

# The Fruit of Obedience

by Roy Pointer

---

*The sermon emphasizes that obedience to God's Word leads to joy and holiness, as illustrated through the biblical account in Nehemiah and the Feast of Tabernacles.*

**Duration:** 35:26

**Scripture:** Ezra 8:21, Matthew 6:16, Matthew 6:33

**Topics:** "Biblical Obedience", "Spiritual Revival"

---

## Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on Nehemiah chapter 8 and the rebuilding of Jerusalem. He starts by discussing the act of looking in the mirror and how it can reveal our flaws and imperfections. The Word of God is described as powerful and transformative, and the importance of reading and praying is emphasized. The sermon also mentions the example of the people of Israel in Nehemiah's time, who wept over their sins and sought to get right with God through fasting and confession. The speaker also references the contrasting approaches of Charles Simeon and John Wesley in their interpretation and application of the Bible.

---

## Transcript

I'd like to turn you to Nehemiah chapter eight, and we continue our studies in this great book about the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the reestablishing of the people of God in their faith, as well as their place. I wonder if you looked in a mirror this morning. I think probably most of you did.

Maybe one or two of you didn't, but most of you did. And as we look in the mirror, we kind of step back in horror or whatever. I got rather personal this morning.

I said, well, the first thing I do, I kind of tidy up my hair, what little I have. And then I, in my pajamas, go and eat my breakfast. And that's an interesting sight.

The squirrel watches me. And I'm usually the first one up early in the morning. And then I look in the mirror a bit later on, and then I get to work making myself presentable for others than squirrels.

But the mirror is very important because you get an image, you get a picture, and you can respond to the picture and the image of yourself and literally tidy yourself up. Well, James tells us that the Bible's like that. The Bible, he says, is like a mirror.

And he says, the people who pay attention to what the Word of God, they actually do treat the Word of God as it should be treated. He talks about, you know, hearing and doing. And really this is all about hearing and doing the Word of God as we study the book of Nehemiah.

What we discover too, I think in this passage this morning, for this is the continuing response to God's Word, is that if you obey God's Word, you will find joy and you'll find holiness. So that the fruit of obedience to the Word of God is joy and holiness. Let me set the context for you.

Nehemiah has been the instrument under God to bring about the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. The city is now secure in the sense of having its walls built. They're now in the process of reforming the society and bringing them back to the Lord and back to the Word.

And Ezra the priest has been waiting 13 years to preach the sermon that he preached the last time we studied it. And he took the first five books of the law and began reading and then expounding. And the people came under very deep conviction of sin.

Verse nine, all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Lord. The Word of God is spiritual dynamite, powerful, transforming. In the Alpha program there was one session called Why and How to Read the Bible.

And one of the illustrations that was used by Reverend Nicky Gumbel, who's the teacher, was the illustration of the GI during the war who landed on one of the Pacific islands and got chatting to one of the natives there and discovered the native was a Christian. And this Christian was testifying to his faith and the importance of reading the Bible and praying and so on. And this GI said to him, he said, oh, we've outgrown that in the West.

He said, you know, we don't need to read the Bible anymore. And the native looked at him and he said, well, he said, if we didn't read the Bible, he said, by now, he said, I would have killed you and cooked you and eaten you. The Bible is transforming in its power.

And if we obey it, we receive joy and holiness. So let's look first of all, the fruit of obedience, joy. And I turn you to the text, verse 13.

On the second day of the month, the heads of all the families, along with the priest and the Levites, gathered around Ezra the scribe to give attention to the words of the law. It's the day following that reading of the law that the leaders come together around Ezra and they want to study the word of God more carefully and being instructed in it. And it is the particular role of the leadership of the people of God to really be grounded in the word of God and to understand it.

It's very important, it's one of the qualifications, of course, of being a leader in the church is that you are knowledgeable of and committed to obedience to the word of God. It's one of the qualifications of deacons and elders, pastors and teachers and so on. So we do notice that leaders see the vital role of knowing and obeying the word of God.

We need to see the importance of the word of God in the life of the people of God. Traditionally, we speak about the church being reformed by the word and revived by the spirit. And we must never lose sight of the role of word and spirit.

If you have word only, you dry up. If you have spirit only, you blow up. And if you have word and spirit, you grow up.

You keep the two together. Dr. Dermot MacDonald, HD, was a vice principal at London Bible College, Baptist minister and the man who ordained me to Christian ministry some 24 years ago. And Derry, as we used to call him, was a great scholar of the Bible and a man who wrote two very notable works on the revelation, theories of revelation and ideas of revelation.

