

Obedience Leads to Knowing God More

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Well, I don't know how you convince a bunch of white boys and a bunch of black boys and a bunch of Latino boys to all gather together in a tiny little room on a miserable night in November to hear Bible preaching. That must be Jesus. So let's open the Bible together. So, last night for those of you that weren't here, we began looking at the book of Philemon. And we were talking about the fact that men are called to lead and they're called to lead well; they're called to lead biblically. They're called to lead themselves. They're called to lead their wives, their children. They're called to encourage their friends. And we saw that Paul is really the example of skill in leadership. And he led with his compelling character. He says, "I, Paul, an old man and a prisoner for the sake of Christ..." He led out of who he was and the weight of what God had done in his life. And then he led really by a compelling change that had happened in Philemon. He's trying to get, if you'll remember, he's trying to get Philemon to forgive Onesimus.

Onesimus was a runaway slave who had done Philemon dirty and then stolen his money. And had really stolen himself away from Philemon. And now Paul was trying to get Philemon to forgive this runaway slave. And so he first of all starts by saying you should do it; you should listen to me because I'm Paul, a prisoner, an old man for Christ. And then he goes, and then you should do it because this guy's now your brother. He's now my spiritual child. He's changed. He used to be - just like everyone in this room who is a Christian - he used to be useless. Now, he's useful. What a great way to think of yourself as a Christian. I used to be useless. Now, I'm useful. And then he did it by giving Philemon some space - the freedom of choice. He gave Philemon the liberty, and he said I don't want to constrain you. I don't want to force you. I wanted to send Onesimus back so you could think about doing the right thing and come to it for yourself.

And this evening, I want to focus on one verse in the book of Philemon, and it's verse 6. And it might sound like it at first, but I'll explain in a second why this is not an evangelism verse. Although, it certainly has some implications for evangelism. But in Philemon 1:6, it says, "And I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ." "And I pray that the sharing of your faith may become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ." Can you imagine that? Having a fuller knowledge of everything that is in you? For the sake of Christ. Knowing more about all that's in you for the sake of Christ.

Above all, brothers, above all, all the earthly treasures, what the Christian wants is to know God. That's the main thing every Christian wants is to know God. If you're not in touch with that right now, you're not in touch with the main thing that God has made new about you. That's that you want to know God. That's why you're gathered in this little tiny room is because we want to know God. The cry of the Christian is the cry of the Apostle Paul in Philippians - "That I might know Him." The difference between being of the world and being of Christ is the world does not know Him and the Christian has tasted and seen that the Lord is good. The promise of the New Covenant is "they shall all know Me. No longer shall a brother say to his brother, 'know the Lord,' but they shall all know Me." We look at each other around the fire, we

begin to talk about the things of the Lord, if you're a Christian, and you're like, "Yes, brother, I know what you're talking about." Whatever background you come from racially, socioeconomically, all of a sudden, you find you have the most important things in common with the ones who know the Lord.

How does a Christian change? We're transformed from one degree of glory to another as we see Him. And we shall ultimately be like Him when we see Him as He is, because when we see Him as He is, we will be like Him. It's a transformative knowledge. The more you get to know Jesus, the more you become like Him. The main thing about being a Christian is knowing God. It's everything. It's everything to know God. If there's anything in your Christian life that isn't leading you to know God more, you are going down a rabbit trail at best, and you are going down a destructive path at worst. Because everything is meant to serve the Christian and to bring them to a knowledge of God. Have you ever thought about this? The reason we repent is because we want to know God.

What's the difference between worldly sorrow and godly sorrow? Worldly sorrow we're told leads to death. Worldly sorrow is the kind Judas had where it makes you depressed, it makes you suicidal, it makes you want to kill yourself, but there's nothing godly about it. Worldly sorrow is depressed because it lost the world. Do you know what Judas lost when he betrayed the Son of God? He was no longer going to be able to enjoy the rest of his life. He was going to have a defiled conscience as being the one who handed over the Son of God. But he had no remorse really about losing God. He had no love for God.

Why do preachers who get caught in sexual immorality shed a couple tears and then just try to get their way through it in the easiest way possible? Because they have worldly sorrow. They're sad that they can't be the preacher anymore. And they've lost the world. It's worldly sorrow.

