

GROW

AN SMBS SERIES

Lesson 7 – The Right Process Part 2

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.

Overview: This lesson will introduce the second main components of biblical change – being renewed – which will be developed further in future lessons.

Introduction: Last week we saw that saying “sorry” alone just doesn’t cut it. Our apologies to God need to be sincere and need to conform to the patterns we find in Scripture, acknowledging the wickedness and guilt of our sins, sorrowing over them in repentance, ready to make things right and seeking to cut them off totally and completely. But confessing our sins and mourning over them aren’t enough, because our sins are a result of who we are, not just of what we do.

Imagine a small town with a river that flows nearby. The town is in the normal course of the river, but the townspeople have built a dam to keep back the river and allow them to build and expand their little village. The dam works great, except every time it rains, the village is flooded since the dam just isn’t big enough to keep back the torrent of water. For a while the people of the city are Ok with the set up, but the dam gets weaker and weaker, and less and less rain is required making flooding more frequent.

Desperate for help, the people of the village send for a civil engineer. After studying the situation, he tells the city that if they ever want to be truly free of the threat of the river they need to reroute the whole thing and change the course of the river. It will be far more difficult than building another dam, but the only truly effective method of saving the town. Similarly, cleaning ourselves after we've sinned and putting up guardrails to protect our hearts isn't enough if it's done alone (although it certainly needs to be done!). Beyond that, we need to change who we are, we need to redirect the river, and that only happens as we are continually renewed.

How does this line up with what people typically take away from sermons? What verses (including ones we have looked at) support this illustration and teaching?

Scripture uses the word "renewal" and "renewing" in five passages. In one of those it seems to be a reference to salvation (Titus 3:5), while the other four deal with our spiritual growth (Romans 12:1-2; 2 Corinthians 4:16; Ephesians 4:22-24; Colossians 3:9-10). Several other passages that don't specifically use the word "renewal" will also contribute to our understanding of how God grows us spiritually (2 Corinthians 3:18; 1 Peter 3:18; Titus 2:11-14). Spiritual growth happens as God renews us, recreating us from the inside out.

As we begin talk about the many verses God's Word uses to describe for us spiritual growth, what passages have you found to be helpful in your personal spiritual life?

A. The need for renewal.

(Illustration) Ever had an app that refused to work properly? Perhaps it was running slow, or it would close randomly. You were about to delete the stupid thing, but first checked and realized it needed an update. You update the app, and found that the update fixed all the problems. Apps have a tendency to need to constantly be updated, and when they aren't they struggle to function properly. Similarly, in our spiritual lives, we constantly need to be "updated" by God's Word. Our hearts have a tendency to drift away from God and the

truths of his Word. Perhaps the hymnist said it best when he wrote “Prone to wander, Lord I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love.”¹ Fortunately, God’s Word provides us with the answer to such wandering: renewal.

As we look at the four different passages that specifically use the word “renewal” (or renewing), we find that they fall into three general categories:

1. Renewal gives you strength for enduring trials (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

- **Renewal remains confident in God’s purpose (v 16a)**

Paul is very transparent about his ministry in this book, particularly how difficult and discouraging it can be (1:8-9a; 4:8-11). But he does this, not to gain sympathy, but draw people’s attention to God’s glory and sustenance through difficulty (1:9b-11). He does it to magnify God (4:15). Paul was able to maintain confidence in the good plan of God despite difficulties because he was constantly renewing his mind with the truth of God’s Word, rather than the discouragement that Satan threw his way. Paul sums this up at the beginning of verse sixteen by saying “we do not lose heart.”

When going through difficult times, it can be very easy to “lose heart.” To become discouraged, despondent, or disheartened is natural and normal when life refuses to go our way, but God can help us have a strong, joyful spirit even in such trials.

What can a believer do to practically, consistently remind themselves of the truth of God when going through tough times?

¹ Chris Rice, *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing*.

What truths does a believer need to be reminded of during such hard times (and where in Scripture do we find those truths)?