That was his PhD and his post-doctoral work. But he also wrote this little paperback called *I Want to Know What the Bible Says About the Bible*. And I'm going to quote from it.

He's talking about the importance of word and spirit. An historical illustration of these two contrasting approaches is that of Charles Simeon and John Wesley. Few will deny that Simeon was a masterly expositor of the scriptures.

The 21 volumes of his works demonstrate his ability to unfold the meaning of the biblical text. To him, the Bible was in all its parts, in very truth, the word of God. And he took pains to elaborate its meaning.

But he was careful to insist on the need of the spirit's illumination, both to interpret and apply the word to life. Typical is such a statement as this. It is by the scriptures that the Holy Spirit speaks to men.

Or again, we are therefore to submit to the teaching of God's word and spirit. Simeon can indeed say, it is not the word that does good, but the Holy Spirit by the word. John Wesley, on the other hand, gave prominence to the subjective action of the Holy Spirit.

Although he argued strongly for the full inspiration and the complete accuracy of the scriptures, he can still declare, this is quoting Wesley, we know that there is no inherent power in the letter of the scripture read. Without the spirit, Wesley contends, the sacred oracles are a dead letter. But Wesley will not have the spirit apart from the word.

He writes eloquently on the witness of the spirit. But he insists that the witness is by the word. God by his word and spirit is always with us, says Wesley.

The contrast then is between Charles Simeon, the evangelical Calvinist, and John Wesley, the evangelical Arminian, and it may be put like this. For Charles Simeon, revelation is the word through the spirit. For John Wesley, revelation is by the spirit through the word.

Whether therefore we start from the scripture or the spirit, this relationship must be maintained. For the scripture without the spirit makes for a fruitless faith, while the spirit without scripture gives an undisciplined faith. The one makes for a dead orthodoxy and the other for an unrestrained enthusiasm.

The one gives lifelessness to the church and the other gives license to the individual. A scripture without the spirit is numb. The spirit without the scripture is nebulous.

So says Dr. MacDonald. We need to hold together word and spirit. So the importance of the word then is established and the leaders gather to study it and to be instructed in it.

And then verse 14, they found written in the law which the Lord had commanded through Moses that the Israelites were to live in booths during the feast of the seventh month and that they should proclaim this word and spread it throughout their towns and in Jerusalem, go out into the hill country and bring back

branches from olive and wild olive trees and from myrtles, palms, and shade trees to make booths as it is written. Now these booths were kind of tents and we all love camping. It's a tremendous time, you know, to get together.

Once, of course, the insects have left all the booths. When I did my Bax Woodsman's badge as a boy scout, we had to rush through it in a weekend and we didn't have time to let the insects crawl out of the booths, which was quite interesting. But anyway, the thing is, once you've made them, you live in them.

And so this was the idea. They were discovering the feast of tabernacles. That's what they were discovering.

This was not unknown to them, but what had happened was that they had their sort of festival, which was really a harvest festival, solely that. It had degenerated. So there was some sense of gratitude for the produce of the land, but who are you grateful to? Now in the surrounding cultures, of course, it was to the fertility gods and goddesses.

I mean, if your wife did not bear a child, then you prayed to the gods and goddesses. If you had cattle or sheep, and they either didn't reproduce or you kept losing the lambs or the calves, you would pray to the fertility gods and goddesses. If you didn't have your crops growing up properly to the right sort of height or with the correct sort of number of grains, you prayed to the fertility goddesses.

Because the gods and the goddesses of the land, in other words, the nature goddesses and gods were the ones to whom you prayed. Bale and bale. So this harvest festival was prone to all kinds of linkage with the fertility cults.

And fertility cults were worshipped with gross and obscene acts of worship. Cult prostitutes were common. All the hills would be surrounded with all kinds of drunkenness and debauchery.

This was all part of it. All part of it. So relevant even today.

So you had a problem. So what they did was to try to reform them and bring them back to the feast of tabernacles and the proper celebration of the festival. And that's what always happens when the word is read and the word is understood.

At the Reformation, of course, there was a great back to the Bible campaign. The church at the time of the Reformation had constructed a ladder to heaven based upon seven sacraments. There was the first sacrament of infant baptism.

Then there was the sacrament of the Eucharist that had become the Mass. And at the Mass, the sacrifice of Jesus was reenacted and he was re-sacrificed. Then there was confirmation and then penance and ordination and matrimony and the last rites.

