

# The Blessing of Obedience

by Jim Cymbala

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*The sermon highlights the critical connection between obedience to God's word and the transformative power of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life.*

**Duration:** 34:00

**Scripture:** Psalm 119:2, Matthew 6:33, John 13:34, Ephesians 1:17, Hebrews 4:12, James 1:22, 1 John 5:3

**Topics:** "Obedience"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the nature of the Bible as both a human and divine book. He explains that the Bible contains human words and can be analyzed like any other book. The preacher emphasizes the importance of obedience to God and highlights the need to surrender all aspects of our lives to Him. He shares examples of individuals, like D.L. Moody, who had a deep understanding of God's word despite their lack of formal education. The sermon concludes with a call to surrender to God and seek His help in living a life of obedience.

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## Transcript

I want to give you, to lead us and prepare our hearts to pray about something very serious. I think we're going to touch on something tonight which is just an absolute key to unblock so many things that God wants to do and it'll help you in reading your Bible too. So there's a little collage of verses that I'd like to leave with you.

The first verse is found in Ephesians 1:17. Can we read it together out loud? Notice that the translators of this version have wisely capitalized the S so it's not a spirit of wisdom and revelation like there's such an attitude. But as Paul almost always when he refers to things that the Holy Spirit does, he's referring to the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead.

So what he's praying for is, I want the church there in Ephesus, I'm praying, notice this can't be taught, that God himself might give you the spirit of wisdom and revelation. That means the spiritual wisdom, understanding, and revelation. That means the unveiling so that you can see things about God that the natural mind cannot receive so that you may know him better.

If God is a spirit and those that worship him in spirit and truth, then to know him, what kind of wisdom and insight would we need? Spiritual wisdom, spiritual insight. It can't be high IQs. People with very high IQs can know lots about God but not even have a clue about who God really is.

The second verse is found in James. Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

For as Karen was just praying, those who listen to the word but do not do what it says are like people who look at their faces in a mirror and after looking at themselves go away and immediately forget what they look like. But those who look intently into the perfect law that gives freedom and continue in it, not forgetting what they have heard but doing it, they will be blessed in what they do. And then finally from the longest chapter in the Bible, Psalm 119, two verses.

I call with all my heart, Lord. Answer me, Lord, and I will obey your decrees. I call out to you, save me, and I will keep your statutes.

Let's look at that again. I call with all my heart. That's how you're to pray.

We're to pray with all of our hearts, not with our minds merely or our lips, but with all of our hearts going up to God fervently. Answer me, Lord, and notice what the cause and effect that he's hinting at is. If you hear me and answer me, I will obey your decrees.

I call out to you, save me, and I will keep your statutes. Not if you do that, then I'm going to obey you. No, do that so I can obey you.

If you don't help me, how am I going to obey you? So now let's just analyze what that's teaching us. And this is going to help somebody a great deal if God helps me to explain it and our hearts are all open. The Bible is a human and a divine book.

There's two elements to it. It's a human book because it has human words. It has subjects.

It has verbs. It has objects into it. It can be parsed and analyzed like any other book in the world.

And when we read it, the first understanding we get is the understanding of our mind. This is what the verse, the Lord is my shepherd, the subject is the Lord, the verb is is, and the object is he is my shepherd. And you can analyze that.

You can study what a shepherd means. You can analyze who the Lord refers to. You could say it's not will be or was, but he is.

It's a present tense verb. And you can analyze the Bible like that. But the Bible is a supernatural book because the men who wrote it were inspired by the Holy Spirit.

So this is why Paul is praying that the Holy Spirit would give the believers in Ephesus a spirit. The Holy Spirit would impart wisdom and revelation to their heart because the Bible has to find, the truth of the Bible has to find its place in our heart. You have to experience the word of God for it to have power in your life.

You don't analyze it with your mind. That's why most, so many churches just mental religion verse getting, analyzing verses telling people try to obey that. There's such a heavy legalistic spirit to that all because the word of God, thy word have I hid in my heart.

