

GROW

AN SMBS SERIES

Lesson 3 – The Right Help Part 1

Teacher Edition



Review: In the last two lessons we saw that in order to change you need to want to change and you need to be saved. This week we'll see that once saved, you have a friend who's help you absolutely need if you're going to change.

What do you think about the statement "It's up to God to help you live rightly"?

(Illustration) John was a very frustrated believer. His laziness was out of control, and was starting to cost him big time. He couldn't seem to muster the energy to get out of bed in the morning, and after being late several times to work, he had received a job warning. He stayed up late at night watching Netflix and wasting time online. He then would wake up exhausted and groggily make it through his job until he could go home and nap. Then he would wake up from his nap and repeat the whole process. John hated his life, but didn't know what to do about it. He was showing up later and later for church, and had quit going on Wednesday nights and was missing about half of Sunday nights. He tried everything he could think of: multiple alarms, alarms that he had to get out of bed to turn off, personal commitments, nothing had worked. He would commit to reading his Bible, and normally would for a day or so, but then would eventually come home and put it off until later and later and later, and eventually at 4 in the morning just give up and go to bed. While truly a Christian, John was struggling!

Many people are like John. They know they aren't living right, and they have been born again and so they have a genuine desire to do right. But they don't really know how, so they just try harder and harder. They

forget that God is ready to help them, if only they knew how to tap into that help. In this lesson and the next, we will examine how it is that God helps us change.

This will be a 2 part lesson. The first lesson will cover God's part generally, and then the Holy Spirit more specifically. Our next lesson will cover the role that Jesus Christ and the Father play in helping us to grow.

A. We need God's Help

1. Some think becoming holy is all their own work

Scripture is abundantly clear that we as believers have work to do. The New Testament letters alone are filled with hundreds and hundreds of commands, to say nothing of Jesus' sermons and instructions to his followers. Some commands are general (1 Peter 1:16; 1 Corinthians 10:31) while many are very specific (Ephesians 4:25-32). The fact that God over and over again commands us to obey shows that we have at least some responsibility to obey.

While God makes clear he has expectations for us, however, it is not enough to simply say, "Go do right." In our own power, without the help of God, the commands of Scripture can become daunting and crushing. Our naturally proud selves will always try to do it ourselves, just as a young child often tries to do things far beyond his ability because he wants "to do it myself." It can be easy when we hear preaching or read our Bibles to walk away with only "*what* I need to do" forgetting what Scripture says about *how* you are able to do it.

2. Some think becoming holy is all the work of God

As we look at Scripture there are passages that describe sanctification as the work of God (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24). So as often happens, people have reacted against the overemphasis on man's role in sanctification (becoming holy) by going to the opposite extreme. Some have argued that becoming holy is all the work of God and that if you're trying, you're doing it wrong. "Let go and let God" has become the mantra of these teachers, insisting that sanctification comes from sitting back and glorying

in what God has done for us. They have confused how to be saved, which truly is a work of God alone, with the teaching of sanctification, which requires human effort.

One former pastor wrote “Contrary to popular belief, Christianity is not about good people getting better. If anything, it is about bad people coping with their failure to be good.”¹ What is true about this statement? What is dangerous about it?

3. The Bible teaches becoming holy requires both

The solution, of course, is that both are required. God must work, and we must work. God has a part to play, and we have a part to play (Philippians 2:12-13). We are to “work out” even as God “works in” us. This lesson and the next will examine God’s part, and most of the rest of the series will examine our part and what it looks like practically to cooperate with God.

