

## **When You Just Can't Cope**

*by David Ord*

A friend in south Wales recently asked, "Why is it many non-Christians seem to have more of the fruit of the Spirit than many Christians do?"

This question penetrates to the very reason for the existence of *Union Life* magazine.

Of course, tremendous change has been wrought in countless lives through the gospel. How many have been brought back from the brink of suicide because they heard the good news of forgiveness and peace with God through Christ? Who can number the ailing marriages which have been saved from total breakdown?

What about the hardened criminals whose lives have been turned into productive channels? Or the prostitutes and drug addicts who have found a new lease on life?

And yet, it is true that millions of Christians do not know the fulfilled life that Jesus promised — the "abundant life" which He said we could experience right here and now.

The situations in which Christians discover that they just can't "cope" are seemingly endless.

Divorce isn't a tragedy which comes only to non-believers. Brothers and sisters in the Lord discover that they simply can't stand to live together any longer.

Christians who go into business ventures find that they don't seem to have what it takes to work amicably together, and have to call it quits.

For many, it's the everyday irritations of life that seem too much. It might be a difficult child, or an unpleasant neighbor. Somehow, the love, joy, peace, patience that we feel we ought to be able to show in such situations seems to "run out," and we feel guilty and become discouraged, even to the point of despair.

Frequently, relationships are our greatest difficulty. We can't get along lovingly and peacefully together. Many of us can't even get along with ourselves. We plain don't like ourselves, and our dissatisfaction with who and what we are is mirrored in our relationships with others.

This isn't to point the finger. There is no condemnation. Though many of us live under an almost perpetual cloud of self-condemnation and judging of others, we should *never* feel condemned! "*It is God that justifies; who is he that condemns?*"

If we were honest, most of us would have to admit that we have been in situations in which we could very easily have "gone under."

In my own life, I have found myself many times being forced to face the inescapable conclusion that I am nothing but a weak, pitiful individual when it comes to living up to the standard of Christ. I have been in situations over and over again in which God has absolutely nailed down my weakness, demonstrating beyond a shadow of doubt that I am no stronger today than when I first believed.

No matter who we are — even if we are the Archbishop of Canterbury or the Pope himself — God wants us to know that we are nothing better than clay pots, and that He doesn't intend for us to amount to anything more.

*"But surely I've changed over many years as a Christian?"* You ask. No, you haven't changed. What you do might have changed, but you are the same clay pot that first came to the foot of the cross to be cleansed. You are just as weak, just as incapable of living up to the life of Christ as you ever were.

Of course, if you don't yet know that, then you will have to keep struggling and falling down until you finally see that you are able to do precisely "nothing" toward living the life of Christ. Some see it through the ordinary failures of daily life. Others, especially those with strong natural talents, have to be broken in pieces before they will confess that they can't do anything to help themselves be like Christ.

In my own case, I went through years of dedicated living before I came to the end of myself. I tried to follow the Bible meticulously. At one period in my life, I wouldn't end the day until I had spent a full one-and-a-half hours in really fervent prayer on my knees. And I made sure that I fasted at least once every two weeks, a full day at a time (no food or water), spending most of the time in rotating hours of prayer, Bible study and meditation.

And don't tell me that I did it out of fear or a sense of duty. I did it because of a sincere desire to really know God's power in my life, as have many of you reading this article. I sought to draw near to God so that He might draw near to me.

But at the end of it all, I finally had to quit the praying and fasting and admit that I was just as weak and unable to do the will of God as when I began! I was frankly no better! I had only learned to act a little differently.

Jesus talked about a man drinking from Him and *never* thirsting again. But I still seemed to be thirsting. He had contrasted the life of the Spirit with physical life, which has to be replenished through food and drink daily. He said that the life He had to give wouldn't *need* to be "topped up" daily. It is drunk only the one time.

But I found that unless I daily tried to get close to God, I quickly felt empty. Unless I prayed earnestly and renewed my commitment each morning, I would soon drift into laxness.

