

**Southport Presbyterian Church**  
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**Experiencing God through Obedience**  
**John 2:3-6**

To obey or not obey, now that is the question. Consider the school crossing guard who was concerned about drivers who would speed through his school zone when children were trying to cross the street. All of the signs were in place, yet they blatantly disregarded the law.

Finally, the concerned guard came up with a very creative plan. His wife had an old hair dryer that no longer worked and which she hadn't yet thrown away. He carefully covered it with electrical tape.

Now when thoughtless drivers come speeding toward his crossing, he simply pulls out the hair dryer and points in at the unsuspecting drivers with a sense of authority. It works every time as the drivers slam on their brakes and meekly drive through. To obey or not obey, now, that is the question.

Laura Bush tells the story about the time when she and the president recently spent the night at George's parents' home. As he usually does, the president was up at 6:00, got a cup of coffee and went into the room where his parents were sitting. As he sat down, the president casually put his feet on the coffee table as he kind of stretched out.

Barbara immediately said, "George, please don't put your feet on the table."

The president's father quickly interceded, "Barbara, he's the President of the United States."

Quickly she replied, "I don't care who he is. He's not going to put his feet on the table in my house."

Instantly, the president's feet were on the floor. Even the president has to obey his mother. To obey or not obey, now, that is the question.

Today, we are thinking together about Unit 8 in Henry Blackaby's *Experiencing God* - "Experiencing God through Obedience." When it is all said and done, it finally comes down to obedience. It is the last of Blackaby's "7 Realities of Experiencing God." If I am going to know and do the will of God and truly experience the reality of God in my life, it all comes down to obedience. It's obedience not to just a list of "dos" and "don'ts" which we must religiously follow. No, it's obedience to a life style which incorporates all of who we are and everything we do.

While there are several passages in the Bible which tell of this, I really like I John 2:3-6. John has just shared how we can know forgiveness from our sins by confessing them to God. This forgiveness comes to us because of the "atoning sacrifice" of our Lord Jesus Christ when He died as the Lamb of God on the altar of a cruel cross. This forgiveness offers us the opportunity of knowing and doing the will of God in our everyday lives. Without forgiveness all of us would be discarded to the moral junk yard of life.

While we cannot earn God's forgiveness, once we have experienced it, we have an obligation to be obedient. Let's look together at what John says about obedience.

Read I John 2:3-6

### **In verses 3-4, John says that obedience is the key to knowing God.**

Before and at the time of John, there was a question about how one could “Know God” In this letter, John uses the two Greek verbs for “know” 42 times. The heresy “Gnosticism” which was rampant in the first two centuries derives its name from one of those verbs meaning “to know.” The Gnostics believed that somehow a person received salvation, not by faith in Christ, but instead by a special knowledge.

In the Greek world, there were a couple of opinions about how a person came to know God. The first goes back to the classical age of Greek literature and thought. They felt that it was through intellectual prowess where reasoning and argument were elevated that a person could know God. Knowing God in this sense did not make a man good in any way. Knowing God was an intellectual exercise that did not impact the way in which you lived your life.

Much closer to the time of the New Testament, there was also the Greek idea that you could know God through emotional experience. Everything was done to heighten the emotional atmosphere. Such things as cunning lighting, sensuous music, perfumed incense and marvelous liturgy were used to set up the desired atmosphere. It was a kind of religious drug which provided an escape and not a stimulus for ethical, moral living.

It’s with this as a backdrop, that John passionately proclaims the truth that really knowing God means that we are obedient to the commands of God. There is no mistake about it when in verse 4, John says, “The man who says, ‘I know Him,’ but does not do what he commands is a liar and the truth is not in him.” If we really know God, obedience to His moral way of living is a must.

The more things change, the more they stay the same. You don’t have to go far in any church or denomination to find people for whom knowing God is purely an intellectual pursuit. It means storing away as much knowledge about God and the Bible as possible. Sad to say, there are times when this pursuit of God has very little bearing on how life is lived. Knowing about God and living ethical, moral lives out of obedience somehow are not connected.

Likewise, in many of our forms of worship, whether traditional or contemporary, we become wrapped up in the feeling or emotion of trying to know God. We may live from one emotional experience to the next, but it really doesn’t impact how we live our lives in between time. Obedience to God is not part of the equation.

Does this sound familiar to you? Maybe your approach to knowing God is a mind trip with all of the intellectual gymnastics that go with it. Yet, it doesn’t affect the way you live day by day. Or, maybe you live from one mountaintop to another always seeking that emotional high. Those emotions in no way have a bearing on how you conduct your life.

### **In verse 5, John says that obedience makes God’s love complete in us.**

Notice again what verse 5 says, “But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him.” Love is a relational term. Here the idea is that when we are obedient to God, we in turn experience the love of God in its fullness. In contrast, when we are disobedient, we only experience less than all God desires for us.

Maybe the best illustration comes from one of our most basic relationships in life, our relationship with our families. When my thoughts, words, or actions cause me to feel estranged from or separated from those I love the most, the relationship suffers in two ways. First, when I

have wronged them in some way, I am not loving them as I should. Secondly, I am not open to receive their love, because of my guilt. Our love is incomplete because of my disobedience.