(Illustration) Jerry Bridges in his book, *The Discipline of Grace*, has a chapter devoted to dependent discipline. He begins that chapter with this scenario. “Think of yourself seated in a jet passenger plane flying thirty-five thousand feet above the earth. Suppose (I know this can’t happen in real life) the pilot were to say through the speaker system, “Folks we’re in real trouble. One of our wings is about to break off.” Which one of the wings would you rather lose, the left or the right one? It’s a silly question, isn’t it? No plane can fly with just one wing. Multi-engined planes such as passenger airlines are designed to fly in an emergency mode with only one engine. But no plane can fly with just one wing; both are absolutely necessary.” He then goes on to explain “Just as the airplane must have both wings to fly, so we must exercise both discipline and dependence in the pursuit of holiness. Just as it is impossible for an airplane to fly with only one wing, so it is impossible for us to successfully pursue holiness with only dependence or discipline. We absolutely must have both.”²

¹ Tullian Tchividjian, *Glorious Ruin: How Suffering Sets You Free*

² Jerry Bridges, *The Discipline of Grace*

Why is this such a hard balance to strike?

What do you think it looks like for someone to both trust God and work hard?

B. We need the Spirit's Help

The first member of the trinity we will look at is the Holy Spirit. 2 Corinthians 3:18 marks the Holy Spirit out specifically as the one who changes us to look more and more like Jesus Christ. But how does he do this? We will look first of all at our relationship with the Spirit and then secondly at what the Spirit does to change us.

1. Our relationship with the Spirit

- **The Personhood of the Spirit**

Before we can have a relationship with the Spirit, we have to understand that the Holy Spirit is indeed an actual person. Probably the most common heresy regarding the Spirit is to view him as an impersonal force. Many cults and false religions who claim to follow the Bible but deny the trinity will say that when we see "Holy Spirit" the Bible is simply talking about the power of God (spirit = power). When it says that the Holy Spirit does something, it is saying that God's power has done that thing.

Scripture couldn't be clearer, however, that the Holy Spirit is indeed a person, not just a force. For example, the Spirit does all the things a person does: thinks (John 14:26), feels (Ephesians 4:30), and wills (1 Corinthians 12:11). Luke 4:14 and Romans 15:13 both describe the power of the Spirit, and it would be odd to describe the power of God having its own power. The Spirit is seen as distinct from the Father and the Son (Matthew 28:19; 1 Peter 1:2; 2 Corinthians 13:14). It becomes fairly clear as we read the New Testament that the Holy Spirit is different from God the Father and God the Son and that he is in fact a "he," not just an "it."

- **The Filling of the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).**

Once saved, believers are indwelt by the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). However, that does not mean that the Holy Spirit is necessarily in charge. The Holy Spirit can be grieved (Ephesians 4:30) when we do wrong and even quenched (1 Thessalonians 5:19) if we continue with sinful activities long enough. Rather, the believer should seek to “be filled” with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). So what does it mean to be filled with the Spirit?

There are several things worth noting about the verb “be filled” in Ephesians 5:18. First, it is an imperative, a **command**. We must seek to be filled. But secondly it is **passive**, it is something that is done to us. Thirdly, it is **present** in the Greek, which here probably indicates that it is an ongoing action. A clue as to what it means comes in the first half of the verse where we read, “do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery.” Why are these two statements put back to back? Because both alcohol and the Spirit can control a person. While we shouldn’t be controlled by wine, we should be controlled by the Spirit.

Being filled with the Spirit means being controlled by the Spirit. So how does the Spirit control us? The parallel passage with this is Colossians 3, in which we are told in verse 16 to let the Word of God dwell richly in us.³ As we think on and meditate on and saturate ourselves in God’s Word, we find that God’s Spirit will control our actions more and more. Students of God’s word have observed that being filled with the Spirit isn’t so much about how much of God you have, but how much of you God has.

³ It is interesting to note the results of being Spirit-led and being word-filled end up being essentially the same in Ephesians 5:19-20 and Colossians 3:16-17: joyful singing and thanksgiving.

(Illustration) “D. L. Moody said, ‘I believe firmly that the moment our hearts are emptied of pride and selfishness and ambition and everything that is contrary to God's law, the Holy Spirit will fill every corner of our hearts. But if we are full of pride and conceit and ambition and the world, there is no room for the Spirit of God. We must be emptied before we can be filled.’”⁴

How would being continually aware of the presence and personhood of the Spirit help you in your everyday life?