Paul says I want you to have a spirit of revelation. Why do we need a spirit of revelation? Paul just teach us what we need to know about God. Just teach us, then we'll know.

No, I can teach you with words, but unless he gives you a spirit of revelation, you won't experience the word in your heart with all of its power. The classic example of that that I heard some months ago or a time ago is you can take a brilliant man in his 50s who has a very, very high IQ, but he's blind. And he has access to Braille and he has access to teachers.

And because his mind is so brilliant, he's very quick to learn. And now you start to talk to him about light and you explain what light is and what is light made up of. What are light waves? How do they move across the earth? Where does light come from, from the sun? What would happen if there's no light? And you could feed him all this information.

You can give him a six-month course just on light. But an eight-year-old child who can see knows more about light than the man who's blind because he's felt light. He's experienced light.

There's something the blind man will never know about light because he hasn't experienced it. He can't see it. He knows about it, but he hasn't experienced.

The eight-year-old boy, he's experienced light. He might not know about light waves and the speed of light and all of that, but he knows a lot about light because he's experienced it. And that's the way it is about the things of God.

You can know about Christ, where he's born, where he died, rose again on the third day. But if you just know it in your mind and the Holy Spirit doesn't make it alive in your heart, then you say, he died for me. He died for me.

The Son of God died for me. And when that revelation comes to your heart, your heart softens and it goes out to the Lord. He bore my sins on the cross.

That's not something to analyze. That's something to experience. And only the Holy Spirit can give us that spirit of revelation.

So many people, we read the Bible and our Bible reading doesn't help us because we don't pray for a spirit of wisdom and revelation so we can know him better. So that his word by the Holy Spirit would go into our hearts and give us an experience of God. This word is living and active.

It's not just a mental thing that you read, you memorize. But the word of God is like a what? A two-edged what? Sword. It's moving, it's cutting if you open your heart and you're open to the Holy Spirit to make that word alive.

Otherwise, you become just a little parrot of the Bible says, the Bible says, the Bible says. But there's a lack of power in it and it doesn't affect your life because you know about what the Bible says, but you don't know it in your heart. How many get it so far? Lift your hand up and say amen.

Read Psalm 119. I've been reading that for the last few months and going very slowly through it. And you'll find verses where the psalmist says, open my eyes that I might see wonders from your word.

Well, what do you mean open your eyes? Just read it. No, no, no. I'm reading it, but I want you to open my eyes, the eyes of my heart, that I might have a revelation of what you're saying here and who you are.

Because that's what changes your life. When you get a revelation by the Holy Spirit. Now, some churches emphasize only the word and they dry up.

Some churches only emphasize the spirit and they blow up. What God wants for us to do is combine the word and the spirit so that we can grow up, so that the Holy Spirit can be our teacher. Didn't Jesus say that? When I leave, I'm going to send the spirit and he will teach you.

He, the Holy Spirit, will teach you all things. So that's why some guy up in the mountains of Peru can know more about God than a student at Nyack Theological Seminary. Why? Because the Holy Spirit is teaching him.

This is how D.L. Moody shook the world. Semi-illiterate, but he had revelation. And I got a book that someone gave me, an original copy of a book, 1877, Moody's sermons, with all the grammar, nothing fixed up.

I mean, the guy, the guy not only couldn't write a proper sentence, he couldn't even hardly get them out. God don't, he didn't know his verbs, he didn't know where, how to align his words right. But you read it and you fall on your face and you weep and you say, who taught him that about God? Who showed him that? Who gave him those words to say, to explain the word of God? It was taught by the Holy Spirit.

Come on, haven't that ever happened to you? How many have ever read a verse that you thought you knew? It happened to me just the other day. A verse I heard a thousand, I read a thousand times and suddenly as I'm reading it, the thing just knocks me dead in my heart. Come on, how many have ever had that happen? Well, what is that? It's not your brain working harder, it's the Holy Spirit coming and teaching us.

Someone once put it like this, the word of God is like a seed and on the outside is the covering of the seed. And a lot of all of us, we just feed on that. But inside this seed, if we'll wait on God and meditate and let him teach us, read less and let the Holy Spirit teach you more, rather than reading more and you don't even remember what you read.

