

“Longing for Change” (Gospel Sanctification I)
(Study 7 of “Getting Personal with God: Sonship A” Series)

The Scripture Passage (Paul’s Letter to the Colossians 2:6-7, 18-23)

English Standard Version Translation (ESV)

Colossians, Chapter 2:6 Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, 7 rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. [...] 18 Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, 19 and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. 20 If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— 21 “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch” 22 (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? 23 These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

New Living Translation (NLT)

Colossians, Chapter 2: 6 And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. 7 Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness. [...] 18 Don't let anyone condemn you by insisting on pious self-denial or the worship of angels, saying they have had visions about these things. Their sinful minds have made them proud, 19 and they are not connected to Christ, the head of the body. For he holds the whole body together with its joints and ligaments, and it grows as God nourishes it. 20 You have died with Christ, and he has set you free from the spiritual powers of this world. So why do you keep on following the rules of the world, such as, 21 "Don't handle! Don't taste! Don't touch!"? 22 Such rules are mere human teachings about things that deteriorate as we use them. 23 These rules may seem wise because they require strong devotion, pious self-denial, and severe bodily discipline. But they provide no help in conquering a person's evil desires.

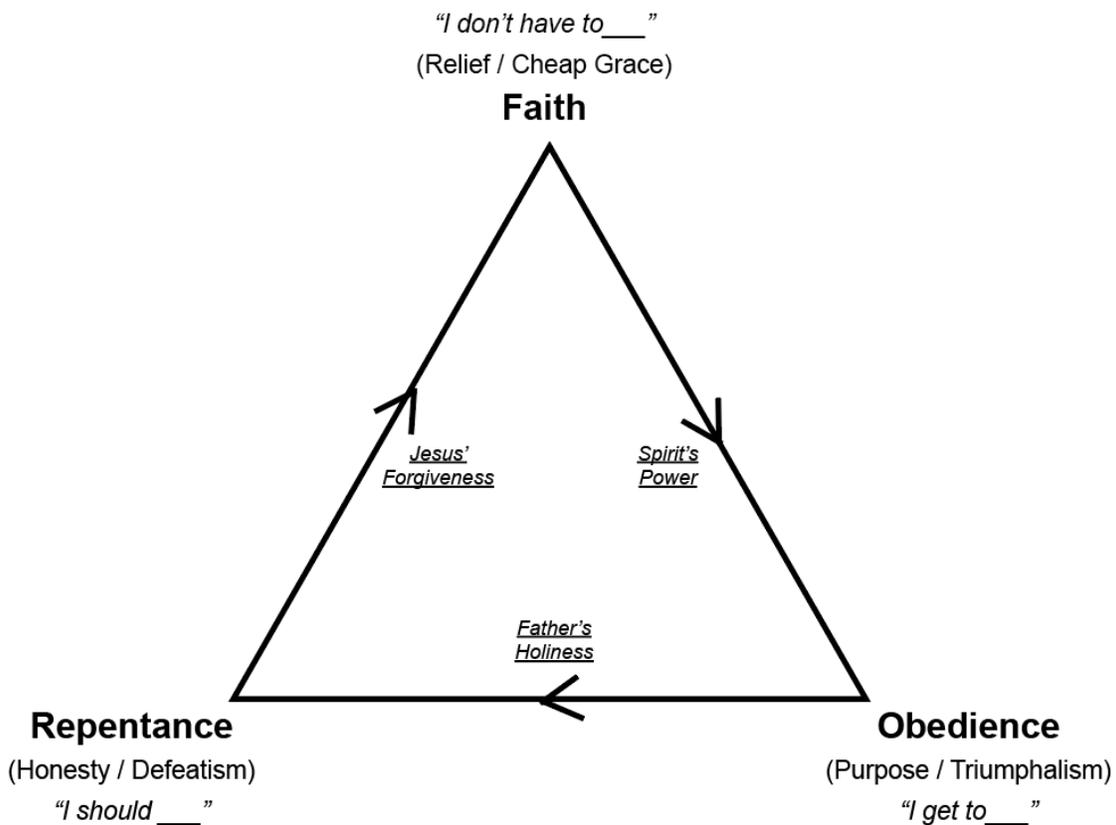
The Triangle Diagram (Part 1): A Gospel Growth (“Sanctification”) Model

The diagram below (page 2) is an attempt to answer the questions: how do we live the Christian life?, what do we do with our freedoms?, and how do we change for the better? (Or: how do I stop doing ____? How do I start doing ____?). This triangle shows us how resting and rejoicing can lead to doing good.