Again, Jesus described Himself as the *"bread of life"* and assured the disciples in John 6 that if they would once eat of this bread, they would *never hunger again*.

Yet in my experience, if I didn't study my Bible for spiritual food each day, my mind was soon in the ends of the earth. I had to be anchored in a daily discipline, or I would drift aimlessly in my spiritual life.

And yet, Jesus clearly said that no daily routine of drawing additional water from the wells would be necessary.

This sounds so opposite to what we have all been taught and practiced for years that I feel compelled to quote Jesus' words:

*"Jesus answered and said to her, 'Everyone who drinks of this water shall thirst again; but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life'"* (John 4:13-14).

*"Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst'"* (John 6:35).

Jesus said that the Spirit in us would be a well of water springing up naturally, without any help from us (no daily drawing of water necessary), into eternal life. And it would become such a torrent, without our doing a thing to help it along, that it would flow out in rivers of living water to quench the thirst of those around us in a dry and arid desert, meeting all kinds of needs that we couldn't possibly "cope with" humanly.

Here then is an enigma. Jesus confessed that He could do *nothing*. He was unable to contribute a single thing toward the fulfillment of God's will in His life. Yet at the same time, He manifested the life of God totally.

Further, He said that we would be able to do even greater works than He did, and that we too could know the totally fulfilled, abundant life which He knew.

How can we do nothing, and yet do *everything*?

Paul speaks of us continually as an "inner man" and an "outer man." The inner man of spirit manifests himself through an outer soul and body. What we are is the inner man of spirit. Yet it is the outer man that is visible to the world, and so we think of people in terms of what they look like and what they say and do. The Scripture tells us, however, to look through the outer man and judge rightly, instead of by external appearances.

The human being is a vessel, made to contain deity. We either contain the god of this world, or the true God. Our spirit is a container for the spirit of the deity who is "in" us, and the external man expresses the nature of that deity.

We are all born "in Adam," containing the spirit of the evil one. All of us are by nature his children, indwelt by Mr. Sin (Eph. 2:2-3; John 8:44). That is why Jesus said that out of the heart of man — from his spiritual center — come all of the evils in the world today. We simply fulfill the desires of our spiritual father

At conversion, the evil one is ejected and can no longer indwell us. The union of our spirit with his is broken. This union is called in biblical parlance "the old man."

The human spirit is just the container, and it remains unchanged. But God now places within us a new Spirit, His own Spirit. This union of our spirit with His Spirit is "*the new man*." We are now children of God instead of children of the wicked one. We have become "*partakers of the divine nature*," because He now indwells us and expresses His nature through us.

This begins to answer the question we started out with, as to why we don't see more of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, and why it is that many unconverted people can appear more loving, more fulfilled, more at peace with one another.

The inner man, being an invisible spiritual union, can only manifest himself through soul and body — through emotions, for instance, and through actions. The flesh in which the inner man is veiled is our vehicle for expressing ourselves. And this flesh does not always fully mirror what is in the heart.

Although the unconverted person's heart is "*deceitful above all things and desperately wicked*," so that out of it flows all kinds of evil such as "*fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting*" and so on, the external man does not manifest the whole of what is in his heart.

When Adam chose to become joined in spirit with Satan, he ate of the tree of the knowledge of "good and evil." Not just evil, but also good! Jesus Himself said that we "*being evil, know how to give good gifts*."

The nature of Satan expressed through the human vehicle is principally *self*. When it benefits us to do good, we will do good; when evil is to our advantage, we do evil. As long as the kingdom of self is advanced, Satan is delighted. So evil manifestations predominate in some, and good manifestations predominate in others, according to the circumstances of upbringing, environment, etc., and whatever is going to help self in those circumstances.

But the new man is also veiled in flesh. We have been made totally new within (2 Cor. 5:17). There is nothing of the old man left. The union ended at conversion, when we became identified with the crucified body of Christ. The old man is crucified, dead and buried, as pictured in baptism, and "*old things are passed away.*"

Yet it takes time for this new man to burst forth into manifestation at the level of soul and body. Remember, it is only the inner man who has so far been made new; sin still resides in the flesh, awaiting the redemption of the body in the future. So we may appear the same externally, even though the new life is actual and not just "positional" as some falsely assert. There has been a *real* change within.

