

Dear Philippians, VI

Working Out

March 9, 2003

ROAD-RUTS AND ROCKETS

Solid Rocket Boosters (SRBs) are manufactured for NASA in Utah and sent by train to Florida. Because of this, SRBs have to be designed to fit through the railroad tunnels along the way.

- Railroad tunnel width is influenced by railcar width.
- Railcar width is determined by the width of the axle.
- The Axels correspond to the width of the train track.
- Track width is 4'8.5" which was the British standard.
- This British standard came from horse drawn tramways.
- Tramway builders used the jigs and tools from wagons.
- Wagon wheels had to align to ancient Roman road ruts.
- The ruts were caused by centuries of war chariot use.
- Imperial Roman war chariots were given 4' 8.5" axels.
- This accommodated the width of two horse's hind ends.

The chariot ruts in the Via Egnatia (the Roman highway) at Philippi had a tangible impact on NASA's space program!

And you thought that being a horse's behind had no merit!

We're going to concentrate on only two small verses today; Paul lays down some pretty thorough theology. In fact, this is the most concise Biblical clarification of the cooperation between God and man regarding spiritual growth:

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. – Philippians 2:12-13 NIV

God has a part and we have a part; Paul uses two terms to clarify this collaboration: work out and work in. Working out is our responsibility; working in is God's.

Whatever else Paul means, the first and most obvious is that salvation isn't a past event but an ongoing experience.

And this is a process Paul cautions us not to treat flippantly but to take very seriously; "fear" and "trembling" seriously. But believers aren't supposed to fear God's condemnation; 1 John 4:8 tells us that "Love casts out fear." So what does Paul mean?

TWO HEALTHY FEARS

There're Two Healthy Fears every believer should possess.

Law abiding citizens shouldn't fear the police, but they should have a "healthy fear" about defying their authority.

1. [Likewise] we should fear Defying the authority of our creator

When I was little my folks wanted me to stop using the backyard as a bathroom. I was terrified when they asked me to explain some evidence I had left behind. I told 'em a dog did it. They pointed out that the yard was completely fenced in. I said: "... it was a circus dog!" (It could've jumped the fence!)

It is my love for the Lord and my reverence and respect for His authority, power, and holiness that help me remain faithful.

Electricians need to have a "healthy fear" of the consequences of mishandling the forces that are entrusted to them.

2. [Likewise] we should fear the Consequences of sin and rebellion

That's what brings so much destruction, tragedy, suffering, guilt, shame, remorse, and regret into our lives ... I got a good spanking for that circus dog remark!

Paul is saying that the creator of the universe wants to work in and through you! To treat this casually, nonchalantly, glibly, or dismissively, is the height of arrogance and offensiveness.

TO WILL AND TO ACT

Q: The question is: what exactly is it we continue to "work out"?

1. Paul doesn't say we have to "work for" our salvation.

He's writing to believers who've received salvation; he's simply reminding them to develop what they already have.

- When you *work out* to get a "new body" it's not really to get a "new" body, but to develop the body you already have.
- When you *work out* a puzzle you already have the pieces, you simply arrange them in their proper order.

The key to understanding what Paul is getting at is to examine what it is that he says the Lord "works in" us:

... for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. -
Philippians 2:12-13 NIV

- He gives us the will, the desire for what is good and right
- He empowers us to act, to accomplish what is good and right

The part He leaves up to us is free-will the choice to develop and grow; the choice to arrange our lives in a proper order.

There are four ways He “works in” us that require us to “work out”:

1. The Lord works in us through His Word ...

He uses the Bible to speak to our hearts, to give us examples to follow, to sharpen us, develop us, and build up our faith.

- We work out how often we meditate on it

Q: Do you have as much faith as you would like?

... faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. – Romans 10:17 NKJ

The Word of God influences our thoughts; our thoughts influence the way we feel; the way we feel influences the way we act.

2. The Lord works in us through people ...

He uses people to walk beside us, help us discern truth, and to support and encourage us in our faith.

- We work out who we’ll surround ourselves with

He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm. – Proverbs 13:20 NIV

3. The Lord works in us through His Spirit ...

When God formed the world He said, “Let Us make man in Our image.” (Gen 1:26) This is His ongoing and ultimate goal for us.

And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him ... – 2 Corinthians 3:18 NLT

God’s ideal is to instruct us how to change through His Word, encourage us through people, and empower us through His Spirit.

- We work out when to draw on His power

Q: How do we know if we’re drawing on God’s Spirit?

A: Check your prayer life; whatever you pray about you're drawing on His Spirit for; whatever you don't, you're not.

Q: Do you know what it means to be empowered by His Spirit?

A: It means to be convicted, directed, and inspired so that we can choose (or continue to choose) to do what's right and best.

It's not very practical to pray: Make me a better husband. It's much more productive to talk to God about the details, and ask:

- *Convict* me of all my wrongs and offenses.
- *Direct* my steps to reconcile and restore.
- *Inspire* a desire not to repeat my errors.

4. The Lord works in us through circumstances ...

... even though Jesus was God's Son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered. - Hebrews 5:8 NLT

Q: If *Jesus* learned obedience through suffering, how do you think we'll learn it?

- We work out how we're going to respond

Q: How does God produce the fruit of His Spirit in our lives?

A: By putting us in the exact opposite situations.

True love is learned around the unlovely; true joy is strengthened when happiness is absent; true peace is fortified in chaos.

- God is more concerned with our character than our comfort.

God lights fires under us to get us out of our ruts; we may not budge if we see the light, but we move when we feel the heat! That's when I must choose: depend on God and act accordingly, or depend on myself and let my emotions and passions direct my steps.

The ongoing process of Salvation is a collaboration that we're called to take very seriously:

- God works in us to know and desire what's best and then He convicts us, directs us, and inspires us to accomplish it.
- We must work out the details: What to meditate, contemplate, and reflect on; who to hang around; what to pray about; and how we'll respond when things get rough.