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## Christian Experience

by Desmond Ford

There are precipices, mine-fields, and pitfalls in every Christian's Pilgrim's Progress. One of the most common is a mistake I find myself prone to make repeatedly. It is the mistake of looking to oneself for that which is only to be found in Christ; for instance, for strength, wisdom, courage, and righteousness. We are unceasingly reluctant to believe the axiomatic truth of Christian experience that "without Christ we can do nothing."

A Christian who has perhaps influenced more people towards Christianity than any other in the last century and a half was Hudson Taylor. His is the most prominent name in the annals of Christian missions in China. A large proportion of the fifty millions or so in <sup>C</sup>China professing Christ are the fruitage of the China Inland Mission founded by Taylor. x C

But despite dedication, enthusiasm, energy, probity, and many other virtues, Hudson Taylor was dissatisfied with his Christian experience for many years. At a time when he had been forced to return to England as a convalescent his spiritual trials reached a crisis. We have his own words concerning their resolution....

(needs quote)

Others Christians tell the same story. Hannah Whitall Smith, famous author of *The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life*, wrote another book rarely seen today called *The Unselfishness of God*. This records her growth in Christian experience. While I have reservations regarding some theological positions taken in the volume I heartily endorse her counsel on living the Christian life from day to day.

(needs quote)

Major Ian Thomas widely known speaker and writer stresses the same truth.

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Does Scripture clearly teach these things? And if so, where? John 15 with its tenfold emphasis on "abide" certainly teaches that only as the believer recognizes his oneness with Christ and dependence upon him, can his or her joy be full and fruitfulness guaranteed. x

But the same truth is implicit in the scriptural teaching regarding man's fallen nature. Paul could say: "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, there dwells no good thing." Romans 7:18 7:18

By <sup>v</sup>flesh Scripture means all that we are apart from Christ and the influence of His Spirit. The fact that the holy fruit of a true Christian life is called the fruit of the Spirit repeats the lesson. x  
Love, joy, and peace are not the fruit of our wills, hearts, or minds. They come from the Spirit as we look to Christ. Hebrews 11, with its repeated "by faith" verse after verse, is also sounding forth the same truth. "By faith" means "looking to Christ, trusting him, abiding in him, x

depending on him.<sup>2</sup> In this way, men in their weakness were made strong and made able to endure as seeing Him who is invisible. This is how mighty deeds were wrought and great victories gained. X

Our treacherous old nature continually clings to us like a garment, so that we are continually tempted to look to ourselves for that which is only to be found in Christ. Many times in a crisis I have found myself bankrupt of what was urgently needed. I do not have the patience, the long suffering, the temperance, self-control, meekness or goodness that life demands. What I do have is the potential for all their opposites.

Consider also the clear teaching of Romans 6 which exhorts us to reckon our old nature as dead and to yield ourselves to Christ who is our life. Notice how the Living Bible paraphrases verses Rom 6:11-14:

(put in quote from Living Bible)

Such expressions as "Christ our life," "Christ our righteousness," and "Christ who is made unto us wisdom, sanctification, and redemption," assume new significance when read in this light.

This is likewise true of the repeated admonition the New Testament to "look unto Jesus." We are advised to "Consider him," to behold "as in a mirror the glory of the Lord," that we might be transformed into the same likeness.

After the glory of the Transfiguration has passed the disciples "saw no man but Jesus only." If only we could be like them. When Peter declared "I know not the man," he uttered words that would have been best said about himself, but not Jesus.

We must refuse to depend upon our own wisdom or strength or righteousness because we only know it poorly. We are quite unsuspecting regarding its liability to deceive us and trip us up. No man or woman knows the depth of wickedness in their own heart.

*One of heaven's indescribable gifts for mature believers is the awareness of ~~our~~ ~~spiritual~~ ~~weakness~~. It is this that in every crisis, looks us as beggars, ~~and~~ ~~experiences~~ ~~as~~ ~~beggars~~, to "the unsearchable riches of Christ". Hence we know ~~nothing~~, ~~but~~ ~~knowing~~ by experience the meaning of the words: "as having nothing, yet possessing all things." 2 Cor 6:10.*



*see me for books for quotes.*