Godly sorrow is sad that it's lost its grip on God. That's why the slightest sin can ultimately disturb a Christian, right? Just the smallest thing. Ugh! I can't enjoy my Lord! I'm not walking in fellowship with Him. It doesn't have to even be something heinous like pornography. It can be the slip of a tongue. It can be something that you knew the Lord didn't want you to do and you did it anyway, and then all of a sudden the day is ruined. It can be 75 degrees out. There can be no snow clouds in the sky. It can be all your friends around you, and it's all misery because you're not walking in fellowship with God. And so what do we do? We have godly sorrow and we repent. We've got to have God. We've got to have God. Christians can't keep going on with something on their conscience because they've got to have God. They've got to know God. The Christian life is all about knowing God, and it's about knowing Him better and better. It's not just about coming to know Him when we're converted. It's about getting to know Him better and better after we're converted.

And what I want to point out to you tonight is that Philemon - in the book of Philemon, we're watching Paul, but Paul is not just giving Philemon a rule to follow. Paul's not just trying to give us an example of what it looks like to be an amazing leader as important as that is. Paul's trying to lead Philemon to know God better. And what Paul is telling us is that the way you come to know God better is by obeying God. Obedience is God's means of further revelation to your soul. Obedience is not just something you do in response to God's revelation. It is that. Obedience is something we do in response to God's revelation. Therefore, in view of God's

mercies, offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. In view of what He's done; in view of what you've seen; in view of what you know, offer yourself as a living sacrifice to God. We obey because of what we know, but we also know more once we obey. And in that sense, obedience is God's means of further revelation of Himself to your soul.

Let me spell this out. Jesus said it clearer than I'm going to say it. So we'll just read Him. He said in John 14, "Whoever has My commandments and keeps them, he is it who loves Me. And he who loves Me, will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." Who hasn't prayed for that? If that's not a regular cry of your heart, I wonder if you even know the Lord. I want to see more of You, Lord. Sir, we would see Jesus. That's the cry of the Christian. That's the irony of the Christian. We know the Lord, and what do we want more than anything else? We want to know the Lord. That I might know Him. That's our desire. And here's Jesus telling you, "I will manifest Myself. I will display Myself. I will show Myself to your soul."

The Apostle Paul prayed for the Ephesian Christians, in Ephesians 1. And he prayed for them and he said, he prayed that they "might have a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him." He wasn't praying that they would increase their Bible knowledge. The Ephesians were notorious for their Bible knowledge. You read chapter 1:3-14 of Ephesians and it's pretty clear Paul knew they had lots of Bible knowledge because he's just going off - praising God for God's election and adoption, and redemption, and Spirit-filling and sealing. He's praising God for all of that, and then he comes to the end of it and he goes I just wish this was lit up in your souls. Isn't that the greatest frustration of those Christians who have learned good theology? Lord, why isn't it on fire? Why isn't it lit up? I know more glorious truths than almost every other Christian I meet and yet, why isn't it on fire? Why isn't it lit up? Why isn't the spotlight burning in my soul? You know the difference between standing out in the middle of that patio and standing by the fire, right? There's a big difference. I want to be by the fire. And you want God's Word not to leave you out in the cold, but to be lighting a fire. And in Ephesians 1, the Apostle Paul says, "I pray that you'd have a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him." And he prays that the Spirit would light up our hearts. Is your heart being lit up? What did the disciples say on the road back to Emmaus? Or the road from Emmaus? As Jesus opens up the Scriptures, they go, "did not our hearts burn within us?" Mormons aren't the only people who should be talking about the burning heart. Man oh man, we have the heart that should burn after God's truth.

You want that, beloved. You want more of that? I hate every day I go through life without the fullness of that. It's a sadness to the Christian not to see more of the Lord and to have - just listen to it - "I will manifest Myself to you." "I'm going to show you more of Me." "I'm going to make your soul quake with My holiness." "I'm going to make your heart melt with My love." "I'm going to make your heart thrill with My promises." "I'm going to show you more about Me." In Ephesians 1 it says, "That the eyes of your heart might be enlightened, that you might know the power that's at work in you." That you might know the inheritance that you have. That you might know the hope that you have. So that heaven is not something distant and abstract, but it's lit up in your heart. So that being God's people is not just like, yeah, I'm a Christian, but it's gripping your heart, so that resurrection power is not something distant and abstract, but it's something where you face a temptation and you're like, "I have resurrection power!" "I know it!" "I know it's

at work in me." And the pathway into more and more knowledge of the Lord like that is greater and greater obedience.

This generation is so confused about obedience. Every single time you mention the word obedience in this generation, someone is going to start talking about legalism. Beloved, obedience is not legalism. Legalism is one of two things. Legalism is when someone says, "you need to obey this and then you'll be accepted by God." That's legalism. Legalism is when someone adds to the Bible what's not in the Bible and says, "Thus saith the Lord," when the Lord didn't say anything. That's legalism.

