, at the same time, rule out almost every human being who has professed the name of Christ. The history of the church is not lacking in confessions, by great spiritual heroes, of intense struggles for victory over impurity.

First of all, let us make a distinction between temptation and sin. Many confuse one with the other, and blame themselves mercilessly for sinning, when they have only been tempted. If a thought takes shape in the mind enough to be recognized as an evil thought, a man has not yet sinned. Sin can range from a passive acceptance of the thought to an active entertainment of it. The latter can take the form of phantasy, in which the action is projected only on the moving-picture screen of the mind, or it can start a process of response that finally finds expression in action. How can a man be tempted unless the temptation is presented to him? If it cannot take shape even as a thought, then how is he to reject or accept it?

The enticement of sin is like the baiting of a fish. The fish, let us say, has not sinned when he sees the bait or even when he realizes that he is

"None of the apostles and prophets ever claimed to be without sin. Men who have lived the nearest to God, men who would sacrifice life itself rather than knowingly commit a wrong act, men whom God has honored with divine light and power, have confessed the sinfulness of their nature. . . .

"So it will be with all who behold Christ. . . .

"Let the recording angels write the history of the holy struggles and conflicts of the people of God; let them record their prayers and tears; but let not God be dishonored by the declaration from human lips, 'I am sinless; I am holy.' Sanctified lips will never give utterance to such presumptuous words."—*The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 561, 562.

"The Lord would have all His sons and daughters happy, peaceful, and obedient. Through the exercise of faith the believer comes into possession of these blessings. Through faith, every deficiency of character may be supplied, every defilement cleansed, every fault corrected, every excellence developed."—*Ibid.*, p. 564.

"We are not yet perfect; but it is our privilege to cut away from the entanglements of self and sin, and advance to perfection."—*Ibid.*, p. 565.

"Sanctification is not the work of a moment, an hour, a day, but of a lifetime. It is not gained by a happy flight of feeling, but is the result of constantly dying to sin, and constantly living for Christ. . . . We know not one day how strong will be our conflict the next. So long as Satan reigns, we shall have self to subdue, besetting sins to overcome; so long as life shall last, there will be no stopping place, no point which we can reach and say, I have fully attained. Sanctification is the result of lifelong obedience."—*Ibid.*, pp. 560, 561.

You will note from these quotations that the new birth does not open a period in life in which a magically changed nature makes its way undisturbed to the kingdom of glory. Rather, the new birth marks the beginning of a continuing struggle, a lifelong conflict.

The whole nature is affected by the new loyalty. The basic drives, the executive center of the personality, and the conscience—all sense the power of the new life working in them. The basic drives, now under the control of a stronger, finer "self," are placed in the service of high and pure ideals. The whole personality is responsive to a conscience that is now sensitive to the impulses of God's Spirit. Formerly, the desire for love may have deteriorated into the grossest types of sensual activity. But under the sanctifying influence of the Spirit, love

appears only in wholesome and healthy forms—for God, for man, and for self. Formerly the aggressive drive manifested itself in contention, in malice, in destructiveness, and in an intense feeling of need to achieve status at the expense of one's fellows. Now the aggression is that exhibited by the Christian soldier marching on to the war of God against His foes. It shows itself in a strong and fearless advocacy of good. It lies at the base of sustained and broadening mission advances. Paul's aggression before conversion was directed *against* the Christians; after his conversion it was placed in the service of God *for* Christians. John's thundering drive, which could urge fire on defenseless villages, is, after conversion, used in the defense of love and the brethren.

The Spirit of God mysteriously and mightily permeates a man in such a thorough and dynamic way that the "oid" nature is transformed into the "new." Putting it somewhat crudely, the horse is not killed, but his nature is tamed and he now responds gladly to the wishes of his new rider. No earthly illustration can quite bring out the real meaning of the process of regeneration and sanctification, but this one may help.

A God-given Instinct

Let us apply what we have been discussing to the sex instinct. This instinct was placed in man's nature at Creation. It has the unqualified blessing of God, and was intended by Him for the procreation of the race, and also to bind two lives together. "And they shall be one flesh." At conver-

sion this strong drive of one's nature is not destroyed or anesthetized. It is purified. It becomes one of the finest demonstrations to the Christian of the transforming power of the grace of God. When normal expression is denied by circumstances out of the control of the individual, he sublimates this energy in acceptable ways of service for man and God.

The surgings and pressures of these basic drives continue through life. Self is insistently calling for attention and satisfaction. Under the control of the Spirit of God, self is lovingly dealt with, but is not allowed to act *selfishly*. Self takes its proper place in relation to the other children of God. Self recognizes the sovereignty of God in all areas of life. Self, then, serves the best interests of self by placing *itself* wholly in the loving hands of the Father.

This means a daily renewing of the original act of surrender. Each day continues the battle against the selfish trends of man's nature.

In conclusion, then, we see that sin is not temptation, that temptation will continue through life, that human nature is not destroyed at conversion, that self must be fought all through the life under the controlling grace of God, and that God, sometimes quickly and sometimes gradually, brings all the elements of man's nature and personality into willing obedience to the Saviour dwelling within. This is the heart of the gospel message the church has been bringing to lost men through the centuries. Its finest summary—

"For me, *life is Christ.*"

Fellowship of Prayer

"We Are So Thankful"

"We are so thankful for the prayers of God's people. Last Sabbath our oldest son and his wife were baptized. 'It is a part of God's plan to grant us, in answer to the prayer of faith, that which He would not bestow did we not thus ask.'—*The Great Controversy*, p. 525."—Mrs. W., of Washington.

"I requested prayer for our younger son and his wife. It seemed as though their marriage was surely going on the rocks. The Lord heard, and their home was saved. I appreciate your prayers and thank you so much for them."—Mrs. L., of Texas.

"Thanks for the prayers you have sent up for our son and daughter-in-law. They were separated but are back together now. Continue to pray that they will give their hearts to God."—Mrs. M., of North Carolina.

"Our son has taken one step closer to God since I wrote my first letter. He has overcome the smoking habit."—Mrs. R., of New Jersey.

This column is dedicated to the encouragement of prayer for others at the sunset hour each Friday evening. Because of the large number of requests received and the complexities of the problems presented, it is impossible for us to answer each letter personally, but all requests will be acknowledged and will be kept on file in our office. Portions of letters, especially those that tell of answers to prayer, will be published as space permits.