And in his word does he meditate day and night, meditate. So as we wait, the Holy Spirit can come and give us the seed and the power is not in the shell. The shell has to fall away for the seed to germinate and bring forth life.

That's the way it is with the word of God. So that's helped to us, isn't it? We need to pray more for each other. When was the last time you ever heard anybody pray for someone? Oh God, I pray that you'll give this person the Holy Spirit's wisdom and revelation so that they might know you better.

And as we read your word, God, please teach me your word, God. I can read and analyze it. In fact, God, my trouble is I know some verses so well, I skip by them because I say I know that.

And I don't know that verse. I think I know it because I've memorized it. But God, give me a new insight into John 3.16. For God so loved.

Just that word loved. God, what does that mean? For God so loved. Who did he love? Why did he love? How deep did he love? God, show me these things, rather than just God so loved the world, praise God, and all of that.

So we need to pray more like that, don't we, brothers and sisters? Well now, here's the other hindrance that goes right along with that hindrance, which is some people read the Bible, it actually does them not only no good, it actually sets them back. And some of you are sitting here, and you're going to be

convicted by what I'm about to say. So the reason is because we read the Bible without a hundred percent intention to obey every word we read.

We read it, and we get deceived, like James says, because there's a thrill in reading the Bible, because truth has an effect on your heart. Coming to a service like this, hearing the people sing, hearing other believers, there's a thrill to it. Come on, doesn't it warm your heart? How many know what I'm talking about? Sometimes I walk into this building, I just hear you singing, and my heart gets warm, and I want to praise God with you, right? But the trouble with that is, many of us live in like a spiritual denial, a spiritual fantasy, and we read the Bible, and we go, oh, that's good.

But we're not going to obey it. We're not going to obey it. We're not intending to obey it.

We're just reading so we can say we had devotions. Hey, you got to read the word every day, Pastor. You got to spend time in the word.

But why would God give us these things if he didn't want us to obey it? So James says, these are the people, religious people, go to church, churches in Brooklyn, churches in Middletown, they're deceived, because they hear the word, and they say amen to it, but they don't do it. The word says, keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit. They just go, isn't that good? God says, we should be filled with the Spirit.

No, he commanded you to be filled with the Spirit. Now, what are you going to do about it? Bible says, true religion and undefiled is to keep yourself unspotted from the world. Well, he means for you and I to be unspotted from the world.

Well, what does that mean? That the world can stain us. The world and all that's in it can stain our spirits. We get wrapped up in the world, and we're stained by the world, the pollution of the world, and to help the widows and those who are afflicted, that's pure religion undefiled.

If any man thinks he's religious and doesn't bridle his tongue, his religion is in vain. That means God's telling you when you read it, today bridle your tongue, I'll help you, but be quiet. Be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger.

What's the sense of reading slow to anger if you're going to blow up that day and say, well, God knows I'm not what I'm used to be, and God knows I'm not what I ought to be? No. Just think of that. If I call the secretary, I call Phayla in my office and say, Phayla, here's five things I want you to do.

Yes, Pastor. This is important. This is important.

This is going to help me now in ministering to the people. Here's five things I want you to do. Yes, Pastor.

Pastor, before I leave, could I pray with you too? Yeah, let's pray. So we pray. Then she doesn't do one of the five things I told her.

I go to her, Phayla, what's up with that? I told you to do something. I'm your boss. I told you this had to be accomplished.

Yeah, I know, but wasn't it nice when we talked and we prayed in the office? Hey, I know it was nice, but I didn't bring you in there to pray. I asked you to do something for me. And this is where people, notice what James says, people are blessed when they do it.

You're not blessed when you hear it. You're blessed when you do it. And there are things that God's dealing with some of us about.

You're not obeying. You're saying amen. You shout glory.

And how many times God going to tell us, what are you reading for it if you don't want to do it? God says, love everybody the same, and you don't. You love black people better than you do white people because you're black, or you love white people better because you're white, or you're into this West Indian thing, or you're Latino thing. And God says, I don't like that.