But the Lord Jesus, when He told us to go and teach people to obey everything He commanded was not the world's greatest legalist, He was the world's greatest Savior. He was leading His people to follow the One who had set their souls free with truth. And He knew that as He led them in obedience, they weren't just going to be His rule keepers, they were going to be increasing in the knowledge of Christ. Knowing Him more. And you ought to meet every command in the Scripture as a wide open door of possibility to know your God better. Isn't that amazing? We get a command and we're like, "that's going to cost me." "That's going to pinch me." "That's going to limit me." "That's going to hinder me." Rather than thinking, that's going to open me wide open to knowing Him better.

So here in Philemon 1:6, the Apostle Paul puts a big umbrella over the whole book - a big prayer covering over the whole book - and the prayer is that Philemon, by the sharing of his faith, would become effective for the full knowledge of every good thing that's in us for the sake of Christ. Now, in our English versions, this term "pray for the sharing of our faith," we can't help but think of evangelism. We call evangelism "sharing your faith." And that's good. Evangelism is sharing your faith, but evangelism is really not the main focus of the book of Philemon. And the whole idea here of sharing your faith is really "koinonia" your faith. Participation in your faith. A sharing of your faith. So it's really this idea of: I want you to live out your faith, Philemon. I want you to put into practice: Christ is a forgiving God. I want you to put into practice that forgiveness towards Onesimus. Christ is a God who makes people from different backgrounds brothers. I want you to put that into practice, Philemon. And as you put that in practice; as you share your faith and participate in your faith and have this koinonia with the truth, what is going to happen to you, Philemon, is that you are going to find that this becomes effective - not possible brothers - effective for the full knowledge of what we have in us through the Lord Jesus Christ. For the full knowledge of every good thing that is in us for the sake of Christ.

This principle that obedience leads to greater understanding of the truth, it's all over the Bible. It's an evangelistic principle. John 7:17, "If anyone's will is to do God's will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or whether I am speaking on My own authority." If there's anyone here who doesn't know that God's teaching comes through Christ, I'll tell you why you don't know. Because you're not willing to do it. You're not willing to do it. There is some magazine under your bed; there's something under your Internet; there's something in your family; there's some obedience you know you'd be called to and you don't want to do it. And there's some piece of pride in your heart that you don't want to let go of, and you do not want to let go of it because the minute that you do, I'll tell you what, you'll know that it's really from God. You're in a moral coverup. You're holding on to your own sin until you can't even see the truth. But the minute you're willing to obey, He'll show you it's all true. Isn't that amazing?

It goes on not just in our evangelism, but this principle that obedience leads to greater revelation can be found in Colossians 1:10. And when I say greater revelation, I don't mean you obey and you get something better than the Bible. I mean you obey and you get deeper, sweeter insight into the Bible. Colossians 1:10, the Apostle Paul - we'll start in v. 9 - starts praying here again. "And so from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you asking that you may be filled with all the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding." So I want you to know God's will and I don't want you to be fools about it. I want you to know it in spiritual wisdom and understanding. I want you to have some savvy and some spiritual insight. And so I want you to know God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding so that you can walk in a manner worthy of the Lord. So, you're obedient; walking in a manner worthy of the Lord. "Fully pleasing to Him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God." I want you to have mature, balanced obedience so that you will increase in the knowledge of God.

The same principles in Ephesians 3:14-21. Ephesians 3 - maybe my favorite passage in the New Testament. Ephesians 3:14-21. The Apostle Paul says, "For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of His glory, He may grant you to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in your inner being." So, the first thing Paul prays: I want you to have power. I want you to have spiritual power. That's what you need to obey. That's what you need to do with the will of God. You need spiritual power. You don't just need it on the outside coercing you. You need it on the inside. And I want to ask that you get this power in your inner man, so that... Christ might dwell in your hearts through faith. Well, isn't Christ already dwelling in our hearts? Yes, He is. Yet the word here is *oikodomia*. It's this idea of settling down at home. Settling down at home.

One person has illustrated this that when you move into a house and decide you don't like the color of the living room, so you paint it the color you want. You don't really like that lima bean green in the bathroom, so you change that one up too. You wanted a patio in the back, so you build one of those. And after ten years, you're like, this place... this is home. Well, Christ moves in and He's like I'm not really sure I like what you're doing in the bedroom, so He rearranges things. I'm not sure I like what you're doing in the wallet. So He rearranges things. And then He settles down increasingly at home. And pretty soon, you open your wallet, and you know you've got His smile. You walk into the bedroom, you know you've got His smile. You turn on the TV or turn off the TV, whichever it is and you know you've got His smile. And you want that power in the inner man so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

And then he goes on, "...so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith that you being rooted and grounded in love." Your roots are just soaking up the love of Christ. "...May have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge."