And there were these seven steps that led you to heaven. And as the priest performed these rites and ceremonies and laid his hands upon those who'd come or conducted the rite, *ex operere, operata*, by the act performed, the person received grace. And so there was established this ladder to heaven.

And of course, it's by works that you are saved. Now at the Reformation, they got back to the Bible. They started to read the Bible and they said, well, this isn't true.

It is simply not right for us to teach and to preach this because the Bible doesn't teach it at all. And the Reformers said, there are only two sacraments or two ordinances and they are the Lord's Supper and they are baptism. So you have the Lord's Supper and baptism.

There are two sacraments or two ordinances. In Baptist circles, we tend to prefer the word ordinances because they were ordained by Jesus. The Anabaptists, the radicals of the Reformation said that the only form of baptism that you find in scripture is baptism of believers.

The baptism of believers by immersion, total immersion and in the triune name of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. So as they read the Bible, their practices were reformed at the Reformation. It's important for us to understand these things.

And this is what's happening here in the text. As they read the Bible about this great festival, they realized that they're doing it wrong. Verse 16, so the people went out and brought back branches and built themselves booths on their roofs, in their courtyards, in the courts of the house of God and in the square by the water gate and the one by the gate of Ephraim.

The whole company that had returned from exile built booths and lived in them. From the days of Joshua son of Nun until that day, the Israelites had not celebrated it like this and their joy was very great. As they obeyed the word of God and put it into practice, so joy was the result.

And the fruit of obedience to the word is joy. And then day after day, verse 18, from the first day to the last, Ezra read from the book of the law of God. They celebrated the feast for seven days and on the eighth day in accordance with the regulation, there was an assembly.

And so here they came together and the people were all invited to come and celebrate this great festival and this great feast. Hallelujah. And as we respond to the gospel, so there is great joy.

Now I don't have time to turn you to Leviticus 23, 33 to 43 or Deuteronomy 16, 13 to 15, where you will read all about the feast of tabernacles. And this is the part that they were studying. These leaders came around Ezra and they discovered the purpose of the feast.

Well, first of all, there were the booths and the booths were to remind the people of a past deliverance. How they had wandered out into the wilderness and the Lord had been with them to bless them and guided them by that great pillar of cloud and that great pillar of fire. And the Lord had blessed them by sending manna from heaven and had sustained them in every way.

They were remembering God's presence and God's grace and God's salvation and God's giving of the law. All of these things were celebrated as they came together in this great feast and lived in booths. And they remember the harvest, that God was not only the present with them, but God was the one who provided for them.

That this bounty that surrounded them did not come from the fertility gods and goddesses, but came from the Lord, the creator of heaven and earth, the creator of the whole cosmos. He has done this. And they remembered it.

And in times of reformation and revival, they would go and smash the idols. And on the cover of the Biblical Archeological Review are some pictures of smashed idols that have been put together again. And there the archeologists have found all these grotesque idols in their pieces, literally smashed at a time of

reformation and revival in Israel.

And the archeologists have put them all together. And there they are, families of the gods and goddesses staring at you. They look rather cute.

Unfortunately, the worship was not cute at all. It was perverse and gross. And then they were reminded in the great Feast of Tabernacles of sacrifice, to remind them that sin needed to be forgiven, that God was holy and they needed to be holy.

They were reminded in this great feast and festival that they could be reconciled to the Father by the shedding of blood. There was a whole sacrificial system that they remembered. And there was a re-covenanting.

They reaffirmed their relationship with God. God says, I will be your God and you will be my people. And so the great Feast of Tabernacles, one of the great festivals of Israel, was actually to remind themselves of to whom they belonged.

So it wasn't just to harvest Thanksgiving. It was a lot, lot more than that. And there was tremendous joy.

How wonderful it is that God is so gracious and so good and gives us rituals and rites in order that we might remember. At the Lord's table, we remember his death and his sacrifice and his rising from the dead and his promise to return. It's all built into this wonderful celebration of our Lord's death on our behalf, rising on our behalf, ascending on our behalf, and returning on our behalf.

Our response to all that God has done is remembered in another great rite and ritual, the Ritual of Believers' Baptism, where we come and stand and declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, my Lord. And we join the people of God and we enter into this new covenant. What a wonderful and glorious thing that we can become the children of God.

And it is marked by joy. And so as they study the Word of God, they come under the Word and under the Spirit and their lives are transformed. They didn't want to miss anything.

And the tragedy is, our ignorance of the Word means we miss things. We miss out on the joy. We miss part of the adventure.

