

THE JOY OF DRIVING, PHIL.2:12-18

Letters from Prison #4

◆**Intro:** Once upon a time... in my younger days, our family went to Disney World. One experience sticks in my mind, I suppose because I was a little boy, and little boys have a propensity to want to drive cars. Well Disney had a nice little road with what we called "old-time cars" and guess what! Kids could drive them because down the middle of the trail-sized street was a metal rail. No matter how bad you were you would get around that track.

As long as you pushed the gas, the little lawn-mower engine would power the kid-sized car forward. If you veered to the left or right, the rail would stop you before you left the pavement.

◆Here's the point: you would make it around but it could take a long time, you could slam and scrape along the rail the whole way, you could have bumps and frustrations. On the other hand, if you watched the rail closely, and you lined your tires up with it's curve, you could get a smooth ride and even a fairly quick patch of speed now and then.

◆This is very much the Christian life. God's Word tells us that God's electing love is pre-existent. That he decides to save through no merit of ours. We call that justification. And as Jesus said, he shall lose none of who the Father has given him.

Justification is all Jesus' work. He bought you a ticket to a ride that can't go completely bad. That's like the rail in the little street. You can't go completely off the road if you are in God's family car. He will keep you on his path all the way to the finish line.

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◆ However, you and I still get to do a lot of steering with the car. We can thus have a very frustrating and bumpy ride, or as we work at it, work it out –we become better drivers under his guidance. We call that sanctification: the process of growing in holiness. Humans have nothing to do with their justification. It is a gift that we receive through faith alone. But not a faith that is alone. Faith is accompanied by becoming someone new. God in his wisdom lets us have a part in that holiness. That part (our sanctification, or our learning to drive) is what this text is about. Joy will come on our car ride of life as we...

◆1. To find joy, work out ...your salvation. v12

◆ Verse 12 tells us to "work out" our salvation. But we know that doesn't mean "work for" our salvation. That was Jesus free gift to us! This is salvation in the holiness sense, the sanctification sense. The greek term for work is energeo (energy), and the form here is kataenergeo (work along with). So Paul is saying, cooperate with the salvation gift that God has given you in Jesus! or as he wrote to the Galatian church...

◆ *"Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit." Galatians 5:25, NIV.*

◆ What God is after in all his children is the holiness we all need. There is no way he will let that NOT happen. God's love is not an affectionate glance in your direction, or a passive invitation to a date. No, it is a choice to take you home. Remember chapter 1?

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◆ "...he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." *Philippians 1:6, NIV.*

◆ But we get to cooperate on the growth. "Work out your salvation..." God's saving love is not a trophy we win at the end of the road. God's love is the car and the fuel in the engine that's taking us there. Verse 13 reminds us that *God* is at work in us - whether we like it or not!

◆ "for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose." *Philippians 2:13, NIV.* Or in the TLB version: "For God is at work within you, helping you want to obey him, and then helping you do what he wants."

◆ Do you find, deep inside, even the faintest of desires to do the right thing, or even to know what the right thing is? That is the Spirit of God working in you. No goodness comes out of the heart of man without the work of God. Have you found a desire to be rid of your sins, forgiven and promised eternal love of God? Then you know God has been working on your heart in the first place! Have you accepted that forgiveness and the free gift of eternal life? Then God has saved your soul. You're on the ride. But he's gonna let you learn to drive. It is in your best interest to cooperate with the traffic laws. Joy comes whenever we cooperate with God. *Work out your salvation with fear and trembling...* That brings us to point two. To find joy...

◆ **2. Hold out...the word of life. v16**

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◆ People who accept the forgiveness of God, are forgiven in that instant. We become children of God and destined for an eternal life without sin, ugliness, pain, and sorrows. But while in this life we have a new nature through Christ, we still have an old, sinful, nature to work against. And what we do with it matters.

◆ How are we to become "pure and blameless" (v15)? How are we to live the life of "children of God"? How are we to become straight in a crooked world of men, and among depravity of humanity. We have that nature in each of us. We need direction. Power. Well, like getting our drivers license, we need to know the rules of the road. We need to know the laws of the land. We need to know how the car works and what we can and can't do with it. God has given us all that in his "Word of Life". Moses said the same thing to the Israelites when God gave them his commandments in the desert of Sinai.

◆ *"he said to them, "Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you--they are your life. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess." Deuteronomy 32:46, 47, NIV.*

◆ **B.** That's what "fear and trembling" is about (v13). These are not idle words. This is not horror, this is not fear in the sense of dread. *There is a healthy fear, deep respect, like the fear of a gun.* You shouldn't carry a gun without a healthy fear of what it

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can do. You don't shoot at something if there is another something behind it that could get damaged. Why, because you know the power of the weapon. Same thing with the car. A car is a weapon. If you roll over someone you could kill them. If you go off the road and argue with a tree, the tree will win, and you are going to get damaged in the process.