The goal of diagram is to keep moving through the corners, in clockwise order (e.g. Repentance → Faith → Obedience.) Each time you work through a corner, you are drilling in deeper, so it feels more like a spiral than going in a circle. The goal is not to skip corners, go in the wrong direction (counterclockwise), get stuck, or be vague. It works best when we’re willing to go deeper- into heart motivations, be more specific (with people, places, times, and dates) of our failures in love (sins), forgiveness for these

failures (Jesus' love), and our attempt to love God and others well (obedience). The diagram reflects the reality of the Christian life: there is no final destination or stopping point this side of heaven or Jesus' second coming.

Finally, this triangle diagram primarily serves as a kind of diagnostic: where do you (and others) tend to get stuck in the Christian life and why? Or where are you stuck now? And how do you (and others) move forward? When we say we need to preach the gospel to ourselves and others, we do that by using this diagram to ask: what aspect of the gospel do we need to emphasize- and how and when.



*Additional Thought: The process of Christian growth (or “sanctification”) involves both what we do and what God does. Augustine of Hippo puts the issue like this: “Without God, we cannot; without us, God will not.” And so, the above diagram only focuses on one side of how we grow: what we do. It assumes that the other side (God’s side) is at work behind the scenes “in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure”-and likely in a more primary and effective way (Philippians 2:13). This means you could draw a triangle diagram that includes both sides, and it would flow like this: Repentance (“I should but can’t”) → Faith (“God does and did”) → Obedience (“we can and get to.”) Thanks to Mark Upton for this insight!

The Triangle’s Corners: Repentance is the honest recognition of how great my sins are and my need to turning from them to Jesus.
Faith is the joy-filled and restful recognition of how I am delivered from my sins by Jesus
Obedience is how my gratitude to Jesus for forgiving my sins is expressed in love: good thoughts, acts, words, and feelings towards God and others.

Getting Stuck on a Corner: Repentance only feels like *defeatism* and says “I should (pray at all/better), but I can’t because I’m a helpless mess.”

Faith only feels like *cheap grace* and says, “I don’t want to and have to (pray). (Prayer) doesn’t work, matter anyway.”

Obedience only feels like *triumphalism* and says, “I can (pray). Why can’t you (pray)- and correctly like I do?!”

Moving Forward to the Next Corner: Repentance → Faith needs Jesus’ forgiveness, and then Faith feels like *relief* and says, “Jesus came to heal the sick, not the healthy; he came to call sinners, not the righteous. It’s okay to not be okay. A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Mt. 9:10-13, Ps. 51:17).

Faith → Obedience needs the Holy Spirit’s power, and Obedience then feels like *purpose* and says “God will finish what He has started with you, by working inside you. So, I can, I get to move out of something bad and move into something good” (Php. 1:6, 2:13)

Obedience → Repentance needs God the Father’s holiness, and then Repentance feels like *honesty* and says, “His good and love must increase, and I and my abilities must decrease (at least to me.) As I grow, I see myself as more needy and feel less strong” (Jn. 3:28-30, 1 Cor. 1:25).

Group Prayer

Ideas for Communal and Personal Prayer (Choose 1-2 topics to share about and pray for):

1. What’s one *burden* you need prayer for- for relief or healing?
2. What’s one *sin* you’d like to (re-)confess to God?
3. What’s one *deed* in your life or community you’d like to praise God for?
4. What’s one *desire* stirred by this time together with God that you can pray for?