

GROW

AN SMBS SERIES

Lesson 4 – The Right Help Part 2

Teacher Edition



Review: In our first two lessons we saw that to change, you've got to want to change and you have to be saved. In our last lesson, we saw that God himself helps you change, and we looked specifically at how the Holy Spirit does that.

Overview: In this lesson we will see how the Father and the Son help us grow and change and how we can best cooperate with them.

Introduction: The Trinity is a challenging doctrine: ***One God in three persons***. A ten-year-old can recite it but an eighty-year-old theologian can never fully comprehend it. Cults and false religions refuse to accept it. Our minds start to bend in either forgetting these distinctions exist, or in separating them so much they become three separate gods. But the Bible emphasizes both. It tells us clearly that there is one and only one God (Deuteronomy 6:4) but it is also clear that there are distinct persons who have different roles (1 Peter 1:2).

When we come to spiritual growth, it can be helpful to understand the different roles that the members of the Trinity play. The Spirit is often viewed as the major agent of change (1 Peter 1:2; 2 Corinthians 3:18), but the Father and the Son participate as well. Knowing that God is totally and completely invested in your spiritual growth will both encourage you and help you to better cooperate with what He is up to.

(Illustration) Football, perhaps more than any other sport, is a game of roles. The skills required to play quarterback and the skills required to block for a quarterback are almost polar opposites. The skills required to be a kicker and punter are even different, as larger teams normally have two different players to do each! To be a successful team, everyone needs to know what his role is and play it well. A lineman who leaves the line because he wants to catch the game winning touchdown is going to come back to a steamrolled and quite upset quarterback.

As we come to growth and change, we have to understand what God's role is and what ours is. We can drill down even further and ask what the roles God plays within the trinity are, and then what our role is. Missing this or getting it wrong would be the equivalent of a kicker picking up the ball and trying to throw it to someone when he's supposed to kick it. Everyone would be extremely confused and the team would be in a lot of trouble.

Do you remember what the roles of the Spirit we covered last week were?

Can you think of any other ways the Spirit helps us in our spiritual growth?

A. We need the Father's Help

The Father's role in our sanctification could be summed up in one word: sovereignty. The Bible portrays the Father as the great architect of salvation. It is by the Father's foreknowledge that election takes place (1 Peter 1:2; Ephesians 1:4-5). The Father sends the Spirit (John 14:26) and the Son (John 20:21). And once we are saved, it is the sovereignty of the Father that guides the circumstances of our lives to result in our growth over time. The Bible emphasizes God's sovereignty in our spiritual growth in three different passages.

1. The Father sovereignly disciplines us (Hebrews 12:5-11).

The first picture of God's sovereignty is found throughout the Bible, but probably nowhere clearer or more developed than Hebrews 12:5-11. Here the author of Hebrews is arguing that the suffering and persecution Christians are undergoing are a necessary part of their development as sons of God. Just as a Father will train up his child, so God will train up his.

***Side note:** that the word translated "discipline" or "chasten" (KJV) is a broad word that at its core means "child training" (Greek *paideia*¹). While this can have the narrower definition of corrective discipline (such as a spanking) it can be broader to include the general intellectual, emotional, and social development of a child. It is much like our word discipline in that way, a word that can mean correction or more broadly instruction.*

The author of Hebrews wants us to know 2 things about God's discipline. First...

- **God's discipline is lovingly motivated (vv 5-9)**

God's discipline is a good thing because it means God loves us. Loving parents correct their kids, and God is a loving parent.

(Illustration) David was a pretty poor parent. One of his sons raped his half-sister. Another son killed that son and eventually led a revolt against his father. A third son, Adonijah, tried to take the kingdom when his father was old. What did David do wrong? We're given a clue when Adonijah began his coup: "His father had never at

¹ One Greek dictionary defines *paideia* as "the act of providing guidance for responsible living, upbringing, training, instruction, in our lit[erature] chiefly as it is attained by *discipline, correction*" BDAG, 748.

any time displeased him by asking, ‘Why have you done thus and so?’” (1 Kings 1:6). David was a godly man but a terrible parent, because he never corrected his children. No one likes to get a spanking, but most people look back and are thankful their parents confronted them when they did wrong.