He's not a respecter of persons. But you've been keeping, wait, wait, wait, wait. I'm not saying for applause.

You've been doing this for how many years now? And you wonder why you don't get anything out of your Bible study? You're deceiving yourself. You got a Korean thing just for Korean people, or whatever. Think how many people live like that.

You go down south or you can go up north. White people, they don't want a black person in their church, but they're pounding the Bible. What does God think when he sees that? How many times does he tell us, love one another even as I have loved you? Did he say that to make you get a chill or to do it? To do it.

You're not saying amen, but God be with me today, Lord. Oh boy, we're hitting home. Come on.

How many know it's the truth? Let's put our hands together. All of us. So why read 20 verses? It's better to read one verse and do it.

Read 20 and say, this is deep. Ooh, I got a thrill from that. I got to share that insight I got.

God doesn't want to share insights. He only, he wants you to obey it. Don't be hearers of the word only and not doers and deceive yourself.

Think how many of us are deceived by the thrill of spiritual ecstasy of hearing a sermon. You hear Tony Evans or an orator or some great preacher and you go, oh, that was so good. And then within three hours, you're back to the same old, same old.

Then you come to another meeting and you get another thrill. But God says, no, I don't want you to have thrills. I want you to obey it because I bless the person who does it.

It's not the hearer of the word that gets blessed. It's the one who wants to do it. So when we read the word of God, starting today, we not only have to ask the Holy Spirit for insight.

God's been dealing with me about this. Read less. Why are you going so quick? You're not even obeying that.

You want, you know, give me new light. Why? You're not even doing the things I gave you already. Think about some of us.

Oh God, show me new things. Why? You're not doing the old things. Are you rejecting this or are you receiving this? Is this, is this practical? Is this in the word of God? And some of us have been dealt with by God about some things.

How long is he going to deal with you about this? And then you wonder why you don't have the full blessing of God on your life. And you want someone to pray for you. And you want to find out where Pastor Cymbala is in the prayer line so he can pray for you.

What do you, look at these hands. Look at these hands. These hands are nothing.

These hands are nothing. You don't need me, you need God. But listen, if you're walking, look, listen to me.

If you're walking in disobedience, what's the sense of anything? Obedience is better than sacrifice. But I'll go on a mission trip and sacrifice. That's good, go on a mission trip and sacrifice.

But if you're, if you're talking rudely to your wife and abusing her verbally, what good is the mission trip? What do you think God's going to do, a trade-off? I'll forget that because you're going to Malawi? It doesn't work that way. Am I speaking the truth here tonight? This is, this is what holds a lot of us back. Look, I study this because I have to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.

I have nothing to show Christ. I have nothing. I have limited, very limited abilities, talents, gifting, but I have to present you.

My wife and I have to present you. I have to present everybody in this room. You're all I have.

You are my glory, you're my crown, you're my joy on the day of Jesus Christ. But I don't want to present disobedient people. I don't want to be disobedient.

Remember the prophet? He was a prophet, but he was disobedient. Jonah. Look how God dealt with him.

Some of us are living in the belly of some kind of whale where God is waiting for us to obey. How many times has he said that you got to give up that resentment against that person? What does he have to do, write you another letter? He already gave you a letter in the Bible. He says, let it go.

If you hold onto it and say, I won't let it go, how will you progress in spiritual things? That doesn't make any sense. Because we grow up in religiosity and we grow up in churches and we grow up with, ooh, I love the song and all of that, we can forget what the essence of this is all about. If you love me, keep my commandments.

That's what Jesus said. Did he not say that? If you love me, keep my commandments. What good is a husband who doesn't care anything about what his wife wants, but he keeps saying, I love you, and here's the marriage certificate.

I always keep it with me. You're married to me. I don't care anything about you.

