

Notes for the Ekklēsia Meeting

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Working Out Corporate Salvation

by Dan Trygg

“So then, my beloved-ones, just as y’all have always obeyed, ...not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence..., with fear and trembling y’all-(for-yourselves)-work-out the salvation of yourselves; ¹³ for God is the One in-working in y’all, both the-to-desire and the-to-energize (or, ‘the-to-inwork’) on behalf of that which is well-pleasing.” Philippians 2:12-13

“And He gave on the one hand the apostles, also the prophets, also the evangelists, also the pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints unto a work of service, unto building up of the body of Christ; ¹³ until we all might attain to the unity of the faith, and of the true-knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature person, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. ...speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up all-things into Him, who is the head, Christ, ¹⁶ out from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.” Ephesians 4:11-13,15-16

Philippians 2:12,13 is one of my favorite passages, because it describes both the human and Divine side of walking out our faith in practical ways. **We are to “work out” what God “works in” us.** He will put within us a new desire for change or obedience, and even go so far as to “energize us” with new strength and ability to carry out what He is prompting us to do. *This*, however, is not sufficient to actually bring about change. *We* have a part to play. **We must choose to respond to that new desire and walk out that new leading and ability.** We must put shoe leather to the inner prompting and empowering, or nothing will actually happen. **There is an active partnership between God and me. He designed it that way. We are to be co-laborers with God** (I Cor. 3:9). The word “co-laborer” refers to people who work together at the same time to get a job done. We can’t do it without *God’s* empowering, and He can’t/won’t do it without *our* input or cooperation.

Notice the *priority* in this passage. **We are to respond to the inworking of God.** We are to work out, or work according to, the inner leading and energizing power of God. **We are not to go ahead, and expect God to catch up.** It is ok to take initiative in prayer, asking for God to work a new desire, or cause a new empowerment, but *we cannot “work out” something that is not already activated inside of us.* Paul wrote, “we by the Spirit, out from faith, are *waiting for the hope of righteousness*” (Gal. 5:5). We are even to *wait on God* for His energizing, His inworking. This is in contrast to people who live by the law, trying to live the Christian life by their own strength. No one can be justified by works of the law, nor can anyone be perfected or matured by works of the law (Gal. 2:16; 3:1-3). **Law-based people try to do the “work” of living righteously without God’s help.** It is like they are *working alone.* Left to themselves, by their own ability and resources, the power of sin will deceive them and cause them to fail (Rom. 7:8-11). **Human effort without God’s empowerment is unfruitful.**

On the other hand, *if God is prompting and stirring us, and we choose to ignore Him, we will quench the Spirit and continue to live defeated, self-centered lives.* If we stubbornly resist God, or choose to continue in old patterns of living *in spite of His prompting* us to make changes, then we will not *benefit* from His inworking. **All of the commands and exhortations contained in the NT demonstrate that God requires our response in order for growth, change and maturity to develop and become established.** If we do not understand that *we need to take risks and try new things* in order to grow, then God’s stirrings will go nowhere. Paul put it this way, “Working-together with Him, we urge you not to receive the grace of God *in vain*” (II Cor. 6:1). This verse says that there are times when God’s grace is poured out, ...and we can even “accept it”, or, “feel” and “welcome” it..., yet choose to *do nothing* with it. Faith is *the assurance* of the things we hope for from God. Faith means *we act*, because we trust that God is with us, acting on our behalf. When you read Hebrews 11, the “hall of faith”, one thing becomes clear: Those who had faith *acted*, they *did* things, because they trusted God. Faith is *not* passive. **God’s inworking, without human cooperation, is also unfruitful.** There needs to be a *joint working*, a *partnership*, a *co-operation*.

That is a good lesson in itself, but there is much more to these verses in Philippians than this. A brother was asking about this passage the other day, and pointed out something that I had never seen. **These verses were not written simply to us as individuals. They were written to a group, an interactive church, and they are descriptive of the interactive Body life God intends for his gathered people to exercise.** Realizing this opens up another whole dimension to this passage. All that I wrote above is true, and good, but it is only a *secondary lesson* from this passage. The *main thrust* of the passage, the *primary teaching* of Philippians 2:12,13, is that **we are to be helping one another to work out the salvation-work of God’s Spirit in each other’s lives!**