(Illustration) One pastor shared that often in counseling he would have people in his office for counseling because their lives were falling apart. “I just want to know that this isn’t God’s chastening” they would tell him. “I would feel so much better if I knew that this wasn’t chastening.”

Why do people think this way? What would you say to them from this passage?

- **God’s discipline is ultimately successful (vv 10-11)**

It’s not good enough for us that God be well intentioned in his discipline. Lots of people have great intentions and make a royal mess of things. We need to know that God’s painful program in our lives will ultimately work. Good intentions won’t cut it.

Hebrews affirms that God’s painful discipline will ultimately result in sharing in God’s holiness, in “the peaceful fruit of righteousness.” In other words, we know that God will accomplish his purpose in our lives. Our fathers did the best they could, but God disciplines perfectly. This ought to give us hope when things get dark, because God is going to use this in our lives and we will come out the other side holy.

Why do many believers struggle with understanding and believing this? How do they normally process “bad things happening”?

What difference does knowing this make in our attitude when faced with God’s discipline?

2. The Father sovereignly prunes us (John 15:1-2).

The Bible depicts God’s sovereignty in shaping and molding us not just as a father disciplining his children, but also as a gardener pruning a plant. When a gardener prunes, he removes dead branches and excess that keeps the plant from growing at full potential. The result is that the plant can now better produce because its energy isn’t being wasted.

God’s plan for believers is that they live fruitful, productive lives (Phil 1:10-11). We often think of sin as simply not doing wrong, but God is not content that we simply not do wrong. He wants us to live lives of obedience and service. In order to do that, however, he must help us clean up our lives so that we will be able to serve him (2 Timothy 2:21).

3. The Father sovereignly works everything for good (Romans 8:28-30).

This passage says basically what the other two do, but a little clearer. Here Paul strips away the metaphors and clearly spells out what the others have pictured.

- **God’s good purpose is Christlikeness (v 29).**

Most believers love Romans 8:28, and for good reason. But you’re not going to understand Romans 8:28 if you stop there and don’t go on to read Romans 8:29, because Romans 8:29 tells us what Paul meant when he

said that all things work together for good. He meant all things work together to make us like Christ, because Christlikeness is our ultimate good!

Often when we think about good, we think about it in somewhat shallow terms. "I was fifteen minutes late because my alarm never went off. Must be I missed a car wreck or something." Based on this verse, what might be some other reasons you would show up to work fifteen minutes late because your alarm didn't go off?

- **God's good purpose is his own glory (v 29).**

Verse 29 not only says God wants us to look like Christ, it gives us the reason he wants that to happen. God wants Christ to be the firstborn among *many* brothers. In other words, he wants a lot of people to look like Jesus! God is glorified by a host of new humanity, bought by the blood and changed by the grace of Jesus. God's purpose in salvation (Ephesians 1:3-6) and sanctification is that he might get the glory! Most people want to change because they don't like what sin is doing to them. While that isn't all wrong (see Lesson 1), hopefully they will eventually see that their change is not just for their good, it is also and preeminently about God's glory!

- **God's good purpose is ultimately successful (v 30).**

Verse 30 is meant to give comfort and encouragement to those struggling through the process of change God has them in. It reminds them 1) that God is the one who is doing the change (and God doesn't fail) and 2) that

God will ultimately glorify them, and this process will be completed.²

How can we cooperate with what God the Father is doing in our lives when he brings challenges, difficulties, and disappointments our way? (Cf. James 1:2-4)

B. We need the Son's Help

1. Jesus models biblical change.

Bringing God glory means reflecting God's character. It means behaving in such a way that people look at us and understand a little bit better what God looks like (1 Peter 1:16). But what does God look like? There is much that God is that we could never be. So if we wanted to take a look at what a human appropriately imitating God (Ephesians 5:1) looks like, where do we turn?

