

JOY – Gospel Maturity, part 1a: Obedience to Jesus

Philippians 2:12

MPS Christians mature in Jesus' likeness as they work out by faith in obedience what God has worked in them by the gospel.

OBJ Every person can understand Christian maturity that produces abounding joy by three distinctives.

INTRO Have you ever heard yourself say something to this effect, "It's time for you to grow up." What "time" is this exactly? The "time" refers to actions aligning with age or stage of life. Immaturity is when actions of life, whether outwardly or inwardly in attitude, do not align with one's age or stage of life. Immaturity is never attractive, and always off-putting.

READ Philippians 2:12-13

*Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. **Philippians 2:12-13***

God looked on Jesus' sacrifice and was pleased, so He responded by exalting Him in a way that no new other had ever been. Here Paul turns our attention to the same, to look on Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, recognizing God's response in glorious exaltation, and exhorting us to respond in a manner worthy with our own lives. Paul is confident that the Philippians will adopt the mind of Christ as their own and follow his instructions. This is what they have done when he was present. But most important, he tells them to continue especially in his absence. He directs their focus to Jesus as he encourages the Philippians to operate from their unity in the Lord. **Paul exhorts the Philippians to gospel maturity for maximum glory and joy.** And this is our focus for today.

Christians mature in Jesus' likeness as they work out by faith in obedience what God has worked in them by the gospel.

TRANS Paul builds to focus his exhortation on Christian maturity by the gospel because this is how one pursues true joy. **SERIES Point** **Christian maturity is the Joy-factory of the faith.** Every mention of joy in Philippians is connected to the Christian's maturity.¹ The more we work out our faith to grow in obedience, the greater the gospel pervades more deeply and permeates more completely our whole being to fill and consume to overflowing with joy from Jesus. **The Christian who is not maturing always experiences joy-deficiency, while the one maturing always knows joy-abundance.** The process of Christian maturity reminds us of true joy as the aim of our walk with Jesus, that joy is neither the frills nor the feels that we often reduce it to. **Joy is God's staying power in the Christian's life because it is the reality of His staid presence in our life.**

TRANS My aim today is to help you understand Christian maturity, to motivate you to a zealous pursuit with your whole life.

OBJ **Christian maturity that produces abounding joy should be understood by three distinctives.**

1. Christian maturity is determined by obedience to Jesus.

Paul draws from their past obedience, "*as you have always obeyed, so now*"¹², to exhort them to continued obedience. Obedience to Jesus is the definition of Christian maturity because it was Jesus' obedience that distinguished him in His sacrifice.^{Rom5:19} God saved us for obedience to Jesus Christ.^{1Peter1:2} **The work of God for us by the gospel compels us to continue in His work by obedience.**

Paul makes Christian maturity clear in Ephesians 4:13, "*to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ*". An instant of meditating on this is enough to convince us that we cannot accomplish this on our own. We do not even know the way of this on our own. But Christ is the King come down to die for us and walk with us. There is NO Christian maturity without obedience to Jesus. There is no Christianity that is absent of obedience to Jesus. **This doesn't mean that maturity determines salvation, but it shows our salvation by our sanctification.**

¹Philippians uses the Greek word in 16 references: joy – 1:4,25; 2:2,29; 4:1; rejoice – 1:18(2); 2:17,18,28; 3:1; 4:4(2),10; glad – 2:17,18.



APPL The true measure of maturity is determined by two “gaps”. First, the “Obedience Gap” is the difference between one’s knowledge and obedience; “what have done with what you know?” To know and not obey is an act of sinful rebellion. Second, the “Response gap” is the time between when we learn and when we obey; “how quickly do you trust to obey once you learn?” Delayed obedience is the same as disobedience. The greater the “gap” between one’s knowledge and obedience, or from the moment of learning to the moment of obedience, the smaller the maturity. The smaller the gap, the greater the maturity. The ultimate definition of immaturity is to know and not obey, or to procrastinate in obedience. Maturity is cultivated when what we know of God’s Word determines how we live by faith in God. Maturity is about closing these two gaps, obeying by faith AS and WHEN Holy Spirit convicts and leads, without any gap in understanding or response time. **A mature Christian constantly lives to “close the gaps” and live fully aligned with God’s Word by obedience.**

*The Christian who wants to experience abounding joy from maturity must be careful to obey Jesus.

TRANS While Christian maturity is obedience, we must remember that it is not about perfected performance. The most mature Christian knows that maturity is never a point of arrival, but a process. Once Paul sets obedience as the aim for our maturity, he exhorts how we pursue this obedience; “*work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*” **Phil 2:12b**

2. Christian maturity is a learned process of trusting Jesus.

Work out [*katērgazesthe*] means to labor in to produce. This is not something we do for God outside of Christ’s atoning work for us, or absent of Holy Spirit in us. One commentator explains, “Acknowledging Jesus Christ as Lord obligates the believer to obey him. Hence, working out salvation does not mean “working for” salvation, but making salvation operational.”² We work out because of what we know is true of how God raised Jesus up. We work out because we know what He was worked for us. *Work out means we learn God’s Truth to discern His will, and trust to walk by faith in daily obedience.*

Work out your own salvation is a continual process, not a single action, of becoming more like Jesus (sanctification) by engaging His work for us and is doing in us. Maturity is a process because obedience must be learned. Jesus Himself learned obedience.^{Heb5:8} This process ¹involves the whole church, where it takes place³, ²is one in which we learn, and is itself ³one we must learn. As the church worships, fellowships, and serves together, we are encouraged because all are in this process. Initially, we learn IN the process, lessons, truths and principles to apply to life. But the more we grow and mature, we begin to learn the process, which enables us to glean more. It’s one thing (important), to learn a lesson God teaches you. But of far greater value is to learn to identify the process through which God matures. We often learn to identify the process from the church, by counsel, discipleship, or testimony. When you learn to identify the process, you look not only to learn the lesson, but to the Lord as He leads because you know the purpose of the process. *The lessons learned IN the process spur our growth, but the Lord becomes our focus to catalyze our transformation.*

APPL Two disciplines in my life have been formative in learning this process, regular Bible reading and journaling. Bible reading reveals the fullness of God’s work. Journaling has provided a record I can review to see God’s work in my life.

The learned process is most distinguished by one characteristic, a heart of worship. “*With fear and trembling*” informs how we approach the whole process, in complete humility and reliance upon God. We approach God with this reverent awe not to perform for Him, but to have His will produced in us; not for our accomplishment, but for His transformation; not for self-glory, but His glory. When you approach the learned process from a heart of worship, you humble yourself in fear and trembling before God for His glory. When you approach it absent of worship, it only becomes pride and hardening for self

² Homer A. Kent Jr., “[Philippians](#),” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelien, vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 128.

³ Ralph P. Martin, [Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary](#), vol. 11, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 120. Martin writes, “The reference here must look back to 1:28, where the salvation of the Christian community as a whole is in view.”



glory. True obedience is always an act of worship. When your obedience to Jesus fails to produce greater love for Him, His Word and His work in your life, you can know your obedience is not worship, but a “works” righteousness. And in this lesson you come to learn the process of maturity, to confess, repent, believe, and worship Him! **The learned process that matures in trusting Jesus always produces greater worship and glory for God in your life.**

*The Christian who wants to know Jesus' joy must follow the same path as His master, the learned process of obedience.

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