This brings us to the experience of the man of Romans 7. With our mind, we no longer really want to sin. We may be temporarily diverted through fleshly pulls, but at heart we now seek to fulfill the will of God. As Paul put it:

*So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the Law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin.*

And this is the paradox that most Christians eventually find themselves in. They desire to live the Christian life, but they find that they can't do it! And it is meant to be this way. Rather than all pretending, we would do far better to be open and honest about these things. God wants us to be *real*. But that's very difficult around super-spiritual brothers and sisters who would be shocked if we really "let it all hang out." Instead, we go about trying to do what we are supposed to do, and the process of really coming to grips with the problem is delayed.

God wants us to cry out, "*Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?*" He is waiting for that moment of honesty, when finally we face up to the fact that *we can't live the Christian life.*

Are we bound to continue in this frustrated situation for the rest of our time on earth? Thank God, no! When we see that *we can't*, God reveals that Christ can. When we finally quit trying to keep His law and to do His will, we discover that His purpose is "*that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.*" He is the law personified, and He in us will fulfill His will.

When we received Christ, we didn't receive just a part of Him. We didn't get just an arm or a leg, with more to be added later. We became "*complete in Him,*" with no need of anything more. He becomes to us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification. It has to be this way, or we should have room to boast of our have to the lessons He is bringing out of them. All of these things work for good, to establish us in the faith way. We read that "*the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope,*" so that sin continues to be in the world only because God has a purpose for it. He could put an end to it at any moment He wished by removing the devil from the scene.

Frequently we see it as terribly important to stop people from making mistakes in their lives. It's one thing to point out a danger to an unsuspecting brother; it's another to try to stop people from expressing what they really feel. If a person doesn't want to get involved in a particular wrong way, we can encourage him. But sometimes people only become

established in the right way after the dark principle has been brought to the surface and finally laid to rest because the individual no longer desires that way.

God isn't as interested in preventing us from committing individual sins as He is in seeing us fixed in the faith life once and for all. Before we were converted, sin emanated from our innermost being. It came out of our hearts in abundance. We were indwelt by Mr. Sin, and we simply performed his lusts. It came naturally for us to sin.

Now, from within comes love, joy, peace, patience — and the fruit of the Spirit is just as natural, just as spontaneous as sin was, because we are indwelt by Him who is these things. God doesn't have love, He is love. When we are in union with Him, He will express His life through us. We have been born from above, as totally new creations, resurrected into the heavenly dimension, and therefore we are the pure in heart, clean, expressing His nature.

The flesh has not been redeemed, and Satan can still get at us there. We may temporarily falsely see ourselves as separate selves and forget that we are in union, thereby being caught out by temptation. But as we function in faith, seeing ourselves as the new man and not regarding the flesh as of any consequence, the life of Christ will even deliver us from the foolish diversions we take into this false separation thinking.

How does the inner man begin to control the outer?

Not by battling against these outer pulls. No, by rest! The way is not self-effort — more prayer, more Bible study, more fasting — but by *faith*. We rest in the sure knowledge that Christ is our life, and that He has us in hand. Against all appearances, we assert that it is true.

God demands that we believe what He says is actually true of us, even though we don't see it or feel it. That is the battlefield. Not two natures warring against one another; there is only His nature. And "*He that is in us is greater than he that is in the world.*" (Notice, the one in the world isn't in us anymore!). Christ in us will pull the flesh into line, not our own self-effort.

It is not a battle of action, but of believing. We fight it by "standing still" to see the salvation of the Lord! We stand clothed in the full knowledge of who we really are — Christ in our human forms — refusing to wrestle except by faith. We put on the weaponry and armour of faith, simply by recognizing that He is our life.