Man, it's important to have knowledge in the Christian life. Careful, clear, doctrinal knowledge. And once you've got it all right, God will blow it up with His love and go beyond it. He does not bypass knowledge. But He does surpass knowledge, doesn't He. He goes beyond knowledge, doesn't He. You want to know God like that?

I love the story of the preacher. He prayed that God would show Him to himself in more intimacy and power. And the Lord just descended on him one day and eventually he had to ask Him to stop. He was receiving such manifestations of Christ. I find in this generation, most of us are just walking around going, "start!" I want to live in a "stop" generation. Lord, it's too much. It's too much for me. C.H. Spurgeon said, "There is as much difference between a mature Christian and immature Christian as there is between a believer and an unbeliever." There's no end to the heights, brothers. There's no end of the heights of the knowledge of God that we can be brought into, and yet some people are apathetic in the Christian walk and they scoot back from obedience as if they're keeping some freedom for themselves. We're only cheating ourselves when we don't walk in obedience to the Lord. Obedience is the pathway to further manifestation; to further illumination; to further revelation from the Scriptures of what God is like and who He is for you, and not only that, but who you have been made in Him.

I don't know about you, but I find the greatest moments of being a Christian are when I just realize I am a Christian. Man, I'm a Christian! Saved before the world's foundation. Before there was a creation, I was on His mind. He knew I would see the revelation, Him in all His adoration, knowing I was His creation, He walked up Calvary's hill to save me, before the world's foundation, I was on His mind. I was with Him all the time. It's incredible! And now I'm a new creation. Now the third Person of the Trinity has decided to dwell in me, so that He can cause me to call out to the first Person of the Trinity, "Abba, Father," through the second Person of the Trinity who loved me and gave Himself for me. What a thing it is to be just a Christian! I just want to walk through life knowing I'm a Christian. I need the full knowledge of all that God's done in me. That's what I need. And all of a sudden when you get intimidated, I don't know if you've ever experienced this, but there's some people I'm intimidated to witness to, and there's some people I'm not intimidated to witness to. It's just my shameful pride that makes it that way. There are some people I feel a little better than, so I just head right in there and give the gospel to them. There's some people, I don't want them to think I'm a fool, so I'm a little bit more sophisticated I like to think. Cowardly is the real word. What would I need to overcome that? Just a full knowledge that I'm a child of the King! That all I would ever need to be bold is already in me, and He wants to help me. And that, brothers, comes through a life of obedience. It comes through a life of running from sin and running towards righteousness.

Now, I don't mean that now you can only trust God's going to help you when you've been perfect that day. That's not what I'm talking about at all. That's legalism. God's not helping you unless you're perfect. That's not what I'm talking about. We all stumble in many ways. But I am talking about a bent; I'm talking about an orientation; I'm talking about direction that says I'm going towards Christ all the time. And whenever I see myself fall from that, I'm asking Him to forgive me and I keep walking towards the light. Men like that keep getting more light. They keep getting more manifestation of Christ to their souls.

So Paul is saying here to Philemon, listen, there's a guy who's a slave. You're a slave owner. Slave owners and slaves - you're not really notorious for having warm, intimate fellowship, right? Not only that - that he is a slave, and that you are a slave holder, he's done you wrong and you've been wronged. And not only that, but he's ashamed and you know why he's ashamed. And I want you to extend forgiveness to him, and I want you to know what it's like to have him as a brother. I want you to know what it's like to see God be the glory and the lifter

of his head and take his shame away. I want you to see that God forgave you and now you get to forgive him. And I want you to feel the pulsing love of Christ in your heart forgiving him. We've been called to walk as Christ walked, to fellowship in His sufferings, to fellowship in His forgiveness, to fellowship in His mercy. And that's what Paul is inviting Philemon into.

So let me just leave you with this, brothers. Speak this truth. We're called to lead. You speak this truth. Speak it everywhere you have even a grain of influence, and you speak it to each other over the course of the rest of this retreat. Speak this truth: "Oh brother, I hope that God will help you to walk in the faith so you'll know more about the faith. I hope that God will help you to walk in obedience so that you'll know more of Him." Don't just speak this truth. Pray this truth. Did you notice that I've read four texts that prove that obedience leads to greater manifestations of Christ, and three of them were prayers? Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon - those were all, "And I pray..." Brothers, leadership doesn't start with you talking to people. It doesn't start with you at the front of people. It starts where no one sees us except our Father. It starts with us talking about people to God. Lord, would You let them see? Lord, would You let them obey? Lord, would You let them grow in obedience so they can know more of You? You know what that does? That helps you trust the promises of God for other believers.