- **Renewal requires constant attention (v 16b)**

How quickly do our hearts drift? How soon before they forget the truths of God? How long does it take for sin to grab ahold of us and ruin us? Hebrews 3:12-13 gives us the answer: one day. The solution there as it is here is for a constant, daily vigilance over our spiritual lives. In Hebrews, the focus is on others helping us, whereas here the focus is on our own need for personal renewal.

Many people become discouraged after they make a decision at camp or some other significant point in their lives, and then feel a few months later as if they are in need of making the same decisions again. Some teens have been discouraged that year after year they make similar decisions at camp to deal with the same old issues. The reality is, however, that we don't make too many decisions to follow Christ, we make too few. Every day we should renew our hearts commitment and recalibrate ourselves to the truth of God's Word.

- **Renewal focuses on the future reward (v 17)**

Perhaps at this point Paul is almost seeming to be insensitive. "Light momentary affliction?" Is that what you call this Paul?! Losing the closest person on earth to me is a "light momentary affliction"? Losing my job or failing to get into that program or watching my life fall apart for some other reason is a "light momentary affliction"? Isn't that a little insensitive?

The answer that Paul gives us in this passage is that while we go through tough things during this life, things that cause us to "despair of life itself" (2 Corinthians 1:8, cf 2 Corinthians 11:24-28), the reward will be greater still. Our suffering is light and momentary in the grand scheme of eternity, and

when compared to what God has waiting for us. That ought to be an encouragement! Because no matter how deep or dark your valley, what God has waiting for you will be so much greater that you will one day look back and think of everything you went through as a light, momentary affliction.

How should believers respond when what they are going through doesn't feel as if it will ever be light and momentary when compared with God's reward?

- **Renewal prioritizes the spiritual over the material (v 18)**

Paul finishes this description of a life characterized by renewal by noting that the key was a focus on the invisible and spiritual rather than on the physical and material. Because we are physical, sight oriented creatures we often find it difficult to be as impacted by the spiritual world. God has showered us with incredible spiritual blessings (Ephesians 1:3-14; 2:4-7; Philippians 3:20), but it can be hard to live our lives as if those are the most important things about us (see Hebrews 11:13-16). It is only through daily renewal, daily bringing ourselves back to the truth of God's Word that we are able to live with our minds set on spiritual things (Colossians 3:2; Philippians 3:19).

2. Renewal gives you strength for resisting temptation (Colossians 3:9-10; cf Ephesians 4:22-24).

Colossians makes two very long, very specific lists about the types of things that should and should not be a part of our lives. Right in the middle of these two lists is the recognition that the old man has been put off and the new man has been put on. But as an important key to this transition is the understanding that the new man is being renewed in the knowledge of its Creator. So how does renewal help with putting on the new man and putting off the old man?

- **Renewal enables you to put off vices.**

As we saw last week, part of the putting off process involves seeing sin as it really is. Unfortunately, we tend to underestimate the consequences and severity of our sin. For this reason, the Bible describes our sins for us, pointing out ones we tend to skip over, and describes the seriousness of them in terms that at times surprises us.

What are some sins Scripture calls out that we fail to address?

What are some consequences for sins that surprise us?

(Illustration) I worked on a dairy farm for part of a summer, doing random jobs. Many of the jobs involved manure, because there is lots and lots of manure on a farm. My first time being around the stuff was hard, because it was such a strong and ugly scent it was distracting and made doing my job more difficult. Over time, however, the smell began to bother me less and less. At times I couldn't even smell. I would come home and my family would tell me to shower immediately, because the smell had become a part of me and I didn't even know it. We face the same danger of desensitization with our sins. If we aren't careful, we can become so accustomed to sin that we forget how ugly and vile it really is, and when sin doesn't seem so bad it becomes a lot easier to tolerate. It is only as we renew our minds with who God is and what he requires that we find ourselves ready to truly change how we think and feel about our sin.