When God's people don't manifest the fruit of the Spirit, it isn't that they are deliberately disobedient. They want to, but they can't. So preaching obedience, and then preaching repentance because they fail, will never produce fruit. It is the deadlock of Romans 7. Seeing the standard isn't the problem. We don't need to be continually reminded that we are to live a certain way. It's being able to do it that is the problem. And that's the way God intends it to be, because it will never be us but Him!

As long as we live in the illusion of separation — as long as we fail to see that we have been joined as one spirit with the Lord — we will not know the fulfilled,, quenched life that gushes out rivers of water into the desert around us.

If people seem disobedient, it is the fault of those who have preached this false message of works and self-effort! People have tried for years, failed, and finally become disillusioned and hard of hearing because it just doesn't deliver the goods. And then preachers blame *them*, preach repentance, and spank them harder, as if they were naughty children. No wonder they are discouraged! They get it in the neck because their leaders are ignorant of the good news!

Tell me, has the Christian life been portrayed as “rest” in your fellowship? Has it been described as “easy” and “light”? Go back and read Jesus’ words in Matthew 11:28-30.

But when the Christian life comes as a natural flow out of abundant resources — worked out through us, but actually Him doing the working within us — then it is truly “rest.” “*His rest shall be glorious,*” said Isaiah, and it is wonderfully glorious for those who have entered into it. It is a continual sabbath — great work being done, yet all out of a state of effortless ease because it flows naturally from the One within.

The life of the new covenant is being blocked in many congregations by teaching from the pulpit that is nothing short of *unbelief*. It is *unbelief* that always prevents men from entering into Christ’s glorious rest (Heb. 4).

The truth is that much of our teaching denies a living Christ. If we don’t do something, we say, nothing will happen. Why? Is Christ impotent? What do we *mean* when we say that “*for me to live is Christ*”? What do we mean by saying that Christ is “in” us? Are we just using so many meaningless words?

Or do we really believe that He is in us, and that He is living as us — that when we live, it is really Him living because we are one?

There is an obedience in the new covenant. But it is not of works. It is “*the obedience of faith.*” It means that we affirm — confess with our mouths — that what God says of us is true, against all feelings. And that will call forth the manifestation as “fruit.” We will desire to do right, be inclined to do right — and Christ in us will *cause us* to walk quite naturally.

Do you know the difference between “fruit” and “works”? Fruit is produced because of what a tree is. It is the natural product of the tree.

Apples are the natural consequence of a tree being an apple tree. If you peg apples on an oak tree, it may for a while look like an apple tree, but the fruit will soon rot and there will be no lasting crop. It may look as though the tree is producing fruit for a time, but in the final analysis it will be shown for what it is.

On the other hand, a young apple tree may have no apples on it. But because it doesn’t have apples, you don’t say that it isn’t an apple tree. You say that it is an apple tree, despite the fact that there is no fruit. You affirm that it is what it claims to be, and you know that in due season the fruit will appear.

Now, as well as stating that we “have put on” the new man, Paul also says that we are to “put on” the new man. What does he mean? Are we now making a work out of faith?

No, the putting on of fruit is from the inside to the outside. It comes as a natural result of the new life within. The only way an apple tree can put on apples is to be what it is. And as we continue to believe in it, instead of getting rid of it and starting again with another tree, it will put on apples. So the “putting on” is an unfolding from within, just as the bloom of a flower emerges from inside the seed because of the nature of the flower. It is a putting on by *faith*. Our whole salvation is “from faith to faith” — it begins and ends in faith, with nothing but faith all the way.

Does this sound too easy? It is the “simplicity” of the gospel. Instead of preaching so much repentance, obedience, and self-discipline, we would do better to preach *Christ*, until people really know that He is their life.

For a while, the one who walks by faith may look bad, even worse than many in the world. But as we are real, the true life within will manifest itself without our stewing over it and trying to make it happen. And it is the only lasting, safe way for fruit to be produced in us. It puts Christ where He belongs — as Author *and Finisher* of our faith.