2. The roles of the Spirit

- **Illuminates (1 Corinthians 2:10-16)**

One of the roles of the Holy Spirit is to help believers understand what it is the Bible teaches. Christ had said this would be one of the functions of the Spirit when he came (John 14:26). The Holy Spirit helps us understand what it is God's Word says and what it means for us specifically today.

(Illustration) The word illuminate originally means to throw light on something. It is like the person walking around a dark room, bumping into things and trying to find where he needs to go, when all of a sudden the light is thrown and he can see everything. When we read God's Word without his help, there is a kind of blinder that keeps us from seeing the importance, meaning, and significance for us. But when the Spirit illuminates us, he throws light on what the Bible means for our lives.

Some brilliant people study Christian theology and know it and the Bible forwards and backwards, yet don't believe any of it and are headed for hell. Would a brilliant person who can understand orthodox Christianity be illuminated? Why or why not?

⁴ J. Kuhatschek, *Taking the Guesswork Out of Applying the Bible*, 153.

- **Empowers (Romans 8:8-11)**

Romans 6 asserts that believers don't have to sin. Ever. Romans 7 bemoans that they still do sin. A lot. Romans 8 reminds us that 1) they no longer face condemnation for their sins (8:1) and 2) the Spirit gave them spiritual life and continues to give them that life (8:11). The Spirit dwells within us and gives us the power we need to live for God. God empowers both our desires, making us want to change, and our ability, giving us the power to change (Philippians 2:13).

If God's Spirit can empower us for obedient living, why do believers still sin? What can believers do to take advantage of the empowering of the Holy Spirit?

- **Guides (Galatians 5:16-23)**

Galatians 5 is one of the key passages for understanding our relationship with the Spirit, and it makes a shocking promise to us: "Walk in the Spirit, and mye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh." (5:16). In the Greek, the language is even more emphatic, "you will never ever gratify the desires of the flesh!" If we want to live rightly, we must walk in[by] the Spirit, whatever that means. So what does it mean to walk by the Spirit?

In the following verses Paul describes that whatever this means, it looks like the opposite of walking in the flesh. Paul gives us two lists which describe what flesh looks like (5:18-21) and what Spirit looks like (5:22-23). These lists touch on all aspects of our lives. Too often we want God to control us in one area, but not another. We want God to give us victory in our anger, but we're fine with a little jealousy. We want to have joy, but we don't want to give up a little sensuality. We want to live pure lives, but we don't want to develop self-controlled lives. We want to pick and choose; God wants to control every part of us.

Verse 25 helps us understand what it means to walk in the Spirit when it says “If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.” [ESV] The word “keep in step” according to one dictionary means “to go in a line or row: to go in battle-order.”⁵ It was originally a military term that described a soldier marching behind his commander, following him step for step. The picture, then, that this word paints in regards to walking in the Spirit is that we must follow his lead. As we saw earlier, this can’t be some of the time or only when we want his help, it must be in every area of his life.

How do you walk in the Spirit? You ask God what he would have you do in the next moment, and then you do it. When you know that God would have you respond calmly when you would like to lash out, you ask for his help and you do it. When you know there is work that needs to be done when you would rather do anything else, you do it. One step at a time, second by second asking God what he would have you to do and as best you know how, following his lead.

What does God use to lead us in these decisions? What is the danger of putting too much stock in feelings and signs when trying to follow the Spirit? How can we avoid that danger?

Have you ever felt the Holy Spirit lead you to do something, whether share your faith, make peace after an argument, or say no to some fleshly desire? What have you found happens when you say “no”? What happens when you say “yes”?

⁵ H.G. Liddell, *A Lexicon: Abridged from Liddell and Scott’s Greek-English Lexicon* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1996), 747.