One of the biggest problems that happens when we try to lead people, is they get the impression that we don't think they're actually going to grow. "You really need to do this... Really need to." Listen to what Paul says in Philemon. He says that he's confident that Philemon will obey. Do people get that from you? "Man, I just know that God's at work in your life. I'm sure you're going to come around to the truth. I'm just confident that you're going to obey." Now, I'll admit to you, there are some Christians - their lives are dicey. There are harder moments to believe that isn't there? You know what Paul said to the Galatians? I'm confident you'll take no other view than mine. Even in this urgent moment, he's like: these are believers. They're going to turn around. And in Philemon, he does the exact same thing. In chapter 1:21, when he says, "I'm confident of your obedience. I write to you knowing that you will do even more than I say."

Well, that's even more isn't it? I'm laying out to you what I hope Christ will do in your heart. I just know you're going to do more than that. Brothers, there's a power that comes when someone godly expresses the truth about God towards you. It's not the power of legalism. It's the power that John Paton spoke about when his father raised him and poured into him all those years, and then he left his father in the hills of Scotland, and he said, "I just never wanted to displease that man." When someone older and wiser looks at you and says, "Jesus is working in you, I just know you're going to go above and beyond and really walk with Him," you really walk away like, "Oh Lord, I hope that's true! I want to see that be real in my life. I want to see that. I don't want to make that hero of mine ashamed." Those are wonderful, wonderful motivations. Fear is not the only motivation. You need to speak this truth. You need to pray this truth. I don't know what you all do for these kinds of things. I keep a picture book of our church with me and pray for our people. This would be one of the things I'd want to pray. Lord, would You just help them to obey You so they'd know You.

The last thing I want to leave you with is would you trust this truth tonight? Would you take - or, I'm confident you will take a practical next step. What is it? What is it for you? I've been a Christian long enough to know there's almost always something gnawing at the conscience of a Christian. Right? I know I need to grow. Well, let the Holy Spirit fill in the blank. It's not the

same for everyone. Some people - they can barely pull themselves away from pornography. Some people - they aren't even tempted to look. We face different struggles, don't we, brothers? Some people are just naturally frugal. Some people just naturally aren't. But we each stumble in many ways, and we each have areas the Holy Spirit puts His finger on and says, "That one's next." And when He says, "That one's next," our flesh screams. "Don't touch that one!" "I'll give You one of those things I'm good at obeying." I had a guy ask me one time, how does God help you to be bold? He was kind of a timid guy. How does God help you to be bold? I said I'm going to be honest with you. That's not really my problem. I don't have problems being bold in preaching. I've got problems in being compassionate in preaching. I've got problems being sweet. That's where the Holy Spirit might put His finger on me. Where does He put His finger on you? That very place is a precious invitation from the Lord to know Him more. He wants to reveal Himself increasingly to you.

And this isn't tit-for-tat. Hey, I had a good day. Where was my revelation? That isn't how this works, okay. God is not your genie - if you do 24/7 of obedience, He'll give you a nice hour of inundation with His presence. That's not how this works. This is all of grace. It's all of His sovereign good hand. But I'll tell you one place He won't meet you: disobedience. He only has one thing He'll do if He meets you in disobedience and that is He'll reprove you, discipline you, bring you back even through showers of mercy. But He wants to reveal Himself to you. So you take that place, you hold it in your heart. Maybe you express it to a brother. And you recognize that place as holy ground where God wants to begin to keep walking you in obedience because He's going to reveal more of Himself to you. He'll give you more illumination. And when you speak to people about the problems in their life, you realize you're not just there applying leadership principles. That's not it. You're not just trying to get them to be more biblical or more conservative or more whatever. You're inviting them into the knowledge of God. You're eager to see them grow in the knowledge of God. And when that's there, brothers, when that's there, you get churches that can be insanely obedient, and they just get more gracious, not more legalistic. Because they're just all digging for treasure. Lord, give me more.

Let's pray. Father, we thank You - we thank You that You would choose us and make us Christian, but we pray that if there are any here who don't know You, that they would be willing to obey You and You would show them that Your teaching is from God. Lord God, we come before You and we ask You for those of us who are Christians that we would see those areas You're pinpointing - maybe an area of self-control, maybe an area with our finances, or an action towards our children, or our wives - maybe it's a lot of things. Maybe it's just one thing for now, but Lord, whatever You open up, we pray that we would just see it as the pathway to knowing You better. And we would just acknowledge that You have made us know You, and You've made us want nothing more than to know You more. So we would just follow that. Lord, we plead with You for this, in Christ's name, Amen.