- **Renewal enables you to put on virtues.**

So renewal helps you see your sin for what it is, but it also helps you to live holy by seeing your God as he is. Paul is very clear in Colossians 3:10 as to what exactly it is that renews believers: the knowledge of one's Creator. The theme of knowing God as the necessary prerequisite of change is one that runs all throughout Scripture. Over and over again God acts in the OT so that his people and the world will know that

he is God (Exodus 16:12; 29:46; Deuteronomy 29:6; Psalm 100:3; Ezekiel 13:9; 20:20; 23:49). Hosea said “For I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.” (Hosea 6:6). Jeremiah said that one of the blessings of the new covenant was going to be that everyone would know God (Jeremiah 31:34). Peter desired that his readers would grow in both grace and the knowledge of Christ (2 Peter 3:18) and stated that grace and peace are ours through the knowledge of God (2 Peter 1:2). Paul multiple times put forth the knowledge of God as a goal for believers (Colossians 1:10; Ephesians 1:17; 4:13). If we want to grow, we must get to know our God!

This is crucial, and is something far too many believers miss. Reading our Bibles is more than just gaining moral truths to live by, or being reminded that sin is bad, though Scripture contains both. Our reading of Scripture should be first and foremost out of a desire to know who God is! As we study his Word, we should be learning and growing in the knowledge of God our Savior!

What are some practical ways you can focus on the knowledge of God in your Bible study? What can we learn about God from Psalms? Old Testament history? The gospels? New Testament letters? Revelation?

3. Renewal gives you strength for rejecting worldliness (Romans 12:1-2).

Obviously there is much overlap between this category and the last. Worldliness is itself a sin (James 4:1-4), but this passage is saying something slightly different than Colossians or Ephesians was.

- **Renewal prevents sinful conformity.**

Being conformed to the world can happen so easily and so quickly it should frighten us. Every day we are faced with movies, music, advertisements, coworkers, classmates,

blogs, social media, all of which attempts to force feed a wrong view of life down our throats. We are living in a soup of twisted, backward, and wrong thinking, and yet we can be effected by it we don't even see it.

The word used for "world" in this verse is actually the Greek word for "age." We talk about the "spirit of the age," that is, the way people around us think and feel about life. This age, and the thinking behind it, could very easily infiltrate our own thinking if we are not careful. The best way to see how this can happen is to look back on the past and see how it already has in the past.

(Illustration) How could Abraham have thought it was OK to try and have a child through Hagar rather than wait for God's direction? Because that was customary for the time;² it's the way the world around him thought and he didn't even see it as wrong. The Puritans are thought of as exemplars of personal piety and godliness, and for good reason, yet when a few teenage girls in New England made accusations that witches were in their midst during the year 1692, over 150 "witches" were put in jail and nineteen hanged.³ To us, that sounds ridiculous, but to a superstitious church that allowed worldly thinking to trump Bible thinking, it made perfect sense.

What are some examples of thinking of the world that is against Scripture, but all too often believed by Christians?

² "It was the custom in northeast Mesopotamia when a wife failed to produce an heir for her husband, she could give him a slave for that purpose. Any son born of the union of husband and concubine was considered the child of the wife (cf. Gn 30:1–6)." Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "Hagar," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 913.

³ Daniel G. Reid et al., *Dictionary of Christianity in America* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990).

- **Renewal transforms our thinking.**

Often conformity to the world is put in terms of what we say or do. “Don’t talk like the world” or “don’t be like the world.” Although those can be helpful, they are not the root problem. Worldliness is first and foremost when think like the world, for once we start thinking like the world we will start acting like and sounding like them. This is why Paul specifies that the renewal process takes place in our minds first, and only later will be seen in our actions.

Too often we view Scripture memory and meditation as if it were a magic rabbit’s foot. “Quote this verse on anger and you’ll never be angry again!” But that’s not how it works. Scripture memory is important, but only as an aid to Scripture meditation. It is as we meditate on the truths of a verse, as they sink down deep and become a part of who we are how we see the world that our actions will change.

Renewing our minds is a necessary, daily activity. It enables us to resist the pull of the world, to endure trials, and to say “no” to sin. It happens as we allow the truth of God’s Word, primarily the truth of who God is, to saturate our minds and hearts so that it changes the way we think. We’ve touched briefly on *how* we renew our minds, but the next several lessons will seek to answer this important question more fully.