I believe that John is saying the same thing about our relationship with God. If I think I can do what ever I want, disregarding God's expressed intentions for us, I am not loving Him with my whole heart, mind and soul. If I really love Him, I do not want to hurt or disappoint the one who first loved me.

Likewise, when I am not obedient to the God who created and loves me, I am cutting myself off from all that He wants to give to me. I do not experience the sense of peace that He wants me to feel; the joy that He wants to give me in all circumstances; the guidance and direction that I desperately need in the journey of life. In His love God has so much that He wants to give us that we forfeit when we have separated ourselves from Him in disobedience.

As I try to think of a picture to help us see what this means, let me take one from my family's history. When I was 4, my father, who was an alcoholic, left us for another woman with whom he had been having an affair. Because of his disobedience, the love that he had for us and that we had for him was far from being complete. Within that broken relationship, I was neither able to receive the love of a father nor give the love to a father that both he and I needed.

So it is with our Heavenly Father, when we don't love Him within a relationship of obedience.

### **Verse 6, John says that obedience means that we must walk as Jesus did.**

When Jesus came to our world, forever breaking through human history, He died for our sins so that we might be forgiven. John makes that very clear in verse 2. Jesus, by the very way He lived His life also gave us an example to follow. Thomas A. Kempis wrote the classic, *The Imitation of Christ* to vividly make this point. Brother Lawrence several hundred years ago talked about "Practicing the Presence of Christ" in the very fabric of our whole lives.

What John is saying here is that obedience to God means walking like Jesus did. Jesus personified in His life the commandments He gave. Remember His answer when He was asked what is the greatest commandment. He said that we are to love God with all of our hearts, souls, and minds and love our neighbors as ourselves.

Jesus showed us how those two commands were to be lived out in practice. While He knew the Law of Moses well, He hadn't made an idol out of the Law. He showed us how we are to love God by being obedient in every way, even to death on a cross. He showed us how to love one another, meeting people where they were, tenderly caring for them, and showing them how they could know God.

Dear friends, God has not merely given us a check list of rules to follow. He has not given us a map to a destination and the instructions to follow. He has not given us a recipe in a cookbook.

Have you heard of the high-rise hotel built in Galveston on the Gulf of Mexico? Part of it was actually built on pilings right over the water. Just before the grand opening someone was afraid that people might try to fish out of their windows. Therefore each room on the water had a little sign which simply said, "Do not fish out of the window."

It wasn't long and they found they had a horrible problem with people fishing out of the windows. Lines were getting tangled and fish were flopping up against the picture windows in the restaurant. The problem was solved by taking the signs from the rooms. People who come to

a nice hotel never think of fishing out their window unless that is there is a sign there prohibiting fishing.

So it is with God. Instead of merely giving us a list of “dos and don’ts,” God has given us an example to follow; a life to emulate; a relationship from which we can know God more and more as we grow within it. Obedience then takes on a different meaning as we walk as Jesus did. Obedience means living like Jesus lived, doing what Jesus did. Obedience means loving God with all of my heart, soul and mind and loving my neighbor as myself. Obedience means being willing to empty myself of all the “vain things that charm me most” here in this life and becoming a servant to others.

For us as a community of faith, obedience means being a church for others in every way possible. Emptying ourselves of status and prestige, and being willing to give of ourselves to others is what obedience is all about for us.

## **Application**

There is no question about it - all of us in one way or another desire an experience with God. Some would think of that quest as a desire for more meaning in life. Certainly some of us look for that meaning in intellectual pursuits. Others might search for more meaning in all kinds of experiences. Still others might seek more from life in some kind of religious system that gives them a list of “dos and don’ts.”

If we are to find ultimate meaning and joy in life, I believe that it comes through knowing and doing the will of the God who created us. It comes through experiencing God in a relationship of love. Obedience is a key ingredient to that quest of knowing God. We cannot get around it or rationalize away obedience.

I recently read about a herd of sheep in Yorkshire, England who were restrained in their pasture by a metal grid over which they could not walk without getting their hooves caught. That restriction worked well until one day in 2006, one of the sheep lay down and rolled over the grid. The other sheep saw what the wayward one had done and followed suit. It wasn’t long before the sheep had grazed themselves into the gardens of the townspeople, who were of course very angry with them. They had also endangered themselves as they crossed busy roads. The shepherd had to bring them back to their rightful place.

While we chuckle at their actions, aren’t we a lot like them. We look for ways to get around obeying what we know to be God’s will for us. We have creative ways of rationalizing away sin. Then we find ourselves out of “sync” with others, the creation around us and the God who created us. It sort of sounds like Isaiah 53:6 - “We all, like sheep have gone astray; each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.”

Dear friends, it’s the Good Shepherd who was willing to die for us to bring us forgiveness, who calls us back to the green pastures of meaning and contentment. That meaning and contentment come as we know Him and live a life of loving obedience to Him. It’s really not too much to ask for us to surrender our will to the One who gave His life for us.

Are you experiencing God through obedience? If not, the Good Shepherd calls you home today.