◆ So when Paul says "fear and trembling" he is telling us to take sanctification/holy growth very seriously. When God says, sex is for marriage only, it's not whim. It's not a random thought on his part. It's a traffic law. It's gonna keep us from banging against the rail. When God says (v14) don't work for mere money and things that rust, and disappear, -it's because the joyful life doesn't accompany materialism or selfishness. I know you might think it does, but it doesn't.

◆ Sometimes we bang against the rail so often, we no longer have a concept of what smooth driving is. We think, "Oh, this is normal driving. Lots of people are banging against the rail. It's even just a little fun, startling you know! I guess I live with it." But even if WE have decided not to take God at his word by faith, and decided to ignore his rules of the road, consider also how our choices are likely to get in the way of our witness. We are not finding the joy of God's way, AND we are keeping other folks from finding it as well!

◆ Mahatma **Gandhi**, a young lawyer in South Africa, was attracted to Jesus. One day a white elder blocked his

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entrance into a large church, threatening him if he didn't leave. Years later the missionary Earl Stanley Jones asked him why he rejected Christ. Gandhi replied, "Oh I don't reject your Christ. I love your Christ. It's just that so many of you Christians are so unlike your Christ."

◆ We're supposed to "*shine like stars in the universe*"(15), but instead we bring clouds of darkness on other's lives. Phillip Yancy opens his book on *grace* with a story from a man who works with the down and out in Chicago:

◆ "A prostitute came to me in wretched straits, homeless, sick, unable to buy food for her 2yr old daughter. Through sobs & tears told me she been renting out her daughter! She made more money in an hour than in whole evening herself! She had to do it to support her drug habit. I could hardly bear hearing her sordid story. At last I asked if she had ever thot of going to a church for help. I will never forget the look of pure, naive shock that crossed her face. "Church!" she cried. "Why wud I ever go there? I was already feeling terrible about myself. They'd just make me feel worse."

◆ I hope that pains your soul as a christian as much as it pains mine. How has the Church come to be viewed in this way? We must repent of our contribution to the caricature. May I suggest that the reason includes the things of verse 14: complaining and arguing? Complaining is "I didn't get my way", and arguing is "I

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have to get my way." The similarity in both is "my way", or simply ME.

◆God's people have murmured and argued their way through history: 1) Israel in the desert after 10 miracle plagues on their enemies, and 10 divine commandments from God; 2) petty arguments of Jesus disciples about who was better than who; 3) the problems Paul's letters address in various churches. It's all undeniable proof that even blessed people have the ability to behave badly. No surprise there. We all have the same nature, but with Christ you actually have the option to change.

◆To find joy we need to hold out God's good Word, and chose God's good ways. (BTW friends, that also means you need to get into it.) Yeah yeah, we know at the back of our mind that God says this or that. But the longer you live you will find that things at the back of your mind don't affect you much. They need to be in the front of your mind. Hold out the word!

◆**3. Finally, To find joy, Pour out ...your life. v17**

◆Paul says his life is being poured out like a drink offering. Let me tell you about that. First of all, the verb is *spendo*, which sounds like our term "spend", and that's OK really. When you pour something out, it is spent, gone, over.

◆A drink offering (also called a libation) is a sacrifice of liquid, usually wine. We need both food and drink to stay alive, so in ancient sacrificial systems both were part of an offering. Clearly

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a burning animal is more visually impressive as a sacrifice. But then as a last act, when you pour a libation on a burning sacrifice it disappears quickly, instantly sizzling into steam, very short lived. Or if you pour it out on the ground, it simply soaks into the dirt and disappears. You have sacrificed it, and it's gone quite quickly. It's just a little extra, not so impressive really.

◆ Paul is saying that his life and service to God could be almost over. Maybe only a puff of steam left. Doesn't matter, he's still glad about it. He knows the point isn't that Paul can be joyful by being great. The sacrifice here was the Christian service of the Philippians for which he is grateful. Paul's is fine with his life just being a little extra addition on all that. It's a very humble viewpoint.

◆ Our lesson is that joy accompanies willingly spending yourself in service to God's everlasting kingdom. There's no real loss when you spend on something eternal, is there? And we saw that last week in the example of Jesus emptying himself of divine royalty to die as a human for human sin. The result again of this outpouring?

◆ "Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Therefore, my dear friends, as you have

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always obeyed...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling," Philippians 2:9-12, NIV.

◆Why? Because you can see where this all leads! And as it led to Jesus exultation, so it will lead to yours. (Eph.2:6).

◆**Conclusion:** Do you really want to experience the joy of driving? Then you need to learn to steer well, the brake appropriately, to use your signals, and stay in your lane. Then it's a breeze. You can speed past hurling tractor-tailers missing them by inches in the opposite direction, because you've learned to "work out" the gift of driving. Do the same thing with your faith. Through Jesus, God has given you a license to enter heaven. The road is lined with the rail of Jesus merit. The destination is secure. The car is powered by the worth of his sacrifice on the cross. Now, get in and learn to drive. It will give him great glory and you great joy!