In the final supper, Christ gave us the answer. Philip asked to see the Father, and Christ responded by saying "whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9). Hebrews describes Christ as "the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature" (Hebrews 1:3). Paul describes Christ as the "image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15). Christ models perfectly for us what it looks like for a human to behave as God would, to reflect God's character.

It is no surprise then, that over and over Scripture tells us we should be like Christ. We have already seen Paul say as much (Romans 8:29 cf Philippians 2:5-11; Colossians 3:13), but other writers encourage us to as well (Hebrews 12:1-2;

² Most items in this list – predestinated, foreordained, called, and justified – are in the past tense because for the believer they happened in the past. The last item, glorified, is something that will happen in the future but is put in the past tense to emphasize how certain it is (called a Future Aorist). God **will** glorify those whom he predestinates, foreordains, calls, and justifies!

1 Peter 2:21-22). The old motto WWJD, “What would Jesus do,” has been used so much many people are sick of hearing it, but it captures well what God expects of us! We are to seek to live as Christ would every day of our lives.

How can believers learn from Christ’s example today?

Should Christians ever look to the example of other Christians as well? (Hebrews 6:12; Philippians 3:17; see especially 1 Corinthians 11:1)

2. Jesus enables biblical change.

Christ told his disciples that he was the vine and they were the branches. The point, of course, is that vines cannot do anything if they are not connected to branches. A plant can only grow if it has water and good soil to grow in. Droughts are serious matters that in some parts of the world and often mean starvation and even death. A plant that’s roots aren’t receiving water will shrivel up and die, and even more so a branch off the stem of a plant that isn’t connected to the vine will also shrivel up and die. We must be connected to Christ if we are going to receive the help from God we need.

Everything that God gives us to change us he gives us because we are now “in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3). Because we are in Christ, first of all, we have eternal life (1 John 5:11), having been elected, adopted, redeemed, and sealed (Ephesians 1:3-14) because we are in Christ (Ephesians 1:4-5). It is in him that we obtain a righteous standing before God that we didn’t earn and don’t deserve (2 Corinthians 5:21). In Christ is also the grace we need to be strong and live for God (2 Timothy 2:1). Over and over we are told that

the good things God gives us he gives us because we are in Christ (1 Corinthians 1:30; Colossians 2:9).

(Illustration) Identity theft is a huge issue, affecting 17.6 million Americans in 2014, around 7% of the population.³ Having one's identity stolen can mean that another person "gets to be you." They can take your money out of accounts (or put money in, but that rarely seems to happen). They can open up accounts and can shut accounts down. From the standpoint of the law, until they are caught, they are you. When we look at our union with Christ, it's almost as if we've "stolen Christ's identity." Now obviously, we haven't stolen it, Christ freely gave it. But, when God looks at us, he doesn't see us, he sees Christ. He attributes the righteousness of Christ to us, and he gives us spiritual grace and blessings which properly belong to his Son, because we are "in Christ."

If you're struggling to fully understand this doctrine, don't worry, you're not alone. Theologians struggle with what exactly all this looks like, and there is a certain degree of mystery to the doctrine of our union with Christ. But mystery doesn't mean less real or less practical. We are one with Christ, even if we struggle to understand all that means. And we must strive to abide in him, because that is where all God's blessings lie and that is the only way we will ever grow.

In one sense we are in Christ, and that will never change. But Christ tells his followers to remain or abide in him. Read John 15:7-10. Based on these verses, how do we abide in Christ?

³ https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/vit14_sum.pdf

Conclusion: All of this leaves us with the question, if we truly have so much help, if every member of the Trinity is working to help us change, why do we still sin? Remember what we said last lesson, change is cooperation with God, because that means we have a part and can (and often do) fail. We will spend the rest of our lessons examining what it is God expects us to do to work with him in the growth process.