

GROW

AN SMBS SERIES

Lesson 11 – The Right Means: Fellowship

Teacher Edition



Review: So far we have seen that in order to change, you have to want to change and you have to be given a new nature so that you can change. Next we saw that in order to change, you need God's help, although God still requires you to put forth effort as well. Then we got a broad overview of God's masterplan for change: put off, be renewed, put on, and examined what it means to put off sin and what it means to be renewed. We saw that in order to be renewed, we must have God's grace, and that requires humility. That grace then comes through three channels that Scripture clearly gives us: Bible meditation, prayer, and fellowship.

Overview: This lesson will examine the final of the three means of grace: fellowship.

Introduction: Imagine someone goes up to Chuck Pagano, head coach for the Colts and tells him that he would like to play for the NFL. Chuck looks the guy over and says, "Well, you look like you might have the makings of a player in the league. We're having open tryouts in a few months, come by and show us what you're made of!"

The young man looks around uncomfortably and then tells Coach Pagano, "Look, I really want to play for the NFL, but I don't want to play on a team. I'd like to just be on my own. What do you think about that?"

How in the world would any coach respond to that kind of logic? The thought would likely have never crossed his mind. You simply cannot play football unless you are on a football team. Imagine now someone goes to Paul and says, "I would like to be a Christian but I don't want to be a part of a church." I think the look Paul would give you would be almost

identical to the one Pagano would give you. You simply cannot live the Christian life the way God wants you to and not be a part of a church. You need other Christians!

Ephesians 4:29 shows us something surprising: God's grace comes to us through the words of other people. Your words and my words have the ability to be a great help to someone spiritually! Prayer and Bible reading are not exactly surprising means of grace, but this one many people don't see coming. Other Christians are a means of God's grace to you!

In what ways does Scripture teach us we are to help each other out as believers? (This will be the focus of the lesson, but see how much the people at your table know about this topic)

A. Believers should have an encouraging ministry with one another.

1. We should seek to build others up (1 Corinthians 1:4-7).

Paul doesn't pull his punches in 1 Corinthians. He calls this church out for dividing over popular teachers and placing trust in their own wisdom to save people (chapters 1-3), and for becoming proudly abusing their gifts instead of being motivated by love (chapters 12-14). Yet he begins this strong, rebuking letter by thanking God for the very gifts they are abusing and placing an unhealthy trust in! Even though Corinth abused their spiritual gifts, those gifts were still a good thing!

But Paul didn't just compliment people before rebuking them. Reading the end of his letters shows he was very liberal with the compliments that he gave to fellow workers in the gospel (Philippians 2:19-22; 25, 29-30; Romans 16:3-15; Colossians 4:7-14). Even Christ praised Peter when he understood deep spiritual truths (Matthew 16:17-19). If Paul and Christ built people up with their words, how much more should we?

Why don't we build people up with our words more often?

Which characteristics of love from 1 Corinthians 13 will be seen when you choose to use uplifting speech?

Think of some people in your life that you could build up verbally. Who would God have you to encourage? Be a positive person who seeks to edify others rather than a negative person who obsesses over negative things?

2. We should seek to provide comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

Comfort and encouragement are two sides of the same coin. Encouragement, as used above, involves saying positive and uplifting things to people at all times. Comfort is encouraging people who specifically when they are going through difficult times.

• **God comfort us in our afflictions (v 3).**

Paul was someone who knew affliction. In fact, later on in this same passage he states that his anguish was so intense he despaired of life itself (v 8). But Paul's focus was not on how bad things were, but on how great God was through all the bad times. He calls God the Father "the God of all comfort." In John 14-16, Christ calls the Spirit the Comforter (14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7 "Helper" in ESV but comes from the same Greek word as "comfort" here). Both God the Father and God the Holy Spirit comfort us in difficult times.

• **God enables us to comfort others (v 4).**

Part of the reason God brings us through trials is so that we can comfort other people. Difficulties that we go through give us the opportunity to help someone else who has been going through a difficulty. The difficult thing is not normally reaching out, however. The difficulty is normally allowing someone to comfort us. The temptation for many is to shut down and shut others out when they are struggling with trials. God is clear that we need each other, though, and cutting ourselves off from other Christians is unwise and harmful.

Why is it that people tend to shut others out when they need people the most?

How can you strike the balance of comforting someone without overwhelming them?

Notice that Paul says we can help those who are in “any affliction.” Often people going through a trial will think that no one can help them who has not gone through exactly what they have. While we should be careful to avoid saying insensitive things and recognize we may not have felt as much pain as someone else has felt, when we have gone through trials that gives us the ability to minister to others.

B. Believers should have a confronting ministry with one another.

“Who made you the Holy Spirit?” Perhaps you’ve heard of people saying that line. We typically don’t like people meddling in our lives, but as Christians, God commands us to meddle in each other’s lives if we see sin that is being ignored! To put it another way, “You are your brother’s keeper!” Because Christians often overlook this in the church today, we will take some extra time with this one.

1. The need for confrontation (Hebrews 3:12-13).

How quickly does this passage say that sin can harden and deceive our hearts?

What is the author’s solution to such a dangerous situation?

In the Introduction to one of his novels, Christian author Frank Peretti describes the dangerous perspective many have about confrontation:

“Sin is the monster we love to deny.

It can stalk us, bite a slice out of our lives, return again and bite again, and even as we bleed and hobble, we prefer to believe nothing has happened. That makes sin the perfect monster, a man-eater that blinds and numbs its victims, convincing them

that nothing is wrong and there is no need to flee, and then consumes them at its leisure.