I don't care what you want, where you want to go, nothing. What kind of husband is that? So now, well, Pastor Cymbala, it's not so easy, is it? No, it's not easy because there's one more component to this. When the Holy Spirit, when you come to God with an open heart and you want to obey, and God's going to break the spirit of disobedience tonight in some people's lives, and you're going to start to obey.

You're going to start to obey God. And it's not going to be as hard as you think because he's going to help you. You have to come with an obedient heart, God.

Show me. Just read one verse. Just read one verse.

If you come to the altar and you have ought against your brother, leave your sacrifice and go to your brother and make it right. What good is to read that if you're not going to do it? Should we go to a next verse when we're not going to obey the first verse? So we got to come with an open heart to obey. God help us.

Give us that. Then we need a spirit of, from the Holy Spirit, we need help to have revelation and wisdom so we understand God's word better and we can understand God and know God better. But notice what the psalmist said.

When the spirit is working in you, God turns commands into promises. And for every command you know by the spirit, he'll help you to obey. Whatever God asks me to do, he has to give me the strength to do, or how am I going to do it? If you just emphasize the command, then you get people struggling, promise, you know, promise keepers and all of that, and making new vows, and you break that vow, you make a deeper vow, and all of that.

But the psalmist, see, the psalmist was way ahead of his time. He says, God, I cried to you. God, I called to you for help so that I will obey your commands.

If you come and help me, I will obey your commands. If you don't come and help me, how can I obey your commands? So today, God wants you to surrender and say, I'll obey. But he's going to help you to obey.

You want to give up that habit of smoking, let's say, that you feel nasty about. You feel you don't want to smoke in front of Christians. You know, it's not a good habit.

And on top of that, you're committing suicide slowly. But you can't break that nicotine thing. God will help you do it.

Well, of course, you mean my father won't help me break a bad habit? My father won't help me to obey him? No, God's not watching and saying, all right, now you go out there and show me how much you love me. No, God said, come on, let me hold your hand. I'll help you.

I'll work through you. I'll change you. I'll make you obedient.

See, there's the command. Obedience is important. But God says, you're not on your own, for it's God who works in you both to will and to do according to his good pleasure.

It's God. He'll even give you the willing power. That's simple.

I'm not even sure I want to even give that up. Just come to God. He'll give you the power to want to give it up.

And then he'll give you the power to give it up, to will and to do according to his good pleasure. Oh, no wonder the writer says, salvation is of the Lord. He not only forgives our past, he's the one who changes us day by day.

He's going to change us. But you know what? I love you all. And I want to grow in God, and I want his blessing on me.

And Karen prayed prophetically about giving. Like some of you, you don't give. You know what you're supposed to give.

You don't give. Hey, I love you. I'm not checking what you give.

But you know, you're guilty. You hold back offerings from God. But you got every new cell phone.

You got under 17 pairs of sneakers. You have money for all those things. But for God, you only have five dollars to put in the basket.

And you know that's wrong. And he, so when you start to obey, boom, the windows of heaven fly open. And we all have different areas that we struggle with.

We all have different areas that we struggle with. Don't we? We all have something that's not convenient for us. And where one is not tempted and weak, the other one is tempted and weak.

That's why we can't judge and look down at each other, because we all have something. You know what I really believe while I'm talking today? I believe God, the Holy Spirit is convicting people here. Not in the bad way, like, what's wrong with you? But I want to help you.

Be obedient, children. What joy a mom or dad gets when their child is disobedient. And when, if we keep being disobedient, what does God have to do? Whom the Lord loves, he also what? Why does he chasten us? Because of disobedience.

Some of you, your life would be transformed in 48 hours. You wouldn't even need the counseling like you think you need. If you would just start walking in the sunshine of God's love and obey him.

Just obey him. Obey him in that area where you know it's just, he's the enemy, he's like a stronghold on you, just disobedient. It's a good word, isn't it? Preacher's not so good, but what a good word from the Bible.

Is this a good word from the Bible? Can we all say amen to it? Remember now? What does Ephesians say? Ephesians says, I'm praying that the Holy Spirit will give you revelation and wisdom so that you'll really know him, not just the surface stuff, religious people. Remember, the people who carried the biggest Bibles were the people who killed Jesus. Religious people killed Jesus, not Roman soldiers.