That goes so against the grain of our Western individualistic paradigm of self-growth! **We have been steeped in a philosophy or “mythology” of spiritual growth being an enterprise for the lone pilgrim.** Each individual is

responsible to develop his or her own spiritual life. We think of our spirituality as the endeavor of a determined hero setting out on a quest, or an adventurer scaling a mountain. In our minds, we think of it as a long, lonely journey fraught with dangers, pitfalls and enemies to overcome. John Bunyan's classic, *Pilgrim's Progress* has promoted and supported such thinking. **Without a doubt, there is a dimension of individual responsibility, self-discipline, private investment and personal sacrifice to becoming mature in Christ, BUT there is also another dimension of team accountability, corporate values and example, positive input from others, and selfless group service that is part and parcel of what the Bible describes as God's plan for spiritual growth.** The Bible says we are not alone, ...at least, we *shouldn't* be. **Jesus did not come to just build us up as individuals; He came to build His church, His called-out army of followers.** You or I may have a lot to offer, but neither of us make up an *army*! Not even with God, can I be an *army*, or a *congregation*, or a *body*! I am just one limb, member, appendage or organ in a much larger organism. Or, I am just one building block in a much larger building.

Even as I write that, I still think of myself as part of this larger whole, but I do not immediately grasp the implications of the interdependent nature of being part of this team called the Church of Jesus Christ. In my mind, ...again, because of my Western, individualistic mindset..., I still think of myself as an individual who hangs out with others, or chooses to participate in a common goal or activity. **In my mind, it is like joining a fitness center, or a club of some kind. I choose when to come, when to participate, and how much I want to exert myself. I am a consumer, and it is all about me.** There are many Christians in our country who think that way, and many churches are set up to accommodate that mindset. **The Bible, however, teaches something different. We are not the center of the universe, God is.** We are here for *Him*, to serve *Him*. **Furthermore, we are part of a great host, one member of a much larger enterprise.** Instead of the lone mountain climber, we are part of the support system, the porters, bearers, cooks, and background workers that help make the ascent of the mountain a possibility. Instead of the individual explorer, we are more like members of an exploratory expedition. Instead of the lone hero, sent on a quest, we are part of a team of specialists that are to work together to accomplish the mission. In each of these scenarios, **the success of the team depends on the hard work and full commitment of the individuals involved. No one can be lazy or slough off. Everyone must be at their best.**

In the Philippians passage, what Paul is teaching is that **we all are to help one another work out salvation.** A paraphrase of the Greek might be: "You as a group be intensely involved in working out the salvation of the members of your group. Do this with great care and reverence, because God Himself is energizing new desires and inner-strength to bring about good things." In other words, **the focus is not just on yourself, ...it is on helping the others to recognize and follow up on the new desires and enablings that God is working in them.**

This fits with Hebrews 10:24, "...and we might notice/consider *one another* unto a provoking of love and good deeds." We are to watch and think about one another, with the intent of encouraging or stirring-up love and acts of service in the lives of our brothers and sisters. Or, again in 12:15, we are told to be "looking diligently lest anyone be lacking from the grace of God, and not any root of bitterness springing up might cause trouble, and by it many might be defiled." Both of these passages highlight how **we are to be monitoring each other in the Body of Christ, so we can humbly encourage growth or correct evil when it occurs in one another's lives.**

One of the clearest descriptions of the interactive nature of Church life is found in Ephesians 4:11-16. Our spiritual gifts are given to us to serve and build up the Body of Christ, ...until every one of us becomes mature in Christ. We do this by speaking or demonstrating the truth to one another in love, so that we might motivate and assist one another to become more Christ focused. As we develop relationships of trust and openness with each other, we can share with one another from the grace which God "inworks" or energizes in *us*. As we do this, we encourage and strengthen each other, and the Body gets built up in loving interaction.

Throughout the NT, the purpose for the gathering of believers is to build one another up, to help one another mature, to strengthen and encourage one another to press on after Christ. Philippians 2:12,13 is another passage within this line of thought. It is directed to the group, the "beloved ones". Paul commands them to "'work out' or 'work according to' the salvation of yourselves". He is *not* saying to each of them, "work out your own individual salvation". **Paul is saying to the group, "be intensely working out the salvation of everyone in the group".** This is not something to take lightly. **It is a serious and solemn responsibility. God is working in their midst.** He is operating in the lives of people right there in their group. **He is producing new desires to obey Him, and He is making available the power to make changes. The responsibility of the group is to help one another recognize, identify and act on these inner workings, so that everyone could benefit and move on toward maturity.** We are not to ignore what we see God doing in the lives of our fellow believers. We are to encourage growth, help each other process what God seems to be doing, pray for one another, and follow up by holding one another accountable to grow. **God is working to produce good things, things that will honor Him and bless His people.**