I'm sure most of you have seen the film Mutiny on the Bounty or have read the story. You know, there's this ship of the Royal Navy and there's this mutiny and Captain Bly is put into a longboat with those of the crew that were loyal to him. It's an incredible feat of seamanship.

For Captain Bly, if you know anything about navigation of the sea, that was one of the most incredible feats of seamanship, to take that longboat on that great trek and to deliver those men safe and sound back into His Majesty's keeping. What happened to Fletcher Christian and the crew? There's a sequel to the story. Fletcher Christian and the mutinous crew, they took some women off the islands and a couple of men as well to help out with things.

And they sailed for Pitcairn. Now Pitcairn Island had been mischarted and on the bounty's voyage, they had discovered this island where it shouldn't have been. So Fletcher Christian knew that if he could get to Pitcairn, he wasn't gonna be found for a very, very long time, if ever, because it wasn't really on the chart.

It had been put in the wrong place. That's a dangerous thing to do, by the way. Anyway, he got to Pitcairn.

That was another great feat of navigation, but he got to Pitcairn. And once he got there, they burned the ship. And if you were a scuba diver, you can dive on the wreck of the bounty and see the smoldered timbers.

Well, they're all barnacles as well now, but they're there. And when they got on the island, well, they had a whale of a time. They had all these native women and things got degenerate.

And debauched and violent. And they had all the provisions of the ship with all the Navy rum, et cetera. And before very long, they killed one another off.

Eventually there was one man left and the women and children by then. And they were ferreting around in one of the trunks and they found a Bible. A Bible.

Good old King James Bible. And they started to read it. And they started to live it.

And this community of mutineers and their women came to Christ. And they established a community, a Christian community on Pitcairn Island. So that when the British Admiralty finally did catch up with them and found them, there was this Christian community.

And so no charges were laid. They were left. The Bible transforms.

And brings joy. And also holiness. Look at chapter nine, verses one to three.

On the 24th day of the same month, the Israelites gathered together, fasting and wearing sackcloth and heaving dust on their heads. Having dust on their heads, they were heaving it. If you've ever seen people do this, you see them, they wear their old clothes.

If you go still to the Middle East and parts of Africa, when they're in mourning, they literally throw the dust over themselves. So this was a state of mourning, terrible mourning. And they're throwing this dust all over them and wailing.

And the wailing of those in mourning is just the noise. Those of Israelite descent had separated themselves from all foreigners and they stood in their places and confessed their sins and the wickedness of their fathers. And they stood where they were and read from the book of the law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day.

They spent another quarter in confession and in worshipping the Lord their God. Here is an incredible picture. Joy and then suddenly sadness.

Joy is turned to mourning. The Feast of Tabernacles was held from the 15th to the 22nd day of the seventh month Tishri. That's September, October time, harvest time.

This is a 24th day. This is two days later. The people are still gathered in assembly but now the joy has turned to mourning.

The mood has changed and the people have assembled before God and they are fasting and wearing sackcloth and having dust on their heads. A public state of mourning. And you say, why are you mourning? Why are you in this state? Why are you like this? We realize that when the Word was first preached and taught they wept over their sins and their failure and their disobedience.

Not only their own but their ancestors. But they're also now in mourning. Why? Well, because they want to get right with God.

They've had seven days of teaching from the law of God, more teaching, more revelation, more truth, more understanding. And so the mirror of God's Word has now shown them what they are and what they've done and what their fathers did. And so they come and they confess.

And they're fasting. They want to be holy. They want to consecrate themselves to God.

Fasting. Why fast? Well, if you study just three texts I give you. 2 Samuel 12, 16, where David fasts.

He's penitent before God and he's pleading for his son. His son of adultery through Bathsheba. And he's coming to God and he's fasting and praying and pleading, pleading for the life of this child who has been told will die.

He's trying to change God's mind. He's trying to change the circumstances. He wants things to be different.

And he's on his knees, he's fasting and he's praying. And you see Daniel in Daniel 9, chapter 3 and following. He's expressing penitence too.

And pleading for mercy and forgiveness for others. Not just for himself, though he identifies with those who have sinned with his fathers and his grandfathers. And he's pleading with God, Lord, forgive and be merciful.

And so here is Daniel trying to change God's mind, trying to intercede, trying to reach God in a special way. And then, of course, Ezra himself, the great preacher and teacher of the law, in Ezra, chapter 8, verse 21, as he sets out on his journey, he comes and fasts and expresses humility and prays for safe travel. Now, where is fasting in the church today? Not here.

