

Scrupulous ANONYMOUS

PUBLISHED EACH MONTH BY THE REDEMPTORISTS

MARCH 2012
Vol. 49, No. 3



Scrupulous Anonymous
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Ten Commandments of OCD-Based Scrupulosity

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In previous issues of this newsletter we've discussed the very popular Ten Commandments for the Scrupulous, which can be downloaded free from our website (mission.liguori.org/newsletters/scrupanon.htm). These commandments were first proposed by Father Don Miller, CSSR, in 1968 and have been repeatedly demonstrated to be helpful for people with a "tender conscience."

However, for people whose scrupulosity is an actual manifestation of obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) rather than simply a tender conscience, those commandments are incomplete. That's why the second edition of my book *Understanding Scrupulosity: Questions, Helps, and Encouragement* (Liguori Publications, 2007) contains additional commandments: Ten Commandments for Peace of Mind.

Today I introduce the first three of ten more commandments for people whose scrupulosity is a manifestation of OCD. It won't suddenly make everything better, but it's a starting point.



First Commandment

Do not try to hide your scrupulosity or cover up your struggle and desire for healing and wholeness.

People with scrupulosity often have two secrets: "no one knows I feel this way" and "I don't know how I'd be accepted if they knew I have scrupulosity." People struggle for years to keep their scrupulosity a secret.

But nothing of this magnitude stays a secret. Loved ones may not fully comprehend the details or know what to call it, but in every case they know something is going on. No one who struggles with an illness successfully hides the struggle. The people they're close to or see every day sense something is missing.

Therefore, all the energy devoted to hiding the struggle is wasted. No human expects another human to be perfect. We're all aware that humans struggle with feelings of fragility, weakness, and incompleteness. Acknowledging our limitations to ourselves and others isn't alienating—rather, it's endearing. People respect honesty.

Willingness to accept ourselves as fragile people struggling with scrupulosity opens us to healing and removes our often-debilitating sense of isolation. The people who know and love us support our desire for wholeness and healing and want to help.



Second Commandment

Remember that your scrupulosity isn't active in all areas of your life.

It's important to understand the selective nature of scrupulosity: Most of the time, we successfully navigate life without anxiety or unnecessary burden and with some sense of ease and comfort. We might experience scrupulosity when trying to determine whether an action is sinful but have no trouble making routine choices. We might struggle with thoughts and distractions while standing in line to receive holy Communion but not when we're in line at the supermarket.

This knowledge is the basis for real hope and healing: *If we can be free from scrupulosity in most areas, we can be free in all areas.* If we can demonstrate a behavior once, then with practice and guidance and the right kind of help, we can learn to duplicate that success.

Scrupulosity isn't a life sentence of hopelessness and helplessness. Healing and potential wholeness aren't distant and impossible dreams—they're within the realm of distinct possibility.



Third Commandment

Being angry and frustrated with scrupulosity isn't cursing God or blaspheming the Holy Spirit.

Some people believe scrupulosity is God's punishment for their sins or a test of their love and devotion. With either mindset, no wonder they think it's a sin to want freedom from scrupulosity.

Still others are overwhelmed with anxiety, depression, and fear. As they sit in church or reflect on God, the Blessed Mother, or the saints, they think, "I wish I could get rid of this and feel better." That thought is often followed by this conclusion: "I've committed blasphemy, the sin against the Holy Spirit." But they haven't; the only thing they've done is express anger while thinking about something or someone they consider holy. This completely understandable pattern happens to people who spend a disproportionate amount of time thinking about religion.

People who are suffering, who are tired, and who are worn out find themselves at one time or another questioning God. Such questioning is not a sign of disbelief, ungratefulness, or sinfulness—it is, rather, a sign of faith and belief. People who don't believe in God or who don't want a relationship with God don't have this kind of thought or feeling. Only people who want a relationship with God, who want to live good and holy lives, have this thought.

As people of faith, we must understand that God is with us in our struggle. God isn't against us. God isn't waiting to pounce on us. God doesn't want to punish us.

God understands and loves the people he created in his own image and likeness.

Next Month: Commandments four through six.



LIVING THROUGH GRIEF

The following is adapted from *Every Tear Will Be Wiped Away: Prayers for Comfort in Times of Grief* by Gretchen L. Schwenker (Liguori Publications, © 2011).

Living through grief takes courage. When we lose someone we love, everything we know alters dramatically. Because our lives change so significantly, constancy is what we need most. For Christians, faith may be the best source of that constancy. Faith can provide the sense of security that enables us to enter into a dialogue with deep loss, helps us cope with the pain, and in time, even remake our lives.

Getting through feelings of loss is a process. Even as we mourn, we Christians are consoled in our belief that death is only a separation, not an end. Our faith comforts us because we know our beloved dead are given a new beginning—a life more fully experienced with God. This realization does not take away our grief, but it does provide solace. As our journey continues, it can lead us to a spirit of joyful hope. We can also come to understand that having known our beloved is a gift that will always remain with us. We can begin to feel genuine gratitude.

Our gratitude comes most deeply from understanding that all life has been given to us freely and generously by a loving God. This unconditional love, which knows no limits, helps raise us out of personal distress. As Saint Paul reminds us, love “endures all things,” even death. Our faith gives us the strength to endure a serious loss because we know we are not alone. Christ is the center of our lives, and we can overcome any hardship—even the death of a loved one—because of our life in the Risen Lord. It is not that we forget our loss, but we see it in a new way—through the eyes of faith. This deeper perspective can provide peace and enable us to go on.

Thus in gratitude and strengthened by the Holy Spirit, we can stand firm in our faith, using the remainder of our lives to reflect God’s love to others. We who have loved have been blessed. In return, our faith calls us to be a blessing to others, and this becomes possible when we make the effort to live a life of prayerful reflection.



SCRUPULOUS ANONYMOUS
MAILBOX

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Q *Has anyone with scrupulosity been cured and set free? I find it hard to believe this burden can be lifted.*

A If by becoming “cured and set free” you mean being hit by a bolt of lightning and suddenly no longer experiencing the effects of scrupulosity, the answer is a resounding *no*.

If, on the other hand, you mean slowly learning to manage your behavior or adjust chemical imbalances by working with a therapist, spiritual director, or medical professional skilled in the treatment of OCD, the answer is yes.

God wants us to use all of our options to become whole and healthy. Such skilled professionals are, in fact, God’s gifts to us.

Q *I try to live in a God-centered way, but my friends and family have secular lifestyles. When they dress or behave impurely, I have thoughts of condemnation, hate, ill will, and judgment toward them. Is that a sin?*

A First, examine how you perceive and judge others. Then turn the focus on yourself. Can you see that your judgments of others mirror the way you perceive yourself? Do you really believe this is helpful or necessary? Who can emerge from this scathing judgment with a sense of hope or healthfulness? To persist in this behavior is to condemn yourself to a life of pain, anxiety, and fear. You’ll never measure up. The people you judge won’t suffer, but you will. Is this how God wants you to live?

Let it go and resist the urge to judge yourself and others. Learn the daily way of acceptance and love.



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