They carried it out. It was religious people. Remember what Jesus said to them? You whitewashed sepulchers, on the outside you look good, in front of people you look good, but God knows your heart.

You've got every kind of corrupt thing inside of you, disobedient to God. So Ephesians says God's going to teach us. James tells us, come with a heart to obey.

Just say to God today, I don't need a healing so much. I don't need more than a new job. I need more than money, more than anything, more than a husband, more than a wife.

What I need is an obedient heart. God, make me obedient. You know what it is to go to bed, knowing that God's working in you to obey his word? There's a piece that just you can't even believe.

You know how hard it is when you're a Christian, you love God, you're walking in disobedience, and the Holy Spirit is working on you. You're so miserable. Don't tell me you're not.

I know better. I know from my own life, I've been disobedient to God. Did you know in college, I was so disobedient to him, backslid, trying to be someone I was not, full of myself.

I couldn't sleep at night, so I got a TV and brought it to my dorm, and I would leave the TV on, and I would fall asleep with the TV on, because I knew if I turned that TV off, it would be quiet, and he would come. You're laughing at me. He's done the same thing to you, right? How many know what I'm talking about, right? So you try to avoid him, and the noise would just keep me like, I go off to the noise.

One time my roommate got up. He thought I was asleep, and I wasn't, and he turned the TV off, and I got quiet. I said, what'd you touch the TV for? He said, I thought you're sleeping.

You're not even looking at it. I said, put it back on. I want the noise.

You know why? Because I was disobedient. That's it. I was disobedient.

It's hard when you're disobedient. The way of the say yes to me. Surrender to me.

I'll help you. I'll do the work, but just come to me and, you know, say I surrender all. Let's close our eyes.

I know this is hard, but come on. We got time to pray. Balcony downstairs, someone who comes, want to come up here and begin to pray with me.

We're all going to pray. Don't anyone leave this building, but you say, pastor, that was for me. I need to hear that.

I got to give God an area here of my life. I want to have obedience in an area where I've been chasing and fighting against him. You come on up.

I know that's like humbling. No one's looking at you. No one's looking at you.

No one's going to be embarrassed. You don't have to be embarrassed. We've all been there, done that.

Oh my goodness. How some of you are going to begin to grow now. Oh, you're going to grow.

You're going to grow more in a week than you have in five years because you're dealing with reality now. Anybody else want to come? Just come close. Lord, we pray that you will save us from being hypocrites, talking one way and then living another, that you'll help us not to talk one way and then walk a different way, Lord.

When we open your word and help us to do it every day of our lives, let the Holy Spirit give us wisdom and revelation so that we might experience the word of God in our heart and not only analyze it in our mind. This I cannot do. You must come and do it, Holy Spirit.

We pray that you would give us a willing spirit, take away disobedience, stubbornness, rebellion, take away excuses of why we can't obey. Why would you ask us to do something and then promise you'd help us and we still can't do it? That's impossible. So we get rid of and we throw off every excuse, every rationalization, everything about how our past was and that's why we're messed up.

With you, God, all things are possible. All things are possible. What's impossible to man is possible with you.

Come, Holy Spirit, and help us, working us both to will and to do. Give us different thoughts. Give us different desires and give us the power to complete it.

We thank you for your word to us tonight, sobering word but a good word, Lord, good word. We thank you for these verses. Don't let us deceive ourselves and be hearers of the word only and not doers.

Give us the strength to not only hear but to do, Lord. And now before we close, Lord, we confess all of our sins. We hide nothing and we plead the blood of Jesus Christ over everyone in this room, Lord.

We ask you, Lord, to forgive us our sins as we forgive those who have sinned against us. We let go of every bit of resentment, bitterness, what folks have done to us. When we think about your mercy, God, we forgive in your name everyone, Lord, who has ever done anything against us.

Amen. Keep us pure. Keep us clean.

Keep us unspotted from the world, for we ask all these things in Jesus' name.

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