Don't hear anything about it. And yet in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, when you give. And every Christian says, yes, of course we should give.

And then Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount says, when you pray. And we Christians say, yes, Lord, of course we should pray. But the Lord also says in verse 16 of Matthew 6, and when you fast.

Why don't we fast? If we give and pray, we should fast. And we need to seek the Lord and come to the Lord because we want to be holy, because we want to be right with Him, because we want to seek Him and plead with Him. And say, Lord, Lord, Lord, will you move among us? Will you move in power among us? We have the sick among us who need to be healed.

Will we seek the Lord for them? Don't be surprised if I call you to fast and pray. We have a convention that is going down and down and down and down and down. Don't be surprised if as president, I call you to fast and to pray.

We have a world unsaved, a city unwon. Don't be surprised if I call you to fast and to pray, to plead with God. Oh, Lord, send a revival.

Lord, revive us. They separated themselves. They separated themselves.

They broke all ties with foreigners because they had become compromised. They were harmed by other religions and by other practices of other religions. They were in the world too much, too often.

You shouldn't be in the world and of the world. You should be in the world in Christ. It's no surprise, therefore, to find the prophets calling Israel to be separate.

It's no surprise to find the apostles picking up the words of the prophets and calling the people of God to be separate. In 2 Corinthians 6, 17, the apostle Paul quotes Isaiah the prophet. Therefore, come out from them and be separate, says the Lord.

Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters. Here is the covenant promise.

I will be your God. You will be my people. I will be your father.

You can be my child. But if you are my child, act like my child. If you are my people, act like my people.

And Peter says, be holy, for God is holy. We must be holy, separate. Separate.

And so they confessed their sins and the sins of their fathers. They saw into God's word, and it was like a mirror. And there, this mirror touched them deeply.

One of the tragedies of our Western culture is we have lost the sight of God in God's word, and we never allow the word to be the mirror that our culture has to be examined in. And the politicians want family values based on what? Based on what? Pronouncements of politicians? You must be joking. Family values based on God's word.

And as they read, they saw. As they read, they confessed. And as they read, they separated.

Now, by the time of Jesus, this separation of the Jews had become what's called particularism. And the tragedy with that is that you think you are superior because you're separate. No, no, no, no, no.

You are never superior. It's always by grace that you have been saved. So we're not superior, but we must be separate.

We must be distinct as the people of God. It was Whitefield, wasn't it, who saw the man going to the scaffold and said, there but for the grace of God go I. And that's the truth of it. We are not superior, but we are separate, distinct.

We must be holy. Spurgeon was preaching on revival. And great preacher.

Preaching on the text, O Lord, revive thy work. This is a little of what he had to say. All true religion is the work of God.

God is indeed the author of salvation in the world, and religion is the work of grace. If there is anything good or excellent found in his church, it too is entirely God's work, from first to last. It is God who quickens a soul which was dead, and it is God who maintains the life of that soul.

God who nurtures and perfects that life in the church. We ascribe nothing to ourselves and everything to God. We do not dare for a single moment to think that our conversion or our sanctification is affected by our own efforts or by the efforts of another.

True, there are means by which we are converted and sanctified, but they are entirely God's work. Therefore, trusting that it is the spirit of God who helps me, I shall endeavor to apply this principle first to our own souls personally and second to the church at large. Speaking first, then, to ourselves.

We too often flog the church when the whip should be laid on our own shoulders, says Spurgeon. Are you unsatisfied with the church as it is? Who are you blaming? We should always remember that we are part of the church, and their own lack of revival is in some measure the cause of the lack of revival in the church at large. I will lay this charge before us, says Spurgeon.

We Christians need a revival of piety in our lives. I have abundant grounds to prove it. Then he goes on to prove it.

He just picks, I just pick on one thing, conversation. He says, I've concluded this. You will not know how to get to heaven simply by eavesdropping on the conversations of the members of the church.

We talk too little about our Lord. Is this not the truth? Many of us need to pray, oh Lord, revive your work in my soul, that my conversation may be more Christ-like, seasoned with salt, and kept by the Holy Spirit. Then he talks about groaning for revival.

And, brethren and sisters, I think that we should groan for revival, plead with God for revival, and that's where fasting comes in. And I would call you, and I call myself, to fast and to pray for a moving of God's Spirit among us. And then Spurgeon goes on to talk about revival in the church.

Tonight is from 1 Samuel.

---

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/16/SID16624.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/roy-pointer/the-fruit-of-obedience/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**