We've all been assailed by this beast, sometimes face-to-face, but all too often from a direction we aren't prepared to defend, and it's only in recognizing the beast for what it is that we can hope to escape at all. In Jesus Christ we are forgiven and empowered to overcome sin, but opening the door and tossing the beast kitchen scraps of our character is no way to drive it off. Toying with an animal that is actually toying with us is a sure way to lose part of ourselves.

*I was watching it happen to some friends of mine the year I began writing *The Oath*. As the rest of us just kept on praising the Lord, loving one another, smiling, and trying not to be judgmental, some really good people walked stupidly, blindly into the jaws of sin. The tooth marks still show today, in ruined marriages and soiled ministries. The rest of us should have said something.”¹*

It may sound spiritual to say “I don’t need the church. I love God so much I’ll never turn away from him.” But such thinking is dangerous and foolish, and goes against God’s warnings.

2. The qualifications for confrontation (Romans 15:14).

Paul gives three qualifications for those who would get involved in the lives of other Christians. The word “instruct” in this passage is translated as “admonish” or “warn” the other 7 times in the ESV, and as “admonish” or “warn” all 8 times in the KJV. One Greek dictionary defines this word (*noutheteo*) as “to counsel about avoidance or cessation of an improper course of conduct.”²

¹ Frank Peretti, *The Oath*, 1995.

² William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 679.

- **Salvation**

Paul addresses this passage to “brothers.” Obviously, the first requirement before you confront someone is that you, too, be a believer. However, not only *can* all believers confront others, but all believers *should* get to the point where they can confront others. Confronting others about their sin isn’t reserved for pastors or deacons, but for every single Christian. Not all Christians are at that point as we will see, but that should be the goal.

- **Goodness**

The Romans were ready to confront other Roman believers because they were filled with goodness. This was a moral observation; these Christians were living righteous lives and were therefore ready to help those who were not.

(Illustration) In order to be able to pull someone out of the mud, you need to be standing on firm ground, not wallowing in the puddle right next to them.

Does this mean that someone has to be perfect before they can confront someone else? Obviously not, because no one is perfect (1 John 1:8). But we should not go to the opposite extreme and say that because no one is perfect everyone is at the same place in their spiritual growth. We reject the teaching that there are two levels of Christianity: those who are carnal and those who are perfect.³ Yet we realize there is a difference between someone who is living in willful disobedience to God (such as Lot or David after his cover up and before Nathan’s rebuke) and the Christian who is daily living in humble, repentant submission to God’s will. Those

³ This faulty view of sanctification is most often called Keswick (pronounced without the w) theology. It also sometimes referred to as “Holiness theology” or “perfectionism.” It teaches that sanctification happens at a single moment, like justification, and that a person goes from being a carnal Christian to being a holy Christian who no longer struggles with sin thereafter.

who are obeying and submitting to God as best as they know how are the ones who are ready to help others with the sin in their life.

Why do you think it matters that someone be living for God before they try to help others?

Doesn't Christ warn against correcting others for this very reason in Matthew 7:1-5? How does that passage square with this one?

- **Knowledge**

The final qualification needed to confront another believer is knowledge, particularly knowledge about God's Word. This only makes sense, because our confrontation must be based on God's Word, not our opinions. Again, no one will know everything that can be known about the Bible, but a certain amount of knowledge is necessary in order for someone to point out where another Christian's conduct is out of line. This knowledge includes both a knowledge of how to confront (see below) but also includes a knowledge of the specific sin. For example, if you are going to confront someone on anger, you need to know Scripture that confronts that sin and that is able to help them overcome it.

3. The process of confrontation (Galatians 6:1).

Confrontation must be done the right way, or more harm than good will be done. Fortunately, Scripture describes what the right kind of confrontation looks like.

- **Confrontation should be Spirit-led.**

Paul has just finished talking about the necessity of walking in the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-26) when he says in 6:1 "You who are spiritual." A spiritual person here is one who is Spirit-led, they are walking in the Spirit. This overlaps some with the prerequisite of goodness that we saw earlier (ie the person confronting must be living righteously), but it goes beyond

that to say that in the confrontation itself the person confronting is consciously relying on the Spirit.

- **Confrontation should be gentle.**

The next word Paul uses to describe the confrontation is gentleness (KJV meekness). In 1 Corinthians 4:21 Paul uses this same phrase to contrast a harsh attitude. A condemnatory and unkind attitude while confronting others fails to reflect the fruit of the Spirit and fails to succeed in bringing people back from their sin.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:14 and discuss how the different approaches there all line up with gentle rebukes.

- **Confrontation should be humble.**

In addition, Paul warns that the person confronting must keep in mind that he, too, is capable of the very sin that he is now confronting in a brother. This will keep him from becoming lifted up in pride over his own spiritual success, thus leaving him or her open for attack. An extra degree of humility should be taken when confronting those older (1 Timothy 5:1-2 don't forget, this passage was written to a pastor in his 30s!).

C. Believers should have a praying ministry with one another.

Our previous lesson went in depth about the topic of prayer, so we won't add too much to that here. You need to pray for other believers and you need them praying for you! Paul frequently prayed for the churches he ministered to, and asked them to pray for him. Prayer for others should include more than just praying for physical things, but should also include prayer for spiritual growth and vitality (Colossians 4:12). A failure to pray for those in our lives is sin (1 Samuel 12:23).

What types of things prevent us from having a fruitful prayer ministry for others?